Where can I stay during break? [1]

Dear Alice,

Where can I stay if I can't go home during college breaks? I came from an abusive household. What are your suggestions? Are there places students can stay at a reasonable price?

Answer

Dear Reader,

What a bind. This type of situation presents a real physical and emotional hardship. When the residence halls close and everyone goes home to their families, what's a student without this option to do? In addition to the very tangible concerns about where to stay, there may also be a lot of feelings of loneliness and sadness, and even resentment about not having a safe place to call home during these times. The feelings come up for people with abusive families, but also for international students who can't afford the expensive international ticket home every time there is a break from school (especially a shorter one). It can also come up for students whose families don't have the resources to afford travel or are unable to accommodate them because of space or other limitations.

If you're coming from an abusive environment, it makes sense that you'd want to find somewhere else to be during times when residence halls are not open. Options depend on the city, but here are some possibilities.

- **Family or friends, or friends? families.** Think through who you know in the city in which you live. Do you have any friends in the area? Any distant family? Any friends with families who might be willing to take you in for a short time? How about traveling to the home of a classmate during the break and getting to know her/his family and area?
- **School volunteer and study abroad trips.** Many schools offer volunteer or study abroad trips during school breaks. Studying abroad for a period of time may be another option to consider.
- **House sitting or pet sitting.** Many a college student has made a few extra bucks posting fliers and advertising online for house or pet sitting services for people who go out of town. Many pet lovers would love to have you stay overnight when they are out of town to keep their pets company. Even people without pets often won't mind having their plant-watered and letting you spend the night. And because school breaks often fall during holidays, people will often be heading out of town and needing such services.
- **Short-term apartment sublets.** Depending on what you can afford, check online
posting boards and friend recommendations for short-term sublets. Many apartment renters and owners go out of town for periods of time and would love to have guests help cover the rent. These can often be very inexpensive stays and include a place that is fully furnished.

- **Hostels.** These are places traditionally designed for travelers, but locals can often use them, too. They are cheaper than hotels and usually have several beds per room and a shared bathroom. They can cost anywhere from 10 to 50 dollars per night and exist in most mid-to-larger cities in the U.S. and all over the world. Many have other amenities like Internet, gyms, laundry, phones, and kitchens, while some are more basic with just a bed and a bathroom. Some are located in beautiful scenic areas while others are centralized in busy parts of a city. Some assign chores to residents staying for longer periods of time, but most of the time, these will be minimal if they exist at all. They can fill up during holiday times so it may be good to try to reserve a spot ahead of time. Do an internet search for hostels close to your area or check online postings and discussion boards. Some will require an ID, passport, or bus or plane tickets as proof you are a traveler. But many others do not require such things. If all the hostels near you do require them, it may be worth buying a bus ticket just to use as your proof or to seek out a hostel in a nearby town. It may be a great way to do some traveling while you are waiting out the breaks.

- **Inexpensive hotels.** Depending on where you live, there may be some relatively inexpensive hotel options, some of which may have discounted weekly rates for those longer breaks. A hotel can be as low as 40 dollars per night, but rarely does it get much less than that. If you find a relatively low-cost hotel, ask to see a room before you purchase and make sure it has the basics (a locking door, clean sheets, access to a functional bathroom).

- **Camping.** Depending on where your school is and what season it is, there may be some great outdoor camping options at camp sites that offer plumbing. Depending on your transportation situation, you could camp at night and either hike or study at the library during the day. Check the Internet for campsites near you.

- **Shelters.** Almost all cities and towns have shelters for homeless and domestic violence survivors. Try an Internet search for your local Department of Human Services, 311, or Department of Homeless Services. If you’re in New York City, there’s some great information available online. Most sites will have a listing of public shelters, as well as shelters run by non-profit organizations and faith-based organizations. Safety can certainly be a concern at some of these locations. If you are a college student, you would probably be eligible for shelter at an organization that specifically serves youth (often defined as under age 25) and these may be safer. Space is also an issue at many shelters. Some have a daily lottery that you have to line up for in the morning, while others allow people to stay for multiple nights without re-applying. Some shelters require all guests to leave in the morning and return by a certain time each night, which can be a drag, especially when you want to sleep in or when you’re accustomed to creating your own schedule. But keep in mind, it is only temporary.

- **Drop-in Centers.** Most mid-to-larger cities have drop in centers that allow you to get a meal, use a bathroom, a shower, use a computer, grab a cup of coffee, and have a space to be during the day that is warm. Again, do an Internet search for these; you may be able to find spaces specifically for youth, as well, but you may need ID.

Lastly, be sure to check with your school’s housing or residence life department. Many institutions have limited student housing for breaks or agreements with local options to support a variety of needs, including situations like yours. You might not be able to stay in
your same room, but having a safe and secure spot on campus can really make all the difference.

This is a difficult predicament to be in; hopefully it will be short-lived. But in the meantime, try any one of these options, or a combination of them. Check some of these sites below for some additional resources.

The National Coalition for the Homeless [3] has lots of information about shelters, drop-ins, and ways to safety plan if you know you’re going to be homeless.

Hostels.com [4] has listings for thousands of hostels all over the world.

Craigslist.org [5] is a place to advertise pet sitting services and to look for temporary, short-term, or long-terms housing or subletting options.

Subleaser [6] is another site to look for short term and/or last minute subletting options.

Regardless of which option works out for you, be sure to allocate some time for self-care. During any stressful time it is important to find support. Wishing you a safe and secure housing find,

Alice!

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