

Home for the Holidays?

Managing Conflict, Expectations & Your Own Sanity Over Break



Before the Break

🍁 Set 2–3 realistic goals for the break.

- Example: “Rest,” “Finish two assignments,” “See my cousin I actually like.”
- If your goals are clear, it’s easier to say no to things that derail them.

🍁 Have a “hot topics” game plan. Think ahead about politics, social issues, identity, religion, or relationships. Decide:

- What you’re willing to discuss
- What’s off-limits
- One or two phrases you’ll use to redirect, like “I’m not up for a big debate today” and “Let’s agree to park this and enjoy dinner.”

🍁 Know your triggers and your exits. Make a short mental list: comments or topics that really spike your stress, and a few ways you can gently exit (taking the dog out, helping in the kitchen, quick bathroom break, quick walk).

Talking with Family (Politics, Social Issues, Identity)

🍁 Use “I” statements, not “You” attacks.

- “I see it differently...” instead of “You’re wrong/ignorant.”
- “I feel uncomfortable when the conversation goes there.”

🍁 Give yourself permission not to convince anyone. Your job is not to change everyone’s worldview in one dinner. It’s okay to say, “We’re not going to agree on this, and that’s okay.”

🍁 Tag in an ally if you have one. If you have a sibling, cousin, or adult who “gets” you, talk in advance about supporting each other, changing the subject, or stepping in if things get heated.



Rules, Freedom, and “You Still Live Under My Roof...”

- 🍁 Negotiate, don’t just react. Instead of “That’s ridiculous,” try:
 - “At school I’ve been managing my own schedule. Can we talk about a curfew that works for both of us?”
 - Offer a compromise: “How about midnight on weeknights, 1 a.m. on weekends, and I text you if plans change?”
- 🍁 Show your competence. Parents may ease up if they see you acting responsibly: keeping them posted, helping with chores, showing you’re managing your time and safety.
- 🍁 Pick your battles. Ask yourself: “Is this annoying or truly harmful?” Save your energy for issues that actually affect your safety, mental health, or values.

Grades, Major, and “What Are You Doing with Your Life?”

- 🍁 Prepare a short script.
 - “This semester has been challenging, but I’m learning a lot and working with my advisor.”
 - “I’m exploring options in ____, and my major gives me skills in ____.”
- 🍁 Redirect from interrogation to curiosity. When someone grills you:
 - “That’s still in progress, but what about you—how did you figure out your path?”
 - Sometimes shifting the focus defuses pressure.
- 🍁 Remember: their anxiety is not your emergency. Family worries often show up as criticism. You’re allowed to take what’s useful and leave the rest.

Protecting Your Mental Health

- 🍁 Plan basic maintenance.
 - Stick as closely as you can to your sleep schedule.
 - Keep taking your meds as prescribed.
 - Limit alcohol or substance use if they tend to worsen your mood or anxiety.
- 🍁 Have a grounding toolkit. Quick tools for when you feel overwhelmed:
 - Box breathing (inhale 4, hold 4, exhale 4, hold 4)
 - 5–4–3–2–1 grounding (5 things you see, 4 you feel, 3 you hear...)
 - A calming playlist, fidget object, or short walk outside
- 🍁 Identify your support people. Decide in advance: Who can you text, call, or DM if things get rough? Friends, a partner, group chats, or a trusted adult.

If You're Not Going Home/Staying on or Near Campus

-  Intentionally plan your days, Don't leave the whole break blank. Build in:
 - At least one social thing (game night, movie, video chat)
 - A few "anchor" activities: laundry, grocery run, walk, gym, library time
-  Create your own mini-traditions. Cook something simple, order a favorite meal, watch a comfort movie, take a walk somewhere new, or start a "Friendsgiving" with whoever is around.
-  Stay connected, even if briefly. Schedule short check-ins with people you care about (text threads, video calls, or group chats). Small connections beat long stretches of total isolation.

Rest, Downtime, and Boundaries

-  Schedule actual rest, not just collapse, Rest can be: reading, naps, low-stakes hobbies, mindless TV, journaling, drawing. Put it on your mental "to-do" list.
-  Limit doomscrolling and comparison. If social media posts of "perfect" family gatherings make you feel worse, it's okay to mute, log off, or take breaks.
-  Practice one small boundary. It can be as simple as:
 - "I'm going to lie down for a bit."
 - "I'm going to take a walk."
 - "I'm not discussing my dating life today."

When Things Feel Like Too Much

-  Have a crisis plan before you need it. Know what resources you have:
 - Campus counseling center info
 - 24/7 hotlines or text lines
 - Local urgent care or crisis options near home
-  Early help is better than silent struggling. If you notice your symptoms spiking (sleep, appetite, panic, thoughts of self-harm, etc.), reach out to a friend, family member, or a professional.