



December 2007

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 paper deadlines approach
- ▲ High temper as stress mounts
- ▲ The realization that some friends may not be returning next semester
- ▲ 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 drugs

Having the Academic Performance Conversation

First semester grades will soon arrive on your doorstep. Are you prepared to have the appropriate conversations with your student about her academic performance? Regardless of whether or not she got all As or all Ds, addressing grades should be a priority this winter.

For the student who has done well:

- **Give kudos and celebrate!** Getting good grades in college is tough to do, especially for first-year students and those balancing coursework with athletics, a job or other co-curricular activities. Have a special dinner, post the grade report on the fridge, etc. This occasion warrants some recognition!
- **Discuss what your student learned this past semester.** Which class was most engaging and why? What was she able to apply from classes to her life? Will she be taking any additional courses to further explore a particular subject area?
- **Review study techniques and other preparation strategies that worked well.** What tricks did your student discover for himself? Will he be using the same strategies next semester? Will he be trying anything new?



For the student who hasn't done so well:

- **Be supportive and understanding.** You might be disappointed in your student's performance. Chances are he is disappointed in himself as well. If this is the case, try to be constructive in your criticism and conversation. What's done is done. It's important to focus on fixing the issues for the future—so a poor grade report doesn't arrive again.
- **Explore the reasons for the performance.** The why behind the poor grades is what is most important. Perhaps your student is struggling with a professor and needs support in handling the situation. Or, maybe your student spent too many nights goofing off and not enough nights studying. Whatever the case, get to the root of the issue and address it.
- **Brainstorm some strategies for improvement.** Although college students are considered "adults," they still need help. It could prove very helpful to sit down and brainstorm together. Some potential areas to discuss include:

Daily study habits

continued on page three



Helping Students Stay Healthy

Chances are that you've been hearing about recent MRSA, or "superbug," outbreaks, both on college campuses and within K-12 schools. MRSA—or methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*—is a staph bacteria that, in healthy people outside of hospital settings, typically shows up as skin infections, such as pimples and boils that can be treated with antibiotics.

However, staph bacteria can also cause serious infections or pneumonia.



In a community setting, MRSA can spread through shared fitness equipment and other items/surfaces, certain contact sports or through direct skin-to-skin contact. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), other factors associated with the spread of MRSA infections include crowded living conditions and poor hygiene.

Staying Healthy

Students are being encouraged to do the following things to help prevent staph or MRSA skin infections:

- Keep hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and warm water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Shower with soap after playing sports, working out or using a public sauna, hot tub or pool.
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a dry bandage until healed.
- Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as soap, towels, washcloths, clothing or razors.
- Put a barrier (cloth or towel) between skin and shared equipment (like exercise bikes, etc.).
- Wipe down the surface of equipment with a disinfectant before and after using it.
- Change sheets and towels regularly.
- Wash sheets, towels and clothes that may have come into contact with a wound. Use laundry detergent and water. And then dry clothes in a hot dryer to help kill the bacteria.
- Cover mouth or nose when coughing or sneezing, and wash hands right away.
- Clean bathrooms often.
- Wipe down public objects that others frequently touch like phones, doorknobs, desks,

Identifying MRSA

Typically, MRSA infections are skin infections that may appear as:

- sores that look and feel like spider bites
- boils, which are large, red, painful bumps under the skin
- cuts that are swollen, hot and filled with pus
- blisters filled with fluid

These skin infections commonly occur around cuts and abrasions, and on areas of the body covered by hair (e.g., back of neck, groin, buttock, armpit or beard area of men).

Other signs and symptoms of infection include:

- Boils, rashes or ingrown hairs—often occurring in the area of the armpits, groin, neck and/or buttocks where *Staphylococcus* bacteria colonize and thrive.
- Unexplained fever, muscular pain and/or fatigue, especially in the several months following a skin infection.
- Warmth around the infected area.

lightswitches, remotes, headsets, handsets, computer keyboards, toilets, sinks, tubs, counters and pagers with disinfectant wipes.

And, most importantly, if students suspect a MRSA infection, they should head to the health center immediately! There's no need for panic; they just need to act sensibly and get the professionals involved.

Sources: Medline Plus, www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/; "Living with MRSA" from the Washington State Department of Health, GroupHealth Cooperative and the Tacoma/Pierce County Health Department; The Centers for Disease Control, www.cdc.gov

Cleaning Tips

To clean frequently-touched surfaces and items, students can use:

- ▲ cleaners with the word "disinfectant" on them
- ▲ one tablespoon of bleach mixed into one quart of water (use new solution each time; bleach evaporates)



What Will My Student Choose to Do?

For many college students, the pressure to determine a future career weighs heavily on their minds. Even though we know that the majority of people change careers several times throughout their lifetime, students still experience substantial stress as they try to figure out what they want to do with the “rest” of their lives.

A new website, recently launched by TheCareerProject.org, is a free resource that disseminates practical career advice—directly from the people who work in the careers shared. This interactive website includes profiles with detailed interviews, statistics and an hour-by-hour account of a typical



workday. For a nominal yearly registration fee (\$4.99), users can directly and anonymously ask any of the profiled mentors questions. The fee helps protect the integrity of the website and helps ensure against spam and other negative web-associated activities.

The founder of the website, a former career counselor, initially created the site for students. However, the information can be valuable to people of all ages. Visit

www.TheCareerProject.org to learn more. The website may help alleviate stress for young people trying to learn more about the career options available to them. You'll be able to help your student in a non-invasive manner, by allowing him to investigate options on his own time. A year-long registration could be a great academic-related gift to give this holiday season, too!

How to Help Your Student Explore Career Options

- Support your student as he 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 several years of college before deciding what they want to do. This is normal. Encourage your student to take advantage of internships and other practicum 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 her to take advantage of campus resources like career fairs, the career center and more. You might even consider visiting the career center's website yourself to get tips and explore resources.
- Share your wisdom. Many students don't consider the values and lifestyle choices associated with making a career decision. What have you learned along the way? What might you have done the same or differently? Just remember that your student's values might be different than your own at this point in his life.

Ways to Give Back During the Holidays

What better way to spend time with your student than doing some good this holiday season? There are plentiful options...

- ▲ make and deliver cookies to old teachers, along with a note about how college is going
- ▲ help make and/or deliver holiday meals
- ▲ staff a gift-wrapping booth for an organization you believe in
- ▲ adopt a family
- ▲ head out with young friends, siblings or nieces/nephews to pick out a toy to donate to Toys for Tots
- ▲ do the same for a local book-collection drive, too
- ▲ shovel out a neighbor
- ▲ usher at a holiday concert
- ▲ babysit for friends so the adults can get out to do some holiday errands

Academic Performance

continued from page one

Skills including note-taking, writing, reading and test taking

Room set-up

Class schedule

Out-of-class involvements and responsibilities

Whether a learning disability might be coming into play

No matter what, let your student know that you're on her side. While getting good grades is your student's responsibility, being confident that she has your support helps. You'll be less likely to get surprised with poor grades too, as you'll be able to maintain open lines of communication. Remember, college is all about learning. Sometimes, it's the flops that teach the most.



Holiday Gifts for College Students

It's the season for giving and for many of you, this can provide a good amount of stress. Worries about what to get for who can be all-consuming during this time of year. What should you give your college student? We asked a few current students to tell us what they would like from their parents. Here's what they had to suggest as a "gift list" for today's student:



- a nice piece of artwork or a poster to help make a residence hall room feel more homey
- money to help offset costs for academic-related endeavors (and social ones too!)
- sentimental gifts that help them learn more about you and your "pre-children" life
- room accessories they need like book shelves, drying racks, desk-top lights, etc.
- a massage or something similar to relax and unwind after a busy semester
- a nice planner or journal to record all of the changes that happen in college
- a cookbook of family recipes, with space to add new favorite recipes, especially for those students who have access to kitchens
- an empty photo album, with a note that says you'll send a couple of pictures from home each month to help stay in touch

- an iPod and accessories, especially the iPod Touch, which numerous students are hoping for this holiday season
- any practical gift related to the student's major or area of focused study (i.e. if they'll be taking a tough math course in the spring, a fancy new calculator might be helpful)
- a homemade gift as a reminder of home away from home, like a collage or a quilt

- PJs and other comfy clothes to wear when lounging around
- gift cards to restaurants/grocery stores in the area near campus
- a vacuum cleaner

Just remember, it's the thought that counts! In today's materialistic world, a return to sentimental gifts may be exactly what your student needs. Don't be afraid to extend yourself in this manner...the longer students are away from home, the more they actually appreciate keeping a piece of you and your family close to heart.

Preparing to Have Your Student Home for the Holidays

Part of you may be thrilled to have your student around for the holidays. Yet, it's okay if there's another part of you that is apprehensive. Reuniting with your student during the holiday break is your first chance to spend extensive time together since the summer. And it can be an adjustment!

To help you all manage the transition positively, keep a few things in mind:

Don't Overplan Your Student. You may want to go shopping, visit relatives, bake, golf and go to the movies with your student. Nothing wrong with that! Just be sure to leave some wiggle time for him to spend with friends and to recoup from the semester, too.

Make Commitments Known Ahead of Time. Let your student in on what's been planned so far so that he knows what to expect. That way he'll feel a part of the family while still feeling like his time is his own, too.

Find Out Schedules. Some students stay up until 3 a.m. and sleep until noon. Consider asking your student about her sleeping schedule so you're not expecting her at 9 a.m. every morning!

Talk About "House Rules." Will your student still have a curfew? Can he have friends stay overnight? Talk now so you can come up with the rules together and avoid arguments.

Be Prepared for Change. Some of your student's views may have altered because of things she learned in a class or actions she experienced through a campus organization. It's all part of the college experience as she comes into her own. Change can be good—and, oh, the interesting conversations you're bound to have! Be open to it.

