

Returning Home Again

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Some students can't wait to go home again after the semester ends. Others are dreading it. No matter how you feel about returning home, spending an extended period of time at home after being away at college can be challenging. Here are some things to consider to make your time at home as smooth as possible.

Talk about changing expectations- You might not feel that your old curfew is fair anymore, and your parents may not feel totally comfortable not knowing who your with or what you're doing. Openly discuss how you can maintain some of the independence you've gained at college while still respecting your parents' desire to feel involved and connected to you.

Create a wish list- Believe it or not, lots of college student report that they get really bored when they return home. It's a good idea to think ahead of time about the things you really want to do while you're home. Make a list of things you want to do with your family, and make another list of things you want to do with friends or on your own. That way, you can spend your time wisely instead of sitting around wondering what to do!

Old habits die hard- Remember that thing that your mom used to do when you were living at home that was super annoying? Or that thing that your siblings said that made you roll your eyes? Chances are they're going to do things while you're at home, and it will still annoy you. Cut your family some slack, because there are probably things you do that annoy them, too! Everyone's getting used to each other again, and now that you're coming back again, you can address these annoyances with a clean slate. For instance, you can choose to be more gracious if you've responded with frustration in the past, or choose to respond more directly if you have usually avoided conflict.

Reverse culture shock- Just like returning home after traveling abroad, it can be difficult to readjust to the norms and culture of your hometown and your family. Some students also say that people at home don't seem to understand or even care about their experience at college. Staying connected to your friends from college over the break can be validating and serve as a reminder of the things you really miss about being at college, even if people at home don't quite get it.

Lend a helping hand- It can sound pretty awesome to come home again if your parents have usually taken care of most of your needs. Remember that you're an adult now, and you can pitch in with tasks that your parents have usually handled. Make the family a meal. Help clean before a family gathering. Do the things your parents used to nag you about without prompting. Think of it as a way of paying back your parents for all the ways that they took care of you growing up.

Returning to the storm- Coming back home to a chaotic or abusive home environment can be re-traumatizing. If you come from a home where you experienced trauma, make sure that you find others who can support you during your time at home. It is also important to set healthy boundaries with abusive individuals. For instance, set restrictions around what topics of conversation are off limits or emphasize that you will leave if you are the target of harassment or abuse. Talk to a friend or a trusted family member ahead of time and plan a safe place that you can stay if you need to step away from the abusive environment.