



## Support for Carers

It is often a normal part of a young person's life journey to move out of the family home around 18 or 19 years old to go to university to study. For some young people, they may move out of the family home permanently, but for many in today's world, young people will return often, either for weekends, term holidays, and when university has finished. Going to university presents many challenges to someone with an eating disorder, and it also presents unique challenges and worries for the families and carers of those people.

Below is some brief guidance for what to keep in mind:

- If your loved one has been in treatment, they will often have a written plan to help them manage their time at university. This may be a meal plan, but may also be in the form of something such as a "recovery and support plan" or a "relapse prevention plan". This will usually outline what has been recognised by your loved one and their therapist, to be their strengths, possible triggers and how to plan to manage these.
- If your loved one is willing to share this with you, it can be helpful to be aware of this.
- Settling into university. If it is possible, we would often encourage families to have made a plan together about the practicalities of how the move to university will go. This includes preparation beforehand to buy all the equipment necessary to manage food whilst at university, and it is usually helpful for your loved one if you help them to move in and settle into the space, get orientated to the kitchen, food storage and cooking spaces. It can also be helpful to take your loved one to do a first food shop in the local area, to help them figure out where the local amenities and supermarkets are and what to expect there. Having a car can also be very helpful.
- It is often useful to have a plan for when your loved one will return home to visit next, this needs to be balanced with the need to settle in to university life, but it can be helpful for there to be a plan to return home for a weekend after a few weeks of having been at university. This could be in reading week, or earlier, for example. Alternatively, you may like to make plans to visit the area where your loved one is at university at some point to visit them.
- With mobile phones and the internet, it really is very easy to stay in contact with one another. Consider what your loved one may need help with, and it can be



possible to have telephone or video calls to offer support to them to cook their first meals, or eating their first meals. It can even be possible for you to help with arrange online food deliveries.

- For others going to university, it may be helpful to just send photos of the meals that they have prepared. There are lots of ways to make technology work for you and your loved one.
- Depending on the severity of your loved one's eating disorder, you may want to think together about who to inform of their difficulties, whether this be mentors at the university, the wellbeing services, or course leaders. This will be especially important if there may be any risks associated with the type of course your loved one is studying. It will also be important to make sure your loved one is registered at a local GP and knows how and where to access health services in the area.
- Remember to look after yourself, there may be many mixed feelings seeing your loved one go to university, excitement, pride and also worry, concerns, fears, guilt and anxiety. This is all normal and it can be helpful to meet and discuss with other parents / carers going through similar experiences, through online or face to face support groups.
- Remind yourself that it is normal to make mistakes, especially when going to university, which may be a new experience for your whole family.
- It is important to bear in mind that there will always be unpredictable events whilst your loved ones are at university. Be prepared for this and try to be around to offer agreed ways to support as and when needed.