

Transition To University Parents & Carers Guide

Hello! We have created this guide to offer practical support and advice for parents and carers who are supporting the transition to university. This guide covers practical transition tips for students alongside how to support mental health and wellbeing at university.

This guide has been created with students and parents and carers to cover common hurdles that transition to university can bring. We know that starting university can be a difficult and stressful time for both parents/carers and students which is completely normal! However knowing what to expect can support the successful transition to university.

If you would like to access this guide in another format, provide feedback on this resource or have any general queries then please do contact us via:

E: starttosuccess.ac.uk

See our latest updates on Twitter [@starttosuccess1](https://twitter.com/starttosuccess1) or check out our website for a full list of resources starttosuccess.co.uk

We hope you find this guide useful and enjoy reading.

**Thanks,
The Start To Success Team**

Transition to HE

"The change from college to university is really different, I kinda expected the work to be different which it is but it is also your timetable, doing cooking and finding your way around. It can be really stressful at first I felt overwhelmed but didn't want to say anything as I thought it was just me"

You may have heard numerous times that university is very different to a student's experience of college or sixth form, and this would be right. But in what way? We have found that this is often said without much explanation so this is what we would highlight:

There are many differences between higher and further education institutions, ranging from academic differences to structural differences and they can impact individuals differently. For example a student who likes structure and a lot of class time may struggle with having more free time and independent study and may benefit from creating a study timetable.

When a student starts university they are treated as an adult, so that means they are responsible for getting themselves to lectures, waking up in the morning, managing finances and submitting work on time.

Generally in college it might be more notable if your student is not feeling themselves and tutors can prompt students if it seems they may be needing support. This is generally as college tutors likely see students more often and may know a student personally. Generally speaking this is less likely to happen at university due to the amount of students and less frequent lectures etc therefore it is imperative that at university your student knows when to reach out for support.

There may also be differences in your experiences as a parent, as it is more likely that with colleges/sixth form you can have the opportunity to have more discussions with staff whereas staff at the university will not be able to talk to you without consent from your student. We would suggest discussing this with your student before they leave and taking a look at your student's chosen university's GDPR policy.

Managing Expectations

For the person starting uni there can be a lot of expectations to what university life should look like and there can be a lot of pressure for this experience to be perfect. Often the reality can be a little different to expectations as there is likely a lot to process in the first few weeks.

We also need to be mindful that representations of uni do not always show some of the tougher aspects of university life and anecdotal experiences will likely be told through 'rose tinted glasses' this can therefore be difficult for students who assume they will have the best time of their life in the first few weeks.

It can be worth reminding your student of the following if they are feeling like university may not be what they expected at first:

- **Remind them that creating their journey is empowering and they can make their university experience unique to them and their interests.**
- **Every university experience is different and it sometimes takes a little while to find balance and settle. Acknowledge their anxiety but don't let this dictate their whole experience.**
- **There is no ready-made university experience, or a 'one size fits all' aspect to uni life. there will be many ups and down during this time. This helps build resilience and also allows for reflection on what works well and not so well.**

Furthermore, coming to university for the first time will bring new experiences and challenges. Your student may find that friends studying in other subjects may have quite different timetables to them, and that their tutors have different expectations of them. Every student, no matter what their subject, or how they are expected to work at university, goes through a period of adapting and developing over their first year.

Managing Expectations



Other types of expectations your student may have could be around the below:

EXPECTATION

REALITY

"I have always done really well in assignments from college so I will get really good marks at uni "

University study is really different to college and this might mean that initially your student needs to get used to new methods of writing assessments. **Your student can find more support for this in our full transitions guide [here](#)**

"I will meet my best friends in the first couple of weeks of uni"

Sometimes it can take time for your student to meet people that they feel they you really click with, and this will generally happen when they least expect it. **Your student could consider joining a society with the SU as a great way to meet people.**

Managing Expectations

We know that managing expectations whilst transitioning to university can be difficult as often students may feel they are the only ones who are not having a great time, and while we know that this is not the case, we know that students can base these expectations on things such as social media that can be flooded with pictures of great nights portraying close friendships etc.

However you can support your students with the realistic management of expectations through breaking it down and reminding them that not everything seen on social media is a true reflection of experiences. You can also remind them that being out of their comfort zone is a time that they are likely grow and develop however support is available from the university and students union if your student feels they need more tailored support regarding their expectations. And finally remind your student to focus on themselves and what they want from the experience.

"Two days after moving into my room in halls, I phoned my mum, she told me to see how I would feel in a week. Reluctantly I agreed. A week later I was back at home for the weekend and that is how I managed, by breaking it up into small, achievable, time based goals. Now I visit home occasionally and love it at uni!"

***Note: Battling yours and your students expectations of university may be a challenge, be mindful that this is their experience.**

Supporting Their Transition



There are a number of ways that you can help prepare your student for their transition to university both prior to, and whilst at university. Remember though that it is impossible to plan for every eventuality but by having an awareness of university support it can help them to be prepared.

Before Starting University:

- Look at their chosen university's website and check out the virtual tours and photographs.
- Listen to them and talk through any worries.
- Write down any concerns or unanswered questions.

Whilst at University:

- Provide lots of encouragement.
- A listening ear.
- Respect regarding their choices and decisions.
- Remind them of support available (which is detailed in this guide).
- Try to avoid generalised statements such as "everyone is in the same boat" and although this means well it can belittle experiences.

Independence

University is often referred to as a time when students have the ability to develop their independence and this can be tough for parents and carers who have been responsible for them, however:

Honour their new freedom and let them know you are always there for them. Trust is also really important to establish with your student as sometimes students may distance themselves from their parents for a number of reasons. This can sometimes be very distressing for parents but can be very common. You could try and agree on times to talk before your student starts university so you can both be clear on expectations.

Loneliness and Isolation

Alongside independence there can be the worry that your student may feel lonely or isolated when starting university. Loneliness and isolation is something that has impacted students more and more over the past few years. And although there is no definitive reason for this, it could be argued that the increase of digital/online social platforms may have had an impact on this. Also the covid pandemic has meant that lots of teaching has been designed to allow for online delivery meaning students are less likely to be in large lecture halls for example.

'Lots of students feel lonely and we all feel lonely from time to time. Feelings of loneliness are personal, so everyone's experience of loneliness will be different' - Student Minds

Loneliness and Isolation

Change is never easy and it is normal for your student to feel lonely in a new place whilst looking to build new relationships. If they are experiencing loneliness over an extended period of time, you could suggest that they change their daily patterns to connect more with people.

As we know loneliness and enjoying your own company are two different things. And therefore if your student is spending time on their own to study etc it does not always mean they will feel lonely. In fact it is essential for self care!

However it is worth noting to your students that balance is key and although it can be nerve wracking getting out and attending events at uni and it is important that they don't feel pressured, it can be important in making friends and meeting new people that they may not meet otherwise!

*For more tips on managing loneliness see our full transitions guide [here](#):

"ONE THING IVE LEARNED IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FEELING ALONE AND FEELING LONELY- AND HOW YOU CAN FEEL LONELY IN A CROWD FULL OF PEOPLE, BUT QUITE PEACEFUL AND CONTENT WHEN ALONE"- STUDENT MINDS

Wellbeing

Our mental wellbeing can fluctuate day-to-day.

Wellbeing, is the state of being comfortable, happy and healthy.

There are lots of ways that you can support others with their wellbeing and ensure that they are making it a priority too.

In this section I will be talking about student wellbeing and the ways in which you can support your student manage their wellbeing whilst at university and where they can get support with any difficulties they may face.

Transition of Support

If your student is already receiving support for their mental health in your home area, for example through your GP or a secondary mental health service, and are moving to a new area for university, it's important that you plan ahead to ensure a smooth transition for the support they will need while at university.

For most secondary mental health care services your student will need a referral from their GP, so the first step should be to make an appointment to discuss their options. The earlier that they do this, the more likely it will be that the support they need can be ready for the transition to university.

Also remind your student that working alongside support teams is essential, and this may also be one of the big differences between FE and HE support also. Your students is at the centre of their support and involvement and engagement is critical to success.

Five Ways to Wellbeing

When supporting someone with their wellbeing what works for one person might not be the best option for the other So you may need to try out a few approaches and listen to who you are supporting to find out what works best for them.

A good place to start is to follow the five steps to mental wellbeing. You could suggest that your students tries the following:

Connect

- Make time to talk to their friends face to face, rather than sending a message.
- Organise a group dinner within halls.
- Arrange to walk to their class with their coursemates.

Be Active

- Take the stairs rather than using the lifts in campus buildings.
- Join a sports team, whether it's competitive or just for fun.
- Try out some 'desk exercises' such as stretching while studying.

Take Notice

- Create a positive and clutter free environment for the desk or workspace

Give

- Leave a positive note in a library book for the next person to read.
- Help a struggling classmate by organising a group revision session.
- Take part in a volunteering project with your Students' Union.

Learn

- Take an elective module in a subject different to their main degree course.
- Join a society where you can learn new skills.
- Learn how to cook a range of healthy meals to suit their budget.

Disabled Students Allowance (DSA)

DSA is a government funded scheme to support students with a disability, this includes mental health conditions. There is a common misconception that DSA is controlled by the university but this is not the case.

Students who have disclosed a disability on their UCAS application should receive information about applying to DSA.

DSA can support students with university in a variety of ways and is dependent on individual need. Support can include learning support devices, deadline extensions and a peer mentor for example.

The quicker a student is able to get in a application the sooner they will be able to receive specific support if eligible. However university support teams can help with this process and you can always contact support services before your student is due to start university if you have any questions.

You can also check out eligibility criteria on the [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) which outlines the full process of DSA. Take a look [HERE](#)

Remember if you are required to obtain medical evidence you do not need to pay for this.

You can find also further information about disclosure of mental health and FAQ's on the parents and carers area of the start to success website including support and advice from UCAS.

University Support Services

There are lots of services a student can access at university which provide a wide range of specialist support from accommodation support to academic and wellbeing support. So it is understandable that this can sometimes feel overwhelming and confusing for students.

Therefore it can be a good idea for your student to familiarise themselves with the support on offer at their chosen uni before they start. However most universities will have support similar to the types listed below to give you an idea of what can be expected from each service.

Student Guidance

Most universities will have a team of advisers who deal with a range of student enquiries and can usually signpost to other services if needed. Generally speaking student guidance can support with course concerns, general welfare or money needs.

Accommodation Support/Residential Advisers

If your student is staying in university accommodation there will usually be accommodation and residential advisers who can support your student with any accommodation needs, worries or concerns.

Academic support

Academic support is usually a personal/academic tutor who your student will meet with periodically to discuss course needs. Some universities also have peer mentors that can support your student with variety of course and general support.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Support

Mental Health and wellbeing support offered by the university is there to support any student who is experiencing any mental health or wellbeing difficulties. Usually students will be assessed and offered suitable support.

Inclusion

Inclusion teams (otherwise known as disability) can support any student who feels they may have additional needs or require advice/guidance around a disability.

Self Care

You may have some worries about your student taking care of themselves whilst at university.

For example will my student: Be safe? Make friends? Eat properly? Balance their work and social activities? Manage their finances?

This can be a difficult position to be in as their parent/carer. However Contrary to popular representations, self care is not just bubble baths and chocolate.

There are lots of ways you can promote and embed self care into your daily routine. For example ensuring that you student is aware of the following:

Rest

Getting enough rest is an essential part of self care. The first term of uni can be relatively hectic so remind your student it is okay to rest and unwind. They may also find it beneficial to listen to an audiobook or guided meditation.

Movement

Remind your student that incorporating movement in their routine is a fantastic way to support mental and physical health. It doesn't have to be strenuous exercise, and more importantly is best if it is something that your student enjoys!

Sleep

Although getting a good nights sleep might not be the first thing you think of when you think of university, ensuring your student gets a good nights sleep is essential for self care, getting enough sleep helps regulate emotions and improves concentration. There are lots of tips for good sleep hygiene [here](#).

Boundaries

Setting boundaries is a lesser talked about aspect of self care, but it is really important especially when starting university. It can be helpful to talk to your student about boundaries and ways that they can ensure they know how to implement them and what are important boundaries to them.

Self Care

Furthermore, below are a few suggestions that you could suggest to your student around self care:

Plan for the first week of uni.

You can support your student to create a plan for the first week of Uni so they feel a little bit more prepared. It doesn't need to be exhaustive or minute by minute but you could include important tasks such as finding the local supermarket, or going for a walk around campus.

Self Care Box

You could also talk to your student about the creation of a Self Care Box. A self care box is something that your student can create that supports them to manage their wellbeing and self care. For example the box is usually filled with items that cheer the person up. Students in the past have created boxes that have items such as sensory items, candles, soap and things to do, a good book, personal items, treat items or literally anything that promotes positive wellbeing. You can get loads of ideas about making a self care box on Etsy.

Self-Care Timetable

Even though self care is a daily practice, by planning self care into a weekly routine students can ensure that they are making self care a priority.

Before starting uni if your student lives at home it can be a great time for them to practice some tasks that they will need to do at university, such as doing large loads of washing and planning and practicing making easy tasty and healthy meals. You can find some budget friendly recipes on [beat the budget](#).

What to do if you are worried about your student.

We know that not only is this a time of transition for your student, but for you as well and there may be times that you feel worried or concerned about your student and knowing what your options are if you are concerned can be really helpful.

Other parents and carers have feedback to us that they can feel worried when they are unable to contact their student, and what should they do?

Due to GDPR student services will be unable to talk to you about your student unless they have provided consent for the university to do so.




This can mean that if you are concerned and your student has not provided consent no details will be able to be shared with you.

You are still able to pass on your worries and concerns to the student support team. And without confirming or passing on any details the student support team will be able to assess your concern and carry out a welfare check if necessary although they won't be able to inform you of this.

If your son daughter wants you to be involved in their support this needs to be made clear to the service.

Take a look at your students chosen university to understand their GDPR policy and speak to your student about providing consent.

University Checklist

- Register with a local GP 
- Apply for DSA if eligible (the earlier the better) 
- Familiarise with the student support services (you can check out webpages or call directly) 
- Take a look at transition resources such as Student Minds 'know before you go' and transitions guides.
- Ensure they have a sturdy backpack and large reusable water bottle.

Supporting Yourself

First of all, we understand that this time will be likely difficult for you also and that is completely normal! The transition to university brings a lot of changes whether or not your student is moving away, moving out or staying close to home.

It's not all about them! This is a big change for you as well. Talk to other parents, carers, or guardians whose homes are also a bit quieter since their people have left for university. Think about what you'd like to do with your extra time perhaps taking up a hobby or spending more time with friends and other family members.

Final Words

Starting university is inevitably stressful, and if your students says they hate it, it doesn't mean all hope is lost! Listen to them, be there for them and maybe send the odd treat package or pizza delivery to them.

That being said, we want you and your student to know that there is always somebody at the university who can help, and there is no shame in seeking support for whatever your student may be experiencing.

University should be a mixture of tough, amazing, challenging and exciting moments but no student should have to manage university feeling unbearable or unenjoyable so do not be afraid to ask for support if this is the case. You are not alone.



Transition Resources

Student Minds

Student Minds have a plethora of great resources for transitions such as the:

[Know Before You Go Guide](#)

[Transitions Guide](#)

They also have a dedicated information page for parents and carers including FAQ's you can find it [HERE](#)

Higher Horizons

Higher Horizons have some fantastic online resources. They have lots of practical information including student finance and cooking alongside a dedicated page for parents and carers. You can find the website [HERE](#)

UCAS

UCAS have some really useful advice on there website about university. You can take a look [HERE](#)

Start to Success

Our website is full of tailored resources for student transitions including support for students with a chronic illness and students starting a foundation year. Click [HERE](#)

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