



Healthy Boundaries for the Holidays

For many people, winter break provides a pause from the stress, pressure, and quick pace of everyday life as a student. Returning to living with family after being on your own, however, can come with its own challenges. This is even more true if “home” is an invalidating, exhausting, or even unsafe place to be. Here are some tips for setting healthy boundaries and protecting your peace over winter break:

- 1. Identify what is important to you.** Before trying to set boundaries with other people, figure out what actions make you feel happy, supported, healthy, and loved and what actions makes you feel sad, unhealthy, alone, and harmed. Identifying how other people make you feel helps you to be more confident in asking for what you want from others.
- 2. Clearly communicate your boundaries.** Not every relationship has healthy power dynamics, and sometimes loved ones are not open to having these conversations. But when it's safe, clearly and concisely communicate what boundaries you need to have keep a relationship positive. For example: “It makes me feel like I have no privacy when you just walk into my room unannounced. In the future, would you mind knocking first?”
- 3. Invest in your alone time.** Winter break means being away from your normal routines and social circles. This can feel overwhelming and make normal stress harder to handle. It's perfectly normal to take some time on your own to rest and recharge.

4. It's OK to disengage from toxic conversations. You are not obligated to participate in or tolerate debates about identities you or your loved ones hold. If someone refuses to respect your boundaries around harmful speech, try to disengage calmly but firmly. For example: “I understand you feel that way, but I am not going to have this conversation with you.”

The temporary living situation that comes with winter break can be even more difficult for **LGBTQIA+** students returning to family members who are invalidating and harm-causing. If that is the case for you, please know that you are a gift and that you deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. We are so glad you are part of Tulane, and while you are away, here are some ways you can take care of yourself:

- 1. Take time to regularly affirm your identity and self-worth.** Engage in LGBTQIA+ media, wear clothing that signifies your authentic self, and repeat an affirmation to yourself.
- 2. Take positive things with you.** Do you have a picture that makes you feel good or a favorite comfort item? Take it along with you.
- 3. Talk to your allies.** Call your friends/partner/allies. Check in, vent, share stories—whatever makes you feel better. Also, know what resources are available in your location. Is there a PFLAG chapter? An LGBTQIA+ community center? Research this in advance, so you'll know where to turn if you need to.

Seasonal Living & Slowing Down with Nature

As we are entering high-productivity mode in preparation for finals, animals and plants are entering hibernation to replenish their energy and take advantage of the stillness before spring. Just as nature enters its phase of rest, so should we.

Evidence suggests changes in rest periods, brain function, gene expression, and even the biology of our guts occur as the earth cycles through the four seasons. **Seasonal living** is a lifestyle that intentionally incorporates seasonal changes into our behaviors and activities, like work, food, festivities, and recreation. Winter break is a great opportunity to tune our lifestyles into nature's period of rest, essential for rejuvenation and balanced energy levels. We can integrate this into our lives in various ways.

Seasonal eating builds a connection between our bodies and the environment. The seasons nourish different foods that, in turn, nourish us. We crave richer, warmer meals in the winter, and seasonal eating encourages us to listen to our gut—literally.

Hygge is a centuries-old Danish concept that describes coziness and contentment accompanying the wintertime, meant to foster better wellbeing in the colder months. Hygge encourages spending time indoors with friends or family, indulging in blankets, candles, and warm drinks, and participating in calm and low-stakes recreation.

Bringing nature home is a fun and easy way to coexist with winter. Garlands and wreaths or holiday décor, for those who celebrate, could be mindful additions to your space.

Forest bathing is a Japanese practice that encourages spending time in nature under tree canopies to reduce stress and increase wellbeing. While winter can mean replenishment, it is also a time when seasonal-related sadness affects up to one-fifth of us. Over break, consider taking walks in areas with tree coverage. In New Orleans, City Park and Audubon Park are great options.

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Take a Break During Winter Break

Pause and take a deep breath. The semester is nearing the end, and winter break is so close. As a student, you are deserving of a break. The stress of wrapping up classes and finals can be so stressful; so taking a break is crucial for your personal, mental, and physical health. It's understandable that completing some sort of work over a break may be necessary, but if you don't allow yourself to take any time off, this could cause major fatigue and other health issues.

Here are some ways that breaks are super helpful!

- Increases productivity and creativity:** Working for long periods of time can create exhaustion and even amplify stress. The quality of your work will thank you when you take some time to yourself.
- “Waking rest” can help consolidate memories:** Making space for downtime or “waking rest” can help replenish the brain's functioning for attention and motivation. You're basically allowing your brain to do some relaxing yoga, so it can become stronger when it's time to work again.
- Moving around helps with overall health:** We sit all day at our desks, in class, or in our offices and this can have a negative impact on our bodies. Constant sitting can create susceptibility to common health issues associated with a sedentary lifestyle. Get up and move! Go on a walk by yourself or with friends, stretch, play a sport, go for a run, or take a dance break. Do whatever makes your body feel good!

