Alice,

I just went home for my first Thanksgiving break, and my mother had the nerve to try to give me a curfew! I told her that I am safe, don't drink, and have tame friends, but that we like to hang out until late because we haven't seen each other for so long. Well, on my last night home, I fell asleep hanging out at my boyfriend's house. I woke up at 3:30 A.M. and even though I wanted to stay, I went home because of my mother. She was awake when I arrived, and furious! Those hours with my boyfriend and friends are precious, and I hate having to feel guilt, worry, or dread about going home when all my other friends are relaxed and having fun. What can I do? Am I being unreasonable?

Answer

Dear Time warped by mom,

Going home from college for the first time can definitely feel like a time warp that sends you back to high school for you and your loved ones. College brings newfound independence, and you may expect those same freedoms at home. However, it may take a while for your mother to see her child as an adult. In the meantime, you might try working with your mother to understand each other's perspectives and come up with a compromise that works for you both.

Having a conversation with your mother about both of your concerns can help you move towards a solution. Preparing your talking points in advance, speaking calmly, and describing your views in detail can help set the tone for a respectful and productive exchange. Approaching the chat as a mature adult may help show her that you're no longer a child. You can explain what you've noticed about her behavior and how it makes you feel. This is a great opportunity for you to reiterate how much you value the time you spend with your boyfriend and friends. Sharing your thoughts in a calm manner and without accusations can help you plead a stronger case when speaking with her.

While expressing your own feelings, be sure to listen to her feelings as well. Even though your mother's curfew feels unfair, it might help to put yourself in her shoes. During your discussion, take the opportunity to ask your mother why she doesn't want you out late at night and why she's imposing a curfew. She likely has many reasons for wanting you home earlier. For example, is she worried about you being on the road while tired? Was she
expecting you home at a certain time but then was worried because she never heard from you (due to falling asleep)? While you may have considered some of them, she may have reasons that you haven't thought about yet at all. Asking her about her reasons will help you understand her point of view.

Once you and your mother have had a chance to air your concerns, you can try working together to find a compromise that's comfortable for both of you. Maybe your friends could spend time at your house so your mother knows that you're all together and safe. Maybe your boyfriend could visit you at your mother's place or stay the night. Another possibility is that you could extend your curfew on the condition that you check in with her at specified times. These are only a few suggestions, and you and your mother can work together to come up with solutions that work best and address both of your concerns.

Going to college is a big transition for you; it can also be tough for parents who are left with an empty (or emptier) nest. Try using this conflict as an opportunity to demonstrate your maturity by negotiating a fair compromise. Although it may not happen overnight, your mother may worry less about you staying out late as she witnesses your responsibility, maturity, and concern for her feelings.

Alice!

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