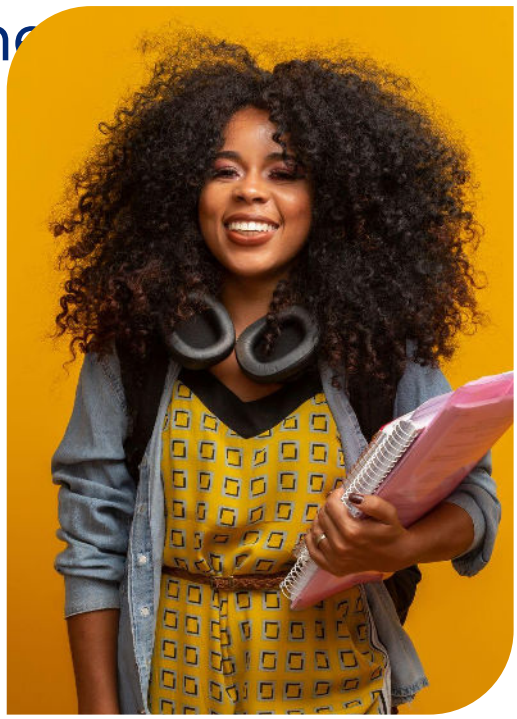
UNAPOLOGETICALLY FREE

Centering Mental Health on Black College Campuses

Homecoming:

Protecting Your Peace When You're Home for the Holidays



Student Resource Guide

During this student-led panel, mental health experts shared valuable coping skills for navigating challenges students may face when going home for the holidays. In this guide, we share those coping skills and effective strategies to help build a students' toolkit.

Originally facilitated by India Turner in conversion with Dr. Rae Lundy and Dr. Lora Robinson
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THE STEVE FUND and THE UNITED NEGRO COLLEGE FUND

This guide is brought to you by The Steve Fund in partnership with The United Negro College Fund (UNCF). The Steve Fund is the nation's leading organization focused on supporting the mental health and emotional well-being of young people of color. The UNCF's Institute for Capacity Building builds upon its heritage of supporting Black colleges and their outsized impact on student success and community progress. Together, both organizations have partnered with HBCUs to center mental health for their students, faculty and administration through workshops, seminars, conferences and virtual resources.

While the holiday season is often associated with excitement and joy, there are many students who struggle with anxiety when faced with going home for the holidays. In this panel discussion, we acknowledge that "home" is not a universally safe space for everyone, and provided coping strategies for students and support strategies for institutions to navigate this season.

The panel discussion aimed to offer emotional support, foster resilience, and build a comprehensive toolkit to navigate the varying experiences students may encounter when heading home for the holidays.

COMMON SIGNS OF STRESS IN THE BODY

- Low energy
- Panic attacks
- Clenched jaw and grinding teeth
- Blurred eyesight or sore eyes
- Sleep problems
- Fatigue
- Muscle aches and headaches
- Chest pains and high blood pressure
- Indigestion or heartburn
- Upset stomach
- Insomnia
- Inability to focus
- Racing thoughts
- Change in appetite

COPING STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS

- **Reconnect Through Texting:** Your family may have adjusted to your absence while you were away. Start texting family members early to reconnect before seeing them again in person.
- **Identify Your Safe Person:** Establish someone (e.g. a sibling, cousin, or a friend from school) as a safe person to confide in during the holiday season.
- **Be Direct and Set Boundaries:** Communicate openly with family members and set clear boundaries to navigate the new version of yourself.



Journaling 101

Becoming more aware of your thoughts and emotions takes practice and keeping a journal can be very helpful!

- Set aside time in your day to write, record - do whatever works best for you!
- Create a cozy journaling area or find a safe nook to journal in/
- The Centre for Clinical intervention has an online Thought Diary.

SELF-REFLECTION

In what ways can I **show up for myself** in times of stress?

Skills to Help Navigate Challenges

IDENTIFY AND UNDERSTAND EMOTIONAL TRIGGERS

Learn to recognize and understand potential triggers for stress, anxiety, or other mental health challenges. This could be specific family dynamics, past experiences, or even the change in environment. Knowing your triggers allows you to anticipate and develop coping strategies to manage these situations effectively.

EDUCATE YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM

Share psychoeducational resources with your family about mental health and the strategies that work best for you. This can help create a supportive environment where everyone understands and respects each other's needs. Consider providing articles, videos, or brochures that explain common mental health challenges and ways to offer support.

TIME MANAGEMENT FOR SELF CARE

Create a schedule that includes designated time for relaxation, hobbies, and activities that contribute positively to your mental well-being. Communicate your need for this time to your family, ensuring you have the space to engage in activities that promote mental health. Invite them to join you in these activities if you feel safe/comfortable doing so.

UTILIZE AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Investigate and familiarize yourself with mental health resources available in your local community. Whether it's local counseling services, support groups, or crisis hotlines, having a list of available resources can be reassuring. Share this information with your support network in case you or someone you know needs assistance.

PRACTICE OPEN COMMUNICATION

Encourage open communication with family members about mental health. Foster an environment where everyone feels comfortable discussing emotions and well-being. This can lead to better understanding and support during the holiday season. Share information about mental health challenges, coping mechanisms, and the importance of seeking professional help when needed.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) is a form of therapy that involves tightening and relaxing your muscle groups, one at a time. The goal is to release tension from your muscles, while helping you recognize what that tension feels like.

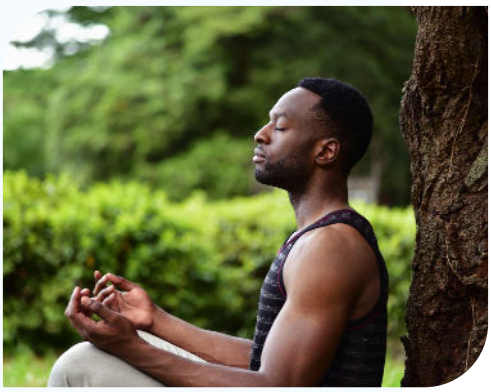
PMR EXERCISES

Minimize distractions by doing this technique in a quiet space and remember to take your time!

Start by lying or sitting down with your feet on the ground. Relax your entire body. Take five deep, slow breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth.

Do each of the following exercises, holding for 5-10 seconds and then releasing.

- Lift your toes upward
- Pull your toes downward
- Clench your hands
- Cross your right arm across your chest
- Cross your left arm across your chest
- Squeeze your buttocks
- Contract your abdominal muscles
- Inhale and tighten your chest
- Raise your shoulders to your ears
- Purse your lips together
- Open your mouth wide
- Close your eyes tightly
- Lift your eyebrows
- Tilt your head to the right
- Tilt your head to the left



Relax your entire body. Take five deep, slow breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth.

MUSIC THERAPY COPING EXERCISES

USE THESE EXERCISES AS YOU NAVIGATE STRESSFUL SITUATIONS

BEFORE

CREATE a calming playlist with your favorite tunes

FOSTER a place for song sharing

ENGAGE in muscle relaxation techniques

DURING

PLAY your pre-created calming playlist

ENGAGE in humming and breathing exercises to center yourself and be in tune with your body

AFTER

PROCESS your emotional reactions through an activity

- Songwrite
- Dance
- Draw

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

- **Safe Spaces and Point of Contact:** Institutions should provide safe spaces for students to discuss grief and anxieties before leaving for the break. Additionally, institutions should offer a designated point of contact, whether a professional counselor or a peer, for students to reach out to during the break.
- **Community Facilitation:** While most campuses may be closed, institutions should establish a time or someone on call during the break for students to connect and maintain a sense of community.
- **Inclusivity and Language:** Communication efforts at institutions should use inclusive language like "holiday breaks" instead of assuming everyone celebrates Christmas.

Resources

Relevant Links

- **Therapist Aid "How to do Progressive Muscle Relaxation":** https://youtu.be/1nZEdqcGVzo?si=sG_YX5ZNb5FDqkyD
- **Shanila Sattar "The 6, 7, 8 Breath" Exercise:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_UnBcDzJ5k&t=1s

The Steve Fund Resources

- Stressed, depressed, or anxious? **Text STEVE to 741741 to connect with a trained crisis counselor 24/7**
- For information and questions email: **info@stevefund.org**
- Visit **https://www.unapologetically-free.org/** for HBCU resources made in partnership with UNCF
- Follow on social media **@thestevefund**