



Counseling and Consultation

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Stress Periods for Students

Counseling & Consultation recognizes that college can be a stressful experience for students. This handout describes some typical sources of stress for each month. Use it as a guide to help you or your student better manage those stressful periods.

**AUGUST/
SEPTEMBER:** *Can be stressful for first-year students in particular.*

- Homesickness; struggle with making new friends and feeling a sense of “ownership” in the university; may feel alienated from others and/or experience discrimination.
- Students are confronted with new experiences and new people who are different than they are. Students may find themselves questioning their values.
- Some students may experience a discrepancy between high school status and grades and initial college performance. This might lead to feeling frustrated if student’s performance is below expectations.
- Returning students may be struggling with new status (e.g., sophomore, junior, senior) at university and the accompanying responsibilities.
- Freshmen may struggle with being a “little fish in a big pond” now that they are no longer recognized as the stars they were in high school. There can be significant stress to having to re-establish one’s self in a new environment.
- **New students may also struggle with newfound freedom – specifically, they may find it difficult to develop a structured lifestyle that will help them meet academic demands.**

OCTOBER: *Students begin to realize that life at college is not as perfect as they were led to believe by parents, teachers, and admissions staff.*

- Some may feel lonely because they have been unsuccessful at developing supportive friendships.
- Some students get “wake-up call” after unexpected poor performance on mid-term examinations.
- Job panic for mid-year graduates.
- **Students may begin to feel overwhelmed by all of the academic demands.**

NOVEMBER: *Increased academic pressure may be experienced due to procrastination, difficulty of work, and/or lack of sufficient ability.*

- Feelings of sadness and worry may increase because of beliefs that one should have adjusted to the college environment by now.
- Economic concerns; funds from parents and summer earnings begin to run out.
- Some students are still struggling with making friends and may be tempted to give up; social isolation may also be negatively affecting their ability to study.
- May worry about returning home to family if semester is not going well.
- **Some students may not be able to go home for the holidays, which could contribute, to feelings of isolation and homesickness.**

DECEMBER: *Extracurricular time strain: seasonal parties, concerts, social service projects, and religious activities drain student energies.*

- Worry may increase as final examinations approach and papers are due.
- Pre-holiday feelings of sadness; especially for those who have concerns for family, those who have no home to visit, and for those who prefer not to go home because of family conflicts.
- Financial strain because of holiday gifts and travel costs.
- **Students may have concerns about losing some or all of the recently acquired freedom/independence while at home for winter break.**

JANUARY: *Sadness over loss of security and familiarity as students leave home and return to school.*

- Some apprehension about academic performance this semester if first semester was more challenging than expected. Some students may also feel ashamed of their academic performance from the previous semester.
- Students may learn that some friends are not returning to school. As a result, students may feel sad at the loss of those relationships.
- Students may also find that they do not like the classes they registered for and/or need to register for different classes due to last semester's performance. Students may experience frustration at trying to establish desired class schedule.
- Seniors may feel sad about impending loss of college student identity and changes in friendships that will occur with graduating in May.

FEBRUARY: *Many students experience optimism because second semester is perceived as easier than the first semester.*

- Some seniors may begin to feel worry when they realize that they do not want a job in the field in which they majored.
- Couples may begin to establish stronger ties or experience weakening of established ones.
- Students who have failed to establish social relationships or achieve a moderate amount of recognition may feel very frustrated and dissatisfied with their college experience.
- **Students begin to feel the pressure of midterms as spring break quickly approaches.**

MARCH: *Talk of Spring Break plans tends to dominate students' conversations.*

- Students may hear bad news about students who have died or been seriously injured while on Spring Break.
- **Returning from Spring Break students realize that there are about 6 weeks left in the semester. As a result, academic pressure may increase.**
- Existential crisis for seniors. Must I leave school? Is my education worth anything? Was my major a mistake? Why go on? Where is God? Will I make it?
- Seniors who have not looked for a job or who have not been able to find a job begin to worry about life after college.
- Students may also worry because they have yet to find a summer job.

APRIL: *Academic pressure continues to increase because of impending final exams.*

- Sophomores, as they register for fall classes, are realizing that they will be taking classes in their major next semester. Some may worry about their abilities to meet the academic requirements of their chosen major.
- **Summer job pressure continues. Students may experience worry while waiting to hear from companies.**
- Students may experience some worry over choosing a major.
- Pressure of planning for graduation increases as invitations need to be sent out and celebratory plans confirmed.
- Final exams, papers, and projects may feel overwhelming.
- Social pressures; everybody is bidding for your participation on trips and at graduation parties.
- Seniors who have not received a job offer may feel anxious – especially when they learn that their peers are getting job offers.

MAY: *Concern develops because of the realization that the year is ending.*

- Seniors may be concerned about transition to new phase of life (job, graduate school, marriage, etc.).
- **Students may experience sadness, frustration, and anger over leaving friends and facing conflicts at home.**
- Pressure of passing final exams peaks.
- Panic over not having any confirmed plans for the summer.