

December 2014

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 project deadlines approach
- High temper as stress mounts
- The realization that some friends may not be returning next term
- 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/she gets ready to return home after a semester of gaining new perspectives
- Excitement/anxiety about returning home
- Increased use of alcohol and other drugs

Mid-Year Transitions

When the end of the term hits, students will be going through transitions of various kinds. Here are some to be aware of as you help your student through these trying times...

Saying Goodbye. Some friends may be graduating in December, while others are transferring to other schools, dropping out, studying abroad or heading off to internship opportunities. Whatever the case may be, saying goodbye to good college friends can be tough for students, and your understanding can help ease the pain.

Ending a Good Academic Experience. Sometimes, a class or a teacher will touch a student in a profound way. So, when it ends, that student may understandably feel a bit lost and sad. Encourage him to talk about what he learned as a way to honor what that experience meant to him.

Leaving a Loved One. If your student started a relationship at school, parting over the holidays will likely be difficult. He/she may

want to visit a significant other or have him/her come to your house. Talk about how to split time and be supportive, too.



Preparing to Take on a New Leadership Experience. After being one of the “worker bees” within a student organization, your student may soon be taking on more of a leadership position. This can be both exciting and terrifying, so let her talk about her feelings and plans as she prepares for this important transition.

Transitions come in all shapes and sizes – and supporting students as they get ready for change will give them courage, confidence and the knowledge that someone cares.

Other Possible Transitions

Your student may also be readying for...

- A new campus job
- Living with a different roommate(s)
- A new class schedule
- An internship opportunity
- Transferring to an alternate school
- Changing a major/minor (or declaring one)



How to Help Your Student Explore Career Options

During winter break, students will likely have a chance to stop, breathe after the stress of finals and start thinking about what comes next. This means being intentional about career exploration, whether they are in their first year or their fourth.

How can you help your student explore career options? Here are a few suggestions...

Support your student as she chooses to take a variety of classes. This is what college is all about. You never know what might spark a student's interest and lead to a career choice in the future.

Talk, listen and suggest options. Many students go through a year or two of college before deciding what they want to do. This is normal. Encourage your student to take advantage of internships and other practical

opportunities to try out potential career areas. The more exposure your student has to different arenas, the better.

Keep the panicking to a minimum. This is an important developmental step in your student's life. Remind him to take advantage of campus resources like career fairs, the career center and more. You might even consider visiting the career cen-

ter's website yourself to get tips and explore resources.

Share your wisdom. Many students don't consider the values and life-style choices associated with making a career decision. What have you learned along the way? What might you have done the same or differently? Share openly but just remember that your student's values might be different than your own at this point in his life.

Exploratory Questions to Ask Students

- What classes have you enjoyed? Why is that?
- Who has a job that seems appealing to you? What is the appeal?
- What would you definitely like to have in your workplace?
- What would you definitely not like to have within your work life?
- What topics do you have a passion for?
- What types of things do you think you are good at?

Ideas to Alleviate Financial Strain

As the holidays approach, your student may be feeling financial pressure due to gift buying, travel costs and more. Help remove some of the strain by suggesting some simple moneymaking options she can pursue once finals are over...

- Doing odd jobs, like shoveling or painting, for neighbors in need of some help
- Giving language or music lessons
- Hosting sports clinics if she's an athlete
- Taking on a seasonal job
- Selling some unnecessary belongings on eBay or Craigslist



- Baking goodies or serving at someone's holiday party
- Plus, remind your student that catching up with friends during the holidays doesn't always have to involve big money-spending occasions like going out to eat or to the movies. Having coffee at home, heading out to sing karaoke, walking dogs together at the animal shelter or going sledding can be just as fun!

Keeping Up the Pace

From now through the end of the term, students need to keep their stamina up so they can finish strong academically. Here are some simple ways they can do just that...

- Eat healthy meals
- Make sleep a priority
- Study some every day, rather than cramming
- Get fresh air
- Say "no" to something if they're overwhelmed
- Spend positive time with friends
- Seek help if they're struggling

Making academics a priority means making *yourself* a priority. You can help your student realize this so the remainder of the term is a healthy one.

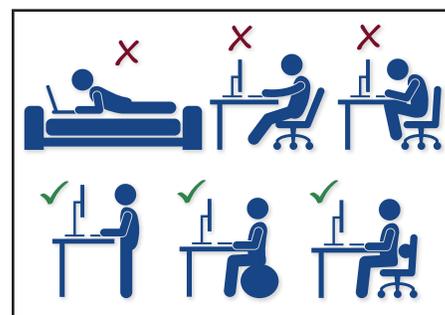


Staying Healthy During “Sitting Season”

December is one of those intense “sitting-a-lot” times, as students prepare final papers/projects and study for final exams. Studies are mounting that say sitting for long stretches of time can lead to a shorter, less robust life, as well as conditions like kidney disease, diabetes and heart disease. So, reducing the amount of time we spend sitting is necessary.

Tips to help reduce the amount of “sit time” include...

- ▶ Stand up for two minutes for every 20 that you spend sitting
- ▶ When watching TV, stand up during commercials
- ▶ Try to watch fewer than two hours of TV per day to be in a lower risk group
- ▶ Stand during telephone calls
- ▶ Be sure to exercise



- ▶ Relaxing your shoulders
- ▶ Keeping elbows close to your body and supported
- ▶ Supporting your lower back
- ▶ Having wrists and hands in line with your forearms
- ▶ Keeping your feet flat on the floor
- ▶ Taking screen breaks every 20-30 minutes to give your body a break

Sources: www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/computerworkstations/; WebMD Health News, 10/15/12; *The New York Times*, 10/17/12

Computer Vision Syndrome

According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), nearly 80 percent of those working at a computer for more than two hours a day suffer from the symptoms of Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS). Symptoms include:

- Headaches
- Loss of focus
- Burning/tired eyes
- Double/blurred vision
- Neck and shoulder pains

At the Computer

When students are sitting, they are often at a computer. To help your student stay ergonomically healthy, encourage...

- ▶ Making sure the top of your monitor is at or just below eye level
- ▶ Keeping your head and neck balanced and in line with your torso

For a detailed checklist to assess a computer workstation, go to www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/computerworkstations/checklist.html

Preparing for Your Student’s Return

As you prepare to have your student home for the winter holidays, here are a few things to keep in mind...

Make Sure Your Student Has a Space. It’s common for rearranging to take place once a student has departed for school. Has your student lost his bedroom? If so, make sure you prepare a space for him to sleep and store belongings, prior to coming home. This way, your student won’t feel displaced or like he’s a burden.

Talk With Your Student About Lifestyle Changes. Rather than waiting until your student comes home, talk beforehand. It’s quite likely that your student’s sleeping, eating,

and thinking patterns have changed during the last few months. Try to avoid surprises by discussing these new habits and perspectives ahead of time.

Prepare Siblings for Your Student’s Return Home. If there are other children in the family, they will be anticipating your student’s arrival, too. Remind them that your student will be very excited to see them, but also will have a lot to do while she is home. This will help alleviate disappointment if there is not enough time for extensive one-on-one interaction.

Communicating with care can help ensure a happy holiday visit for all!

Reconnect

Reconnect with your student by...

- Planning a family game night
- Going to a coffee shop
- Sharing photos from the last few months
- Attending a local school event
- Staying up late one night chatting
- Cooking Sunday breakfast
- Asking for her help setting up a computer program
- Making cookies together the night before he heads back to school so he can share them with friends



Five Tips for Managing Anger

This can be a volatile time of year on campus. Stress, a lack of sleep and trying to finish multiple tasks in a small amount of time may put many students on edge. And when they're feeling like they're on their last nerve, it can be easy for them to lose their temper.

Learning to manage their anger is so important. When anger isn't expressed appropriately, it can disrupt relationships, affect thinking and behavior patterns, and also create a variety of physical problems. Those who chronically suppress anger can experience health issues such as high blood pressure, heart problems, headaches, digestive problems and depression.

When people effectively manage their anger, they can more successfully and safely get on with their business. Here are some tips to share with your student...

Take a Break. It's a simple tool, but counting to 10 before reacting can really help defuse anger or frustration. Deep breathing, visualizing a relaxing scene or repeating a calming word can also be helpful.

Calmly Express Your Emotion. Expressing anger is healthy, but it's important to do so in a non-confrontational manner. Be assertive, but not aggressive.

Be Careful with the Words You Use. It's easy to get carried away when emotions are involved. Stick to the issue at hand and don't say anything you'll regret later.

Use "I" Statements. Avoid blaming language and instead share how you feel from the "I" perspective. The other person is less likely to get defensive as a result.

Identify Solutions to the Problem. After expressing your concerns, offer potential solutions to resolve the issue at hand.

It's important to remember that conflict itself is neutral. It's the behavior of the individuals experiencing conflict that determines its value. By managing anger in positive ways, your student is less likely to let it derail him.

Sources: WebMD.com; MayoClinic.com

Care Packages: A Welcome Study Break

'Tis the season to study and students can use all the encouragement they can get! Send along some love and good luck with a meaningful care package.

You could include:

- A quick video with folks at home offering fun tips and advice
- Coffee or cocoa, along with a cozy mug
- An iTunes card to download some new music
- Healthy snacks
- Homemade treats
- Vitamin C drops
- A good luck note
- A comfy pillow, slippers or sweatshirt for late-night studying
- A photo of the family cat or dog saying, "Come home soon!"

Dealing with the Effects of Others' Drinking

At the end of the term, some students may celebrate by drinking heavily. Encourage your student to make smart choices for himself so that he can focus on the important task at hand: doing well on finals.

Yet, also realize that he could be negatively impacted by others' alcohol abuse in instances such as...

- Taking care of an intoxicated roommate or friend
- Experiencing an unwanted sexual advance
- Having intoxicated students return late at night, being loud and disruptive
- Getting into an argument with an intoxicated individual
- Being hit, pushed or assaulted
- Not getting enough uninterrupted sleep or study time
- Being insulted or humiliated
- Having property damaged

If ANY of this happens, encourage him to talk immediately with residence hall staff members or other advocates (coaches, advisors, etc.) about the best ways to handle such scenarios. Those folks are there to help *all* students enjoy their right to a safe academic and living environment.