

Tips for stress-free winter breaks with college kids

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Here's how parents can adapt when students come home.

(HealthDay)—That initial warm welcome from parents when college students return home for the holidays can turn frosty with unexpected tension and conflict, an expert warns.

"Parents are often shocked when kids spend days sleeping and the nights out with friends, while college [students](#) who have grown used to freedom and independence chafe at curfews and demands on their time," Luis Manzo, executive director of student wellness and assessment at St. John's University in New York City, said in a school news release.

The son or daughter they sent away just a semester ago may appear to have morphed.

"Parents are often stunned by the differences wrought by a few short

months at college—they think their child's body is being inhabited by a stranger. But college is a time when students transition to adulthood; and returning home for the holidays is a time when [parents](#) and their college kids need to renegotiate rules so both parties feel comfortable," he explained.

It's important for parents to clearly outline their expectations about things such as curfews and spending time with family, but also to be flexible and willing to compromise, Manzo said.

It's also crucial to keep the lines of communication open, so that it's possible to have difficult conversations when necessary. Parents also need to remember that college students who sleep till noon may be exhausted from exams or from the stress of school. During the holidays, they want to be in a worry-free, safe zone at home.

Parents shouldn't "interrogate" college students about school during a car ride or at the dinner table. Let youngsters decide when and where they want to open up about what's going on at school. This may occur in non-pressure situations such as shoveling snow or decorating a tree, Manzo said.

Even if they have strong feelings about grades, majors and professions, parents need to be sensitive when speaking to their [college student](#) about expectations. Many students feel guilty about the cost of school and their parents' sacrifices to make college possible. Students' conflicting feelings of gratitude, trying to meet expectations, and the desire not to disappoint their parents can lead to emotional turmoil and tensions.

When it comes to drinking, parents need to be role models, said Manzo, who noted that many college students are underage. If parents have some drinks and then drive home, he asked, what message are they sending to their children about alcohol? He recommended an open discussion about

drinking and driving, and what to do if a student is left stranded at a party.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers advice about [college health and safety](#).

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