

Now that Winter Break is around the corner, most of you are probably awaiting your student's return home for a few weeks. Whether your student is a first year or a senior, your son or daughter has had a full semester here at Columbia, filled with many new experiences. You may be anticipating your student's homecoming with a range of emotions, including excitement, anxiety, and maybe even some dread! What if she has changed? What if he didn't do well in school? What if I don't like her friends or her new partner? What if she makes new demands upon me as a parent?

Winter break is often a time when conflicts come up between parents and their college students. For a first year student, it might be that, after four months of living independently, you have to loosen the reins a bit. For a sophomore, it might be stress about choosing a major. For a junior, it might be anticipating a semester abroad or anxiety about spring semester here when close friends are gone. And, for a senior, there is often anxiety and fear about what to do after college. And, you, the parents, can be helpful by making yourselves available to your students, listening closely to what they are going through, and giving them space to express themselves while also imparting your wisdom.

The college years are a time of life full of experimentation: with new friends, new values, new approaches to being a student, new discoveries about oneself. Sometimes this means disappointing you. You may want your student to study engineering and she may have discovered a love of literature and art. Your job is difficult. How can you encourage your student to develop his own voice but also make suggestions based on your life experience? If you come on too strong, then your student might rebel for the sake of rebellion. That doesn't leave either of you in a good place. It is important to open your ears, eyes, and heart to what your son or daughter tells you. Take this opportunity to get to know your student from a new vantage point. This separation process can be difficult for you as well as for your students. Communication is the key to a healthy relationship. Ask questions, be honest, and try to hold back from making snap judgments.

What if you are concerned that your student is in trouble? Are you wondering if she eating? Has he lost weight? Do you notice signs of depression or anxiety that are getting in the way of functioning? Please remember that, if you are worried about your son or daughter, you can remind your student that Counseling and Psychological Services is here for them. Our phone number is (212) 854-2878. We are located on the 8th floor of Lerner Hall and we have drop in hours most weekday evenings in our residence hall offices. We also welcome calls from parents who may want advice as to how to help their students. The growth of young people in college is remarkable. While there are difficult moments, it is beautiful to watch your child grow into the adult he or she will become.