



Starting university

A guide for students



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We're talking mental health

Moving to university is a huge step, and one you may have been planning for a long time.

Whether you are going to the university you planned, or finding your way after clearing, there is much to think about.

It's a very exciting time and so that you get the best out of the experience over the next three or more years, it's vitally important to look after your physical and mental health. New experiences can be very tiring, and you will have many – new home, new town, new friends, new course – while they can be fun they can be very draining, so it's important to know how to look after your wellbeing and this includes your mental health.



In general, students tend to fall into one of two categories:



**The
Enthusiastic
OPTIMIST**

and
anywhere
in between



**The
Anxious
WORRIER**

If you are prone to worrying, this guide will address some of your concerns before you go and help alleviate some of the accompanying distress.

If you are overly optimistic and think this guide is not for you, then read on – you may be disappointed that your high expectations are not met, and you may struggle with things you had not anticipated or prepared for, and this guide also addresses these issues.

A more realistic outlook will help you stay safe, have a better experience and help you make the most of what is on offer.

This guide aims to address some common concerns as well as giving a reality check to some ideas you may have. It also offers tips and guidance on how to get the best out of your time at university and, most importantly, maintain good mental health.

The university experience

Getting away from home

For some of you this may be the first time you have been away from home without your family or friends.

Whether your homelife experience was good or not so good, there will be things that you miss, this is totally normal. Even if you do not feel ready, being at a university away from home can give you the chance to grow and develop as an adult, and this is a natural part of life. If you have any problems or difficulties, there are plenty of sources of support at university as long as you know who to ask.

If you are staying closer to home, there are still lots of things to experience and learn from and a chance to develop and grow.



THE OPTIMIST

This is the time for you to break free from home. Homelife may not have been the easiest place to be, families can be difficult, you may have been a carer or had poor relationships with your parents.

Situations can be complicated and part of the reason for getting a place at university could be a chance to get away from home and breathe.

It's true that you will have a new chance to breathe, but your family will still be there and the problems you had with them won't necessarily go away.

Most universities have a wellbeing team or counselling service that can support you and help you address the problems, rather than ignoring them, and help process these difficulties so that you can keep your head clearer for study and personal growth.

If you have been a carer, you may find yourself torn between your caring role and the new independence you have been craving. It helps if you share some of these difficulties, either with your academic staff or the wellbeing team so they are aware and can support you from the outset. You are not alone in these experiences and they should be able to advise you.



THE WORRIER

You may have a supportive and loving family and great network of friends, and the thought of leaving home can be scary.

You may worry that losing your network of support and friends will be hard and you may be scared of being homesick. Or your boyfriend/girlfriend is going to uni somewhere else and you are worried about the relationship.

Before you leave agree on how little or often you will be in touch with your friends and family. A daily or weekly text to let parents know you are safe, or let your friends know you are thinking of them can make a real difference.

Being homesick is perfectly normal, it can hurt to miss the things you are used to. It may happen immediately or a few weeks in, but it should pass. It is important to ask for support, talk to friends or family about how you are feeling.

Relationships can struggle with long distance, but many do last. As long as you have trust and stay open and honest about how you are feeling, and as long as you allow yourself and your partner space to enjoy what is happening, things can be ok.

If the relationship breaks down, it can hurt but it's not the end of the world as long as you have other support. You can always seek counselling or wellbeing support from your university if you find you are struggling to cope.

The university experience



Meeting new people

You are going to meet a lot of new people in the first few weeks and while this may be fun, it can be exhausting, so make time for rest.

In your accommodation it is likely that you will be sharing with people that you have never met before and it is important that you feel comfortable in your home space. It can be helpful to recognise times when you need your own space, so make some boundaries from the outset, don't feel obliged to talk all the time, but equally don't be afraid to start conversations or offer someone a cup of tea or biscuit.

With freshers week or the initial social gatherings, try not to assume too much from the people you meet in the early days. While it is possible that you will make lifelong friends, remember that people might not be presenting their authentic self at the start, and you could be stuck with people that you realise are not your type or worse.

Try to get to know different groups of people from your course, accommodation or any clubs and societies you join so you have a range of friends and different perspectives.





THE OPTIMIST

You may be really excited at the prospect of meeting new people, learning about other ways of life, and having new experiences.

Try not to over-exhaust yourself socially from the outset, and while being sociable is important don't feel obliged to keep up a whirlwind pace, some of the best friendships are made with time rather than overnight.



THE WORRIER

You may be socially anxious and really worried about having to meet new people and making conversation. You may be worried about how to speak to new people and how you may be perceived.

In your accommodation you can start with finding out a bit about your flatmates – where they are from and what they are studying, if they are going to join any societies – see if you can find any common ground. (this works with any new people you meet). Offering biscuits and cups of tea helps, and if you can bake then you will be popular if you share the results. Try to be yourself, and be comfortable with who you are (being ungentle makes it harder to make friends, and easier to dislike yourself).

If you find yourself scared to leave your room or go into your kitchen, remember this is your home and you need to feel safe and comfortable. Be polite and open to conversation and be confident when you are cooking and preparing food.

If you find that you are struggling to make friends and feel lonely then your wellbeing team may have some advice or guidance for you. Please don't become a recluse, locked in your room; even though it can be hard, it will pass if you work at it.





The university experience

Finding your way around a new town

Your uni should provide you with guides to the local area and information about public transport links, but you can research on the internet.

Maybe get to know one area at a time and ask if any of your new friends want to join you – shared experiences are good for forming friendships.

It would be good if you could find a place that you can go for some peace and quiet, like a park or courtyard – there are usually places away from the hustle and bustle in every city or town.





THE OPTIMIST

You may be excited about exploring and getting to know a new town or city.

Make sure you take necessary safety precautions, and maybe look at a city map (you can't always rely on phone signal). Practice personal safety with your belongings when you are out and about but enjoy the experience and finding new things.



THE WORRIER

You may be worried about getting lost, feeling unsafe, getting used to transport.

You worry that something bad might happen if you go out.

Most of the anxiety around this can be reduced by planning. Maybe explore with a new friend to begin with, and maybe let people know you are going out.

Make sure you take necessary safety precautions (keep your valuables out of sight), and maybe look at a city map (you can't always rely on phone signal).

Practice personal safety with your belongings when you are out and about and enjoy finding new things.

A new mantra before you leave the house – have I got my keys/phone/money/mask.

If you are really concerned, keep a small list of numbers on you that you can call in case you lose your keys or money.



The university experience

Living independently

Managing your finances, shopping, meal planning, cooking... either dull or exciting depending on your point of view, but welcome to adulthood.

You may have to make your loan last or learn to cope financially on your own, so setting a weekly budget can help. If you are worried about finances your uni should have a team that can support or advise you – you are not on your own, try to ask for help before it becomes overwhelming.

You're now responsible for getting yourself to and from uni and keeping yourself, your clothes and your room clean.

Remember to register with a GP in your university town in case you need treatment.

Learn how to set an alarm on your phone if you haven't already.





THE OPTIMIST

No one is going to check on what you are eating and if you want takeaways for tea then you can.

If your room is a mess, then that's your choice.

Students don't really go in to uni do they?

First year doesn't count anyway does it?

This is all very exciting, and it is really good to be able to make some choices for yourself. Just one caveat, if you don't look after your physical wellbeing you may struggle with your academic demands and your mental health may suffer.

Also, you will be paying a lot for your course, missing university doesn't make sense; but that's your choice. And although first year doesn't always count to your final result, you need to pass, and it can knock your confidence if you don't do well. Also some employers might ask how you did as it can tell a lot about you, plus you will learn things that you may need later on.



THE WORRIER

You don't know how to cook, or what to cook.

You're worried about managing your money and fret about losing your keys or wallet.

You have no idea how to use a washing machine.

You're not used to making decisions and frightened of getting everything wrong.

You don't trust your judgement and worry that everyone else will be super cool.

You're not sure you can keep a healthy balance with your sleep and food, and you're worried about finances.

Living off ready meals is not ideal for your health, not every day at least. Think about learning some simple recipes before you go – look on the internet, try YouTube – it could turn out to be an ice breaker in your accommodation. If it goes wrong that's part of the fun of student living.

Plan what to do if you lose anything, make a note of who you need to call. It's not the end of the world and can usually be sorted as long as you act quickly (such as cancelling your bank cards).

Washing machines are not complicated, and the internet is marvellous for finding things out or ask your parents to show you before you leave.

In order to learn to make decisions you have to practise making decisions. Getting things wrong is not the end of the world, you don't need to phone home every time you want to buy a new spoon. Maybe get advice if you're planning a big financial outlay – this is sensible and often something we continue to do throughout our lives.



The university experience

Living with new people

You are likely to be living with people you have never met, who may have different ways of being, different habits and ideas about how things should be. You will learn a lot from them, and a lot about yourself and what you can tolerate.

Make your room exactly how you want it to be, somewhere you enjoy being and a safe space to retreat to when you need it.

The best case scenario is that you all get on well, cook for each other occasionally, maybe go out together and keep the house tidy enough to avoid needing pest control!

However, you may not get on with one or all of them. Their behaviour may go beyond irritating and start to affect how you feel. Try to talk to them from the outset – it is your home too.

If they continue to behave in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable, if you find yourself locking yourself in your room, getting angry, feeling anxious – not good for your mental health – speak to someone, your warden or residential advisor or accommodation officer. It may be possible, if things cannot be resolved, that accommodation can be changed.

You may have a housemate who struggles with their mental health. Be supportive and kind, but don't feel it is your responsibility to fix them, as this can adversely affect your own mental health. It would be better to find out how your uni or college supports mental health, and signpost to your housemate or friend or even go with them. If things are really concerning you speak to the warden, residential advisor or accommodation officer.



THE OPTIMIST

New people are exciting and will enhance your experience of university.

You look forward to developing relationships that will last a lifetime and having fun and parties.

Meeting new people is enriching and can be a wonderful thing. Remember though that you won't necessarily get on with everyone and not everyone will get on with you, and that's ok.



THE WORRIER

You're worried about sharing a toilet and kitchen with people you don't know.

You hate parties and noise. You're worried about other people's hygiene or being able to relax.

It's quite normal to worry about learning to live with new people, but we all need to use the loo and it is often a noisy, smelly business. If you are 'toilet shy' then play your music while you are in there and invest in some ecofriendly air freshener; make a joke, put yourself and your housemates at ease.

Feeling uncomfortable going into the kitchen can have repercussions on your wellbeing. If you are too nervous to cook properly you won't eat well and your health will suffer. Just say hello, check the cooker is free and get on with creating your meal.

Incidentally, not everyone has good hygiene standards – do your own dishes and wipe down surfaces after yourself. With any luck your housemates will do the same. This can be a major source of irritation and passive-aggressive messages in the inevitable group chat. If it gets too much speak to your warden or accommodation office.

Parties are part of student life; even if you hate the idea it is worth giving them a try. You can stay for as long or as little as you need. Have a plan of who you can talk to, and how you will get away if you start to feel overwhelmed. Think about people-watching – play on your phone for a bit if you feel nervous. Try to avoid getting 'hammered' to alleviate your anxiety, it may leave you feeling regret and down the next day.

Make your room a haven where you can relax and feel safe. Finding things to decorate your room with can be a fun and enjoyable activity. If you are stressed and need some time out, lock the door, listen to music or contact your friends and family for a chat.





The university experience

Starting a new course

Now you've chosen the course you want to study you may find it strange focusing on just one thing, although it will have different modules. You may need to get used to the new ways that material is presented, and either long contact hours or few contact hours depending on your subject.

First year is the chance to familiarise yourself with this, and there is less pressure to score highly as usually scores do not count towards your final award. You will probably still want to do well.

Most universities allocate an academic advisor/ personal tutor to offer you support. There are usually other support staff for your faculty, and it is wise to get to know who to turn to in the event you need help, before you need it.

If you had any academic support in school or college then you may be entitled to this now too, and you should seek advice, usually from the disability advice team – that covers everything from physical disabilities to dyslexia and beyond. Ask for all the support you can – you are entitled to it and it may reduce any struggles you have with your work or wellbeing.



THE OPTIMIST

You are excited to be learning something new and focusing on something that you love.

You can't wait to expand your knowledge and specialise.

Your course might match your expectations, and you may be stretched and enthusiastic throughout your degree, which would be amazing.

Realistically, there may be modules that are disappointing or not what you expected, or lecturers who are not very interesting. Try to look at the overall picture or see if you can change modules if you are really struggling or not enjoying them.

Possibly things that you found easy are harder at degree level, and where you may have been top of the class at college, you might find yourself competing with people who are better at some things than you – don't let this undermine your own abilities and try not to judge yourself against other people.



THE WORRIER

You are worried that you are not good enough and everyone else will be better than you.

You're not sure you have picked the right course and may already be thinking of changing course or university.

You're frightened of the workload and that you will fail your first year and get kicked out.

You worry that you will have too much work to do and that you will fail at everything, so you think you will have to work 18 hours a day.

The thought of deadlines and presentations makes you feel incredibly anxious.

In reality, you've been awarded your place because you are good enough. There may be people on your course who are better at some things than you, but try not to judge yourself against other people. You are an individual.

If you're having doubts about the course, discuss them with your academic advisor/personal tutor or the welfare team and see if there are options to switch. Sometimes you just need to give it a few weeks to get used to the new way of working and methods of teaching. If you are set on moving university, it is not impossible; do your research and consult with departments from your current and prospective uni. You will also need to speak to student finance. Get as much information as you can before you make your final decision.

The workload will probably be more than you are used to, but first year is the time to get used to a new style of learning. If you are struggling with deadlines then speak to your academic advisor or learning support team before the deadline passes – they can help you manage and discuss extensions, much better than ignoring things so they build up.

Your university will want you to succeed so be sure to ask for help, that is your right.

Please don't work 18 hours a day. You need time to rest, eat, exercise and socialise if you are to stay well and look after your wellbeing. Work out a routine that allows this and if you are still struggling, ask for support.

Social life

Joining clubs and societies

Clubs and societies offer lots of opportunities and the chance to do things that you may never have tried or have a chance to do later in life. Making the most of these choices is part of the university experience.

Sometimes students sign up to a vast number of clubs before realising that their academic demands and schedule won't allow the commitment that is necessary, so think carefully about what you really would like to do. You can join later in the term once you have worked out your free time; the joining date is not fixed in stone.

There will be many opportunities to socialise and some of these may involve alcohol – however, increasingly universities are catering for people who don't drink and providing alternatives. Don't feel under pressure to drink if you don't want to.



THE OPTIMIST

You already have a list of societies you want to join – this is the chance for you to try a million new things and meet new people.

You can't wait to go to freshers week and have all those parties.

You're going to sign up for all the sports teams and societies that you can.

You want to go clubbing till six in the morning and see all the live music that you can.

There will be plenty of opportunities; maybe don't feel you have to do everything in the first week.

University sports are highly competitive, which you may enjoy – you don't have to be in the first team for everything though, you can go to have fun! Sport is great for your wellbeing as well as a way of making a group of friends.

Be realistic about your time and finances.



THE WORRIER

You want to join societies but you're not sure which ones. You don't know where to go or what you want to try. You are terrified of making a fool of yourself.

Everyone will already know each other, and you will be self-conscious and feel like an outsider.

Before you go to the freshers fair, have a look online at the societies that are on offer and choose some that really appeal to you – it is easy to wander round in a daze and be overwhelmed by the choice, crowds and noise, so with advance planning you can target the main ones – or email if you can't face the fair. Think about what you want to ask before you go – when do they meet, how much does it cost etc.

Sport is a great way to meet people and stay fit – physical activity is proven to improve mental health. Don't be put off by the competitive people, there is always a chance to have fun too if you are not a sports star.

Some people will know each other, it's true, but everyone started off not knowing anyone. It's ok to be quiet and not feel you have to be the extrovert – there will be plenty of those. However, if you can overcome any shyness to try some new groups then you might make new friends or have some great opportunities to make happy memories.



Social life

Social life and friendships

It is great to be surrounded by your peers and to make new friends.

There may be an emphasis on drinking culture but times are changing and there will be lots of opportunities to socialise that don't have to involve drinking – your university website will have lots of information about activities and events.

You may make friends for life in the first week... or you may make friends with people that you can't stand after the first week. It makes sense to meet people from different areas – from your course, your accommodation, your clubs or other activities, so you are not stuck with one group.

You may not make friends in the first few weeks and feel very lonely – this can be really hard. If you can, join in activities that you think you will enjoy, you don't have to be the life and soul of the party – just listening and getting to know people can be a good starting point – introverts have as much right to exist as extroverts.



THE OPTIMIST

You plan to get very drunk through freshers week, you want to make friends with everyone you meet.

You may sleep with people you've just met.

You may spend your entire loan in the first few days on inflatable chairs, alcohol and takeaways.

You can't wait to sample the student drug scene.

It is exciting going out and having fun and tempting to live the 'wild-life', but it is expensive and it will be detrimental to your health if you don't learn some balance.

You may enjoy getting drunk but end up making choices you later regret; try to pace yourself and don't go out alone if you'll be vulnerable.

Sexual freedom can be great but be aware of consent and what it means – being too drunk to consent means no consent. Practise safe sex and if you are worried about sexually transmitted disease or pregnancy, seek help as soon as possible.

It's tempting to splash out in your first weeks, especially if you're not used to having money but try to keep enough to last the term. The worry of not having money to buy food can cause stress, anxiety and depression.

It's easy to assume everyone does drugs and it's just a bit of fun. Remember that drugs are illegal and you may lose your university place if you bring any onto campus. There is risk with all drugs and you may make choices you later regret...try to stay safe.

If you think you are becoming addicted, seek help.



THE WORRIER

You enjoy quiet activities and think people will judge you if you don't join in the loud games or parties.

You don't really drink and hate being around drunk people.

You need your sleep and worry that loud flatmates will keep you up with their antics.

You worry that you will end up stuck with people you don't like and end up living with them for the rest of university.

You're not used to drinking and are worried that you may be pressured into it, or into taking drugs, or having sex when you are drunk.

There are plenty of opportunities to enjoy quieter activities and find like-minded people to do them with. Anyone who judges you for that is not being very kind.

Peer pressure can be a problem, but if you don't want to party, drink or take drugs, then try to have the courage of your convictions – you should be able to find people like you.

Choose your friends wisely!

Pressurising you into sexual activity can be considered harassment. You can make a complaint about this. Forcing you to have sex or having sex with you when you are not able to give consent is sexual assault and should be reported to the university and the police. Your university will have support services to help you if this happens.

Relationships

Relationships at university can be very intense. If you come to university already in a relationship you may have extra struggles to maintain it, or you may be able to flourish and appreciate the relationship more.

Everyone is different, some people want a long term commitment, others something more polyamorous. Some people are not interested in finding a partner. Wherever you fit into this is what is right for you. Each situation will give you a different experience of university.

Some people become upset if they can't find a partner, but maybe they need to work on self-acceptance and a better relationship with themselves before this can happen. Sometimes therapy can help you understand yourself better to make finding a relationship less stressful.

There seems to be an expectation that all relationships lead to sex but this doesn't have to be the case. Move at your own speed, don't do anything that you are uncomfortable with, practise safe sex, and seek medical advice if you think you may be pregnant or have a sexually transmitted disease. Don't ignore these things as they are better handled early.

Without being too scary, remember that sex without consent is sexual assault or rape. You can't give or receive consent if the partner is too drunk or asleep. If you find yourself in this position then seek support as soon as possible. Your university will have a strict policy to support anyone in this situation, male or female.

Perpetrators may face prosecution or made to leave their course and university.



THE OPTIMIST

You're looking forward to finding a partner, or several partners without being under scrutiny from family.

There's a lot of interest in dating at this age. Perhaps you are taking this opportunity to explore your sexuality away from possible family judgement.

If you can be yourself, you have a better chance of finding the right partner. With luck things will fall into place.

Practise safe sex if you are sexually active, and again, remember consent.

opportunities to be sociable and get to know people.

Move at your own pace sexually, don't assume that you have to have sex if you are not ready (remember consent).

If you are in a relationship already, and your partner is at a different university you may be worried how to maintain the relationship. It may be hard but not impossible, stay in contact and visit each other but at the same time, allow each other space to grow and enjoy the new experiences.

If the relationship breaks up, seek support, including possibly counselling if you are really struggling with the loss. Perhaps you find someone else and feel guilty about breaking up the relationship – try to remember that this is all normal, but that even if it is your choice there may be emotional consequences. Seek support or help if you need it.

You may not want a relationship at the moment – there is no pressure for you to conform.



THE WORRIER

You're worried about finding a partner. It is important to you, but you don't know how to do it.

You may be worried about being expected to move too quickly into a sexual relationship.

You may already be in a relationship and worried about how you can maintain it long distance or wanting to break up to experience fully uni life.

You aren't interested in finding a partner at the moment and worry that you may be under pressure to get in a relationship or date.

You may not have had a partner before university and are hoping that this will present new opportunities. If you are shy, this may still be difficult, so take advantage of



Mental health and wellbeing

Leaving your problems behind you

Coming to university may present you with the opportunity to leave your past, and problems you have experienced, at home.

However, don't assume that you won't still be affected in some way – but there should be support available if you need it.

Counselling services, or wellbeing support, or NHS services in your university town can help you explore and process some of the hardships that you have faced.

If you have experienced anxiety or depression then universities are updating and developing a range of activities and support services to help you; you only need to ask for help.

Remember that you are under a lot of pressure from all the new experiences which can exacerbate anxiety or low mood.

You are never on your own. Please seek help and advice sooner rather than later.



THE OPTIMIST

You have had some difficult experiences at home and this is the chance for a fresh start.

You may have suffered with anxiety and depression and believe that this is the chance for you to leave your mental health issues behind you.

You had mental health problems at school and college, but everything will be fine at university.

You will cope with everything and still have room to party!

If you've had a difficult time at home, you can look forward to some space and personal responsibility when you get away. However, your past may still affect how you feel and may affect the choices you make. This may be the chance to seek support for these issues – your university may have a counselling or advice service that can help you avoid being adversely affected by your experiences.

You may well cope brilliantly but mental health problems don't usually disappear magically. Try to be self-aware and notice when you're dipping and seek the support you need. Find out who to speak to and where you should go before you need it so you are prepared.



THE WORRIER

You have had some issues with anxiety, depression or other mental health issues and you worry how you will manage at university. You don't want anyone to know.



You don't want anyone to judge you or avoid you.

You worry how you will cope without your usual support.

Things at home have been hard and you worry it will impact on you while you are away.

You struggle to cope day to day now; the thought of all the extra things you have to cope with are terrifying.

You may have self-harmed in the past when things were tough and worry that you might again – how you will manage this in a flat with strangers; what will people think?

People will think you're a loser if you can't cope or if you admit you're struggling

Everyone else will be having a great time and you will be all alone feeling unhappy

If you have suffered with mental health problems you may find it is worse at university when your usual support systems are not in place. Mental health services at your university and in the local town are there to support you.

Ignoring your problems can make things worse. Help can be more effective if you access it before you are completely overwhelmed.

Your home life may have been difficult – maybe you've been a carer or have a parent with mental health problems or alcohol dependency. While you may want to help where you can, remember you have the right to a life too and that you shouldn't feel guilty for enjoying university.



Mental health and wellbeing

Self-care

There are five aspects to self-care –

1. Eating well
2. Staying hydrated
3. Exercise
4. Sleeping well
5. Social contact

If you can look after these areas you will be able to manage things better even when things are difficult. If anything is missing from the picture then the balance is off and you may find yourself struggling. There will be support at university, although there are plenty of online resources to help with any of these areas.

Try to get to know different groups of people from your course, accommodation or any clubs and societies you join so you have a range of friends and different perspectives.





THE OPTIMIST

Self-care is for losers.

You will manage ok, it's not a priority for you.

You may well be fine but learning to practise self-care will help you stay stable and deal with issues if they arise. Taking responsibility for yourself is part of growing up and being independent.



THE WORRIER

You're not sure how you will be able to look after yourself; mum normally gets you up and makes sure you are eating ok and get to school on time.

You struggle with sleep and know it will be worse when you are sharing a house with strangers.

Developing and planning a routine of self-care is within your grasp and there are plenty of online resources to help you. If you can start to look after yourself you will develop a sense of achievement and improve your self-esteem.

Sleeping in a new place can be really difficult and lack of sleep can affect your ability to cope – try to develop a good routine, and wear ear plugs or listen to music/podcasts/audio books at bedtime if it's noisy.





Mental health and wellbeing

Being the real you

If you're lucky you have been encouraged to be yourself from childhood.

However, some people have had to change their intrinsic nature to fit in and be accepted, by family or friends.

Away from home you have the chance to explore your nature and learn to be your authentic self.

Do you do things because you like them or because other people like them?

Can you try new things and learn more about yourself?

Be prepared that when you go home your friends and family may not adjust easily to the new you, but that's ok, people struggle with change! If you can be authentic and accept yourself, faults and all, you will be a lot happier.





THE OPTIMIST

You're looking forward to finally being able to be the real you, or a new you.

You have planned the look you want and can't wait to show the world.

If you have found yourself pigeon-holed at school or college, university can give you the chance to explore who you are. Experimenting is fun and good but try to be true to yourself, you will like yourself more and make better friends.



THE WORRIER

You don't like yourself very much, and you worry that no one else will like you either.

You worry about fitting in and not being interesting enough or funny enough and having to be something you're not to make friends.

People think you're weird or geeky and you feel like an outsider.

Liking yourself is the starting point to better relationships with others and being more compassionate with yourself can help. Notice if you are being overly critical, notice the language you use to yourself – would you speak to a friend like that? Be more forgiving and accepting of who you are, even if you get things wrong sometimes.

You make better friends when you are being yourself, in part because you don't have that voice that says 'they wouldn't like me if they really knew me'.





Mental health and wellbeing

Making mistakes

Making mistakes is an important life skill.

Everybody gets things wrong at some time in their lives and how you deal with that and learn from it helps you grow as a person.

If you have done something wrong, own it and see if you can fix it. You may not be able to but if you can accept the lesson then all is not lost.

Sometimes people are so afraid of getting things wrong that they never try anything new. Or if they get something wrong they hide away in distress. Talking about it can help – a supportive friend or family member may help you gain perspective, or you may want to speak to someone outside your circle like a counsellor or therapist.



THE OPTIMIST

I never make mistakes.

Are you sure? Making mistakes and learning from them is an important part of personal development and nothing to be ashamed of.



THE WORRIER

I'm worried about making mistakes and getting things wrong and ruining university and my life.

Making mistakes and learning from them is an important part of personal development and nothing to be ashamed of.

Finding solutions increases personal growth and gives you life skills.

Seek help if you need it. Don't isolate yourself. It will be ok.





Mental health and wellbeing

Missing people

If you love people, it is totally normal to miss them when you are away.

Schedule regular check-in times with those important to you and try to keep any plans, without letting them interfere with your new life at university, and accept that life goes on for people at home.

Also relationships may change with distance; you will have different shared experience when you get together and may have less in common.





THE OPTIMIST

You'll stay in contact by phone or facetime, you're going to be too busy to miss people.

It's good if you have planned how you are going to stay in contact with people, but you may still feel sad that you are not with them or miss them. This is ok and normal.



THE WORRIER

The thought of being away from the people you love is already making you feel sad, and you've already started to plan coming home at weekends.

Missing people you love is normal. Plan how you will stay in touch, texts, emails, FaceTime – there are endless choices.

If you see on social media that your friends and family are having a better time than you, try to remember they only post the good days.

Planning to go home every weekend might seem like a good idea, and might help, but it also might alienate you from the people at university and get in the way of making friends or having shared experiences, so you feel left out. Try to wait a bit before going home, and maybe consider not going every weekend.





Mental health and wellbeing

Support

Having the support of family or friends can really help if you are feeling isolated or struggling to cope.

Sometimes you worry about being a burden and try to manage on your own, but there is truth in the idea that a problem shared is a problem halved. If they care about you they will want to help, just as you would want to help them. If you can speak to a sympathetic family member or friend from home, you may find a new perspective on your problem, and their support can make a real difference.

If you really don't want to talk to someone you know, then your university or college will have services that can help. Check your uni website for uni wellbeing services that can support you with a variety of issues:

- Counselling
- Disability
- Money
- International students support services

You may find advice also through your Student Union or GP or you may be able to access local services by doing a simple internet search.

There are also a number of online resources that can help which you can find on page 38.

If you feel that you can't keep yourself safe at all, then you should present yourself to your nearest A&E or even call an ambulance if your thoughts are very frightening.

Remember you are not on your own – help is always available for you from somewhere if you ask.



THE OPTIMIST

You have a huge circle of friends from school and college and you will stay in touch with them. You have planned to visit them in their uni to experience their new place.

Your family is extremely supportive, and you know you can turn to them if you need anything.

If you have a supportive family you are very lucky and they will be able to help you with any problems you may face, as long as you tell them if you're struggling. Sometimes we want everyone to think that everything is great and don't want to worry people, especially if they have their own problems at home, but your family will want to support you if they can.

It's great to have a huge circle of friends but be prepared for some friendships to shift as people have new and different experiences.

You will be friends with some people for life but some friendships fade with distance and that is perfectly normal.



THE WORRIER

Your family has problems and you don't want to worry them if you are struggling.

You don't let your friends know if you are feeling bad because you don't want to worry them.

You found it hard to make friends at school and have few people to talk to.

Feeling that you are a burden to people is a horrible feeling, but it is rarely based in fact. Even when others are going through hardship, if they care about you, they will want to support you if they can and would hate to think that you are struggling on your own.

Isolating yourself can make your mental health deteriorate and sharing problems definitely can help. If you don't want to talk to family or friends, or don't feel comfortable talking to new friends then speak to your student welfare team or academic support.



Mental health and wellbeing

COVID-19

Nobody expected this pandemic, and it has turned things upside down to a certain extent. However, as humans we are pretty adaptable and universities have spent the summer preparing for different eventualities.

All universities are trying to adapt their courses as best they can to manage in the new circumstances. There may be a focus on online work, but they will still be trying to allow socially distanced small group work where possible.

They want you to feel safe and to get the best out of your student experience and it is in their interests to do so.

Things may be different for a while but you should still be able to benefit from your course and achieve a good degree.

We have to be prepared to be adaptable and accept that things might change quickly if there is another national or local lockdown.

Hopefully this will be a temporary state of affairs, but it may help to remember that you are in the same boat as your fellow students across the world, part of history and when things ease again we will appreciate our health and freedom.



THE OPTIMIST

The pandemic is being managed and you're not going to let it spoil your time at uni.

There will be some things that you can't do, but you're not going to let that get in the way of having the best experience you can.

Whatever the pandemic brings, you can make the most of the opportunities that present themselves, even if it was not quite the experience you were expecting.

However, you may still be affected in a number of ways. Try to stay safe and well and follow guidance on mask-wearing and social distancing.



THE WORRIER

You've an underlying health condition and you worry about being at risk.

You have suffered with people in your family being very poorly with Covid.

You don't know how the uni will adapt the course and worried that it will be rubbish.

You're frightened of another lockdown or not being able to see your family or loved ones if you're far from home.

You worry that you will have to do online learning which you hate.

You are angry that you will not be able to use all the facilities or join the groups you wanted.

If you have an underlying health condition inform your university as soon as you can to discuss arrangements for social distancing and any actions you need to keep you safe.

If you have any poorly family members, or have lost people during the pandemic, seek advice and support from the counselling or wellbeing team at university as soon as you can. They will help you make sense of your loss and allow you space to talk about your distress to help you make the best of your university life. You can be supported academically too if it is what you need, for example, help with deadlines, exam arrangements, etc.

Clubs and activities will be run in a way that keeps people safe - maybe not in the same way as before the pandemic, which is unfortunate but necessary.

If another lockdown happens it will be disappointing but we know what to expect this time and hopefully it will be less scary. Universities will have contingency plans in place to cover this, but talk it through with your family too – maybe you can isolate at home rather than in halls if it would be better for you – nothing is certain however so sometimes we have to accept the uncertainty and how that will affect how we feel – prioritising self-care helps, as well as planning activities that reduce anxiety and help you feel calm.

Further reading

If you want more information about mental health and self-care strategies, there are a number of useful places you can visit:

studentsagainstdepression.org

studentminds.org.uk

[nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/
student-mental-health/](https://nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/student-mental-health/)

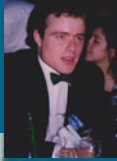
[savesthestudent.org/save-money/health/mental-
health-at-university.html](https://savesthestudent.org/save-money/health/mental-health-at-university.html)

[mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-
everyday-living/student-life/about-student-
mental-health](https://mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/student-life/about-student-mental-health)



IN SUMMARY

- Be yourself
- Practise and plan good self-care
- Ask for help if you need it



Remembering Charlie

Charlie Waller was a strong, funny, popular, good-looking and kind young man, with a close and loving family. To the outside world, he had everything to live for. Yet in 1997, at the age of 28, Charlie took his own life. He was suffering from depression.

In response to this tragedy, his family founded The Charlie Waller Trust, to open up the conversation around depression, and to ensure that young people are able to understand and look after their mental health and to spot the signs in others.

Charlie sits at the heart of our story, our vision and our purpose.

GET IN TOUCH

hello@charliewaller.org
01635 869754

FIND OUT MORE

charliewaller.org

FOLLOW US



SUPPORTING US

If you have found this resource useful please consider donating to help us continue our work



Text

To donate £10 Text 'CWT' to 70085
This costs £10 plus the cost of a standard rate message



Online

Visit charliewaller.org/donate

The Charlie Waller Trust

First Floor • Rear Office • 32 High Street • Thatcham • Berkshire RG19 3JD

Registered Charity No. 1109984



charliewaller.org