



COVID-19 PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLNESS GUIDE:
FAMILIES WITH COLLEGE STUDENTS AT HOME

Version 2, 4/20/20

Are you or your college-aged child struggling being under the same roof unexpectedly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic? Have you returned home from college due to the COVID-19 pandemic and find yourself struggling being cooped up all day everyday with your family for the foreseeable future? You are not alone! In addition to the commonly reported stressors associated with COVID-19, families with college students back at home and students themselves are experiencing some unique challenges. College students are accustomed to a level of autonomy and independence that is difficult to lose when returning home. College students may be disoriented or unhappy by having to move home and complete their classes online. Due to their anxiety and change in routine, they may be much less productive academically. They may be lonely and feel isolated, as they are missing out on their normal social routines. They may be grieving the loss of college experiences such as campus events or commencement ceremonies. They may be concerned that they will not be able to secure summer internships or post-graduate jobs. College students at home also may be concerned about their parents' well-being or economic stability. Parents and families often have their routines disrupted when their college-aged child returns home, as they have developed new patterns of relating and functioning without that college student in the home. Conflicts may emerge between parents and their college-aged children related to expectations about appropriate structure and routine and time with friends versus family. Some college students may revert to old habits while parents expect behaviors to have changed since going to college, whereas other college students may expect new rules or routines while parents expect them to be the same as they were in high school. Tensions also may emerge related to parental control versus the college student's desire for freedom and autonomy. Often there may be added family stress related to the finances of the college students' ongoing education. To help families maintain their well-being, here are some tips for college students and their parents together, as well as each group separately. Helpful resources also are included.

Tips for College Students at Home and their Parents

Enjoy Family Time Together

- Reconnect as a family

EMORY

 **Grady**

 **MOREHOUSE**
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE



- Engage in activities you can do together indoors (e.g., puzzles, board games, cooking, exercise), outdoors (e.g., gardening, walks in nature, sports)
- Prioritize regular family time each week
- Cherish the special times you can spend together, as it is a luxury that you may be unlikely to have again

Communicate Regularly and Negotiate Differences

- Treat one another with respect
- Check in with one another regularly about people are doing and feeling, what they need, and how the family patterns can be optimized
- Develop agreed upon expectations
 - Discuss topics and issues about which parties differ on their expectations
 - Be flexible and compromise on expectations so all parties can get on the same page and conflict can be reduced
 - Establish mutual agreement related to household responsibilities, acceptable behavior, communication approaches, schedules including family time, physical distancing in the face of COVID-19, etc.
- Ensure each person accomplishes necessary tasks
 - Share about one's needs for computer time, WiFi access, and privacy
 - Determine one's schedule based upon a recognition of each person's school and work demands

Tips for College Age Students Who Return Home

Stay Connected!!

- Stay socially connected with high school and college friends
 - Distance physically but not socially
 - Keep up with friends using virtual technologies
 - Meet up for virtual coffee dates or happy hours, workout sessions, and other activities - several streaming sites have the option of hosting long distance movie nights and TV watch parties.
- Set up virtual study dates with classmates and friends to help you be productive



Take Care of Yourself

- Create a routine and structure for the day (e.g., wake up, schoolwork, exercise, meals, self-care, screen/media time, bedtime).
 - Stay connected to school
 - Include family time each day
 - Set work boundaries and give yourself permission to be less productive during this difficult time
 - Let your family know your online class schedule and when you'll be engaging in schoolwork so they know how to respect your work environment.
- Find private, quiet places in your home to be alone or socially connect with others, to the best of your ability
- Set boundaries in a clear yet respectful regarding topics you will/will not talk about with your family
 - Choose not to engage if they raise topics that are uncomfortable or triggering
- Develop a new hobby
- Monitor your own mental health and seek assistance if needed
- Take time to reflect upon, discuss, or journal about your next steps in life

Tips for Parents of College Students at Home

Maintain a Calm and Loving Approach

- Strive to nurture and be a coach, rather than to instruct and solve problems
- Create a dynamic in which your college student feels supported and heard, but do not pry for information
- Extend empathy toward your college student during this difficult transition
- Acknowledge and validate the college student's grief, frustrations, and fears
- Talk to your college student if you are concerned about changes in their emotional status or behavior, as these may indicate that your child is struggling and may need assistance



Support Your College Student's Age-Appropriate Autonomy

- Be mindful not to return to rules and expectations that you held prior to your college student's transition to college
 - Remember your college-aged child has become a young adult at college
 - Allow your college student to maintain the daily rhythm they established at school to the extent possible, even if it differs from other family members' schedules
 - For example, most college students spend the bulk of their time alone or with friends and classmates. Discuss reasonable expectations for their engagement in regular family time.
 - Limit your use of punishment, as it is not age-appropriate or effective
- Be clear about behaviors that are unacceptable in your home, but keep these limited in number and scope
- Choose your battles wisely
- Learn things from your college student – remember they have a lot of skills, talents, experience that they can share with you

Helpful Resources

- McLean Hospital College Mental Health Program, [Tips to Help College Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- Psychology Today, [Helping College Students Cope with COVID-19](#)
- The Hope Center, Supporting Students During COVID-19: The #RealCollege Guide, <https://hope4college.com/supporting-students-during-covid19/>