



look after your mate



**Supporting your friends through
university life**

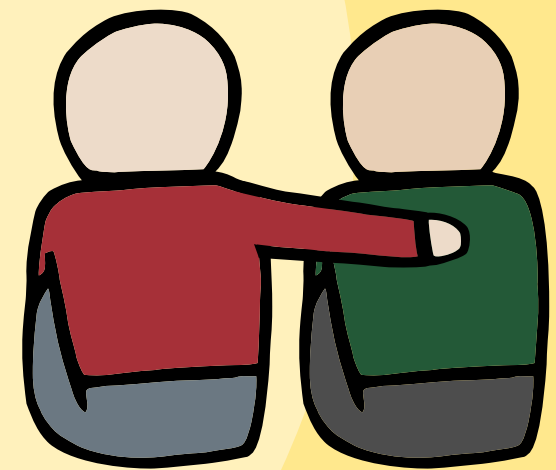
A Student Minds Resource

Who are you most likely to speak to when you're having a tough time at university?

Most students talk to their friends when they are having a tough time. We can talk to friends in confidence and they help us to keep challenges in perspective. The truth is that although university can be awesome, life's curveballs still get thrown at us and in these situations we really need our mates to be there for us.

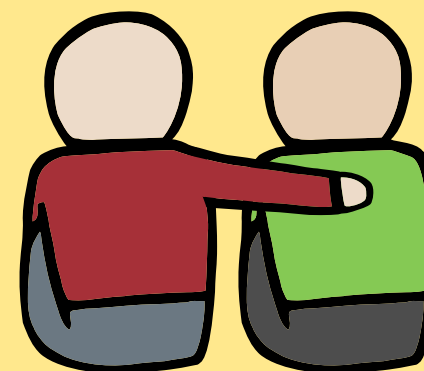
Friendship can play a key role in helping someone live with or recover from any difficulties they are facing. But it can be hard to know what to say when a mate is struggling.

This guide, which is shaped by students' own experiences, will support you to look out for your mates, from starting a conversation to navigating the student journey...

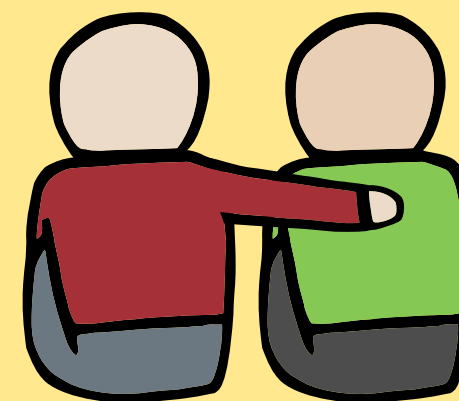
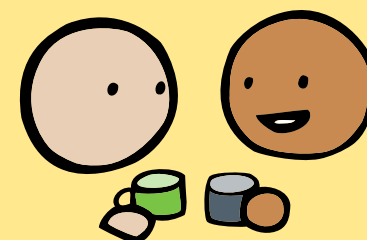


We have used fictitious names throughout this resource.

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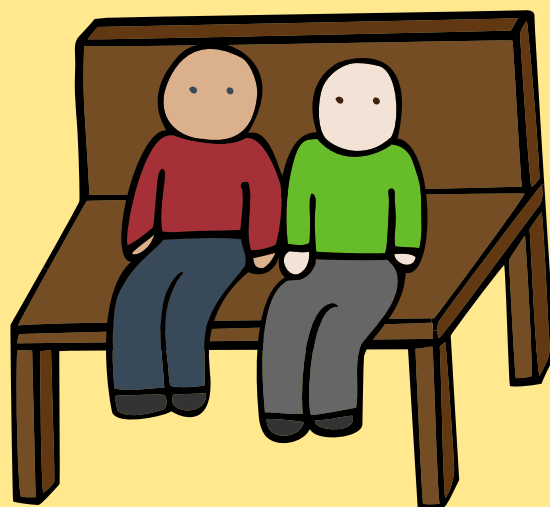


How to get the conversation started

Do something relaxing:
Sometimes it's easier to talk openly when the focus isn't just on the conversation you're having. You might like to suggest going for a walk together, or invite your friend round for a drink or a meal.

If you'd like to offer support to a friend it's a good idea to think about where and when you'd like to talk and spend a little bit of time preparing for the conversation...

Where to talk



Choose somewhere quiet without interruptions: Find somewhere you can have a relaxed conversation. You might like to choose somewhere familiar, such as your bedroom – anywhere you feel able to talk freely. Communal kitchens and living spaces can be cosy, but remember that having people wandering in and out might make it difficult for your friend to feel comfortable enough to talk openly.

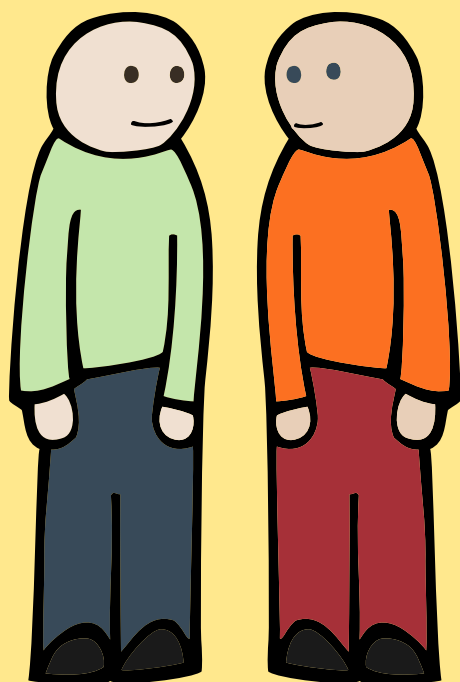
How to get the conversation started

One-to-one: You might have shared initial concerns with others in your friendship group, but remember that it might be intimidating if you all approach your friend as a group. It might be easier to have a conversation when it is just the two of you. This should also be reflected in your language. If you were to say 'we've been talking' or 'we think that...', your friend may feel like they are being ganged up on.

When to talk

When you have enough time to chat: If the person you are talking to decides that they do want to share their problem with you, having only a short amount of time to talk about this can put more pressure on the conversation, and if you have to leave halfway through they may feel hurt or interpret your leaving in the wrong way.

Avoid difficult times: It's probably best to avoid starting a deep conversation at times that are particularly difficult or stressful for individuals. For example meal times or food shopping for a student with an eating disorder.



Having the conversation

Be prepared: You might find it helpful to write down some of the things you want to say, either just to prompt yourself, or as a letter to give to your friend.

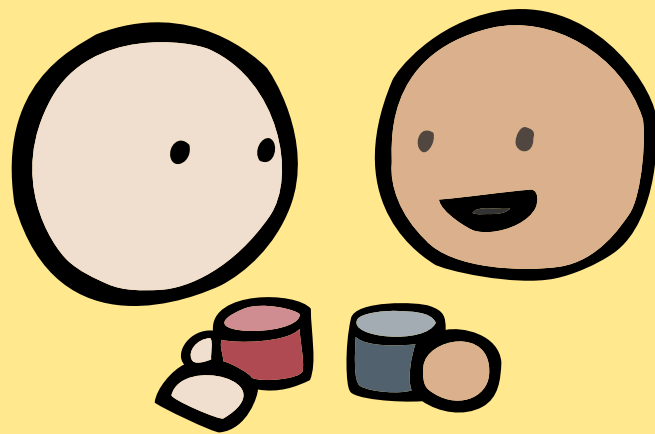
Consider your body language: Try to keep your body language open and approachable throughout the conversation.

Respect boundaries: Remember not to put too much pressure on yourself. Check out the 'look after yourself too' section of this guide for more information.

Respecting privacy: Remember that your friend might not be ready for other people to know just yet – be supportive and encouraging, and offer to be on hand when they decide to tell their GP, tutor or another friend.

Try to focus on thoughts and feelings rather than behaviours: This helps you to look at the bigger picture of what is going on in your friend's life rather than getting caught up in the ins and outs of specific behaviours.

Having the conversation



Don't worry about not understanding everything that your friend is going through, or not knowing exactly the right thing to say. Try not to act shocked or surprised as this could make your friend feel uncomfortable. Don't worry about giving advice - simply by giving your friend the opportunity to talk, you are showing them that they are not alone and that you are there for them.

Ask open questions: Open questions such as 'What can I do to support you with that?' give more scope for conversation and are more likely to encourage your friend to open up about their concerns.

Closed questions such as 'Are you going to have any carbs with that?' invite closed answers i.e. yes or no. Open questions can sound gentler and less direct.

Try to be supportive and understanding when you ask questions. 'Why' questions can feel quite aggressive sometimes. For instance, asking 'What is it about this situation that's worrying you?' might seem less intimidating than 'Why are you doing that?'

Practice reflective listening: This can be helpful both in communicating that you've really heard what your friend is trying to say, and in reflecting back emotions that your friend might not even be aware of.

So use phrases such as:

- 'It sounds as if...'
- 'It seems that...'
- 'What I understand is that...'
- 'So it's almost as if...'

Consider letter writing: If a friend wants to talk but doesn't know what to say, you could suggest that they write to you as a useful first step.

Having the conversation

Actually, I'm thinking about opening up to a friend about difficulties I'm experiencing...

See the section of this guide for more information.

It's great that you are thinking of opening up to a friend.

Being able to chat through your situation with someone else can be a great help. Before the conversation you might like to think about whether there is anything in particular that you would like support with. This could be something as simple as knowing that you can call them if you're having a hard time and need someone to talk to.

Be prepared for your friend to be concerned or to ask questions. They may feel a little out of their depth, so it might be an idea to have some information on hand to help you explain. If you're not ready to talk, writing a letter to your friend can be a useful first step.

Keeping up with the fun stuff

Supporting a friend isn't just about sharing worries and concerns – it's also about keeping up with the things you enjoy and spending time together as friends.

“What do you want to do?” can be a difficult question to answer if you're struggling, so it's good to be able to suggest a plan. We asked students for some of their favourite ways to spend time with their friends...

“We meet up for lunch in town or arrange to cook together in the evening.”

“Often going on a walk with my friends helps, we can talk for hours walking around the woods and the setting also serves as a fun thing to do when the weather is nice.”

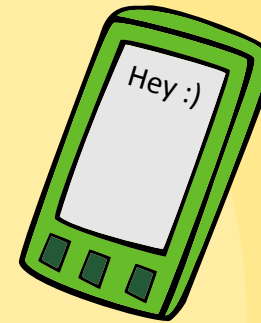
“Walking, meeting for a cosy tea, watching a movie – anything you enjoy and have in common.”

“I get into a box set of some sort; it's a continuous thing to focus on, takes your mind off things and is something you can do socially... I used to have Jonathon Creek nights with my flat mate.”

“Make time for chatting about your shared interests, university life, hobbies, music etc.”

Keeping up with the fun stuff

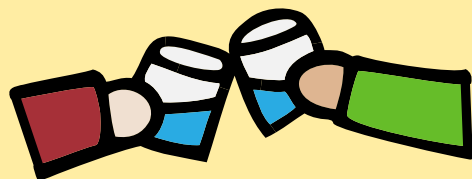
“Stay in touch with your friend over the holidays – give them a call or send them an email or text to say hi.”



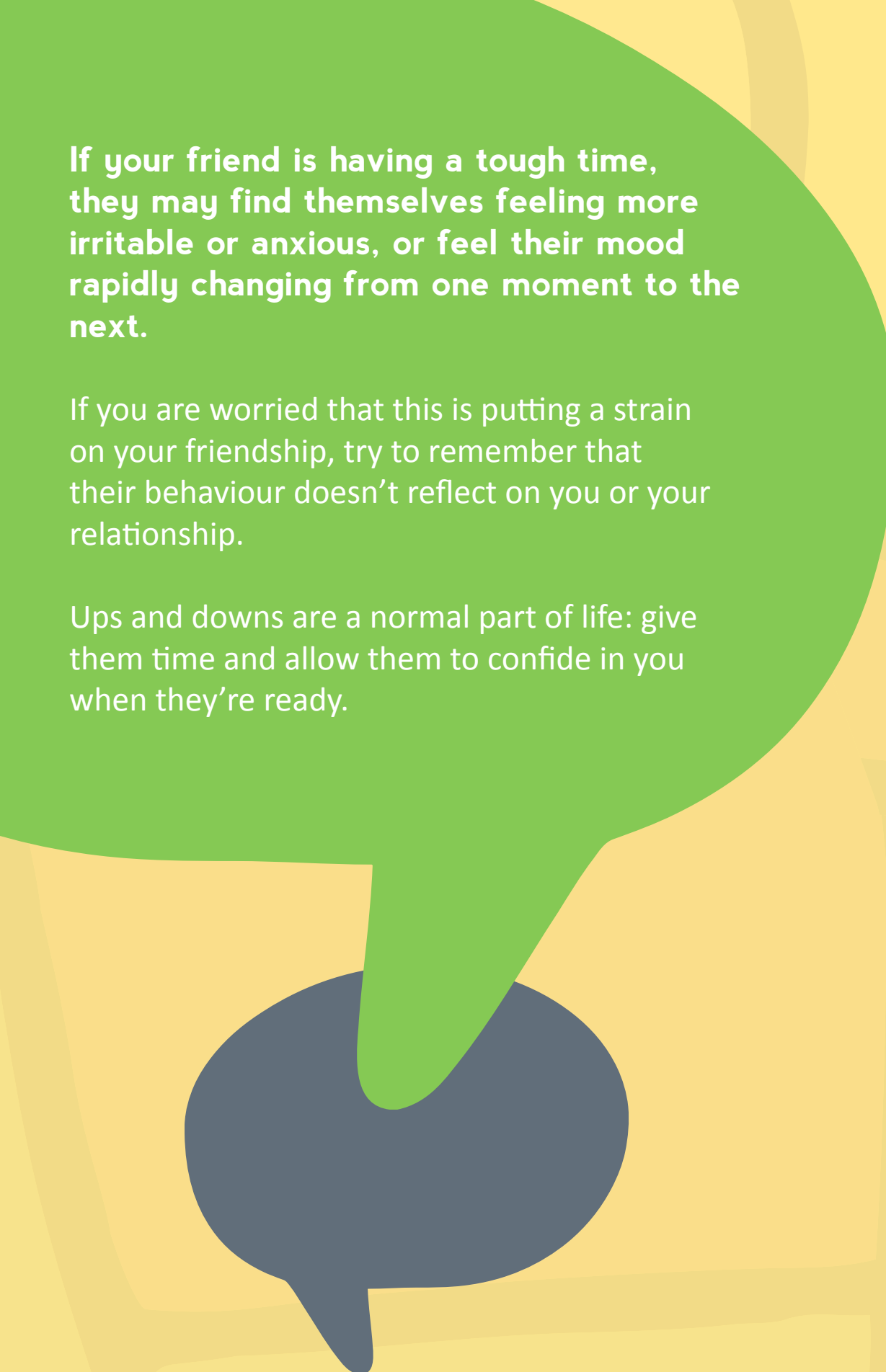
“Feel good film night, games night... who can resist a board game or uno?”

“Invite your friend round for a drink or meal – people appreciate personal attention.”

“Baking, crafty bits, go to a spa, have a meal out or head into the countryside for some fresh air!”



And remember that even if your friend seems hesitant about joining in with social situations, it's important to keep inviting them along so that they continue to feel included in your friendship group.



If your friend is having a tough time, they may find themselves feeling more irritable or anxious, or feel their mood rapidly changing from one moment to the next.

If you are worried that this is putting a strain on your friendship, try to remember that their behaviour doesn't reflect on you or your relationship.

Ups and downs are a normal part of life: give them time and allow them to confide in you when they're ready.

When the going gets tough

Doing small things to show you care can really help to bridge the gap between you if things seem difficult: send them a text to make them smile or drop by their room with a cup of tea.

You might want to encourage your friend to reflect on any particular situations that they find difficult and whether there is anything you could do to help. They could do this through a letter if it feels more comfortable.

Remember that motivation to change varies over time and depends a lot on the situation. If your friend is having a hard day, they may seem more negative about their ability to cope. Simply by being a supportive friend, you can really help to give them the courage and motivation they need to start making positive changes.

When the going gets tough

Adam's Story...



“At the time, I found it difficult to express how I felt, and quite often I didn’t know how I felt...”

Even if the sufferer gets upset or angry with you, most probably this is because deep down you are helping them work through the eating disorder, and all of the anger and emotion is because of the disorder, not because of you.

Being a consistent friend is an unbelievably helpful thing, and just by taking the time to be a friend for someone in recovery, you are doing so much for them, even though sometimes you may feel unappreciated. Believe me, the support of others in what is such an overwhelmingly lonely time for a sufferer, is incredible.”

Responding to a friend who wants to leave university

If your friend suggests that they want to leave university or need to take some time out it can be difficult to provide objective advice.

Encourage your friend to seek the support of a tutor or visit student services to get information about taking time out or extenuating circumstance procedures so they can assess all of their options.

They might be referred to a mental health advisor during this time to help with making arrangements.

It's important that your friend doesn't rush the decision. They should try to evaluate all the options. Your friend should ensure that they are in **conversation with their family/home support network** throughout this time so that everyone is aware of the situation.

Ultimately it's not your responsibility to make your friend stay at university; it's their decision but as a friend you can help support whatever decision they come to.

If your friend does decide to leave university for a break, **make it clear that if or when they're ready to come back, they will have support from everyone.**

It can be a great help if you can visit your friend whilst they are away and drop them a line of contact every once in a while, even if you don't get a response.

Responding to a friend who wants to leave university



Emma's Story...



“One of the hardest things about being an inpatient was the fear of being forgotten by my friends... I worried that being out of sight would mean I was out of mind; the thought of being even more outside the friendship circle made me more depressed and anxious. Whilst some friends found it too difficult to visit, my closest friends made a special effort to come to the unit bringing flowers and teddies to cheer me up.

Whilst I loved them visiting, they seemed to be treading on egg shells, not wanting to say anything that would upset me. Rather than having conversations about new boyfriends, parties and changes at school, we would discuss the weather and what had been happening in the news. I would put on a brave face and pretend all was well.

One morning in the unit, I received a letter. I recognised immediately the handwriting – it was from my best friend who had visited me earlier that week. The letter, which I still have today, was a detailed and entertaining account of everything that had happened within our friendship circle, everything I had missed over the previous couple of months. At the end of the letter, she commented on how she wanted to keep me up to date with all the gossip but thought that writing would be easier. She also encouraged me to write back to let her know about all my gossip! (And of course how I was really feeling). This meant a lot to me.”

Looking after yourself too

When supporting a friend, it's important that you look after yourself and remember your own priorities. Keep up with your usual interests and hobbies, and make time for your relationships with family and friends.

While maintaining the confidence of your friend, ensure you are getting support. It can be tough worrying about how someone is doing, so find a way of ensuring you are supported too. Try to find someone separated from the situation who doesn't have a 'gossiping interest' so you have someone to confide in and talk through any tricky situations or conversations.

Remember there will be some things that you or your friend may not feel comfortable discussing. If something comes up that you aren't comfortable talking about, you might suggest that they talk about this specific issue with someone else, and if you ask something that your friend isn't comfortable answering try not to put too much pressure on them. Let them know the door is open and that you are there as and when they are ready.

Finally, maintain boundaries.

Remember, you are not supposed to help with everything. Encouraging your friend to try to solve their day-to-day problems can be really helpful in giving them greater confidence in their ability to cope without having to rely exclusively on the support of friends.

Looking after yourself too

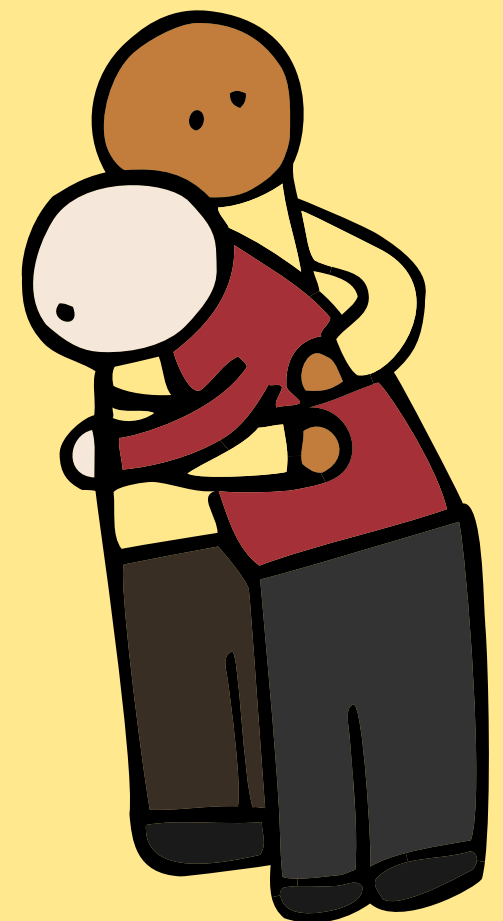
“I only now appreciate the difficult situation I put my own friends through and the stress it must have put on them.

I like to think they had someone to turn to themselves, whilst they were being so supportive of me...

Recovery is something which requires the motivation of the individual, and this takes time.

So I sincerely hope my friends put themselves first. There is a limit to what friends can do to help and compromising their own needs does not help anyone.”

**Aaron's
story...**



“When I think about individual things that made a difference, I can think of one perfect example.

In the depths of illness and depression, when I hadn't been amongst my peer group at school for months, a friend invited me to Party in the Park. I must have seemed very rude because I was withdrawn all day and I struggled to join in. The day itself was a real challenge, but it meant a lot. It made me feel included. It gave me something to talk about with my peers - we had shared a perfectly normal experience; we had shared memories that were fun and light-hearted.

Those experiences of being part of a group, and experiencing normality, do so much to break down the isolation.”



Student stories

“In the depths of my eating disorder, a great deal more of my time was spent living in my head than it was actually really participating in the world around me.

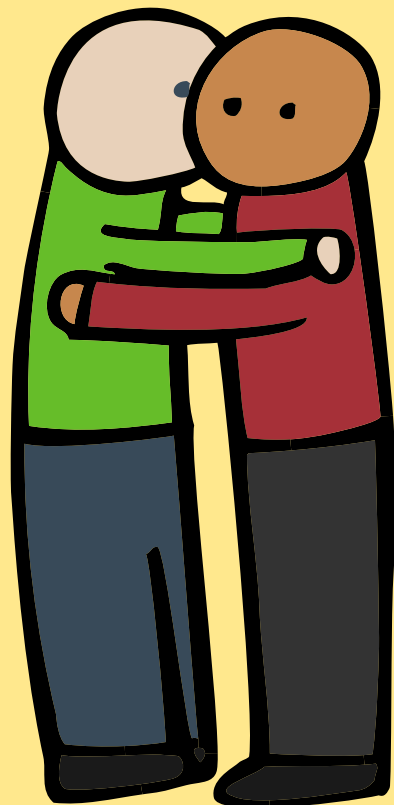
But as much as I convinced myself I was like that because I preferred it that way, in reality my fear of being a social failure played a big part in it. It was much safer for me to isolate myself in the world of numbers and rules in my mind, than it was for me to risk rejection from my peers. Often, people gave up inviting me out after the first few times I turned them down. This confirmed that I wasn't really worth spending time with. Of course there were times when I simply couldn't be swayed, but often just a small amount of encouragement and assurance that my presence would be really appreciated gave me the confidence to venture out of my loneliness and realise that the world was much bigger than my eating disorder.”

Student stories

“What I needed wasn’t some positive speech or someone to tell me that they had felt the same at some point...

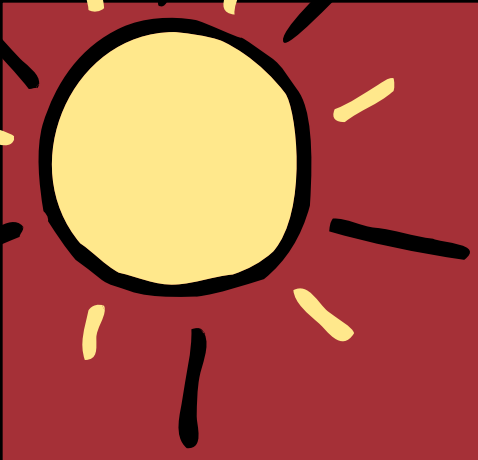
but I needed someone to just be there, a sounding board...

I don’t need to be rushed, or my feelings to be quashed. I need someone to listen, hug me, maybe cook me some food...to sit with me.”



“I went through two months of prolonged depression and stress and winter-blues through December and January.

Not wanting to stress my friends out, I didn’t share with them what I was going through for as long as I could...When I finally did, it was so much better. I could share what I was going through and not have to do it all alone. I was seeking plenty of support from helplines, counsellors, etc., but having a friend of my age to share things with made it much better...My advice for people who want to look out for their friends is: even if your friend seems to be going through serious stuff, don’t feel helpless or compelled to look for solutions! Simply being around and providing a hug or a warm cup of tea or quiet company means so, so, so much more than you will ever know.”



The Student Journey



There are a few points in the academic year that can be particularly challenging, so in this section you'll find practical ideas for supporting your mates and looking out for your own wellbeing at these specific times.

The freshers' period can be daunting for both first years and returners.

You might want to share some of the following tips with friends who are moving to university...

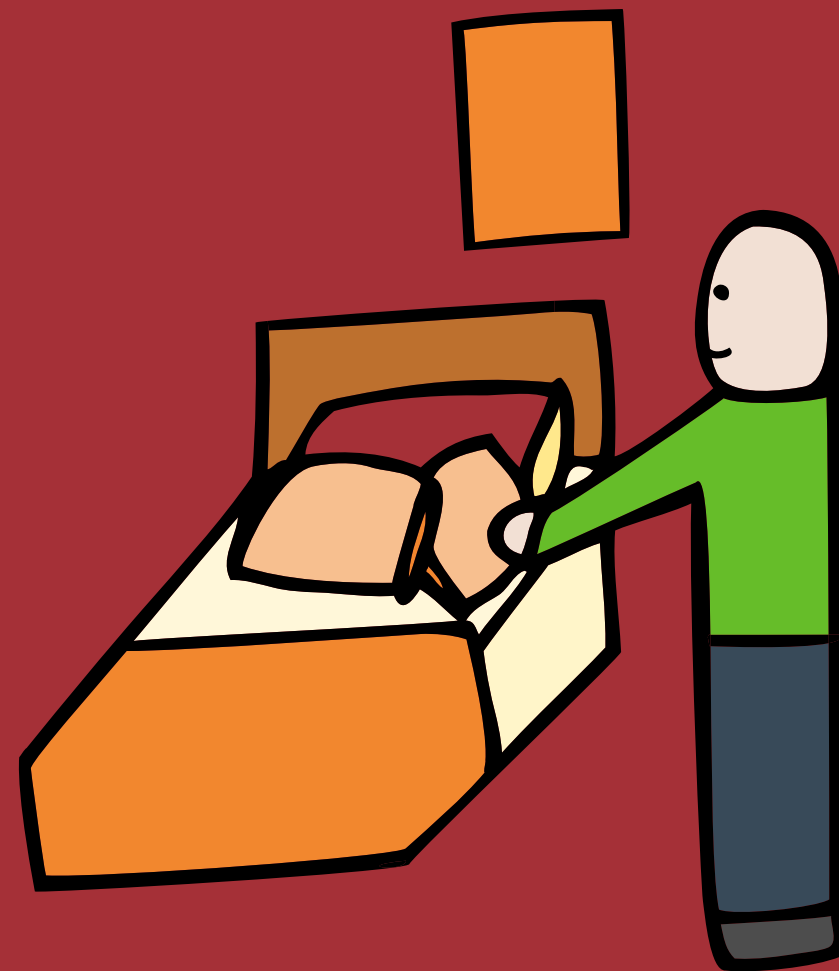
If you're new to the area, ask for recommendations and go exploring:

It's not just about finding the nearest supermarket and library – you'll want to find places you can enjoy going to in your free time as well. Check out local magazines and student newspapers to find out what's going on.

Tips for freshers

Spend some time turning your room into a cosy space that you'll enjoy spending time in.

Hang up posters to help make your room feel your own and inject a bit of personality. Put up photos of friends, family, holidays and anything else that makes you smile.



Tips for freshers

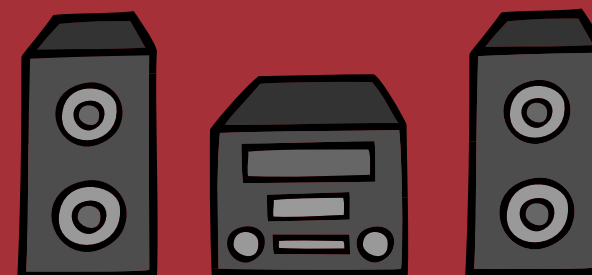
Keep busy: Fill your time with plenty of different activities and take the opportunity to try new things. Joining a club or society is a great way to learn something new, meet a different group of people and make a regular commitment to doing something you enjoy.

Keep in contact with your family and friends from home:
It's ok to want to call your parents!

Keep your room door open for the first few days and talk to the people around you – who knows who you'll meet!

Look after yourself:
Eat good food, get lots of sleep, make yourself a hot drink in your favourite mug and go for a walk in the fresh air every day.

Music is one of the best and quickest ways to transform your mood. Put together a playlist of your favourite songs and play it loud!

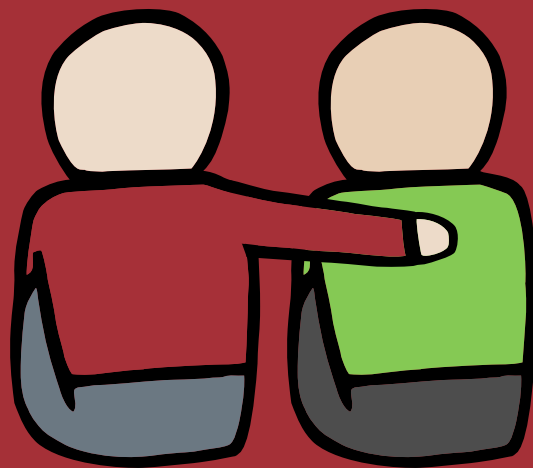


Preparing for university holidays

When you have started to adapt to life away from home, the holidays can feel like an odd time.

Our mental health can be more vulnerable at these times of transition.

Here are some tips you might want to encourage your friend to think about when the time comes to head home for the Christmas, Easter or summer holidays.



Plan ahead: You might find that the holidays mean a change of routine, from waking up at a different time to having family over to stay. If this is something that you find difficult, ask your family about their holiday plans in advance and let them know of anything they could do to make things easier for you. One of the difficult things about holidays is the amount of unstructured time you have each week.

Setting up your own personal routine can help to give you a sense of direction. If you have university work to get done, you could head over to the local library for a few hours each day. Other regular activities can also help to keep you feeling active, whether this is walking the family dog each morning or meeting up with friends in the evening.

Preparing for university holidays

Remember what you love about the holidays:

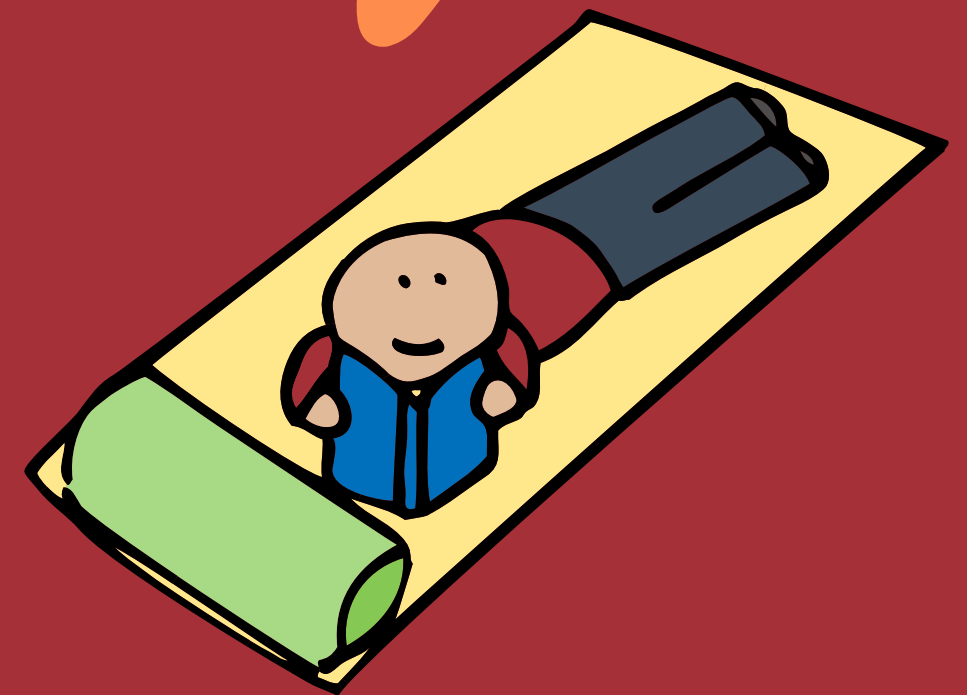
Going home for the holidays may mean being away from university friends and taking a break from some of your regular hobbies, but there are plenty of things to enjoy about being home such as meeting up with old friends and home comforts! Why not arrange to have a day out with one of your parents or siblings?

Look after yourself:

With all the changes in routine, going home for the holidays can mean it's easy to forget about the simple things. Make sure you get enough sleep, keep in touch with your friends and schedule in some 'me time' every day.

Do something different:

If you feel a bit cooped up over the holidays, why not explore some of the volunteering opportunities in your area? You could also try learning a new skill e.g. sign up for a language course, join a sports club or take up music lessons.



Preparing for university holidays

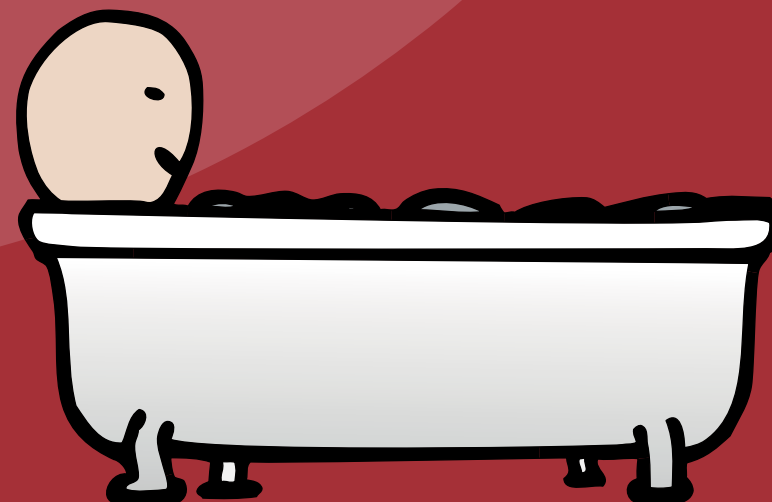
Don't forget to give yourself a little time out to relax:

Call a friend for a catch up.

Escape to your room for a few minutes and spend some time reading or listening to your favourite music.

Indulge yourself: have a long hot bubble bath or sit back with a mug of coffee and a good book.

Head out for a walk – maybe you have a boisterous puppy in need of exercise, or a young cousin who is bouncing off the walls with excitement... or maybe you just want a few minutes of alone time. Either way it's always great to get some fresh air!



Managing revision and coursework

Keeping on top of academic demands can be a struggle for everyone, especially alongside the other changes that university brings.

If your friend is experiencing particular difficulties, the thought of coursework can add further weight to their worries.

Equally, when supporting your friend you might be worried about your own workload. Here are some top tips for keeping on top of essays and exams.



Get into a routine

Plan your everyday routine:

This may sound kind of boring, but it really needn't be... think about what things cheer you up, or what makes for a good morning. You might like heading out for a morning walk, going to the canteen with your friends for breakfast or reading the paper with your morning coffee.

Make the most of your evenings and weekends:

Try to have one or two regular commitments that you'll make time for every week. Having something pre-arranged is a really good way to avoid the temptation to stop taking breaks when you get busy. At weekends you might cook brunch with your friends, or have a house dinner & film night on Friday evenings.

Managing revision and coursework

Study efficiently

Make organising your work fun...

using colour-coded files, folders and notebooks. Remember that you can't keep everything in your head, so collect all of your tasks into a to-do list and find a system that works for you. Focus on breaking projects down into manageable tasks and ask yourself 'what are the steps I need to take to make this happen?'

Change things up and vary where you work each day:

Working at home in the morning and then moving to the library for the afternoon can be a good way to avoid cabin fever. If you're procrastinating about starting a new piece of work, try heading off to a coffee shop for a study session, plug in your headphones and get in the zone!

Find out how you work best:

If you don't like working in the library, try experimenting with different study spots. It may be that you work best at home with music and slippers and a mug of tea, and that's completely fine! Work out whether you're a morning person or an evening person and whether you prefer group study sessions or working alone, then tailor your study methods to fit your preferences.

Set goals to motivate yourself:

What do you want to achieve this term? What are your goals for today?

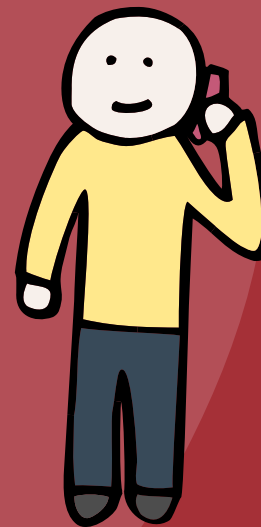


Don't stress!

Sometimes easier said than done, but there are definitely things you can do to help:

Try to escape from the university bubble every now and again. Calling home or going away for the weekend can be a great way to get a sense of perspective on the things you're worrying about.

Planning out your work and making a schedule can help you to feel more in control. Break down big tasks into small manageable steps and add one or two of these to your daily to do list. For example, instead of worrying about having to write a whole essay, you might decide that you just need to spend an hour or two writing a plan.



Managing revision and coursework

Take proper breaks and make the most of your time off.

Get some fresh air: go for a walk, run or bike ride. Whether you decide to explore somewhere new, or just head out to the supermarket to do your weekly food shop, getting outside is always calming and lends a sense of perspective to any work-related panic that's been brewing!

Take a proper break at lunchtime (and just to clarify: eating a sandwich at your desk whilst casually flicking through Facebook doesn't count). Go to the canteen with a friend or pack your own lunch and find a good spot to eat it – head off to the local park in summer or hang out in the common room in the winter.

Read a chapter or two of a **good book** or **watch an episode** of your favourite TV series.

Graduation and the transition out of university

If you have a friend who is approaching the end of their university career they may be feeling anxious about the future and leaving an established support network.

If you're also graduating it's likely that you'll also have your own excitement and apprehension about the future.

Pace yourself:

You're not going to make it overnight – having left university, graduates need to give themselves time to establish and build their own lives in the wider world. This is an opportunity for you to be your own meaning maker and decide what's important to you.

Make plans for the future with friends:

Organise a big get together for a date after graduation so everyone has something to look forward to. Moving apart can put different pressures on relationships. Make a plan with the friend you have been supporting to think about their next steps and how you are going to keep in touch.

Remember this isn't the end:

Resist the 'this is THE END of everything' feeling by keeping in touch with friends and networks. If you're not going straight into a job, find some other positive ways to keep occupied such as volunteering.

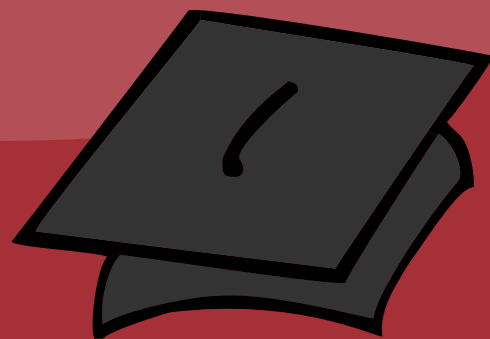
Graduation and the transition out of university

Don't put too much pressure on yourself:

Job hunting can be stressful and we need to maintain a balanced lifestyle through it, but this worry is exacerbated by the pressure we put on ourselves.

The reality is that failure is a part of life – something we all experience – and many positive things can come out of you not getting that particular interview. (The Beatles were initially rejected by Decca Recording Studios and told they had no future in the business!)

So, don't be hard on yourself when things don't go to plan – give it time and get the support you need from your university's career service and from family and friends.



Make preparations for moving to a new environment:

Whether you move back home or to a new city, the transition from a student routine to one of working life or from studying to volunteering can be unsettling. Make a special effort to maintain those good habits and interests you developed at university.

Understanding Your Friend's Diagnosis



If your mate has been diagnosed with a mental health problem or you are concerned that they are showing symptoms of a specific difficulty, finding out more about the condition and increasing your understanding of what they are going through is one of the most helpful things you can do.

It is not advisable to self-diagnose however, so do refer back to our tips on having a conversation and encourage your friend to get professional support...



Supporting a friend with an Eating Disorder

What are eating disorders?

There are different types of eating disorders: Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, Binge Eating Disorder and Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (EDNOS). Here are 8 signs and symptoms of eating disorders that may have caused you concern for a friend...

Be wary of labelling your friend. Try to keep an open frame of mind about the behaviours and underlying issues.

This will help you to be supportive of the emotional torment without focussing on the behavioural symptoms.

Avoiding social situations that involve food / taking to eating alone or in secret / disruptions to 'normal' eating times.

Mood swings, depression, fatigue, irritability, insomnia.

Measuring self-worth based on weight: 'good' for not eating, 'bad' for giving in to eating.

Pre-occupied thoughts of food, weight and cooking.

Difficulty concentrating.

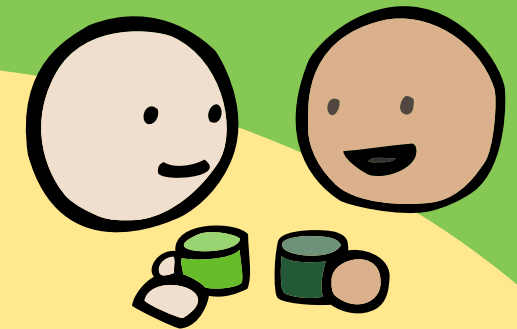
Nervous or indecisive around meal times, especially if the eating place is particularly obvious, such as a canteen or hall dining area.

Very aware of other peoples' eating habits / weight / diets.

Compulsive exercise.

Supporting a friend with an Eating Disorder

How can I support a friend with an eating disorder?



The best thing to do if you think someone might be struggling with an eating disorder is to simply start a conversation with them about it.

We have included lots of help on starting a conversation and maintaining a normal friendship earlier in this guide.

We'd suggest that you try not to say things like "why don't you just eat?" This will only make your friend feel like you don't understand how they are feeling, making them feel more isolated.

Also, try not to make comments about your friend's body or shape, or give the eating disorder too much attention.

Your friend and the eating disorder are separable. Don't ignore your friend, but try not to give the disorder too much attention.



Supporting a friend with an Eating Disorder

Meal times can be particularly difficult.

We don't recommend that friends help with meals; this is an incredibly hard task and one that would be likely to put a lot of stress on any friendship. We know though that a lot of housemates find it difficult to live with someone with an eating disorder and so we have put together some thoughts on how to deal with meal time.

Have a conversation:

Find time away from meal times to talk to your housemate and ask if there is anything you can do to make meal times easier.

Keep calm and carry on!

If the meal time is stressful for you, it is also stressful for your friend. If you can, do your best to stay calm during the mealtime.

Keep conversations flowing:

People like to be distracted from thinking about what they are eating. You can be a great help by simply chatting away about anything else going on in life! It may be helpful to listen to the radio, watch TV or play board games during meals.

Some people find that it helps to cook and eat together:

We'd suggest that housemates lay down some ground rules – you don't want to be in a position where you are changing what you would normally eat. You could simply cook similar meals.

Supporting a friend with an Eating Disorder

Meal times can be particularly difficult.

Don't overly congratulate your friend for eating:

There is likely going to be an ongoing argument in your friend's mind about whether eating is a good thing or a bad thing – adding value statements such as praise or criticism really only adds fuel to this fire.

It's rude to stare:

Where possible, avoid paying too much attention to what your friend is eating. No one likes to be watched and we certainly don't like to be judged. Change will happen over time – it is not effective to raise issue with everything your housemate eats or does not eat.

Spend time together after meals:

This can reduce the anxiety your housemate is likely to be feeling.

Supporting a friend with an Eating Disorder

Find out more...

Natalie's Story...

"I think when you have a friend who suffers from an eating disorder there is a tendency for you to focus on their behaviours: what they are eating, how much they are eating, exercise habits etc.

However, this can create unbearable pressure for the sufferer and cause them to find new ways of hiding their disorder from outside view, making them even more deeply entrenched in it. I remember feeling very awkward and guilty when my flatmates kept asking me why I always seemed to be on my way to the gym; so eventually I stopped telling them.

Instead, ask your friend if there is anything that was upsetting them prior to the onset of their eating disorder, anything worrying them now and if there is anything you can do to help. Helping somebody to identify potential triggers is far more beneficial to their recovery than arguing over the size of their dinner and may even help them if they choose to enter therapy. In addition, talking over painful issues may help your friend realise that they are in fact very 'special' and valued by you and they don't need an eating disorder to feel important or worthy, in addition to lessening the chains of social isolation which accompany the illness."

Student Minds informal support groups for Eating Disorders offer students the time and space to talk openly in a safe and pro-recovery environment:

Supporting a friend with Depression

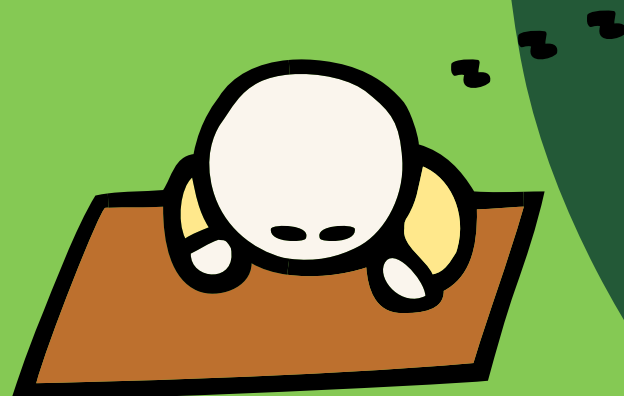
What is depression?

Information from
Students Against
Depression

Perhaps you have noticed that a friend, family member or fellow student is stressed or anxious, even suicidal? Depression is more common than you might think, affecting one in ten of us in any one year.

If you recognise the signs in yourself or someone else, there are clear steps you can take right now to help. Depression affects everyone in different ways, but trends to look out for in your mates include:

- A persistently sad, anxious or generally low mood.
- A loss of interest in life and activities.
- Decreased energy, struggling to complete daily tasks.
- Irregular sleeping patterns – sleeping little, excessively, or without routine.
- Increased tearfulness and feelings of worthlessness.
- Poor concentration.



Supporting a friend with Depression

How can I support a friend with depression?

Be clear about your limits:

Before you step into a situation, be realistic with yourself and know your own limits. There are many ways in which you can aid a friend but depression is still best dealt with by a professional. Don't take on more than you can handle but offer practical, ongoing social contact and connection, which provides an important buffer against depression.

Encourage professional help:

There are lots of options for professional help to choose from as suits your friends' preferences, including the university health centre, local GP surgery or counselling service.

Communicate your concern:

Isolation and lack of support are key factors in depression. Letting the person know you are worried could be a key first step in breaking that isolation. Don't be surprised if their initial response is abrupt or rejecting, persevere in showing you care. (See the 'Starting a conversation' advice at the start of this guide!)

Check out suicidal thoughts:

If you are at all concerned about this, don't be afraid to ask the person directly. Contrary to popular belief, this is unlikely to 'put ideas in their head' but may well instead offer them the relief of being allowed to talk about a taboo subject. See the 'Knowing your services' section of this guide for what to do if you're worried about someone's safety.

Supporting a friend with Depression

Find out more...

It is not possible to 'snap out' of depression and there are no simple solutions but there are practical steps we can take to move forward.

specialises in providing clinically validated self-help content alongside real life student experiences.

There are also fantastic resources on the Students Against Depression website to support people to learn how to cope with self-harming urges.

Seb's Story...

"I had an episode of depression in my second year of university.

My friend Meg, who was two years above me, spent a lot of time talking to me about what I was going through. She struck a very good balance between just listening without judgment and respecting my feelings, and using her own insights to shed light on my experiences.

For me, knowing that there was someone in my life who had been through a similar journey and "come out" the other side was crucial. Second to that, it was very important that there was someone I could talk to, who was patient and understanding. Thirdly, I appreciated that she was able to use her experience to help me understand my condition, but with the awareness that her depression was not necessarily the same as mine."

Supporting a friend with Bipolar

What is bipolar?

Bipolar – sometimes known as manic depression – is a severe mental health illness characterised by significant mood swings including manic highs and depressive lows.

The majority of bipolar individuals experience alternating episodes of mania and depression.

Both males and females of any age and from any social or ethnic background can develop the illness. The symptoms can first occur and then reoccur when work, studies, family or emotional pressures are at their greatest.

The key to coping with bipolar is an early diagnosis, acceptance of the illness and adapting your lifestyle so you are in control of the symptoms as much as possible. Management of the illness can be achieved through strategies involving medication, health care, therapy and self-management.

Information
from Bipolar
UK

Supporting a friend with Bipolar

**If you are
worried about
a friend...**

**Bipolar affects everyone differently and can be
difficult to diagnose.**

If your friend feels comfortable doing so, they could complete a mood diary (available on the Bipolar UK website). They should then make an appointment with their doctor and tell them how they have been feeling over a period of time. It is also useful to take a friend or family member along. Sometimes your GP may refer you to a specialist – usually a psychiatrist. Diagnosis should always be undertaken by an appropriately trained medical professional.

**Find out
more...**

info@bipolaruk.org.uk

Supporting a friend with OCD

What is OCD?

What is OCD?

OCD UK describe Obsessive–Compulsive Disorder (OCD) as ‘a serious anxiety-related condition where a person experiences frequent intrusive and unwelcome obsessional thoughts, often followed by repetitive compulsions, impulses or urges.’

Find out more...

How can I support a friend with OCD?

OCD UK have put together useful guidance for family and friends, clarifying information about OCD symptoms and treatments, as well as offering hope and encouragement for those affected by this very treatable disorder:

Visit www.ocduk.org for lots of information about OCD and other related disorders. The website also has information about a telephone support group.

OCD Action also runs a confidential helpline that provides support and information to OCD sufferers.

You also might like to read an article about OCD in Student Minds’ magazine ReCover:

Supporting a friend experiencing Psychosis

What is Psychosis?

NHS Choices define Psychosis as ‘a medical word used to describe mental health problems that stop the person from thinking clearly, telling the difference between reality and their imagination, and acting in a normal way. The two main symptoms of psychosis are:

- **Hallucinations** – where a person hears, sees (and in some cases smells) things that are not really there; a common hallucination is when people hear voices in their head
- **Delusions** – where a person believes things that, when examined rationally, are obviously untrue; such as believing that your next door neighbour is secretly planning to kill you.

The combination of hallucinations and delusional thinking can cause an often severe disruption to perception, thinking, emotion and behaviour.’

How can I support a friend experiencing Psychosis?

First, try to keep some perspective if a friend tells you they’re experiencing psychosis. Students will be able to relate to many of the traits such as worry and lack of sleep, and many of us experience paranoid thoughts. For instance, Freeman et al (2005) found that while around 20% of the population reported no paranoid thoughts, over 30% of the population reported 1 – 3 paranoid thoughts.

Information from NHS Choices:

‘People with psychosis often have what is known as a lack of insight, meaning they are unaware they are thinking and acting strangely. Due to their lack of insight, it is often down to friends, relatives or carers of people affected by psychosis to seek help for them. If you are concerned that someone you know may be affected by psychosis you could contact their social worker or community mental health nurse if they have previously been diagnosed with a mental health condition.

If you think the person’s symptoms are placing them at possible risk of harm then you can take the person to the nearest accident and emergency department, if they agree. Or call their GP / local out of hours GP, NHS Direct on 0845 4647 or ring 999 and ask for an ambulance.’

Supporting a friend experiencing Psychosis

The NHS provides a comprehensive overview of treatment for psychosis:

[Schizophrenia](#) is an information resource about schizophrenia in several languages.

Rethink Mental Illness has a helpline that you can call if you would like further information about psychosis.

**Find out
more...**

Supporting a friend with Anxiety

What is anxiety?

Information
from Anxiety
UK

Anxiety is a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease about something with an uncertain outcome.

Even some of the most confident people may have experienced anxiety and it's something that we all experience to some level. However, if anxiety gets out of control or stops a person from doing everyday things, this can lead to feeling unhappy, upset and frustrated.

Many anxiety disorders begin in childhood and adolescence, and the average time a person waits to seek help for their condition is more than 10 years. So a lot of university students may have been feeling anxious for quite a long time.

The pressures of studying, getting involved and being away from home could be making things feel worse than ever.

Supporting a friend with Anxiety

How can I support a friend with anxiety?

It can be difficult to tell if someone is struggling with anxiety as lots of people are able to hide their feelings.

But if someone you know is no longer doing things they used to do or enjoy and they seem to be avoiding situations they didn't used to struggle with, they may be experiencing anxiety.

Encourage them to speak to someone about how they are feeling. This may be difficult for them, especially if they think no one else feels the same or that they won't be understood. If they've been feeling this way for a long time, they might feel like they are unable to cope or that nothing can be done to improve the situation. Talking to someone they trust will reduce the pressure of anxiety and stress. It may also help them to realise that they are not alone in how they are feeling.

Encourage them to bear the following in mind: It is OK to be upset and it is OK to ask for help. You friend should speak to their university's student counselling or welfare services for additional support. Above all, remember that anxiety is treatable and it doesn't have to keep making you feel unhappy. Things can change and you can control your stress and anxiety.

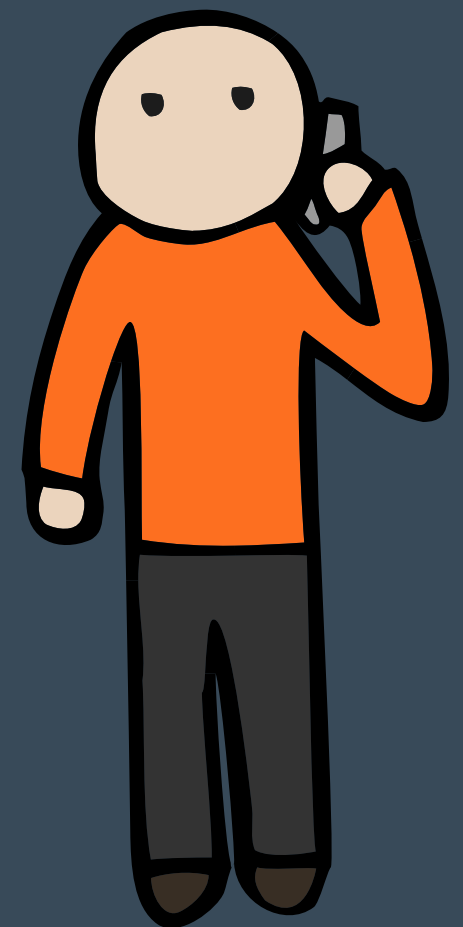
Find out more...

Helpline: 08444 775 774

Website:

Knowing Your Services

It's useful to know what support is out there so that you can signpost your friends and develop an understanding of the sort of support they might receive.



**What to do if
your friend is
feeling actively
suicidal now:**

If your friend is desperate right now

If your friend has indicated they are feeling this way, let them know that you care and that you are here for them right now:

- Ask your friend to make a deal with themselves that they will not act just yet.
- Encourage your friend to access professional support. They might phone an all-hours contact, such as:

HOPEline UK – T: 0800 068 41 41, SMS: 0776 209 697, E: pat@papyrus-uk.org (Hopeline will also be able to offer advice to you, as a friend worried about a young person)

NHS 111 (England & Wales) – T: 111

NHS 24 (Scotland) – T: 08454 242424

Samaritans – 24 hour trained listening: T: 08457 90 90 90, E: jo@samaritans.org

Their local GP / local GP all hours service

For international email and phone help details, visit

- Try to distract your friend from their thoughts - watch TV or a DVD or read together; sit with your friend while they write in a diary; tidy a room together or sort out a pile of papers etc.
- Help your friend to make a plan for keeping safe. Could they consider contacting a family member or another close friend to be with them right now?
- Look through the www.studentminds.org website for more ideas about what to do next. The website will help your friend to understand their suicidal thoughts better and how to get the right kind of help and support.

**If your friend feels desperate
right now:**

**If your friend is about to harm
themselves, has already done so or
tried to do so, phone 999, or get them
quickly to your local hospital's A&E
(Accident and Emergency).**

**The staff should be told clearly that
your friend is at risk to themselves.**

Your GP:

A good first step for your friend to take when thinking about getting treatment is to visit their GP. This can seem like a scary prospect, but it is a very important step on the road to recovery. It can be helpful for your friend to write down what they have been experiencing before they go to their first appointment.

Papyrus is the national charity dedicated to the prevention of young suicide in the UK, which operates a national helpline known as HOPELineUK.

Contact HOPELineUK by phone: 0800 068 4141, SMS: 07786 209 697, or email: pat@papyrusuk.org from Monday – Friday 10am-5pm and 7pm-10pm, or on weekends 2pm-5pm.

Improving Access to Psychological Therapies is an NHS programme. Psychological therapies have been shown to be highly effective, so this is a great place to start! Your friend can speak to their GP about the support available in their area.

Nightline is an anonymous listening and information service run by students for students from 7pm-8am during term-time.

Samaritans provides confidential non-judgemental emotional support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair. You can contact them by phone, email, letter or face-to-face.

Signposting to support

Universities have a range of different services to support student wellbeing. Visit your university's website to find out what help is available, including counselling, student advice services, support networks and other resources. The University Counselling Service can be a great way to gain support. It is an active process which will give your friend the chance to explore and understand the issues they bring in a safe and non-judgemental environment. Your friend may be referred to further support from the university's mental health advisor as part of this process.

Online Advice and Support

[befrienders.org/](https://www.befrienders.org/) and [studentminds.org/](https://www.studentminds.org/) are national charities that provide lots of information on living with mental health difficulties and provide various other services. The [befrienders.org/](https://www.befrienders.org/) website specialises in providing clinically validated self-help content alongside real life student experiences.

Signposting to support

Student Minds Peer Support Programmes:

Student Minds groups offer support through facilitated peer conversation. Our groups are run by trained student volunteers and offer a confidential space to talk about life, university and whatever helps you keep your life on track.

The groups are not an alternative to professional support and we encourage students attending peer support groups to also seek further support from their local GP, university mental health advisor or university counselling service. We support students to run three different peer support programmes at various UK universities...

Positive Minds Course:

a six-week course for students with mild depression, covering topics such as building a support network, establishing healthy routines and exploring different relaxation techniques.

Supporting Supporters Two-Part Workshop:

for those supporting a friend or family member with an eating disorder.

Eating Disorder Groups:

these informal support groups are here to provide support and encouragement to students with eating disorders to help you keep motivated through recovery.

Further support for specific mental health difficulties can also be found at:

Take Action to Improve Student Mental Health

Thank you for already taking action to improve student mental health by reading this resource and thinking about how you can best support your friends.

Why not take it further?

Take part in the national Look After Your Mate campaign:

Visit our website to find out how you can get involved with Student Minds:



Why not submit your story?

Jenny's story

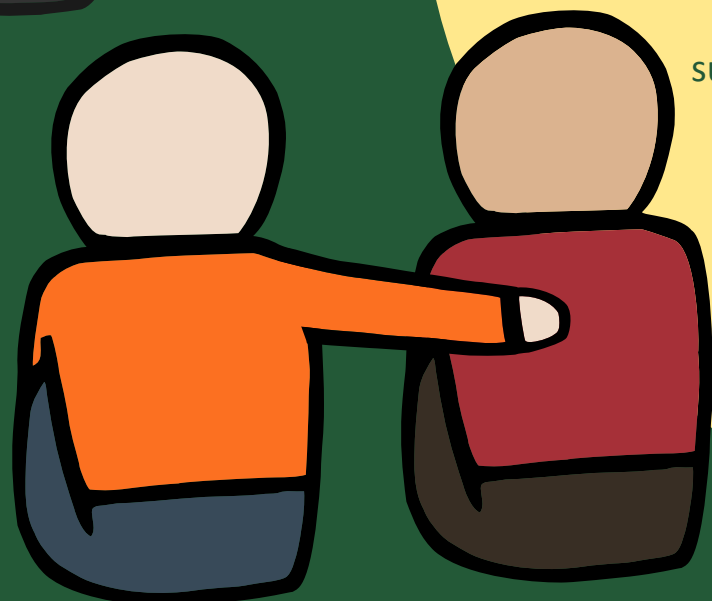
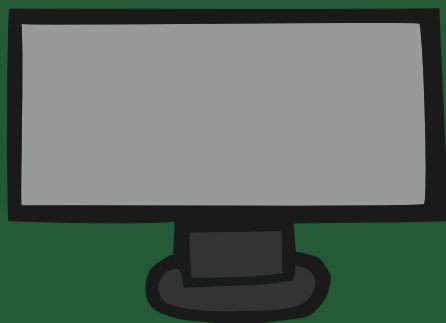


"I am currently in my second year at university and while it's not been easy my friends have really helped me through..."

I was terrified about making friends and the problems my anxiety would cause while socialising... I wasn't sure whether I should tell my new flatmates about my difficulties, I wanted them to know me for me and not to automatically associate me with my various disorders...For me, my friends have been so much more understanding than I could ever have imagined...

I quickly became friends with one girl I was living with and was able to tell her about some of the problems I faced. I explained how my illnesses affect me in day to day life and how my depression makes me isolate myself which may make me come across as moody when really I'm just feeling down...She was (and still is) brilliant. We live together this year too and she has been so supportive and understanding. She can always tell if I'm having a bad day and goes out her way to spend time with me whether that is watching terrible movies or just going for coffee.

She knows if I need to talk I'll come to her and that really helps... When my eating disorder got worse it took months before anyone asked me about it, yet I found it was something that [my friends] had been discussing for weeks. If you think something is wrong - just ask. Even if they don't want to talk, knowing you care will mean so much to them. Sometimes that knowledge is enough."



**student
minds**

Designed by Krishna Lad

Student Minds, 2014

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