Getting into the Midterm Mindset

It’s happening. Midterm madness is almost here! Your student is likely gearing up to demonstrate her knowledge – or lack thereof – on her first set of midterms of the year. You can be more helpful in this process than you think, no matter whether you live near or far.

Be Supportive. When talking with your student over the next few weeks, try to remember that she may be stressed up to her eyeballs. Midterms can cause many students to panic. Reassure her that you just want her to do the best she can and remind her to use her resources. If she is struggling, she shouldn’t hesitate to contact her professors for help or to get some extra tutoring on campus.

Send Some Encouragement. Now’s a great time to put a little something in the mail to let your student know you’re thinking about him. A bit of home cooking or a humorous card will do the trick!

Don’t Take Things Personally. If your student seems unaware of things happening with your family or is cutting conversations short, it most likely is due to feelings of being overwhelmed. Many midterms are given as take home exams, which take a great deal of time to complete. For those happening in class, students are often expected to know everything they’ve learned up until this point in the semester. Some classes only offer two opportunities for assessment – midterms and finals. So, you can imagine the pressure she might be feeling to do well.

Encourage Healthy Eating and Sleeping Habits. The reminders are important. Make sure to gently remind your student to eat well and to get plenty of sleep, especially if he wants to be at his best for midterms. A tired student doesn’t remember things very well!

Don’t Add Undue Burdens. Now’s probably not the time to tell your student that she needs to get a job over winter break to help with finances or that her younger sister is struggling with a bully at school. Consider waiting until midterms are over to let her know about the things she can’t control – especially if there isn’t anything she can do right at the moment to help anyway.

Most importantly, just be ready. Ready to support, ready to talk or ready to back off just a little to offer your student space to do as well as he can. Once midterms are over, everyone can take a deep breath and get back on track. Your support will mean a great deal to your student during this hectic time.

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Seasonal Student Issues

There’s a seasonal ebb and flow when it comes to student issues. Here are a few things your student may be experiencing this month:

- First year students begin to realize college life is not as perfect as they were expecting it to be
- Diversity issues become very apparent as students begin interacting with others who are very different from them
- Conflicts between friends – both new and old – can occur as students settle into the rhythm of the new academic year
- Students may begin feeling behind in class work and wanting more contact with instructors
- They are anticipating midterms and questioning their abilities
- People start to show their “true selves” – masks start to come off as students begin to feel more comfortable in their surroundings
- The job panic of mid-year graduates kicks in as the realization settles in that they will be graduating soon
Celebrating the Days of October

Have some fun celebrating various October festivities with your student! Here are a few suggestions…

October is…

- **Book Month** – Suggest that you and your student read the same book and then compare notes! Or plan ahead for a “book for break” that you can both enjoy.

- **Ergonomics Month** – Send along a few back and neck stretch ideas via email that your student can keep in mind during his many hours at a computer.

- **Eat Better, Eat Together Month** – Check out tips at [www.fruitsandveggiesmore-matters.org](http://www.fruitsandveggiesmore-matters.org) to help you and your student both eat more fruits and veggies during this harvest season.

- **Organize Your Medical Information Month** – Help your student take an important step by gathering all her medical information (including dental and eye info) in one place.

- **Face Your Fears Day** – Compare notes with your student and agree on one thing you can each do to face a particular fear. You’ll help keep each other honest.

- **Dictionary Day** – Share a favorite word with your student.

- **Character Counts Week** – Tell your student what you appreciate about his character.

- **Chocolates Day** – Send along a chocolaty treat. Or wait until Oct. 30th, which is Candy Corn Day!

- **Halloween** – Give your student a Halloween name (e.g. Julie becomes “Ghoulie”), just for fun!

Being Aware of Hazing

As students get involved with various organizations, the positives far outweigh the negatives. However, one serious behavior to be aware of is hazing – or illegal activities that “newbies” are forced to go through to “earn” group membership. It can happen in various groups, from bands to membership organizations to athletic teams. And it’s never okay.

It can be tough to get students to talk about hazing. Sometimes, this is because they don’t even recognize the activities as hazing. Plus, responses to hazing activities can vary. Some students view them as a personal challenge, while others view them as abuse or harassment.

If you suspect that your student is involved in hazing-related activities, watch for these signs:

- Physical signs such as exhaustion, hangovers, increased illness, scars or bruising
- A decrease in performance in school, sports, etc.
- Feelings of anger, confusion, anxiety or depression
- Avoiding conversations related to the group or the activities they have been engaged in

If you have a concern, talk with your student. And remind her that there are many people on campus she can go to for assistance, too, from campus ministry to residence hall staff to advisors, counselors, coaches and more. No one should be subjected to hazing!
Handling Conflicts Between Friends

“I don’t know what happened! Last week we were good friends and this week she’s barely speaking to me.”

Chances are that conflicts between friends may become a topic of conversation between you and your student. Navigating college friendships takes patience, forgiveness, understanding and clear communication. Here are some tips that might help your student along the way…

**Go to the Source.** It’s so easy, especially when living communally and/or being part of a campus community, to talk about conflicts with a friend with everyone but that friend! Going to the source is key if your student really wants to work things out.

**Don’t Believe Rumors.** Part of being in the midst of this type of community is that rumors fly faster than light. Encourage your student to shake off a rumor and go directly to the source to better understand what the true issue is.

**Tamp Down the Drama.** There are so many real-life issues to contend with that fabricated drama doesn’t deserve the time and attention it sometimes demands. Suggest that your student not get caught up in unnecessary drama. This isn’t an episode of “Gossip Girl,” after all—it’s real life!

**Look for True Souls.** If someone sidles up to you because you have a car, it’s pretty easy to tell what his or her intentions might be. But if someone shares interests and likes your student for who she is, that’s a true friendship worth pursuing.

**Give the Benefit of the Doubt.** When in conflict with friends, sometimes giving them the benefit of the doubt can diffuse the initial tension so students can get to the heart of the issue. Encourage your student to be the bigger person.

**Keep Voices & Emotions Calm.** Getting all riled up is one sure way to make a situation worse, rather than better. Suggest a cool-headed approach where students use “I” statements to express their concerns and a genuine interest in resolving the conflict. Sometimes, that’s all it takes.

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**Make a Difference Day**

October 27th is Make a Difference Day. This annual event, held on the fourth Saturday of every October, is a time to embrace difference making. Check out the Make a Difference Day site at [www.usaweekend.com/section/MDDAY](http://www.usaweekend.com/section/MDDAY) for ideas and more information.

In the meantime, you can make a difference today! Consider calling or writing your student to tell her the difference she has made in your life. It may sound corny, but we bet you’ll catch your student off guard…and probably make her day!

You can also encourage your student to take a moment to drop a line to the people who’ve made a difference in his life. Chances are, he’s had teachers, coaches, family members or mentors who’ve helped him get to where he is today. Taking stock of where we’ve come from, and those who’ve provided support and direction along the way, is a humbling and meaningful experience. Plus, doing so will make your student feel really good in the process.

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**Possible Sources of Friendship Conflict**

- Someone not pulling their weight with a group project for class
- Misunderstandings enhanced by rumors
- Thinking the other person is upset when it really has nothing to do with you
- Someone borrowing something and not returning it
- Looking for reasons that someone might not like you
- Sharing confidential information with others, even when asked not to
- Being a “taker” instead of viewing friendship as a two-way street
- Talking behind someone’s back
- Publicly humiliating someone with words and/or actions
“I’m Homesick”

Those can be tough words to hear, yet it’s a reality that some students may be missing home and the people who populate that part of their world. Here are a few ways to respond…

“Have you reached out?”

Sometimes one of the best ways for any of us to get outside of our sorrows and ourselves is to reach out to others. For college students, this can be as simple as asking someone to lunch in the dining hall, saying hello in class or volunteering through the community service office.

“Who is a trusted faculty/staff person you can talk with about this?”

We all need sounding boards, especially those who understand what college students are going through and who want to help. Luckily, your student is surrounded by these folks, from coaches to professors to club advisors, residence hall staff, campus ministers, counselors and more.

“What have you been doing outside of class?”

Students who just go to class and don’t engage through other activities will likely feel homesick because they haven’t developed a sense of campus belonging. It can start with little things: attending a club interest meeting, working on a service project, going to a concert, saying “yes” when an RA rounds up a group to go to dinner…

“Who and what are you missing?”

Sometimes students just need to lay it all out there, to identify where their homesick feelings are coming from so they can then address them. Asking a few questions in this vein can help your student get to that point, so you can then help her figure some ways to face the issues, head on!

If you suspect that your student is experiencing more than just homesickness — whether it’s anxiety, depression or something else — encourage him to seek help on campus. There are plenty of good people here who are eager to help.

Getting Involved

Now that your student has been in school for several weeks, it’s time to take stock of his level of involvement in campus happenings. Do you get the sense that your student is taking advantage of all that college life has to offer? From academic to social to artistic to athletic, we promise that there is plenty to choose from!

Some Questions to Ask

You can gauge your student’s level of involvement on campus by asking the following questions:

- What are the some of the events that have been happening on campus lately?
- Have you done anything fun in the last week?
- What kinds of events are being sponsored in your residence hall?
- Are there any major speakers or performances on campus this semester?
- How are the athletic teams doing?
- Where are your favorite places to hang out on campus?
- What kinds of events are going on in the local community?
- What’s the best way to find out about campus happenings?

By chatting about this topic, you’ll let your student know that you care about more than just how he does academically. Participating in things outside of classes will enrich him intellectually, physically and spiritually. Encourage him to read flyers, peruse the campus newspaper and website, attend hall events, and visit the cool nooks and crannies on campus. College is all about trying new things! He’s got to get out there and explore in order to reap the benefits.