

There is some truth to the old adage, “You can’t go home again.”

Simply because you’ve lived away from home, things have changed—both you and your family. So, it’s worth doing a little planning about how you’ll manage some of the changes and tensions that come with going home for the holidays. A few common tension points include:

- **Parents and other family members may expect things to go back to the way they were before you went to school, but you’ve likely gotten used to doing many things differently**—your sleep and eating schedule, the chores you prioritize and when (and how) you do them, what you do with your leisure time. If you can predict some of the things that might become sticking points, it might be worth having a proactive conversation about it so that you can come to some agreement on things like chores, meals together, etc. And, if you feel tension building, it’s often best to address it in the moment rather than hoping it will go away.
- **Parents and other family members are often full of questions.** They may ask about grades, new relationships, majors or post-graduation plans. These questions are often unwelcome, especially if you don’t have the answer. Try to take a deep breath and remember that typically, they are asking because they love you and are eager to have a window into your life. If there are topics that you know are going to be stressful, consider talking to your family in advance to establish a boundary—offering a reason is often helpful (i.e., I’m still trying to figure this out, so being asked about it feels like pressure.) You can also plan (and practice) a few stock answers to give to some questions.
- **Differing expectations.** Parents and family members often begin to envision your life when you are still in diapers. If your interests, goals, values, or identity do not align with those visions, that might be a difficult adjustment for your folks to make. And, their misalignment with you might make you feel judged, misunderstood, or unvalued. How you handle these kinds of conflicts might depend on your family dynamic, as well as where you are in your own development.
 - In some families, it might be helpful to share some parts of your own journey (i.e., “In my Social Inequalities class, we talked a lot about . . . and I now think/feel/believe . . .”).
 - In others, setting boundaries might be most helpful (i.e., “I think it might be best for us to agree to disagree/not talk about this right now.”).
 - Sometimes focusing on places where you are in alignment—like an activity that you can enjoy together, or reminiscing about a positive shared experience—can be helpful in redirecting.

When human beings live together, conflict is inevitable.

War is not.

--Daisaku Ikeda

Although conflict is not comfortable for most of us, try to remember that it is a natural part of relationships. We have the best chance of moving through conflict and building greater closeness when we employ good communication strategies like:

- Active listening
- Focus on specific issues without generalizing or escalating the situation
- Share feelings directly and honestly
- Express your own needs clearly
- Check your judgment
- Engage your empathy

Regardless of the conflict or challenges, it's important to plan how you'll manage conflict, frustrations, and hurts. What support systems, self-care strategies, and stress management strategies might you be able to use while at home for the holidays?

Don't wait until you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed to use your supports and self-care strategies! Be proactive in scheduling time for self-care or conversations with supportive friends, and be ready to step away if you start feeling overwhelmed.