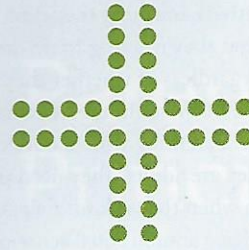


## COLLEGE LIFE SKILLS



# NAVIGATING SUMMER BREAK

By // Dr. Lisa Strohman, J.D., Ph.D.

**M**any parents will count the days until their college student returns for summer, excited to have their child back home. Admittedly, however, they may be a bit nervous about this new transition.

Most kids will share limited information about their college experiences and their newfound freedoms (this is normal), but they are happy about the opportunity to come home, to be themselves with the family and enjoy the comforts they've missed while away. Going away to college is about more than picking a major and figuring out a career path, it is about learning who we are. When children return home, it can be challenging.

To prepare, it helps to know what to expect. First, they will be eager to show off their independence, and parents will be eager to be conflict-free, but still need to be clear about who is in charge. Defining your expectations in a conversation, rather than a directive, is a healthy and more productive approach.

✦ **Discuss the rules adult-to-adult.** When you move your college student to school, you expect them to begin making adult decisions, so it is important to treat them as such. Discuss your concerns and listen to theirs. Talk about finances, job expectations, house rules and any other important issues. Remind them that if they are respectful of you and the house rules, you will be respectful of their choices.

✦ **The dreaded curfew.** This is often one of the most difficult areas to address because it is different for everyone, especially if there are younger siblings in the house. It's best to sit down and talk about a reasonable time that is respectful of others in the house and agree on a rule everyone can live with.

✦ **Summer chores.** Many parents think this will be a battle. You may be surprised by how much easier it is to get help from students returning home after living on their own. Asking them to help clean the kitchen, do the laundry and keep areas of the house picked-up is reasonable, you just need to set expectations early.

✦ **This isn't a vacation.** Don't make the mistake of being so excited that you do everything for your child as if they are a guest at a five-star hotel. It's OK to dote on them a bit and make sure they feel secure, loved and happy, but don't go overboard; it will only make them fall back into patterns of childhood where they allow parents to do everything for them.

Remember, things will never be the same. Part of raising children is helping them become responsible, successful, well-adjusted adults. When you approach them with kindness and respect, your summer reunion will go more smoothly. You may even get to know your adult child in a way you haven't before and they may appreciate knowing you on a new level, too. Don't hold your breath if that isn't the case immediately; this changing relationship takes time. ☐