

Tertiary studies - friends and family

Becoming a student at a university in higher education (HE) or technical and further education (TAFE) is exciting. However, it can be challenging to adjust to new academic requirements, unfamiliar surroundings and new people.

You also have to find a balance between study and other considerations like your personal health and wellbeing, friends and family. You may also need to find somewhere new to live and you might need to find a new job or make changes to your current work arrangements. Some students find the change easier than others. Making new friends and leaving family can be stressful. Remember that plenty of support and advice is available on campus if you need it. Don't wait until you're really in trouble – seek help early.

Feeling 'lost' is normal

If you feel a bit lost when you start tertiary studies, you are not alone. There are many issues to sort through in your first few months of campus life.

Common issues of concern are:

- How to make new friends
- Loneliness, feeling homesick and missing close friends and family
- Living and learning in new surroundings, a new culture or even a new country
- Sharing a house or living in a college or student residence
- Coping with the academic workload
- Concerns about money, debt and paid work
- Coping with new freedoms and responsibilities
- Family and friends understanding the changing demands that tertiary study may place upon you.

Making new friends

Making an effort to mix and socialise in your new environment can help a lot. Tips on how to meet new people and make friends include:

- Attend the orientation activities organised by your faculty or campus.
- Check out the various clubs and student societies. Join a club that interests you or start your own club.
- Find out whether students can join professional associations attached to your field of study.
- Find out about campus sport clubs and teams or join the gym. Get involved in recreation or other leisure activities.
- Start a conversation with someone who is doing your course or similar subjects to you. You could suggest doing some study or a project together.
- Join a local community group or charity. Find details at your local library or on the Internet.

Dealing with shyness

Almost everyone feels a bit awkward about meeting new people in the beginning. Be patient and give relationships time to develop.

Remember:

- Many other new students may be feeling just as shy as you.
- Someone who appears distant and uncommunicative may also be shy – they may be waiting for you to start a conversation.
- Believe in yourself – your friendship will be valuable to someone.
- Remember you don't have to be the life of the party and not everyone wants to belong to the 'in' crowd.

- Keep things in perspective. It may take time to meet people and even longer to build close friendships and relationships.
- You can learn skills to manage shyness, or use self-help strategies from websites or books. Ask the student support services at your institution for more information.

Family relationships

If you live away from home, your homesickness will usually lessen as you become familiar with your new life and develop a routine. Stay in touch with your family via a regular phone call, letter or email. If possible, take time out to visit your family or organise a member of your family to visit you.

If you are living at home, it may take some time for everyone to adjust to your new role and routine as a tertiary student.

Managing your time

Finding a good balance between study, work, friends, family and leisure is an important part of coping with university life. A good balance will keep you motivated and focussed on your goals.

A study timetable should include your various academic commitments, but also time for breaks and fun.

Other issues

Other issues can cause stress and anxiety when you start tertiary studies. These may include:

- **Housing** – finding cheap rent, sharing a house with strangers or living with a roommate.
- **Financial** – supporting yourself, managing on your student allowance or learning to budget.
- **Work** – finding suitable part-time employment and juggling work and study commitments.

Support is available

Seek support from student counsellors for any personal, social or study problems. They can help you find ways to make the transition to university life easier.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your local community health centre
- Student counselling and other student support services at your institution
- Find a GP near you who specialises in mental health issues through beyondblue's website at www.beyondblue.org.au/

Things to remember

- Starting tertiary studies is a challenging experience for all new students.
- Being homesick and feeling stressed about making new friends is normal.
- Seek advice from student counsellors if you're struggling to settle in or would like to develop further coping skills.

Want to know more?

Go to [More information](#) for support groups, related links and references.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

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