



Office of Student Affairs Boyden Hall Rm. 106

December 2011

## Seasonal Student Issues

There's a seasonal ebb and flow when it comes to student issues. Here are a few things your student may be experiencing this month:

- Much panic, fear and cramming as finals and paper deadlines approach
- High temper as stress mounts
- The realization that some friends may not be returning next semester
- Increased pressure to participate in sexual activity because of the approach of vacation and extended separation
- Financial strain due to holiday gifts and travel costs
- Religious conflicts as he gets ready to return home after a period of gaining new perspectives
- Excitement/anxiety about returning home
- Increased use of alcohol and other drugs

## Drowsy Driving Dangers

As you well know, college students are notoriously some of the most tired folks around. Drowsy driving is dangerous business—and an important topic to discuss with your student.

### The Dangers of Drowsy Driving

When you are sleepy, your brain starts to shut down. Driving while you are drowsy reduces your ability to drive effectively and to think quickly. This means your reaction time is slower, your awareness is decreased and your judgment is impaired. Drowsy drivers are often confused with drivers under the influence – that's how much their actions are impacted by lack of sleep.

### The Signs of Drowsy Driving

There are a number of drowsy driving warning signs you can share with your student:

- Constant yawning
- A nod of the head
- Heavy eyelids
- Blurred vision
- Wandering while driving

### How to Avoid Being a Drowsy Driver

Help your student avoid driving while drowsy with these tips:

- Get adequate and quality sleep before a trip.

- Avoid alcoholic beverages and heavy foods before driving.
- Beware of medications that can impair your driving ability.
- Limit long distance driving—stop at least every two hours and rest.
- Stop at a safe place and take a nap. Wait at least 10 minutes after waking up to see how alert you are. If you don't feel any more alert, don't drive. Find a place to sleep for an hour or for the night.
- If possible, drive with a companion and switch driving when necessary. Talk with passengers but not to the point of distraction.
- Keep the temperature cool in your vehicle. Keep your eyes moving and check your mirrors often.
- Avoid caffeine-type drinks like coffee or cola. They provide a short-term boost, however, if you are seriously sleep deprived, no amount of caffeine will help. It's best to stay off the road.
- If possible, avoid driving during the peak drowsy times—from 2-5 pm and from 10 pm-6 am.

Road safety starts with each of us—be sure that your student knows the signs and dangers of drowsy driving.

**Source:** [www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/safety/topics/drowsy.shtml](http://www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/safety/topics/drowsy.shtml)



# The “Finals” Countdown

The countdown to the end of the semester has begun! But, your student still has finals to complete before break and the stress is likely building. Here are some “stress-busting” tips you can offer your student as he prepares to demonstrate all he has learned this semester:

- Snack on healthier choices, instead of fatty fixes. Yogurt, a piece of fruit or a granola bar are all quick and easy to grab while you are studying.
- Have a 5-minute dance party in your room – by yourself or with a few friends. There is nothing like moving your body and feeling good doing it!
- Play a quick round of Angry Birds, Words with Friends or another game for some creative, mind-bending fun.
- Take advantage of free resources in the local community such as an ice rink or a live band at a local coffee shop for some de-stressing fun. This is a great way to get recharged and ready to ace exams.
- Head to the campus recreation center to sweat or swim that stress away. Go running, join in on a yoga class or play some



impromptu hoops. Balance your mind, body and spirit and you’ll be better prepared.

- Take a movie break! Watch a comedy for some good laughs or a holiday classic to escape the stress.
- Get enough sleep! Students often skimp on sleep, which is the one area that you shouldn’t. Making sure you are well-rested will ensure that you can think at your best.

Encouraging your student to keep his anxiety level down will help him keep things in perspective too. Finals aren’t the end-all, be-all. Although it can be tough to consider, there are many, many other important aspects of college and life. Remind your student that taking good care of himself during this time is what’s most important, so he can put his best foot forward and feel good about his performance.

## Spending an Extended Break with Your Student

The top three areas that usually cause conflict between families and college students during this extended break are...

3. **Expressing newly-developed or developing ideas surrounding religious, political and lifestyle beliefs.** One of the benefits of college is the opportunity to interact with people from all walks of life. Students may come home with new or different thoughts and values than those instilled in them while growing up. Sometimes students are struggling with the pressure of reconciling old and new ideals. Given their increased ability to think and process differences of opinion, this is an excellent opportunity for you to engage in productive dialogue and debate, rather than arguments.
2. **Trying to balance reconnecting with friends and spending quality time with family.** Students sometimes struggle with this over the extended break, because they are receiving pressure from multiple people. Additionally, students need to adjust to the changes that have taken place in friends – and themselves.
1. **Readjusting to house rules and routines after living independently.** While colleges and universities do have rules, students are used to making their own decisions and dealing with the consequences. As a parent, it may be difficult to allow this process to happen without interference. Sometimes a little bit of negotiation at the beginning of break can go a long way towards maintaining a conflict-free household.

Overall, the key to a successful break is treating your student like an adult. Communicating openly and honestly, listening with care and interest, and working together to establish rules and boundaries will help you and your student continue to develop a more mature relationship.



# Appreciating the Holiday Season

Amidst the holiday hubbub, be sure to take some quality time to enjoy all the season has to offer with your student. After all, she's now at home after a finals and end-of-the-semester frenzy. And while she likely celebrated the holidays on campus to a degree, now's the time to appreciate some simple moments...together.

Here are 5 ways to appreciate the holiday season during the next few weeks:

1. **Take a drive through the local residential community to see the lights.** Play holiday music in your car and sing along. Then, stop for some cocoa and cookies afterwards to round out the evening.
2. **Play holiday music in your home to get in the spirit.** This

way, you can enjoy the holidays...while getting stuff done. It will help everyone in your family get in the spirit too.

3. **Consider the thousands of people who don't have a home, a family or a job to pay for holiday treats and meals.** Give your time by volunteering for a local holiday event. There is no better way to get into the holiday spirit than by giving. Food banks, shelters and children's hospitals are great places to get involved.
4. **Learn about other religious or holiday celebrations happening during this time of year.** Take some time to explore online, to watch a TV special, to check out books or to talk with others. Share your learning and use it as another

opportunity to give during this season of giving.

5. **Remember shelters and rescue groups all over the world that need help for abused and abandoned pets this season.** Visit <http://SantaPaws.info> and take part in bringing some holiday cheer to dogs and cats waiting for forever homes. Visit the Operation Santa Paws website or Facebook page for a list of items that can be collected. Deliver your donation to your favorite local shelter sometime before Christmas.

Taking the time to appreciate the holidays will make you feel more blessed and less stressed. Make the shift in how you think about these next few weeks and you'll feel the difference – and your student will too.

## The Holidays are Here!

Don't forget the December holidays...

- **Hanukkah Begins at Sundown on Dec. 20** - An eight-day Jewish holiday, also known as the Festival of Lights, which commemorates the rededication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.
- **Yule on Dec. 22** - A winter festival that was originally celebrated as a pagan holiday, but is now incorporated into the Christian holiday Christmas. It is celebrated on the Winter Solstice.
- **Festivus on Dec. 23** - An annual holiday made popular in 1997 by the hit TV show "Seinfeld" in which people celebrate by airing grievances and wrestling the head of the household to the ground.
- **Christmas on Dec. 25** - An annual holiday that commemorates the birth of Jesus.
- **Kwanzaa Begins on Dec. 26** - A weeklong holiday celebrated primarily in the U.S. that honors African heritage and culture.

## Books for Break

Looking for some good reads this winter break, that you and your student can read together...just because you both *want* to? Here are some options...

- *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins
- *The Leadership Secrets of Santa Claus* by Eric Harvey, David Cottrell and Al Lucia
- *War Horse* by Michael Morpurgo
- *Into Thin Air* by Jon Krakauer
- *The Mockingbirds* by Daisy Whitney
- *Until Tuesday: A Wounded Warrior and the Golden Retriever Who Saved Him* by Luis Carlos Montalvan
- *The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating* by Elisabeth Tova Bailey

Encouraging your student to read during winter break – anything from a serious novel to a gossip magazine – will help keep his brain working in a different way and feed his creativity. It's a great excuse for you to read something too. Plus, you'll both feel refreshed and have something to talk about with one another.



## Safe Holiday Travel Tips

Student travel home for the holidays can be stressful on so many levels. Students traveling by car should be aware of weather advisories and be prepared accordingly. As your student prepares to travel home by car, consider sharing these safe travel tips with him:

- Winterize the car before heading out – make sure everything is in working order and ready to go for cold weather conditions.
- Allow extra time to reach the destination when the roads are slick and avoid making sudden stops and turns.
- Keep the gas tank close to full, so that an unanticipated delay or traffic detour will not be problematic.
- Wear a seat belt.
- Remember that bridges and overpasses freeze before road surfaces and take extra caution.
- Allow additional stopping distance between cars when driving on wet roads.
- Keep the windshields and lights clear of accumulations of ice and snow.
- Know what to do if you skid on ice or get stuck in snow (When skidding, counter steer to regain control and then steer the car in the same direction that the rear wheels are sliding. When stuck in snow, remove snow from the area around the tire and spread sand or salt under the wheel instead of spinning the wheels.)
- Use common sense. There are occasions when the best driving decision is not to drive. It's better to be safe and get home a bit later than to get in an accident.
- Bring a cell phone, if possible, with pre-loaded highway information networks for updates on road conditions, along with emergency contact numbers – and a charger.
- Make sure you have an ice scraper and/or broom for cleaning off the car.
- Be aware of alternate routes, in case weather conditions warrant detouring traffic from the main roadway.
- Make sure you have extra blankets, warm clothing and other emergency gear should the need arise.

Here's to a safe travel season!

**Resource:** [www.accuweather.com](http://www.accuweather.com)

## The College Student Gift List

What do college students wish for these days? Here's a list of ideas:

- A stylus for an iPad, iPod touch, iPhone or other touchscreen
- iTunes gift card
- Netflix or Hulu Plus subscription
- Grocery store or gas gift card
- Digital camera
- Boots or galoshes
- Scarf and mittens
- iPhone or Smartphone
- Flannel PJs or comfy robe
- Cozy throw
- Keurig Coffee Maker
- Cool stick on wall decals
- Fun case for iPhone or Smartphone
- Ticket stub diary for memory keeping
- Self organizer storage cases
- Funky string lights for their room or apartment
- Cool headphones
- Thumb drive or external hard drive
- Travel mug
- Video games or movies
- Amazon gift card
- A Vermont teddy bear
- Warm fleece or down jacket
- A bicycle (and a lock)
- Digital photo frame
- Luggage set
- Portable DVD player

