

# Managing Transitions and Expectations

## Transitions

Beginning life at university, at whatever age you arrive, naturally generates both excitement and anxiety about the move, academic work, meeting new people. For some, this apprehension is quickly overcome as you adapt to a new environment; for others the transition takes longer and sometimes emerges as homesickness where there is a preoccupation with home-focused thoughts. There is a yearning for and grieving over the loss of what is familiar and secure: most often it is about the loss of people - family and friends - but it is also about the loss of places and routines.

The tasks involved in the process of transition are about loss and gain. They are about looking back and looking forward at the same time so it's not surprising that sometimes people lose their balance during transition. In order to manage transition well you need to take stock of what you are leaving behind and be honest with yourself about what you will be glad to lose and those that you will be sorry not to have immediately to hand. You then need to think about what of those things that are familiar and secure you can carry with you inside your head that will sustain you when you face the challenges of the new. Adapting to new things, people and places can be exciting but also daunting and challenging. You have the opportunity to engage in new experiences and gain the rewards from these, but this may feel uncomfortable and unsettling.

Individuals have different levels of tolerance of change and have learned different ways of coping with new situations. For some, though, transition is tough and can mean tasks that would normally have been taken in one's stride can suddenly seem quite a challenge, or even feel impossible. So here are some thoughts to help with the process.

## Strategies that could help with the process of transition

1. Talk to someone. If you haven't yet made friends here, then try a peer supporter, tutor, supervisor, chaplain, nurse or counsellor.
2. Keep in good contact with the people you have left behind; arrange a time to go back to see them or to talk to them by electronic means but also give yourself time within the university to begin to get involved here. Don't let looking back actually hinder moving forward. Try to get the right balance between doing new and 'uncomfortable' things, so they can become familiar and comfortable, rather than always feeling you have to rush back to the familiar.
3. Encourage friends and family to come and see you in your new setting or give them a virtual tour of your new surroundings.



4. Remember that many other people will be sharing similar feelings, although you may assume that they are doing fine. (They may look fine from the outside but you can't read their minds - just as they can't read yours.)
5. You are allowed to feel sad about the things you miss. However, you are also allowed to enjoy yourself - it isn't being disloyal to those you miss!
6. Be realistic about what to expect from student life and from yourself. Establish a balance between work and leisure: you are NOT expected to work ALL the time - you would soon burn out. On the other hand, if you don't put in enough time on work, you can very quickly get behind, which only adds to the stresses.
7. If work is proving very difficult, can you improve your study skills or your organisation of time and work so that you gain satisfaction from what you do? There may be people in your college or department or the Student Union who can help in this area, such as your tutor, supervisor or the Welfare Officer.
8. Remember to get enough food and sleep. These affect us emotionally as well as physically. This is much more important than we sometimes realise.
9. Make contacts and friends through shared activities such as sport, socialising or other interests. There are so many clubs and societies within the University, your colleges and the city, that you are very likely to find something that suits your particular interests. At the start of the academic year many new people will be joining - you are unlikely to be the only new person.
10. Expect and prepare yourself for frustrations, disappointments and things going wrong, as they will in life. Learn the skills and resilience to manage these situations, rather than letting them overwhelm you.
11. Give yourself time to adjust: you don't have to get everything right straight away. If you don't feel happy or confident at first give yourself time and support to adjust, don't make any hasty decisions that could affect your long term future.
12. If you stop being able to do normal social and academic things, seek professional help either from your doctor or the counselling service. Don't wait until the problems have grown impossibly large.

## **Expectations**

It is important that we have ideas about the future to provide motivation to engage in the challenges of life and achieve goals. It is as important that we have expectations of ourselves and our environment so we can plan for the future.

However, it is crucial that the expectations we have are based in reality rather than setting ourselves or the external environment unrealistic expectations that are impossible to live up to. This can stop



us engaging with the newness and uncertainty of reality if we keep hanging on to impossible or idealised expectations.

If we have rigid expectations of how we should be, what we should be able to achieve or how things are going to be, these rigid expectations can cause problems, which could have been avoided.

*“There are two ways to be happy: improve your reality, or lower your expectations.”*

People often have very rigid expectations as a way of coping with the unknown and uncertainty. Rigid expectations may also be due to something hoped or wished for, which might become idealised. This can often be the case if there has been a great deal of hard work and effort to achieve the goal that was wished for.

Having very rigid expectations can mean that if reality does not meet these expectations it can feel like a major problem or failure, rather than just being different to what you expected. *“A wonderful gift may not be wrapped as you expect”.*