

Coping with College Series

Going Home on Breaks: Is It Ever the Same?

It's not news to you, to be sure, that there are two major vacation periods during the fall semester – Thanksgiving and Christmas. Some of you may be counting the days until you can get away from here and return to the familiarity of home, the privacy of your own (unshared) room, catching up on the news with old friends and, perhaps, brining a new friend home for the holiday.

No matter if you are a freshman and this will be your first return home since school has begun, or an upperclassman who has done the break routine many times before – that which you anticipate and hope to experience when you are home may or may not live up to your expectations. Is coming back home ever the same once you leave for college?

There is some evidence, primarily gathered from students, which suggest that students may feel that home really isn't the same for them. Statements like "my parents don't understand me anymore," "my parents still expect me to be in early, like I'm still in high school" and "my friends at home have changed," reflect this perceived change in others

"Isn't the same..." doesn't necessarily mean better or worse – just different. Have you considered the possibility that while many of the physical characteristics of home have stayed the same, that people back home may be changing?

Take parents, for example. They, too, are experiencing changes in the ways they see themselves relating to you. "She/he doesn't want to be around the family anymore," or "She/he doesn't seem to want to come home" are statements suggesting that parents, too, are observing changes and having to adjust.

But, reflect a moment: Is it not possible that you are changing rather than they, and that you are in the process of defining a different type of relationships with them (for example, moving more toward an equal relationship)?

You have established, in a way, a new home here at Illinois State, with a new set of friends – people who are a part of your day-to-day life and who may better understand what it is like to be at college. The friendships you had in high school may not meet your needs now, and you might find your interest in keeping contact with them diminishing. The security that home provided you earlier may now be beginning to change.

So these changes, we suggest, are natural and inevitable. When our expectations are somewhat idealized about "back home" and we find that what we wanted, hoped for, doesn't "pan-out," it's not surprising that we might feel a bit depressed. This, too, is what is called "just another phase" of that transition to adulthood.

Can home ever be the same for you? How are you changing in what and who is important to you? Can you step outside of yourself and see how your parents and other family members or friends might be changing too? Going home for breaks may provide new insights on who you are and how you are changing. Enjoy them!