

The Holiday Season with your Teenager

The month of December typically brings more family time and an extended break from school for our children. The holiday season can also bring out stronger emotions, positive and negative, and both heartfelt expressions of gratitude and increased consumerism. While this time can be joyous, the images of perfect families, complete with a full complement of shiny new goods, can lead to unhelpful comparisons to our own lives.

How do parents manage the inherent materialism of the holidays in America, while also giving teens what they need most: unconditional love, a chance to truly relax, and opportunities to give back, both to the community and to those they love? The Staples Resilience Project would like to offer the following suggestions for navigating the holiday season when emotions can run high.

1. While your teen may regale you with anecdotes about what everyone else is getting for the holidays, what they likely need more than anything is sleep and relaxation. During the break, let them sleep until lunch time a few days without judgment so they can recharge for the new year.
2. Give your teen the gift of a week without conversation about academics or post-high school planning. School is their job, and they need a break from work just like we do. Midterm exams aren't for a few weeks, and a short time away from their studies will refresh stressed students.
3. Some seniors are hearing back from colleges in December. If the news is unwelcome, allow your child a few days to rage and be upset, communicating your unconditional love with hugs and affection. Acknowledge that a denial from a college *feels* personal when we know it isn't, eventually communicating your firm belief that all will turn out well in the end.
4. Give your teen the opportunity of alone time with you: lunch out, a movie, etc. Be ready to listen or just be quiet if they would prefer, and resist the temptation to pepper them with questions; instead share in your experience (past and present) of the holiday season.
5. If you haven't already done so, establish a family tradition, and continue those that have been established. It can be as simple as cookies for Santa or a family photo in matching pajamas. The predictability of traditions helps teens to feel safe and connected.
6. Offer your teen the choice of a few "give back" activities you can do together. For example, wrapping a "Toys for Tots" gift that your teen has chosen or spending time with an older relative. Teens appreciate feeling they have made a difference.

Soon enough, the time will arrive when you are hoping with all your heart that your child will make the trip home for the holidays. The memory of expensive presents will fade, but the warmth created by love and quality time is more meaningful and longer lasting. Happy Holidays to all!

The Staples Resilience Project is an ongoing endeavor by the Staples Guidance Department aimed to promote the well-being of our students and foster a positive, inclusive school community.

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