



Parent and Family Newsletter

MAY 2021

Dear parents and families,

As we approach Commencement Day on May 14, we take time to celebrate the accomplishments of several hundred students. Our in-person graduation ceremony will have special meaning this year as we are able to gather and pay tribute to the classes of 2020 and 2021. This past year has been unlike any in our 108-year history. I do believe the experiences that have demanded resiliency and persistence will serve our students well as they make their mark in the world.

As we close the chapter on this semester, I feel a special excitement for 2021-22. We will introduce expanded programming for parents and families, and all of us at Minot State are looking forward to seeing you in person at events this fall. There is no denying that MSU is not the same vibrant place without your student and you participating in our campus life. Classes will be offered in-person in August.

Our current mask policy will remain in effect through May 31, including at Commencement. President Dr. Steven Shirley recently announced that beginning Tuesday, June 1, 2021, masks will be strongly encouraged on the MSU campus, but usage will not be mandated as it has been since last August. Individual faculty members who are teaching in-person summer classes will have full authority to require mask usage in their classrooms if they choose, and summer programming across campus will establish their own policies regarding masks.

Fall 2021 is expected to look like Fall 2019, not Fall 2020 on the MSU campus. Plans are being made for the start of the 2021-22 academic year and planning continues for other fall happenings such as Homecoming and on-campus activities like music and arts events and Beaver Athletics. We're looking forward to the resumption of normalcy with a vibrant campus life at MSU next fall.

Please don't hesitate to ask any questions at kevin.harmon@MinotStateU.edu.

Respectfully,

Kevin Harmon,
Vice President for Student Affairs



IMPORTANT DATES: MAY

- 10 – 14** – Final exams
- 14** – Commencement, 10 A.M., MSU Dome
- 24** – Official grades available

View more dates and events:
[MinotStateU.edu/calendar](https://www.minotstateu.edu/calendar)

Be seen. Be heard. Be empowered.



10 ways to reduce end-of-semester stress — reminders for your student By Lori Bender, [CollegiateParent.com](https://www.collegiateparent.com)

This has been an academic year like none other. But finals are finals. At the end of the semester, work piles up and pressure is high with final grades on the line. Students get tired and burned out.

This year, students have had to cope with so many added stressors related to the pandemic. Their on-campus experiences were limited, many dealt with illness or quarantine — or they lived at home taking classes online and separated from their friends and normal college routine.

In any year, but particularly this one, parents want to help their students finish the spring term not only with academic success but, more importantly, with balanced and nurtured emotional, mental, and physical health.

One of the most effective ways to help your college student minimize stress is, first, to **communicate your interest in helping**. “I am happy to listen. I know this seems unmanageable. You will get through this.”

Second, **extend a lifeline of support and encouragement**. “Even though things are weird and uncertain because of the pandemic, you’re right where you need to be at this stage in your college plan. You’re doing great and trying your hardest under challenging circumstances.”

Finally, **check in, follow up, and stay connected**. Even if your student is living with you at home, most likely they’re doing their work pretty independently and may

or may not be sharing a lot of information. Ask if they’re struggling, and find out what’s giving them trouble. Listen. Slip in reminders about the importance of keeping a healthy brain and body.

Use these buzzwords:

- Balance
- Choices
- Habits
- Boundaries
- Intentionality

It’s crucial to remember that *how* you deliver your reminders and support is more important than *what* you choose to say. The minute you say, “Maybe you should exercise more often,” you’ve lost their ears.

The Anxiety and Depression Association of America states that 30% of college students report stress negatively affecting their academic performance, and 85% report feeling overwhelmed by everything they have to do at some point within the past year.

These statistics alone indicate students could benefit from parental guidance as they navigate the demands, pressures, and deadlines that contribute to college stress.

COVID-19 has upended campus life but the essential steps to organization and stress reduction remain the same. Here are 10 gentle reminders for your student so they can finish the semester with minimal stress:

1. Lean into your best study habits

Start preparing now for the semester end. Organize content. Schedule deadlines and project dates in a planner. Take advantage of virtual office hours with professors and TA's and attend online study sessions.

Organize your study space (see #3). Make a study outline. Review older content and online quizzes. Create an online study group. Try using The Eisenhower Matrix. Also known as the Urgent-Important Matrix, it's a highly effective, easy-to-use planning and decision-making tool for managing time and priorities.

2. Organize your personal learning space

An organized physical space creates an organized mind. Decide the best place(s) for you to study (i.e., somewhere comfortable and quiet). If you're studying in your bedroom, take extra trouble to keep the whole room as tidy as possible.

Be aware of the most energetic and alert times of the day and night — when you find you're best able to focus and retain information. Avoid multitasking (ear buds) when studying.

Always keep water within arm's reach for hydration.

3. Say no to cramming

Cramming results from irresponsible planning and causes undue stress on the brain. Waiting until the last minute to attempt to absorb and retain large amounts of content and then pulling all-nighters contributes to poor information storing and test error.

That's why tip #1 is #1. Remote learning may make procrastinating with assignments more tempting, but commit yourself to advance planning and prep. Allow the most study time for the most difficult and boring classes.

Please be careful about how you use stimulants to stay awake and help you concentrate, whether it's coffee, tea, or energy drinks with tons of caffeine. Adderall is a prescription drug commonly misused and abused by college students; [click here](#) to learn more.

4. Schedule (and enjoy) study breaks

The brain is designed to respond to change and variety. Reading the same subject matter for long periods of time causes the brain to slow retention, especially if it does not sense the information as relevant or worth remembering.

You'll learn better if you take study breaks. As Rick Nauert PhD observes in PsychCentral, "Brief diversions from a task can dramatically improve one's ability to focus on that task for prolonged periods."

Having to stay home reduces options, but you still have them. Take 15-minute breaks every hour and a half — get out of doors if you're able. Study for another class for a short amount of time before reactivating your focus on the original content. This will help with productivity, memory, attention, and stress reduction.

5. Tend to sleep hygiene

We're still washing our hands a lot and wearing masks when we go out. Don't forget that sleep hygiene is important, too.

Your student may not realize that a regular sleep routine supports proper management of mood, cravings, energy levels, memory retention, decision-making, and overall wellness.

College students should get at least eight hours of uninterrupted sleep a night. This is one thing that might actually be easier for students who are living at home and have fewer (no?) social distractions plus are trying to accommodate themselves to other people in the household.

A smart sleep environment is necessary. White noise, device elimination, and comfort all help improve sleep. Power naps are effective in restoring and rejuvenating brain energy. Hitting the snooze button is not effective, nor is rushing.

6. Feed your brain right

What we ingest has a direct effect on brain as well as body function. Food is the brain's fuel (think about what you put in the tank of your vehicle).

College students should eat for sustenance and long-lasting energy. Monitor refined sugar, food packaged in cellophane, and fast foods. Limit caffeine, alcohol, and stimulants. Eliminate energy drinks! Choose "clean and green" foods. Incorporate Omega 3 fatty acids (from cold water fish), fiber, and good sources of clean protein (hummus versus sour cream dips). The best foods to help fight stress are those containing vitamin C, magnesium, selenium, and vitamin B (e.g., nuts).



College is still your student's top priority. They need to protect their time, energy, and health. Parents can support this goal. If your student works part-time, encourage them to limit hours at their job to 10-15/week.

7. Nourish your body with movement and relaxation

The benefits of exercise for stress management are well established. But for students, scheduling exercise can be difficult — especially now, when many rec centers and gyms are still closed.

Still, it's essential to fit in some type of vigorous activity each day. Don't add stress by obsessing about the type of exercise or time spent. Choose something fun or new. Be intentional and consistent. A "walk before you run" mentality is the most effective for maintaining a routine.

Journal your activity choices and the feelings that result. You'll notice improvement in sleep, mood, emotional regulation, and overall wellness.

8. Preserve boundaries

During ordinary times, one of the hardest things to do in college is say "no" to fun invitations and distractions. Your student may not be able to go to parties and hang out in person with their friends as much as they might like, but there are plenty of other distractions, whether it's video games and movie/TV streaming or if they live at home, being pulled into helping with household chores (which they should share, within reason).

9. Break up (sometimes) with their devices

There's little need to present statistics on young adults and their smartphones. Study after study has shown that usage in this age group is high and distraction even higher.

A powerful and eye-opening exercise is to have your student record how much time they spend on their devices (not counting academics) in a 24-hour period. Simply being more conscious of this should help free up time to study, check in with friends, and relax/exercise.

And as ever, be sure to shut off devices at least an hour before sleep.

10. Cultivate mindfulness

Being mindful is a forgotten skill in our culture. We're busy all the time and don't think it's okay to "do nothing" and "simply be."

It's healing to be aware of the sights, smells, sensations, tastes, and sounds of the present moment. Now and then, choose a spot in the neighborhood (or one you can bike or drive to), take nothing (i.e., your phone) with you, and just "be."

Notice your breathing, and watch thoughts pass through your mind without connecting or judging them. Walk with eyes and ears open. Magic.

Of course, many of these reminders are things we all need right now!

The last, most basic message we want to share with our college students is: Believe — REALLY believe — that you are doing your best.



**Parent and Family
Weekend
Oct. 22 – 24, 2021**