



All of Us

Supporting your
estranged and care
experienced students
this winter

Winter can be a challenging time for students who don't have family support.

This guide empowers every member of staff to make small, meaningful changes that create a sense of belonging and safety for estranged and care experienced students.

Three simple actions everyone can take:

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, review your messaging and consider wishing students a 'happy holiday' instead. The main rule? Don't assume your students 'go home' over the winter period.

Keep the place alive:

Nothing is as isolating as going to your SU, library or favourite spot and finding it closed because everyone has 'gone home for Christmas'. Keeping 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. Support your student communities to continue running, peer support helps keep the place alive in winter.

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



Community: How do I support our students to connect with their peers?

Let your students know about existing local and national social groups, they don't have to be specifically for care experienced and estranged people – but signposting to [All of Us](#) and local student societies especially can be most helpful. We all know that having a local community and support network helps all year round, especially at Christmas.

See also:
[Useful Links | All of Us](#)



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.

Academic staff

Ask your students about their home situation. Where will you be studying 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 available to them from your institution.

Deadlines and assessments understand how bad this time of year can be. 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 for international students, open these up to your estranged and care experienced students too and make it clear in your messaging that they are welcome. 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 (or some form of skeleton staffing) and check in with those in your campus accommodation.



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. Proactively check in on students' wellbeing.



Senior Leadership, Vice-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'/Guilds, Advice & Finance Teams

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 or college. Link up with local food banks or Real Junk Food Projects 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 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 collect them 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.



Every small action counts.

Share this guide with your team and commit to one change today that will make a student feel supported this winter.



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The Unite Foundation supports our community with funding and dedicated team members who work hand in hand with estranged and care experienced students across the UK, to help us all become better connected on and offline.