

### **Anticipate and plan ahead**

Holidays, by their very nature, have definite beginning and end points. Also, the people involved can usually be identified ahead of time. By thinking through holiday plans, stresses can be minimized or even avoided.

### **Time management and activity planning.**

It helps to think of holidays in terms of a series of individual days, with morning, afternoon, and evening time blocks. It boosts one's sense of control to plan how to fill each of the daily holiday time blocks.

There's usually nothing worse than empty time in a difficult family environment, with nothing to do and time dragging.

So, it helps to find out ahead of time the family plans for meals or outings, and then to plan one's own specific activities in other time blocks.

For example, to get out of the house or limit stressful contact, one can plan study time, visits with hometown friends, personal shopping trips, job hunting excursion, or recreational activities—from bowling to skiing.

### **Count Down!**

A simple way manage stress is to count down the days. If the holidays are stress filled, sometimes the best you can do is take things one day (or even one hour) at a time. For some reason, it feels better to count the days backward. For example, on a 4-day visit, tell yourself, "There's only 4 more days to go," then "3 days to go," and so on. (Don't count up.)

### **Consult a Counselor**

Many students will find they can plan for coping with holiday visits on their own, and with the help of friends. Some situations are complicated, very emotionally charged, or the coping process is a new skill. Talking to a helping professional can make the planning process work better. If possible, meet with the counselor a few weeks in advance, to allow time to explore the situation and develop plans.

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**MANAGING  
YOUR VISIT  
HOME**

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## HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Not all holiday visits are easy and relaxing...

Holiday breaks are often assumed to be a welcome break from the pressure of college's cramped quarters, and studying. The Norman Rockwell image is of a student returning to visit their family for rest, relaxation, pampering and re-union.

For some students, holiday visits can have stress, conflict, problems, and sad, lonely, or upsetting feelings. Staying on campus or with friends may not be a viable option.

Temporary and chronic family problems can be a source of stress, as can the re-adjustment to living as a "child", after the freedoms of living more independently.

It often helps to have a plan for the more difficult parts of the visit, to ease the emotional strains.

### Knowledge Is Power!

*Use your knowledge of family members and plan accordingly*

With a little thought, typical reactions and interactions with family members can be anticipated, and plans for managing communications can be developed.

Many family interaction styles and patterns have developed of many years and are fairly predictable.

For example, one can predict:

- Dad will drink too much
- Mom will want to monopolize my time
- Grandpa will tell me what to major in
- Grandma will be sad and depressed
- Mom and Dad will argue and fight
- My family will be critical of my choices

While one cannot prevent family members from doing or saying things, one can anticipate comments and behaviors and choose ahead of time how to react.

Your reactions are yours to determine...

The ability to choose your reactions to others' behaviors or what they say to you empowers you—with your maturity as a college student, you are no longer helpless and simply "struck with" the situations presented to you.

You can choose reactions which:

- Are diplomatic yet consistent with your own views
- Prevent you from being dragged into negative discussions and arguments
- Limit your sense of personal responsibility for the other's poor choices
- Retain your freedom to make choices while politely acknowledging other's "advice"
- Minimize the emotional impact (on you) of criticism, blaming, etc.

To focus your own thinking, take some time before a holiday visit, and write down what you expect to happen. Then write down how you would like to respond.