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:

- Roommate problems and floor tension
- Academic pressures due to procrastination, workload and lack of ability
- Burnout
- Not feeling like he/she has the stamina to keep up the pace through finals
- Job search stress for holiday break
- Problems from increased alcohol consumption
- Lack of initiative to find new friends or activities because it seems social groups are already set up
- Concerns about going home at Thanksgiving time – whether it’s concern about seeing changes among old friends, how things will be with family members or dealing with a romantic relationship

Heading Home for the Holidays
Making the transition

A visit during Thanksgiving break will be a time of transition as you all live under the same roof again. Here are some things to keep in mind as you lovingly make this transition work.

Reflect, Don’t Order. A student who has been living independently for the past few months will naturally balk if ordered to do something. Have discussions instead, where you listen to one another.

Consider Compromise. Where can you compromise so that you and your student can meet in the middle?

Prepare for Difference. As your student learns new things and experiences new people, chances are that some of her views will change. Be prepared for her to express different opinions and discuss varied topics.

Agree to Disagree. You and your student may not always see eye to eye. This doesn’t mean he disrespects you. It’s more about him testing his newfound knowledge and interests. So, agree to disagree on certain topics and listen to one another’s different perspectives. You’ll learn a good deal from one another!

Reintegrate Into Family Life.
The student who has been away for a while may need time to reintegrate back into family life. Her sleep patterns may not jive with everyone else’s. She may take some nudging to participate in household chores. And siblings will need to get used to one another again. Just be prepared that this reintegration won’t happen automatically.

The Thanksgiving transition will be okay, as long as you prepare for changes and remain open to your student. Talk about things, make him feel welcomed and realize that this Thanksgiving test run will make the winter break even better!
Supporting Sick Students

Being sick stinks, whether it’s the flu, a stomach virus or a bad cold. And the season of sniffles is now upon us. There are some things you can do to help make students’ sickbeds not quite so miserable, though...

**Make Sick-Packs.** Include items such as a package of tissues, a can of soup, cough drops, some teabags, a magazine and Vitamin C drops, along with anything you know helps to make your student feel better.

**Be Proactive.** Encourage hand washing, sneezing into the elbow, disinfecting doorknobs and light switches, keeping their room clean and more.

Encourage Academic Follow-Through. Students who are sick may wonder if they can miss class or postpone assignments as a result. Encourage them to talk with their professors and their academic advisors to find out what’s possible so they’re not putting themselves in hot water.

Push the Health Center. Sick students don’t just need to suffer – the health center is there for them to use. So, strongly suggest that they get assistance – and possibly a prescription – to help their illness go away sooner rather than later.

Keep in Touch. When we’re sick, we often crave the comforts of home. If your student is away, keep in touch and check in to let him know he’s not alone.

Flu Symptoms

They may include...

- 100 degree or higher fever or feeling feverish (not everyone with the flu has a fever)
- A cough and/or sore throat
- A runny or stuffy nose
- Headaches and/or body aches
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea (most common in children)

Encourage your student to visit the health center if he’s not feeling well.

Source: Flu.gov

Encouraging students to be proactive about their health and seeking assistance when needed can make a significant difference in their well-being.
Lending Support, Even When You Don’t Agree

It can be one of the most difficult aspects of your role as a family member: supporting your student’s choices, even when you don’t agree with them. You may have been down a similar road before yourself and hope to encourage your student to take a different path. Or you may have some guesses for what will happen as a result of the decision, which the student can’t yet see clearly for himself. Whatever the reason, you find yourself biting your tongue and hoping for the best.

Although part of your role is to advise your student, even though he is in college, you also know how important it is for him to make his own choices and to experience his own successes and mistakes. So, when you clearly don’t agree with your student’s choices, what can you do? Here are a few suggestions:

■ **Listen to your student and ask open-ended questions.** As you are engaging in conversation, be sure to reflect back a summary of what your student has shared. Utilizing this technique can help your student come to his own conclusions, without you offering an opinion.

■ **Offer some of your life experience, by sharing personal stories.** As you share the stories, try to make some parallels to your student’s experience. With some open and honest dialogue, you may be able to help your student benefit from what you are offering.

■ **Be honest about your concerns,** but don’t get discouraged if your student doesn’t follow your advice. Ultimately, it’s his choice to make. The best you can do is offer your expertise and care.

Three Questions

When in doubt, ask your student to consider three questions:

1. How will your decision make you feel?
2. How would you feel if your family knew about your decision?
3. How would you feel if your decision was printed on the front page of the newspaper?

These three values-loaded questions can help your student ensure that his decisions are in line with his values. These are the most important life lessons your student can learn from such situations.

The Stress of Heading Home

The holiday buzz has likely begun. Thanksgiving Break will be here soon and, shortly thereafter, winter holidays abound! Although there will be a lot packed into the next few weeks as students finish up assignments and take exams, it’s important not to forget that preparing to go home for the holidays can be a stressful time for your student.

What You Can Do

Consider some of the things your student might be most nervous about:

■ Sharing a new or different aspect of who she is
■ Seeing a parent or sibling he has fought with over the phone during the last few months
■ Seeing old friends or an old partner
■ Discussing a change of plans such as major choice, plans for upcoming breaks or wanting to go to a different school
■ Coming clean about poor grades or getting in trouble at school
■ Having to conform back to your rules and ways of doing things

Taking the time to talk with your student candidly and supportively during the next few weeks will help make the holiday break, whatever it may hold, more pleasant all the way around.
How Students Can Get to Know Faculty & Staff

When students attend faculty office hours or interact with administrators and other staff members, they may unintentionally miss a great opportunity. Sometimes students are so focused on the intent of their conversation with a faculty or staff member that they forget to take a few minutes to get to know more about that person.

To learn more about the faculty and staff in their lives, students can do things like:

- Ask about something that’s hanging on their office wall (“That mask is really interesting – where did you get it?”)
- Notice their diploma and ask what they liked about attending XYZ University
- Ask how long they’ve been at the institution and where they’re originally from
- Notice a book on their bookshelf
- Encourage them to talk about the scene of a photo in their office (“Where did you catch that massive fish?” or “Those mountains in the photo are beautiful – where was that taken?”)
- Comment on something mentioned in class (“In class last week you mentioned your dog – what kind do you have?” or “The story you told last week about veterans often having trouble with driving once they return from war intrigued me and I looked up more about it.”)
- Ask if they have a favorite kind of music or if they’ve seen any good movies lately

Sometimes a few minutes of “get-to-know-you” talk can go a long way in helping your student develop a relationship with a professor or staff member on campus. Students need these people in their lives, as educators, challengers and advocates. They are worth the time.

The Vegan Choice

So what is the choice all about?

Vegans go one step beyond what vegetarians choose by not eating animals; they steer clear of all animal products.

What Does It Mean? Vegans avoid using or consuming animal products. This includes items such as milk, cheese, eggs, leather, fur, wool, silk, down and products tested on animals (such as chemicals or cosmetics).

Why? Veganism is viewed as the touchstone of a cruelty-free lifestyle, plus it provides benefits to the lives of animals, to the environment and to individuals’ health.

Students often choose to make a commitment to a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle during their college years. The reasons for this vary – their awareness is raised, they are able to talk with more people making similar choices, they are stirred to get active – and this lifestyle choice is one part of it.

Sources: www.eatright.org; www.vegan.org; www.vrg.org

Secondary Drinking Effects

Your student has or will likely come into contact with peer drinking behaviors. And, whether or not your student is choosing to partake, risky drinking often doesn’t just impact the students who are doing the drinking.

Consider talking with your student about this “secondary drinking effect” to make sure that he is standing up for his rights as a campus community member and keeping himself safe.

Some of the ways that students may be negatively impacted by others’ alcohol abuse are:

- Taking care of an intoxicated roommate or other student
- Experiencing an unwanted sexual advance
- Having a loud hallway on nights when intoxicated residents return
- Getting into an argument with an intoxicated individual
- Not getting enough uninterrupted sleep or study time
- Having property damaged

If your student is experiencing any of these situations, encourage him to talk with his residence life staff or another campus advocate. We certainly want to know this information so we can address these behaviors and their individual impacts!

Fortunately, most students choose to drink responsibly or not at all. Empower your student to seek assistance so his life isn’t disrupted by secondary drinking effects.