

# Making the Most of Your Student's First Winter Holiday Home





# Introduction

Snowflakes are falling, the house is decorated and your college student is home for their first winter break!

You have holiday plans on your mind, and can't wait to ask them a thousand questions about their first semester.

But first, a little bit of planning is in order.

From navigating boundaries and house rules to talking about grades, budgets and social pressures, winter break is a chance to get back in touch with your student and offer loving guidance.

Plus you want to sneak in plenty of time for family traditions and bonding — while respecting your student's desire to see friends, sleep in and relax.

Here's your guide to making the most of your time together.

# Easing in

A lot has changed since your daughter or son left for college. Even though they may look (for the most part) like the same teen you dropped off at the residence hall a few months ago, they've gotten used to being independent and managing their own routine.

Establishing boundaries will contribute to harmony in the household. You're excited your student is home, but smothering them with too much attention (or too many questions and expectations) can turn them away.

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**Here are a few ways to create mutually respectful boundaries with your student during winter break:**

- BALANCE FRIENDS AND FAMILY**
- RESPECT THEIR PRIVACY**
- LET THEM SLEEP**





## Balance friends and family

Have a practical conversation about what's going to happen over the holidays. (Try to do this before they travel, especially if there are special events on the calendar already.)

What family activities do you expect your student to join? Have they made plans with friends yet? Being on the same page will minimize conflict and disappointment.

They may bring home some school work. Students with a long winter break often try to make some money or line up an internship or job shadowing experience. Talk about how and when these responsibilities will fit in.

## Let them sleep

Chances are, your student pulled a few all-nighters trying to cram for an exam or finish a term paper. For the first few days, let them get the extra winks they deserve.

After that, make fun plans together that start a little earlier in the day (a breakfast date, going to the gym or shopping) to help them transition back to a schedule that lines up better with your own. You really don't want to hear them fixing a snack and watching TV at 2 a.m.!

## Respect their privacy

Although they're still your son or daughter, and it's your house, be considerate of your student's personal space and routine — as long as they return the favor by keeping things clean and organized. (More on the next page on laying ground rules.)





## House rules

At college, your student is responsible for managing their own time — including choosing when and what to eat and how late to stay out. The word “curfew” is no longer in their vocabulary.

How does this newfound autonomy translate when they return to the nest over break?

It’s a balancing act. If you’re not the “anything goes” type, you’ll still want to establish some house rules over the holidays. At the same time, you want “home” to remain comfortable, welcoming and — dare we say it? — fun so your student will always look forward to coming back.



### Some advice during this time of transition:

- **RESPECTFULLY NEGOTIATE THE RESPONSIBILITIES THEY’LL HAVE WHILE HOME.**
- **HELP YOUR STUDENT UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT OF THEIR ACTIONS ON THE REST OF THE FAMILY.**

## Respectfully negotiate the responsibilities they'll have while home.

- Your student won't respond well to micromanagement, so prepare for a two-way discussion that takes into account the needs of the household as well as your student's personal (and social) agenda.
- Make any rules and expectations clear. If they won't be around for dinner, do you want to know that in advance? Are they doing their own laundry? What chores will they take on while they're home?

## Help your student understand the impact of their actions on the rest of the family.

- Discuss the reasoning behind house rules like curfews. For example, if they come home late and the dog barks, then the whole house gets woken up — and you probably have to get up for work the next day (while they get to sleep in).
- Vehicle privileges should be addressed if they want to use a family car to run errands or go out.



# Keep family traditions alive and make new memories

Whether it's shopping, spending a day on the slopes, cooking a big meal or watching your favorite holiday movie together, you're excited to share family traditions with your college student when they get home.

Or maybe you're looking for ways to create new traditions this year. Here are a few ideas to warm up your winter break.

## Play in the snow

Head to a local sledding hill or skating rink for some old-fashioned winter fun, or plan a family ski day to enjoy the beauty of nature while cruising down the slopes. Never skied before? Book lessons for the whole family!



## Get out the family recipe book

If your student can't get enough of your world-famous stuffing every holiday, now's the perfect moment to teach them how to make it themselves so they can carry on the tradition for their own family someday. Plus it's a great way to bond while getting some help in the kitchen.

## Game on

Whether you're a clan of skilled strategists or just love a good laugh, plan a game night where the goal is to have fun. Apples to Apples, Cranium, Pictionary, Pit and Super Fight are family favorites, or break out the playing cards for a few spirited rounds of Hearts, Poker or Casino.

## See a show

Whether you share your student's love for local rock bands, the symphony or musicals, a night out to see live music will be fun for the whole family.

## Check out the sparkle

They might not admit it, but deep down your student probably still loves the nostalgia of walking around the neighborhood or driving through town to admire the holiday light displays before warming up back in the kitchen with cocoa and cookies (preferably ones you decorate yourselves).

You might also plan some holiday crafts that they can bring back to their dorm room like a new bulletin board, homemade throw pillows or a photo collage.

## Build a winter wardrobe



Is your student's winter coat looking a little worn? Do they complain about frosty toes while walking around campus in their sneakers? Plan a morning of warm winter clothes shopping followed by a tasty lunch to get your student bundled and ready for their return to college in January.

# Getting caught up

Whether you and your student will talk about logistics like grades, their budget or roommates, or need to dive into heavier topics, we've got tips to help you navigate these important conversations.

## Roommates

Your student may be at school for a week, a month or even a year before they have a roommate issue, but it's bound to happen at some point. Most of the time, roommate conflict is short-lived and gets worked out with conversation. In other cases, the drama can be far more complicated.

Students should resolve these disagreements on their own. Learning to get along with all kinds of people is part of the growing up process.

Encourage your student to address any concerns first with their roommate. If things don't improve, they can enlist the help of their RA. And point out that getting along is a two-way street — they're responsible for communicating and adapting as well.



**Learn more about the 10 types of roommates your student may encounter in college, and how to live peacefully with each »**



## Academic adjustments

Of course, you'll want to talk to your student about how school is going.

What was their favorite subject last term, and where could they use help? Should they make it a goal to be more proactive in the future: go to faculty office hours, join study groups and find a tutor when needed?

## Budgeting time

The ["time budget" conversation](#) is a valuable one to have now that they've spent a semester at school and can recognize the importance (and challenge) of good time management.

Help your student create a time budget. How can they best align how they spend their time with their goals and priorities?

- Suggest they start by keeping a time inventory for a week when they get back to campus. They'll log the minutes and hours they spend on each daily activity: studying, working, going to class, eating, sleeping, using social media, hanging out with friends, etc. The object isn't to pass judgment, but simply to see how they currently use their time so they can make the adjustments they need to be successful students.
- An old-fashioned planner is more useful than ever in college. Encourage your student to buy one at the campus bookstore or any office supply store, or pop one into their stocking.

Check in about their tech, too. Can they count on their current laptop to make it through the year? Students still using an old high school laptop may be overdue for a replacement. A new laptop or tablet could be in order, or a backup hard drive or new charger.









## Healthy relationships

When your student was in high school, you were probably in the habit of talking about relationships and dating (even if these conversations weren't always comfortable). You knew their boyfriend or girlfriend if they had one, and the friends they socialized with.

Typically once college starts, parents are in the dark about their students' romantic relationships. And students often want to keep it that way!

Nevertheless, it's important to keep talking about sexual health and consent, and you can do this while respecting your student's privacy.

You might talk in a general way about the social scene on campus and their new friends (is there anyone special?). News stories can springboard a discussion — campus sexual assault continues to be a big issue. Your student will be able to tell you about the culture on their campus, and how they're proactive in their own behavior.

Make sure they know that if they're sexually active, they can get check-ups, contraception and advice at the campus health center. They can also get mental/emotional health support at the counseling center for issues relating to personal relationships, or any other college life pressures.



# Holiday gift ideas for your college student



## Gift cards they'll actually use

- [Zipcar](#), [Uber](#) or [Lyft](#)
- [Ticketmaster gift card](#) to see a concert
- Audible audiobook subscription (from Amazon)
- Local coffee shop or restaurant in their college town — many places have e-gift cards now, making it easy to give!



## Electronics they'll love you for

- Bluetooth speaker like the [UE Boom](#) or the [Bose SoundLink Micro](#)
- [AirPod](#) headphones
- Noise cancelling headphones
- External phone charger



## Cozy weekend essentials

- Onesie pajamas are a hot commodity this season, and [Kohls has some great options](#).
- Slippers they could also wear outside the house, like these durable ones from [L.L. Bean](#)
- A throw blanket or a robe to stay warm while they binge watch Netflix study
- An easy brunch cookbook (college students LOVE brunch)
- [Wax warmers](#) are great candle alternatives for students living in a dorm.



## Stocking stuffers they'll savor

- 10-foot phone charger
- Coffee mug with a family photo (or better yet, one of the pet)
- Nice pens or office supplies
- [PopSocket](#) phone grip
- [Poo-Pourri](#) Toilet Spray (no, seriously)
- [Sriracha To-Go Bottle Keychain](#)



## Gifts they won't even think to ask for

- [Hydro Flask Water Bottle](#) or [Yeti drinkware](#)
- School gear like a new sweatshirt or a warm hat
- [Spike Ball](#) or Kan Jam — active games to play with friends (they work great at tailgates, too!)
- A fun game like Bonanza, Balderdash, Game of Things, Cards Against Humanity, or What Do You Meme?
- [Eno](#) or [Kammok Roo Hammock](#) — perfect for campus hangouts



*We polled college parents and students to find the best gift essentials for 2018. CollegiateParent is not affiliated with, does not endorse, and will not receive any form of compensation from these brands in exchange for being featured in this article.*