



February 2012

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:

- Difficulty getting into study mode
- Things become routine... school finally becomes home
- Pressures to figure out living plans for next year as the room assignment process draws near
- Missing family and friends at home, and friends who did not return to school
- Cliques become stronger within residence hall communities, student organizations and in classes
- Cabin fever and burnout
- Valentine's Day depression if not dating
- Vocational choice/internship search causes anxiety
- Spring break planning
- Sophomores facing decisions about declaring a major

Choosing a Major

Many second year students are currently facing the selection of a major, after taking a variety of courses. This process can be stressful and a bit agonizing for some students who still don't feel 100% sure about what they want to do. Your support is a key element in this process.

How to Be Helpful

- Listen!
- Support the exploration of a variety of potential careers.
- Encourage your student to make academics a high priority.
- Encourage her to build skills and strengths out of the classroom that complement her in the classroom learning.
- Identify talents and abilities you have observed in your student and share them with her.
- Encourage your student to find

his passion and pursue a vocation rather than simply guaranteeing himself a job.

What Do I Need to Know as a Parent/Family Member?

- Be aware that the majority of college students change their major at least once.
- Recognize that many career choices today require further schooling.
- Encourage your student to visit the Career Center and an academic advisor regularly.
- Ask intentional questions to help your student filter through what can be an overwhelming decision.
- Don't...
 - Push earning potential as a sole decision-making factor.

continued on page four

Honoring Black History Month

College campuses often have some of the best programs available, especially when it comes to celebrating important dates such as February's Black History Month. Encourage your student to see what's happening on campus, through the school website, event listings, the school paper and more.

And discuss the program after your student has attended, to see what he learned and what he thought about in that context. Reflecting after an event is one of the best ways to solidify what it meant and what was learned.



Discussing Healthy Relationships

February is Relationship Wellness Month. Talk with your student this month about what a healthy relationship looks like. It doesn't matter if you're talking about the love of your student's life or a good friend. The basic tenets of healthy relationships are the same, regardless! Consider using this acronym to get the conversation started:

Signs that a Relationship is Healthy...

- V Vitality.** In a healthy relationship, both individuals have the opportunity to grow, explore areas of interest to them and live life to the fullest.
- A Acceptance.** It's nearly impossible to change another person. In a healthy relationship, both partners accept the good, the bad and the sometimes ugly parts of one another.
- L Love.** This goes without saying! But, it's important to note that love is intimacy, friendship and respect – not possessiveness, obsession and manipulation.
- E Emotion.** Relationships are emotional roller coasters, there's no doubt about it. Sometimes you'll face uphill battles and sometimes you'll feel like you're coasting downhill. This is important in building a strong, solid relationship.
- N Natural.** In a healthy relationship, partners aren't pressured to do things they don't want to do. If something doesn't feel right, it's quite likely that it isn't. You should never feel intimidated or put down by the person who loves you.
- T Trust.** It's much easier to be vulnerable when you trust someone wholeheartedly. And this vulnerability is so important in achieving an authentic relationship built on honesty and openness.
- I Interdependence.** In a healthy relationship, partners aren't dependent on each other, and both have their own positive identity.
- N Nourishing.** A relationship should make deposits in your emotional bank account, not withdrawals. Healthy relationships are those that make you feel good about yourself.
- E Effervescence.** If you're not feeling excited about your relationship, something is wrong. Although relationships are hard work and take a great deal of compromise, if you've tried this and you're still not feeling excited, it might be time to evaluate why you're feeling the way you are. This is okay! Sometimes you just need to take stock to realize all that you have. But sometimes, it may be time to part ways. If this is the case, stay true to yourself and be as honest as you can.

Show your student that you care about his emotional well being by encouraging him to take a close look at his relationships to determine how healthy they are.



Spread the Love!

So, Valentine's Day is fast approaching and, for some students, this can be a day of ecstasy while others find it to be one of agony!

It's important that students know there is nothing wrong with them if they aren't currently in a relationship. And for those who are coupled up, they need to make sure they are happy and healthy, instead of losing themselves in a relationship.

These relationship topics are very real in students' lives. Let them talk with you, if they choose, to get things off their chests. Realize, however, that they're not always looking for advice! Sometimes, it's just about having a listening ear available when they're feeling at the height of emotions.

If you suspect that your student may need some additional help handling relationship issues, remember that the campus counseling center, as well as the health/wellness center specializes in these areas. The folks who staff these centers *want* to work with college students, plus they really have a handle on the issues they're facing. Encourage your student to seek out support – it's everywhere on campus!

And foster a bit of self-love, too, by letting your student know that you think he is a good egg. Ask siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles and friends to chime in, too! We all need to be reminded that we are loved and appreciated. Happy Valentine's Day!

Two Lesser-Known Eating Disorders

National Eating Disorders Week happens from February 20-26 this year. Here are two eating disorders that don't always get as much attention, yet that students struggle with regularly.

Binge-Eating Disorder

- People who have this disorder have frequent episodes of compulsive overeating, often at least two binge-eating episodes per week, on average, for six months
- Unlike people with bulimia they do not purge their bodies after eating
- During binges, they often eat alone or very quickly, regardless of whether they feel hungry or full
- They often feel guilt or shame over their actions
- Binge-eating disorder is a vicious cycle, as the excessive eating usually causes guilt, unhappiness or stress, which may lead to more binge eating
- It often leads to obesity, cardiovascular disease and type II diabetes
- Someone with this disorder may eat between 10,000 and 20,000 calories per day
- People with binge-eating disorder often have coexisting psychological illnesses including anxiety, depression and personality disorders
 - As many as half of all people with binge-eating disorder are depressed or have been depressed in the past
- Certain behaviors more common in people with binge-eating disorder include abusing alcohol, acting impulsively, not feeling in charge of themselves, and not noticing and/or talking about their feelings

Signs & symptoms include:

- A marked increase in food consumption
- Weight gain
- Secretive eating habits
- A compulsion to eat as much as possible
- Eating even when full
- Eating very quickly
- A feeling that binges are out of control, but a compulsion to continue
- Hiding food containers

Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD)

- This is characterized by a fixation with a real or imagined visual imperfection on the body
- Certain physical obsessions are common among people with BDD. These include:
 - Size or shape of a facial feature, like the nose
 - Moles or freckles
 - Acne
 - Scars
 - Body/facial hair
 - Thinning hair
 - Breast size
 - Size and shape of genitals
- The preoccupation with appearance causes significant distress and/or shame
- It may cause impairment in work, school or social settings
- The preoccupation is not accounted for by another mental illness
- People with BDD may have very low self-esteem
- This disorder can cause self-alienation from peers
- People with BDD may be inclined to get plastic surgery

Seeking Help

If you're worried that your student may have an eating disorder, he or she can get help from the campus counseling center, the residence life staff, a trusted advisor/supervisor or the health/wellness center.

Signs & symptoms include:

- A large amount of time spent looking in mirrors
- Constantly talking about their appearance
- Using hands or posture to hide or draw attention away from defect
- Wearing specific clothing or a lot of makeup to hide flaw
- Frequently measuring perceived or exaggerated defect
- Putting themselves down, calling themselves unattractive
- Skin picking
- A lot of exercise, if the fixation is with muscle
- Refusing to have pictures taken
- Excessive grooming
- Avoiding social situations (so the flaw or perceived flaw will not be noticed)

Sources: Binge-Eating Disorder, National Institute of Mental Health, www.nimh.nih.gov; What are EDs? Something Fishy, www.something-fishy.org; Binge-Eating Disorder, Mayo Clinic, www.mayoclinic.com; Body Dysmorphic Disorder, Mayo Clinic, www.mayoclinic.com; Binge Eating Disorder, Weight Control Information Network, www.win.niddk.nih.gov; Body Dysmorphic Disorder in Men, PubMed Central, www.pubmed-central.nih.gov



Contributing to Community

At this point in the year, some students are knee-deep in community involvement, while others are still trying to figure out their place. A key question to ask your student in regards to this is “What could you contribute to the campus community?”

This focus on community is particularly important right about now, since most students have been here for a while and may be taking their community for granted during a “community slump.” You can help reinvigorate their contributions with a few key questions...

- What are some things you could teach other people? (These can be anything, from basic Spanish to how to wrap a gift creatively to the rules of basketball!)
- What about your personality makes you a positive community member?
- What does “community involvement” mean to you?
- What community contributions have you provided thus far?
- How else do you see yourself getting involved in this community?
- What interests/talents/hobbies do you have? How could each be used to contribute to this community? (i.e. You play the guitar – this could be used during a campus coffeehouse event.)

- What do you hope to show other members of this community?

Encourage your student to talk with a trusted advisor, coach, residence hall staffer or supervisor about positive ways to get involved in the campus community. It doesn’t have to be a huge commitment, especially not at first! Yet, engaging in the community is a proven way for students to feel more a part of things and to feel like they want to stick around.

Possible Community Contributions

Your student can get involved in various ways, such as:

- Attending hall or student government meetings
- Helping his residence hall staff with a program or bulletin board
- Joining the campus newspaper to do graphic design
- Forming an intramural basketball/volleyball/ping pong team
- Attending a retreat run by campus ministry
- Participating in a service project with some classmates
- Giving campus tours through the admissions office
- Helping to decorate a campus space for Open House
- Singing with the gospel choir or another campus group

Having Fun with the Academy Awards!

It has been a pretty good year at the movies, from *The Descendants* to *The Help*! The Oscars will be awarded live this February 26 on ABC. A variety of high-quality movies have been nominated, providing yet another topic of conversation to share with your student.

Tune into the Academy Awards website at www.oscars.org for more information. Plus, you can check out the movie descriptions, actor/actress bios and previews available through the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com). You’ll have all sorts of information at your fingertips to “talk movies” with your student.



Choosing a Major

continued from page one

- Bug your student about changing his mind and not sticking with a major.
- Push “occupation specific” degrees over a liberal arts degree.
- Be careful not to expect your student to follow in your footsteps or take over the family career “legacy.”
- Promote internships, job shadowing and mentoring as a means to “test” possible majors and career paths.

