

# ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2006

## 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

## Eating Disorders

**B**ody image issues are prevalent among college-age students. The transition into college life brings new anxieties, feelings and emotions, along with a newfound sense of control over how one treats his or her body. Students who don't know how to handle the stress of college sometimes turn to eating disorders as a way of regaining control and blocking out what is going on in their lives.

Winter break may be one of the first times you have seen your student since the summer. Knowing the signs and symptoms of the most common eating disorders and how to talk about body image issues can help you proactively address any potential concerns you notice over the upcoming weeks.

### Anorexia Nervosa Signs & Symptoms

Anorexia Nervosa has four primary symptoms:

- Resistance to maintaining a body weight that is at or above normal for age and height.
- Intense fear of gaining weight and anxiety over being "fat," even if underweight.
- Disturbance in how weight or body shape is experienced, overemphasis on weight or shape on self-evaluation, or denial of the seriousness of low body weight.

- Amenorrhea (loss of menstrual period).

Warning signs of anorexia include: comments about being fat in spite of weight loss, refusal to eat certain foods or categories of food combined with food-related rituals, denial of hunger and excuse-making around situations involving food, and excessive and rigid exercise routines.

### Bulimia Nervosa Signs & Symptoms

Bulimia Nervosa has three primary symptoms:

- Frequent intake of abnormally large quantities of food, coupled with a sense of loss of control over eating.
- Use of compensatory "purging" behaviors after binges, such as self-induced vomiting, laxative

or diuretic abuse, fasting, and/or compulsive exercise.

- Extreme concern with body weight and shape.

Warning signs of bulimia include: evidence of binges



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## Safe Holiday Travel Tips

**S**tudent travel home for the holidays can be stressful for the whole family. Whether students are traveling via mass transportation, hitching a ride or driving their own car, there are safety issues to keep in mind. Prepare your student for travel by addressing these concerns.

### Travel by Bus, Train or Plane

Students traveling via mass transportation should check schedules and advisories before heading out. Additionally, encourage them to:

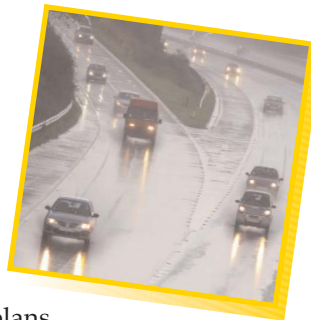
- Review specific airline regulations and federal restrictions (at [www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov)) regarding carry-on items and checked baggage, so they don't have to dismantle anything or throw things out at the airport.

### Car Checklist for Winter Travel

- ✓ Get a tune-up
- ✓ Check battery
- ✓ Check coolant
- ✓ Fix leaks
- ✓ Check wipers
- ✓ Fill your tank
- ✓ Fill washer fluid
- ✓ Carry sand bags
- ✓ Check rear defrost
- ✓ Know your car
- ✓ Get snow tires
- ✓ Carry supplies
- ✓ Have a phone
- ✓ Carry tire chains
- ✓ Clean off your car
- ✓ Go slowly

Source: [www.cartalk.com](http://www.cartalk.com)

- Keep their bags with them at all times.
- Carry important documents in front of their body, rather than in a backpack, purse or messenger bag that someone could easily snatch.
- Wait in public spaces where there are many people present.
- Carry a cell phone, if possible, to keep folks abreast of any changes or delays in travel plans.
- Carry a small amount of cash in a secure spot and a credit card, if possible, in case of an emergency.
- Dress appropriately for their destination.



### Travel by Car

Students traveling by car should be aware of weather advisories and be prepared accordingly. Specifically, students driving through snowy conditions should:

- Winterize their car before heading out—the boxed checklist offers a great resource for making sure everything is in working order and ready to go for cold weather conditions.
- Allow extra time to reach their destination when the roads are slick and avoid making sudden stops and turns.
- Keep their gas tank close to full, so that an unanticipated delay or traffic detour will not be problematic
- Wear a seat belt.

- Remember that bridges and overpasses freeze before road surfaces and take extra caution.
- Allow additional stopping distance between cars when driving on wet roads.
- Keep their windshields and lights clear of accumulations of ice and snow.
- Know what to do if they skid on ice or get stuck in snow. (When skidding, counter steer to regain control and then steer the car in the same direction that the rear wheels are sliding. When stuck in snow, remove snow from the area around the tire and spread sand or salt under the wheel instead of spinning the wheels.)
- Use common sense. There are occasions when the best driving decision is not to drive. It's better to be safe and get home a bit later than to get in an accident.
- Bring a cell phone, if possible, with pre-loaded highway information networks for updates on road conditions, along with emergency contact numbers.
- Make sure they have an ice scraper and/or broom for cleaning off their car.
- Be aware of alternate routes, in case weather conditions warrant detouring traffic from the main roadway.
- Make sure they have extra blankets, warm clothing, and other emergency gear should the need arise.

Here's to a safe travel season!

esource: [www.accuweather.com](http://www.accuweather.com)



## Spending an Extended Break with Your Student

The top three areas that usually cause conflict between families and college students during this extended break are...

- **Expressing newly-developed or developing ideas surrounding religious, political and lifestyle beliefs.** One of the benefits of college is the opportunity to interact with people from all walks of life. Students may come home with new or different thoughts and values than those instilled in them while growing up. Sometimes students are struggling with the pressure of reconciling old and new ideals. Given their increased ability to think and process differences of opinion, this is an excellent opportunity for you to engage in productive dialogue and debate, rather than arguments.



- **Trying to balance reconnecting with friends and spending quality time with family.** Students sometimes struggle with this over the extended break because they are receiving pressure from multiple people. Additionally, students need to adjust to the changes that have taken place in friends—and themselves.
- **Readjusting to house rules and routines after living independently.** While colleges and universities do have rules, students are used to making their own decisions and dealing with the consequences. As a parent, it may be difficult to allow this process to happen without interference. Sometimes a little bit of negotiation at the beginning of break can go a long way towards maintaining a conflict-free household.

Overall, the key to a successful break is treating your student like an adult. Communicating openly and honestly, listening with care and interest, and working together to establish boundaries will help you and your student continue to develop a more mature relationship.

## Gift Ideas for College Students

Not sure what to get your student this holiday season? Here is a list compiled by several college undergraduates:

- ✓ Tool set
- ✓ Binder filled with all of his/her favorite recipes
- ✓ Cool room décor
- ✓ Travel mug
- ✓ Galoshes
- ✓ Flash drive
- ✓ Grocery/Target gift cards
- ✓ Gas gift cards
- ✓ Books to read (gasp!) for fun
- ✓ iPod/mp3 player speakers
- ✓ Home-cooked meal
- ✓ Board games such as Apples to Apples, Scattegories or Boggle

## Creating a Study Space

Finding and creating a comfy and healthy place to study on a college campus takes some creativity. It's important to remember that not everyone finds studying at a desk comfortable or productive. No matter where students decide to hit the books, their study space should be:

- ▲ Free of clutter
- ▲ Stocked with pens, pencils, a calculator and anything else needed to complete assignments without interruption
- ▲ Adequately lit with no shadows or glare
- ▲ Comfortable, but not too comfortable that they fall asleep
- ▲ Free of distractions that are annoying to them, such as aromas or sounds



## Eating Disorders

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such as the rapid disappearance of large amounts of food or the existence of many empty food packages; evidence of purging such as trips to the bathroom after meals, signs and/or smells of vomiting, presence of empty laxative or diuretics packages; a rigid exercise routine even if sick or injured; the creation of complex schedules or rituals to make time for binge-and-purge sessions, and withdrawing from friends and activities.

Physically, an individual with bulimia may have swelling of the cheeks or jaw, stained teeth, and calluses on hands or knuckles from vomiting.

### Binge Eating Disorder (or Compulsive Overeating)

Binge eating disorder has four primary symptoms:

- Recurrent binge eating similar to bulimia without the compensatory measures to rid oneself of the food.
- Extreme discomfort from consuming large quantities of food.
- Avoidance of social activities that draw attention to one's body or involve food, or eating

only small amounts around others.

- A history of cyclical dieting, depression and weight gain.

### How to Help

Many individuals go through periods of disordered eating in response to transition or stress. Disordered eating behaviors do not necessarily indicate that an eating disorder exists. When eating or restricting patterns become a compulsive urge and interfere with health, social interactions and academic progress, it's likely an eating disorder has developed. At the heart of any eating disorder is a lack of emotional coping skills for dealing with stress, anxiety or trauma. The person's relationship with food becomes their mechanism for coping and a way to manage or alter mood states.

If you suspect that your student has an eating disorder:

- Learn as much as you can about eating disorders.
- Develop a support network in which you can talk openly about your feelings and frustrations—and where you can develop a

plan of action to help your student.

- Directly express concern, tell your student that you care and offer to help. Share details about behaviors you have noticed that concern you the most.
- Try to be objective and calm in discussing the behaviors that concern you. Avoid offering simple solutions—if it were that easy, there would not be a problem.
- Suggest that you and your student seek professional help from a physician and/or therapist.
- Avoid making comments about his or her appearance. Concern about weight loss may be interpreted as a compliment; comments about weight gain may be felt as criticism.
- It won't help to become involved in a power struggle. You can't force the person to eat. Offer continued support and refrain from judgment.
- Try to maintain as normal and healthy a lifestyle as possible.
- Do not blame yourself.

## The Stress of Going Home

**While the stress of college can encourage an eating disorder to develop, so can the stress of an anticipated trip home for winter break. It is not uncommon for students to begin crash diets and other destructive eating patterns in early December, as they prepare to come home and see family and friends. The fear of looking like they gained the "Freshman 15" makes some students worry that others will think they are not doing well in school. Focusing comments on weight or appearance during phone conversations and email exchanges will only add to this anxiety. Instead, promote positive behaviors and image concepts by encouraging healthy fitness and nutritional habits while focusing on internal qualities as well.**



"Reflect on your present blessings, of which every man has many; not on your past misfortunes of which all men have some."

-Charles Dickens