



FRESHERS WEEK 2021

# TalkCampus Connect

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Starting College or University?





# intro

Starting college or university is an exciting, nerve-wracking time full of change and transition. It's no surprise if you're feeling a bit apprehensive. The last 18 months have looked pretty different for all of us, and as you prepare to start this new chapter in your life you may be experiencing additional challenges and fears!

Not only are you going to be embarking on a big learning journey but studying may mean that you're moving away from home, to a different country, or redefining your home life in a new way. You might also be planning for more distance-based learning, student life in a pandemic, and a future that feels like it's changing at pace. It's a lot to take on, so taking some time now to plan and prepare is a good way to set yourself up for these changes so that you can enjoy your studies as much as possible.

We've pulled together some ideas to help you to feel resilient, strong and to support you to support yourself and your mental health during those first few weeks and months.

A photograph of three young adults (two women and one man) looking at a laptop screen. The word "preparation" is overlaid in white text on the left side of the image.

# preparation

Whilst you can't foresee everything that might happen over the coming months, you can prepare yourself so that you've got a great base and some solid support mechanisms in place to help you steer the ups and downs of life as they happen. Here are our top 4 ideas that you might want to try!

## **Consider a Routine**

Summer is the perfect time for routines to slip away! Throw lockdowns into the mix and it's not at all surprising that routine may feel like a distant memory. We can easily forgive you for late nights, late mornings, and days all blurring into one.

But maybe now is the time to rethink things, start prepping for a little more consistency, and getting your body used to being awake at the same time each day! Some of us thrive on routine and others find it much harder to plan, but routine can be a brilliant way of grounding yourself and helping you keep your mental health balanced - Just don't let it become too restrictive! Being able to be flexible and react to change or spontaneous events is just as important!

Having a routine doesn't have to be regimented but having a few things that provide structure to your day and week will support you to be productive and feel more energetic. It can also help calm nerves, anxiety and give you space to practice some vital self-care.

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# preparation

## Consider a Routine (cont.)

Try going to bed and waking up at a consistent time (even on weekends if you can!). Getting a consistent 8 (ish) hours sleep a night and getting your body used to knowing when it can expect to be awake or asleep will be something that it will thank you for. It will also help you to feel awake in the day and tired at night - for your mental health this is a real plus!

A daytime structure and routine can also help you feel motivated and focused during the day and will support your studies. Consider what you feel like when you first wake up and think what routine would be best for you in those early hours. Do you like to sit down with a coffee and read the news? Is a run the type of thing that will set you up for the day? Do you need a slower start with a long shower and some yoga?

Likewise, setting yourself a clear lunch break and cut off point for the end of the day is a great thing to work on. What helps you to wind down and relax at the end of the day? Can you find a few things that you do regularly that can be incorporated into your nightly practice? Routine can also help you feel in control. Planning when you are going to cook, do food shopping, life admin, when you are going to exercise or how and when you will study can make you feel less stressed.

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# preparation

## Be Proactive About Making Friends

Having to make new friends can feel really daunting, and right now making friends might look a little different. But there are a few things that you can do to ease the transition. Freshers might be more low-key, with some online activities or social distancing measures in place. But before winter kicks in, take advantage of local open spaces like parks and beaches to spend time with your new friends!

If you're staying in student accommodation/halls see if you can reach out to any potential roommates in advance to help ease any anxiety you may have about living with someone new and also check out any social media pages where other first years may be looking to connect.

*“The great thing about university is that everyone is new, and everyone is worried about fitting in! As someone who’s been to two different universities, I’ve realised that being friendly, open to new experiences, and being completely authentic is the best way forward. But I still get nervous! With so many people on campus, you’re bound to find someone who shares similar interests. A good starting point is your course - all these people have the same interest as you and there’s going to be others.”*

**Ayeshah**

Don't put too much pressure on yourself to meet your lifelong friends in the first week, month or even at all. Although it may not happen right away, you will naturally find your tribe if with time. Many of us feel a little uncertain to start with, as if we don't fit in and anxious about meeting new people. However, be kind to yourself, take your time, and enjoy the company of new people for who they are. Remember, everyone will be feeling nervous, even if they don't show it!

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# preparation

## **Establish a Mental Health Support Network at Your University**

If you currently receive support for your mental health and you are moving to a different location to study, make sure that you speak to your healthcare practitioner to see how you can have continuity of care. It's important that you establish a support system wherever you move to.

Familiarise yourself with the local doctors, health and support centers, so if you need anything you know where to go. Secondly, make sure that your place of study is aware of your needs so they can understand how to best support you. Having a good foundation in place and knowing where to go in advance of needing support will make it easier if you do find yourself in need of help.

## **Making Your Space Work for you**

Maybe you're moving into a new place to study or maybe you will be looking to repurpose your existing home to suit this new phase of your life. Either way, making your space feel homely and work for you is an important step to this transition.

If you're moving out, think about what makes home feel so comforting for you, and if you can, plan to bring elements of that along with you. Is it all the framed photos, the scent of a candle or a cherished stuffed animal that you've had for 18 years? Make room for all of those things. They will make your new home feel more comforting and grounding when you have anxiety about how new everything else feels.

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# preparation

## **Making Your Space Work for you (cont.)**

Alternatively, if you're staying at home it might be time for a bit of a bedroom makeover to reflect this new chapter in your life! Adding small things like a planner on the wall, a bookshelf or a dedicated workspace can change the whole vibe of the room, making it feel more suited to studying in. It's also worth thinking about setting some boundaries with those you're sharing your space with.

Do you need to talk to your family about how your needs might change now you're studying? As you grow so do your needs and it's okay to talk about them with those around you who may not realise. Let them know how they can best support you as you study.



# starting off well

The time for preparation is over and you're about to embark on your new studying adventure! Here are some ideas for those first few weeks.

## Keep Your Connections

Balancing meeting new people with connecting with your existing support network can be a little tricky when you start college or university. There's often a lot going on and we can feel pressured to quickly meet and form new friendships. But don't underestimate the importance of keeping in touch and finding time to speak with people who know you. Sometimes just hearing a familiar voice is all we need to feel comforted. Establish a communication plan with those closest to you by figuring out what will work the best for the both of you.

*"I message some of my friends all the time, and others I schedule in hour-long phone calls fortnightly. I email my grandparents a lot which I really enjoy doing! As soon as I established how I could best communicate with those who are important to me, being away from home became a lot easier."*

On the flip side, spending too much time trying to contact home can make it harder to make new friends. Whilst it's great to stay in contact and visit home, make sure that you spend some quality time with your new housemates and coursemates. Sending pictures and videos of your new life to your loved ones back home can be a great way to stay connected.





# starting off well

## Keep Your Connections (cont.)

Of course, living in halls or on campus is not everyone's experience. The pandemic has forced many of us to study from home or you may choose to stay at home, live off-campus or study online. All of these situations will present their own challenges and benefits however there are some key takeaways that are true for all of us no matter what studying looks like.

There will be times when everything feels incredibly exciting but also times when it feels lonely, all too different and unsettling. We're often told that university or college is the best time of our lives but wow, what pressure that puts us all under! Keep your expectations real and allow yourself time to adjust. Whether you are feeling grief, anxiety or are kind of optimistic, feeling your feelings will allow you to better adjust to anything that comes your way.

## Continue Doing What you Love

Doing what you love is a brilliant way to meet like-minded people. There's often a club for everything; from dance to activism to anime, and it's a great way to find common ground. When we do the things we love, our engagement and passion really shine through, and it will take the edge off making new friends, especially if you struggle with social anxiety. Activities also keep the mind and body moving. These activities can help manage stress, anxiety and contribute to mental wellbeing.



# starting off well

## Continue Doing What you Love (cont.)

Doing what you love whether it's organised or by yourself is so good for your mental wellbeing. It's easy to deprioritise our hobbies, why not try building these into your weekly routine, they could become real pillars of your week to look forward to and unwind.

## Keep Yourself Busy

Take advantage of any club fairs and orientation events that your place of study arranges as they're a great way to orient yourself with university life. Look to make friends in your classes that you can study with so you avoid doing late-night sessions alone. Take advantage of the fact that everyone is new - everyone is looking to make friends and socialise, you're not alone in this!

Equally, be sure to spend time in the communal areas. Although it can seem intimidating, picture it as your living room; a pressure-free zone to relax and unwind!

*'The people who I best connected with during Freshers were my flatmates! Although I was completely racked with nerves before I arrived at my accommodation, I made sure that I spent as much time as possible in the communal space! Admittedly, I did very little bar having the T.V. on! But that didn't deter my new flatmates from coming in and having a natter!*



# starting off well

## Keep Yourself Busy (cont.)

Adding new activities will also help keep you mentally and physically healthy, and give you something new to look forward to. See if any clubs offer taster sessions, if you and a friend are interested in trying something new, check it out together! This will also be helpful with maintaining a routine, as you'll have time blocked out each week for your activities.

Also, don't forget to factor downtime into your schedule! Making time to rest and reflect will help you to feel re-energised and not burn out.

## Keep Your Perspective

There is no knowing exactly how your experience of starting university or college will be. It's a big moment in your life to be taking this step and its one that comes with a whole host of feelings and emotions. You may be feeling a number of mixed emotions as you read this. But remember, as far as you are able, keep things in perspective. Whilst important, this experience and what happens over the coming months is one in many, many experiences you will have.

No matter what happens you will grow, learn and change as a person in many ways and that is always something to be excited about. You've likely taken many challenging steps to get where you are today, feel proud of yourself and take these next steps forward with a curious mind. You're not alone and if you do need somewhere to talk there are many places, including TalkCampus, where you can reach out.