



How to Support your Care Experienced and Estranged Students this Christmas

A Practical Guide for all HE Staff

This is a practical guide aimed at all staff in Higher Education, regardless of area of expertise or job title. It offers input on the small changes that can massively support, and be inclusive of, your estranged and care experienced students during the winter period and Christmas break.

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Top three tips for Everyone

In your Higher Education institution there are three things **you** can do:

1. **Mind your language:** Christmas is not something everyone celebrates, not all students 'go home' over the winter break, and the language of family get togethers can be difficult for many. Steer away from these words, audit your messaging and consider wishing students a 'happy holiday' instead. The main rule? Don't assume your students 'go home' over the winter period.
 2. **Keep the place alive:** Nothing is as isolating as going to your SU, library, favourite spot, etc and finding it closed because everyone has 'gone home for Christmas'. Keep services open, even a skeleton service with a friendly face can make a world of difference. Put activities in place specifically for year-round residents (don't be surprised when your commuter students and those holding down jobs love these too). Support your student communities to continue running, peer support helps keep the place alive in winter.
 3. **Signposting specifics:** Make sure all students know they are not alone. Share exactly where they can access support from within your institution. Be purposeful about it – put information in your email signature and on posters and billboards around campus. See also: [Signposting & Support](#).
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Community: How do I support our students to connect with their peers?

Let your students know about existing local and national groups where they can meet and socialise, they don't have to be specifically for care experienced and estranged people. We all know that having a local community helps us year-round and having a local support network helps these students.

We'd recommend you let your students know about our This Is Us student-led community. It is a new dedicated and safe online space for estranged and care-experienced students in the UK to connect, share info, arrange meet-ups and more! It's free, national, and open to all ages & years of study. Link to join:

<https://thisisusatuni.mn.co/>

Learn more about how community can be a lifeline for care experienced and estranged students [here](#).

A-Z of tips for your area

Hint: You can mix and match, much of this advice might be helpful to you, even if it isn't explicitly mentioned under your area. You can read more about supporting care leavers and estranged students in general throughout the year [here \(HEPI\)](#)

Academic staff

- Ask your students about their situation. Will you be around over Christmas? What are your holiday plans? This check-in can allow students to feel cared for and give you the opportunity to flag resources and activities available to them from your institution.
- Deadlines and assessments. Understand how bad this time of year can be for some. Make sure students know your department's extenuating circumstances routes and how to apply for extensions.

Accommodation and Residence Life

- If you have events over the season, perhaps intended for international students, explicitly open these up to your estranged and care experienced students making their welcome inclusion clear in messaging. There are many students – international, refugee, commuter, and mature students who will also be accessing the campus in this time and living locally.
- Keep any residence life support open and check in with those in your campus accommodation weekly or facilitate sociable drop-in sessions.



Estates, Facilities Management and Library Staff

- Keep some key, central buildings open at least some days a week so there are still somewhere warm places people can go to study and socialise.
- Let everyone know exactly what and where the open spaces are.
- Try and get to know some of the remaining students on campus. Not expecting you to know everyone's name (though that would be lovely!), but a kind smile can make a big difference.

Security

- Be aware that estranged and care experienced students are more likely to have experienced domestic abuse. They can be at greater risk of stalking and harassment around this time of year from estranged family members.
- Don't shy away from doing those welfare checks and checking in with the remaining students on your campus.

Senior Leadership, Chancellors & Deans

- Consider funding hampers, presents, or cards for these students to receive in the lead up to the holidays.
- Ensure relevant teams across your organisation have the knowledge and resources to support remaining students. How care experienced and estranged students feel over the period sticks with them and can be a huge factor in whether they decide to drop out or continue studying.

Student Unions, Student Advice & Finance Teams

- Student union-run events. Support your local care experienced & estranged students society to have meetups. Alternatively, the president or a welfare officer could arrange a meet-up or fun event to mitigate loneliness.
- Make sure there is still a skeleton staff available to give advice, this is often a hard financial time for students with this background, especially with the cost-of-living crisis.
- Relentlessly advertise events or support with posters and on social media; everyone benefits from knowing you're an inclusive university
- Link up with local food banks or Real Junk Food Project so that students in need can access essential groceries. Or consider offering some vouchers for those who need it.



Welfare, Mental Health, and Counselling Services

- Mental health or counselling support needs to stay open, even if only a few staff, so that there is not a large gap in sessions.
- Consider running a couple of mindfulness or support-group sessions for students staying over the holiday period.

Widening Participation and Access

- If you employ students, please don't cut off employment at term dates. Not only can it provide income and good experience, but it can also keep minds occupied and provide a healthy distraction during the holiday period.
 - If you do give your care experienced or estranged students gifts or a card, ensure they can receive them okay at their accommodation or have a centralised pick-up point. Some may be quite mobile during the period but would still love the support.
 - Make sure your known estranged and care experienced students know who their designated contact is and who they can call if they are low or concerned about dropping out.
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