



# TRANSITION TO UNI

*A time of change- information for parents*

**Student Life - Counselling Support**

# **The First Year of University**

## **A Time of Change**

During this first year of university there are many changes for school leavers and their parents, and each of the changes can be a source of worry and anxiety. Some first year students feel a sense of loss as they move from school to university, and they feel apprehensive as they contemplate the changes. You, too, may feel anxious about how well they will cope, and how the change will affect your relationship.



## **What's New for First Year University Students?**

### **New Environment**

A new environment means they will have to find out: Where to go? When to go? Who to go to? – and meanwhile they may be inclined to think everybody else seems to know all this. For students, used to a familiar school environment, the more complex university environment can be initially quite challenging.

*Suggestion:* During Orientation Week there are a number of tours of the University campus, and maps are available. Students may benefit if they spend time familiarising themselves with the campus, or take advantage of tours offered during orientation week (e.g. Library tours). Students can also obtain information on Freshers Day, the first day of orientation Week, when they make contact with a peer advisor in their faculty.

### **New Ways of Learning and New Subjects**

For many first year subjects, students will find they are but one of hundreds of students in a lecture theatre. The style of teaching in a large lecture theatre is necessarily very different to that used in school classrooms where there are much smaller groups of students and where the teacher personally knows everyone.

For young adults who are learning to accept responsibility and learning to become independent, it is better that they make a mistake than avoid making decisions. So, try not to make decisions for them. Perhaps ask what they would like to have happen, then after reassurance that it is OK to make mistakes, allow them to make decisions. In this way, you will be demonstrating confidence in them, and helping to boost their self-esteem.

### **Suggestions for Promoting Independence and a Sense of Responsibility**

- Avoid an approach which gives the impression that you have “been there, done that” when they discuss issues with you. It is the first time for them, and they need to experience it themselves.
- When discussing solutions to a problem, let them think of alternatives first. Then offer your suggestions only after they cannot think of other options. Ideally, try to offer at least two options so that they have the final choice. In this way, they will feel more responsible for the outcome.
- It may be unwise to “tell” them which option is best. If they are unable to achieve the desired outcome, they may blame you. Further, their motivation to achieve the desired outcome may diminish if it is not their decision.
- If they do not wish to take action to address an issue, don’t take actions on their behalf.
- Let them carry out chosen actions even if you can perform these better.

- There will be times when you may need to let them make mistakes, but let them know the positives of their actions.

## **What Can Parents Do to Help the Transition?**

For many students, year 12 studies involved considerable study and stress, and students were necessarily dependent on their parents for emotional, financial, and educational support. However, as they begin university and complete the transition to adulthood, it is time for them to set up a more independent life.

So, the challenge for parents of university students is to:

- Promote a sense of responsibility
- Promote independence
- Form an adult to adult relationship with them

### **Communication**

While patterns of family interaction may change when they begin university, regular family get-togethers can provide valuable opportunities for family members to communicate with each other. Adult to adult communication involves:

- LISTENING – not asking too many questions - trying to gain an understanding of the other person's perspective
- Adopting an attitude of EQUALITY - talking at the same level and avoiding comments such as "stupid", or naïve".

### **Responsible Behaviour**

Responsible behaviour involves:

- Considering different ways of solving a problem
- Choosing a course of action after considering the consequences of each alternative

- Carrying through the chosen course of action
- Accepting the consequences of choosing this course of action
- Reviewing the outcomes

*Suggestion:* The Adelaide Centre for University Education (ACUE) runs free courses for students who are having difficulties with essay writing, note-taking, and other study skills. Some faculties also offer short courses to familiarise students with specific aspects of courses.

Students may find it difficult determining the amount of studying needed to cope with the reading and written work. Students can have doubts about their ability to cope with the expectations of university studies where it is expected that they are able to work independently.

*Suggestion:* It is often worthwhile getting to know other students in tutorial groups, and perhaps form a study group.

For some courses there are a relatively small number of hours when students are required to be at lectures or tutorials. Students may find it difficult to know when and for how long they should be studying. After year 12 studies, some students may have the misconception that university is a "bludge".

*Suggestion:* Tutors and lecturers are available to speak to students, to discuss work and expectations, and to help with other study issues. It is up to the student to initiate contact by finding out when the lecturers have scheduled available times, and visiting them in their offices at these times

After a few months, some students may question their course or subject choices, finding their studies differ from expectations. While this is not unusual, for parents and students it can be a cause of concern. However, changing courses does not mean failure, and may be preferable to continuing with a course that is not interesting or enjoyable.

*Suggestion:* Course advisors have expert knowledge of subject and course information, and are available to assist with decision-making.

### **New Expenses**

University Students usually have expenses that they did not have as a school student. For example, if they wore school uniforms, additional clothes will probably be needed for university. Textbooks, social activities and perhaps also increased travel may require extra finances. While some parents may be able to support them financially, many students will necessarily undertake part-time employment. For many students, the challenge will be to balance the demands of employment with university life, while also managing their finances.

*Suggestion:* Education and Welfare officers (EWO's) can provide advice re budgeting or loan application, and advise students about their eligibility for Youth Allowance or Austudy. The Student Employment and Careers Services have staff to assist with vocational queries, and information about part-time work. Second-hand books are advertised on campus notice boards.

### **New Social Activities**

Unlike school, students are treated as adults, so they make their own choices about the nature of their social activities. For example, most students are able to drink legally in their first year of university, so being in the proximity of liquor outlets may increase the likelihood that they consume alcohol, and the time spent at hotels and clubs may increase. Other drugs are also likely to be more available to students than previously. Each student will need to make his/her individual choices regarding drug use.

*Suggestion:* Counselling Support is available at the Adelaide campus. The staff are either psychologists or social workers. Students can make an appointment. This service is free and confidential.



Whatever the choices, you may find that during the first year of university changes in lifestyle result in different patterns of communication with the family, with perhaps reduced involvement in family affairs.

*Suggestion:* Special traditional family occasions such as birthdays and anniversaries can still be a feature of family life, and they enable young adults to still feel part of the family. A family get-together (perhaps Sunday lunch?) can provide a forum for family discussions, for sharing the week's happenings, and for planning the next week's activities.

### **New**

If they have friends who are studying at the same university, perhaps making friends is not a major issue. However, for some students, especially those from the country or from overseas, there may be no other students known to them, so making new friends will be a priority. While there are numerous clubs and interest groups available to university students, it is usually up to students to make the first move to become involved. For some students this may be daunting.

*Suggestion:* Lists of clubs with contact names and phone numbers are available. During Orientation Week most clubs provide information re introductory sessions for prospective members.

### **New Relationships**

Many students will have their first intimate experiences while at university. While relationships can be fulfilling and rewarding, when they end there is potential for loss of self-esteem, and loss of confidence regarding future relationships.

*Suggestion:* If a student is experiencing difficulties with relationships, it may be beneficial to see a University counsellor.

## **Other Adelaide University Support Services**

### ***Careers Service***

Level 4, Hughes Building  
Phone: 8313 5123

### ***Disability Support***

Level 6, Hughes Building  
Phone: 8313 5962

### ***International Student Support***

Level 6, Hughes Building  
Phone: 8313 4828

### ***Student Care***

Level 5, Oliphant Building  
Phone: 83135430

### ***Wirltu Yarl***

Schultz Building  
Phone: 8313 3623

### ***Counselling Support***

Ground Floor, Horace Lamb  
Building  
Phone: 8313 5663

### ***University Health***

Phone: 8313 5050



Counselling Support is available to assist students with personal difficulties that are affecting their study.

The service provides:

- Individual Counselling by appointment
- Telephone Counselling by appointment
- Mental health emergency response

**Counselling Support**

**Ground Floor, Horace Lamb Building**

**The University of Adelaide**

**Ph: +61 8 8313 5663**

**After hours support: 1300 167 654 or sms 0488 884 197**

This pamphlet was written by Flinders University Health and Counselling Services and has been reprinted as part of a collaborative project between the counselling services at Flinders and Adelaide University. Modified by Student Life Counselling Support.

Reviewed Feb 2017