

Parent to parent

Planning for your college student's first visit home

As Lauren was our first child to go off to college, September filled us with both excitement and trepidation—how would she manage so far from home? By all counts, it seemed that she spent her first quarter happy and quite able to handle her own life. We couldn't wait to see her in November, but we also wondered what family dynamics and challenges we might face from this newly independent girl who was used to making all of her own decisions.

We read about unexpected changes in students returning home and about hurt and disappointed parents who had very different expectations than those of their children. In the hopes of avoiding suffering through the holidays, we decided to prepare in advance by having a few e-mail exchanges with Lauren. Our goal was for Lauren to enjoy her time at home while respecting our household norms, and for us to modify our expectations while loving the young woman she was becoming.

Lauren said that if we let her “do her thing,” she would honor our values as she made decisions. We asked that she make time for our family, let us know where she would be and what time she expected to be home (we invoked no curfew), and keep her stuff in her room instead of all over the house. We also said that we would trust her judgment unless she gave us reason not to.

Though unexpected situations did arise, our preparation was rewarded. We wished that we could have seen her more, but she truly made time for our family. She stayed out later than we would have liked, but we held to our promises, as did she.

Because we had jointly prepared for Lauren's first visit home, it was a joyous one. Now we know that doing this before every visit will give us a greater chance to enjoy our daughter.

—*Lisa Alecci and Steve Hartel*

Lisa Alecci (BSBA '80) and Steve Hartel (BS '80, MBA '81) live in Andover, Mass., and are members of the DU Parents Council. Their daughter, Lauren Hartel, is a sophomore English major.