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,

You're not alone in your feelings about going home during breaks. These feelings may come up for people in a lot of situations whether that situation be family dynamics, financial restraints, or the distance that students would have to travel. It makes sense that you'd want to find somewhere else to be during college breaks when going home isn't an option. It can also be helpful to reflect on what your needs are for this time in order to best meet your needs. Just as you're considering your safety and personal well-being when deciding not to go home, it's key to make those same considerations when deciding where to go, as you have every right to a safe place to stay.

Options about where to go depend on the city, but here are some possibilities:

- **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 such as yours. Even if you were notified that your building will be closed over the break, they may still have some options for students who need to stay on campus. You might not be able to stay in your same room, but having a safe and secure spot on campus might make all the difference.

- **Family or friends, or friends’ families**: You might think about 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? Consider traveling to the home of a classmate during the break and getting to know their 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, if you're able.

- **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 plants watered and letting you spend the night. Since school breaks often fall during holidays, people tend to head out of town and require such services. You may reach out to lists that are specific to your school, community boards, or other online forums to advertise pet sitting services or to look for temporary, short-term, or long-term housing or subletting options.

- **Short-term apartment sublets:** Depending on what your budget is, check online posting boards and friend recommendations for short-term sublets. Many apartment renters and owners may go out of town for periods of time and would love to have guests help cover the rent. This might be an inexpensive option and would include a place that is fully furnished. In addition to online forums, roommate search apps and social media may be useful for finding short-term or last minute subletting options.

- **Hostels:** These are places traditionally designed for travelers, but locals may use them, too. They’re cheaper than hotels and depending on the hostel, can have both shared and private bedrooms. Many hostels have other amenities like Internet, gyms, laundry, phones, and kitchens, while some are more basic with just a bed and a bathroom. Hostels can be known to cater to different types of travelers, so it can be helpful to read about them before booking to ensure it meets your needs.

- **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. Some may also be intended for longer stays and may have a refrigerator, microwave, or even other appliances to help prep meals. If you find a relatively low-cost hotel, you may decide to ask to see a room before you pay and make sure it has the basics (a locking door, clean sheets, access to a functional bathroom).

- **Shelters:** Almost all cities and towns have shelters for homeless and domestic violence survivors. You could try an Internet search for your local Department of Human Services or Department of Homeless Services. If you’re a college student, you might be eligible for shelter at an organization that specifically serves youth. Each city and shelter may have its own requirements for people staying in the shelter, along with eligibility criteria.

- **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. You could try an online search for these; you may be able to find spaces specifically for youth, but you may need ID. The National Coalition for the Homeless [2] has lots of information about shelters, drop-ins, and ways to safety plan if you know you’re going to be without housing for a few weeks.

It's good that you're considering your sense of personal safety when considering where you'll stay over break. Regardless of which option works out for you, finding a place to stay can be a stressful experience, so it can be helpful to allocate some time to care for yourself in the ways that make sense for you. During any stressful time it's key to find support in whatever capacity you may need.

Wishing you a safe and secure housing find,

Alice!

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