
Tertiary studies - settling in

Summary

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

Students need to strike a balance between study and other priorities like 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 these changes 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 struggling - seek help early.

Adjusting to life as a university or TAFE student

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
- adjusting to an unfamiliar teaching environment
- 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 on 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.
- Explore your university's web-based social networking options.
- Find out whether students can join professional associations attached to your field of study.
- Consider volunteering for leadership roles or university committees.
- Find out about campus sports 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 online.

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.
- 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 regular contact with your family. 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.

University and TAFE require a new way of studying

Most students find the process of attending lectures and studying at university or TAFE an experience that is very different to secondary school. School leavers often find their anonymity in lectures and the new freedom to manage their own study challenging.

Studying effectively at university is something you can learn with practice. It can help if you are patient and give yourself time to learn how to take lecture notes, prepare for tutorials, research and reference assignments, and submit work by the due date. Your university or TAFE may offer workshops or assistance to students to help you acquire these skills.

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 focused on your goals. You may find you have comparatively fewer contact hours with your lecturers than you did with your secondary school teachers. Remember, this does not mean the rest of your week is 'free time'.

It is estimated that a full-time student will need to allocate a least 40 hours a week to their study, which equates to about 10-12 hours a week for each unit of study. A study timetable should include your various academic commitments, but also time for breaks and fun.

Other issues with tertiary studies

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.

Tertiary students can seek support from the counselling service for any personal, social or study problems. Counsellors can help you find ways to make the transition to university life easier.

Where to get help

- Counselling and other student support services at your institution
- Your doctor

- Community health centre

Things to remember

- Starting tertiary studies is a challenging experience for all new students.
- Being homesick and feeling stressed about making new friends are normal experiences as you adjust to your new environment.
- Seek advice from the counsellors at your institution if you're struggling to settle in or would like to improve your coping skills.

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

Victoria University - Counselling Services

Content on this website is provided for information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not in any way endorse or support such therapy, service, product or treatment and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. The information and materials contained on this website are not intended to constitute a comprehensive guide concerning all aspects of the therapy, product or treatment described on the website. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions and to ascertain whether the particular therapy, service, product or treatment described on the website is suitable in their circumstances. The State of Victoria and the Department of Health & Human Services shall not bear any liability for reliance by any user on the materials contained on this website.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2019 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.