Learners who are parents in the cost-of-living crisis:

meeting challenges to higher education success

Helen Williams Emma-Louise Simpson Andrea (Andy) Todd



In conversation with student-parents
Helen & Emma-Louise

Student-parent challenges Cost of living challenges What helps?

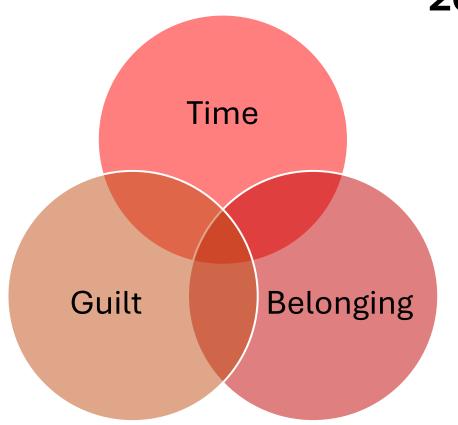


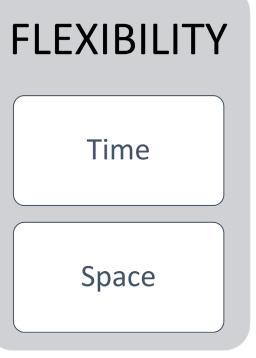


Emma-Louise Simpson LLB Law University of Chester LLM/Bar Manchester Metropolitan

RESEARCH STUDY: CONTEXT

RESEARCH PROJECT 2021 & 2022



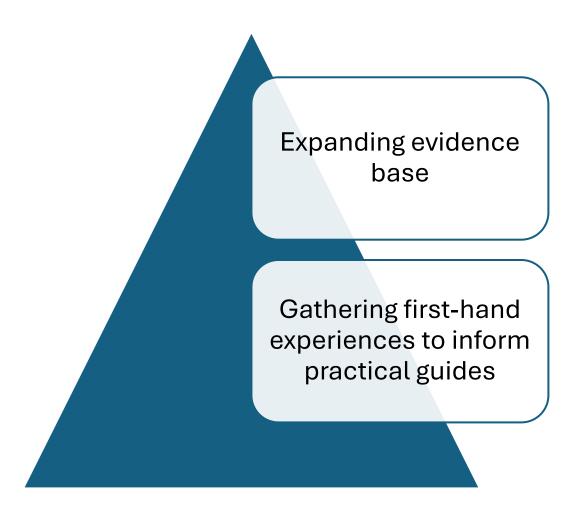




Todd, A., (2023) Let's get visible: evidence-based interventions aimed at supporting, empowering, and celebrating student-parents in higher education, *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, (26). https://doi.org/10.47408/jldhe.vi26.920

Eight Steps to Identifying, Supporting & Celebrating Student-Parents https://www.ukat.ac.uk/media/1886/supporting-student-parents-toolkit-andy-todd-jan-2023.pdf

RESEARCH PROJECT 2023



SECTOR DEVELOPMENTS





FINDINGS

RESEARCH PROJECT 2023

Failures in support

Significant risk to retention progression and success

RESEARCH REPORT:

Student-Parents' experiences of academic and non-academic supportant in UK Higher Education

Associate Professor Andrea Todd, University of Chester

January 2024

This report analyses the findings of a nationwide study of students who are also parents (student-parents).

Carried out between May and August 2023, the study builds on previous small-scale research projects into the needs of student-parents¹ and was undertaken in the context of:

- the introduction of a new UCAS question inviting student-parents to self-identify when applying university; and
- the introduction of the Office for Students' (OfS) Equality of Opportunity Register (EORR).

This report explores participants' experiences of pastoral and academic support at university. It expos systemic failures in such support for student-parents across the sector which pose a significant risk to their retention, progression and success.

Todd, A. (2024).

'Research Report:
Student-Parents'
experiences of academic
and non-academic
support in UK Higher
Education'. Zenodo.
https://doi.org/10.5281/z
enodo.10520460

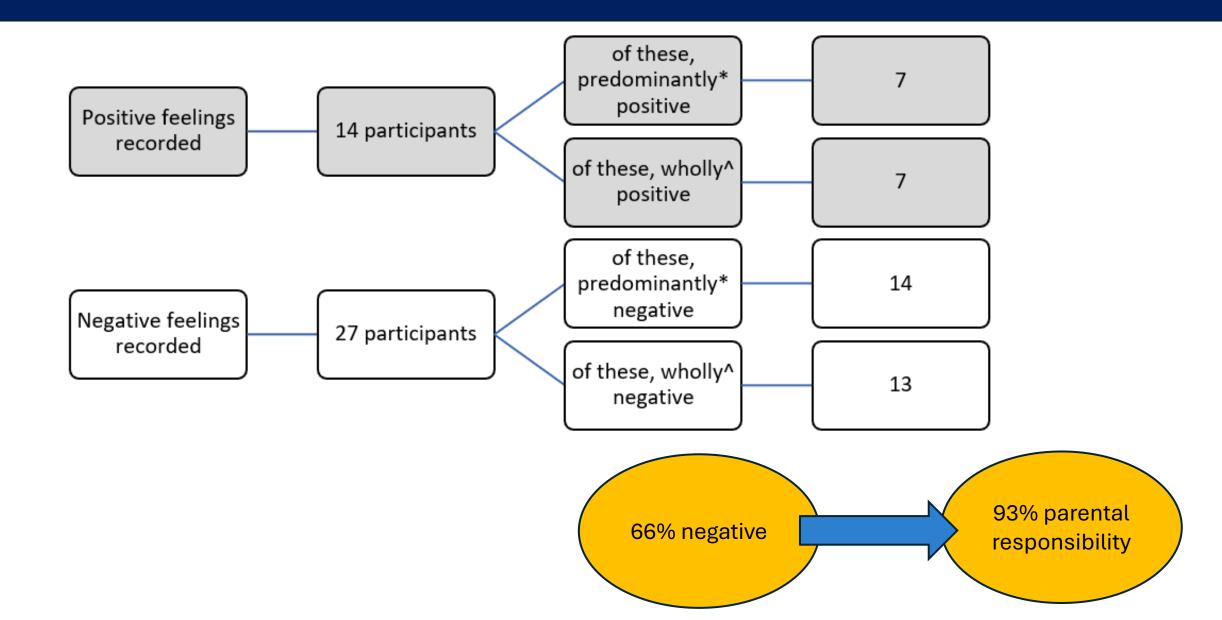
41 survey respondents

		Number	Percentage of respondent group (rounded)
Gender	Male	5	12%
	Female	36	88%
Age	20 to 29	9	22%
	30 to 39	26	63.5%
	40 to 49	5	12%
	50 and over	1	2.5%
Number of children	1	19	46%
	2	15	37%
	3 or more	7	17%
Status	Parent	39	95%
	Guardian	2	5%

University type	Pre-1992	22	54%
	Post-1992	18	44%
	Russell Group	1	2%
Location of University	England	35	85%
	Scotland	6	15%
Year of study in 2022-	Foundation year	8	20%
23			
	1 st year undergraduate	5	12%
	2 nd year undergraduate	9	22%
	3 rd year undergraduate	10	24%
	4 th year undergraduate	5	12%
	Graduated within the	4	10%
	last 3 years		

5 focus group participants

How do student-parents feel when they start university?



Concern around balancing study and parenthood:



'[it was] a time of uncertainty, not knowing if my responsibilities as a parent would fit around my study and if I was going to be able to give it 100%' (Respondent 37)

'[I was] scared in case I was not able to finish my assignments on time, or to my full potential because of having to also care for my children' (Respondent 19)

Practicalities of childcare commitments:



'[I was] really concerned with how I would make it work with childcare, finances and school runs' (Respondent 25)

'As student-parents we rely heavily on extended family, external childcare settings, and after school clubs which are not always available, close without notice, change operation hours and point blank let us down' (Respondent 23)

A lack of belonging:



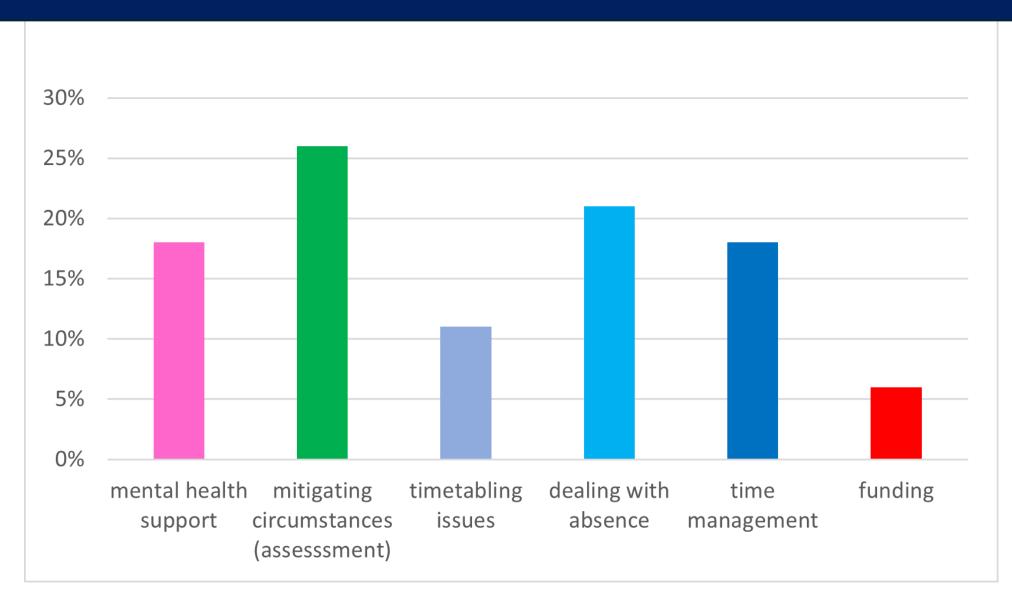
'[I felt] out of place because University is still geared towards traditional students' (Respondent 10)

'[I felt] like a fish out of water, [like] I didn't belong and like I was the only mature student with a child' (Respondent 9)

What do student-parents need when they start university?

THEME	Sub-theme	No. responses noting information needed prior to start of term	No. responses noting information needed during induction	Total no. reporting sub- theme/ theme	Percentage reporting sub-theme/ theme
TIME	Timetable/year planner	13	14	27	25%
	Timetable swaps	1	3	4	4%
	Managing/organising time	12	5	17	16%
	Mitigating circumstances/absence	4	6	10	9%
				58	54%
SUPPORT	Institutional support	8	8	16	15%
	Peer support	6	5	11	10%
				27	25%
PRACTICAL	Funding	8	8	16	15%
HELP	Childcare	3	3	6	6%
				22	21%
				107	100%

What do student-parents need help with during their university journey?



How do student-parents rate their personal tutor support?

Perception of personal tutoring experience	Count	Percentage
Excellent	13	32%
Good	4	10%



'Throughout my academic studies, I have spoken with other parents that feel they must just get on and shut up and there isn't anyone to take their circumstances into consideration' (Respondent 23)

What are student-parents' most challenging periods?

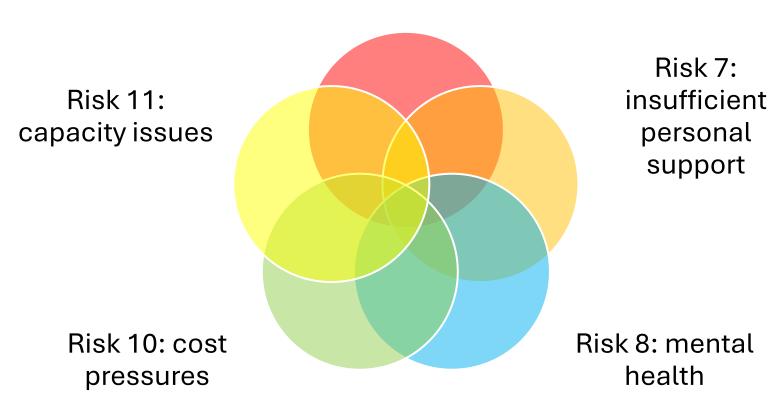
Theme	Sub-theme	Count	Total
Time pressure	Assessment deadlines/periods	17	22
	General	5	
Childcare	Interfering with attendance or assessment	9	14
	Clash between university and school holidays	5	
Timetable	Late release	5	8
	Changes	3	
			44



Timetables Childcare

RISKS TO EQUALITY OF OPPORUTUNITY

Risk 6: insufficient academic support







Home Advice and guidance For students News, blog and events Publications Data and analysis Get involved

Home > Advice and guidance > Promoting equal opportunities > Equality of Opportunity Risk Register > Student characteristics > Students with parental responsibility

See all characteristics →

Students with parental responsibility

This refers to students with a parental responsibility for somebody aged 17 or under.

About the risk register

Equality of Opportunity Risk Register

About the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register

How to use the risk register

THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

Timetables

Time planning

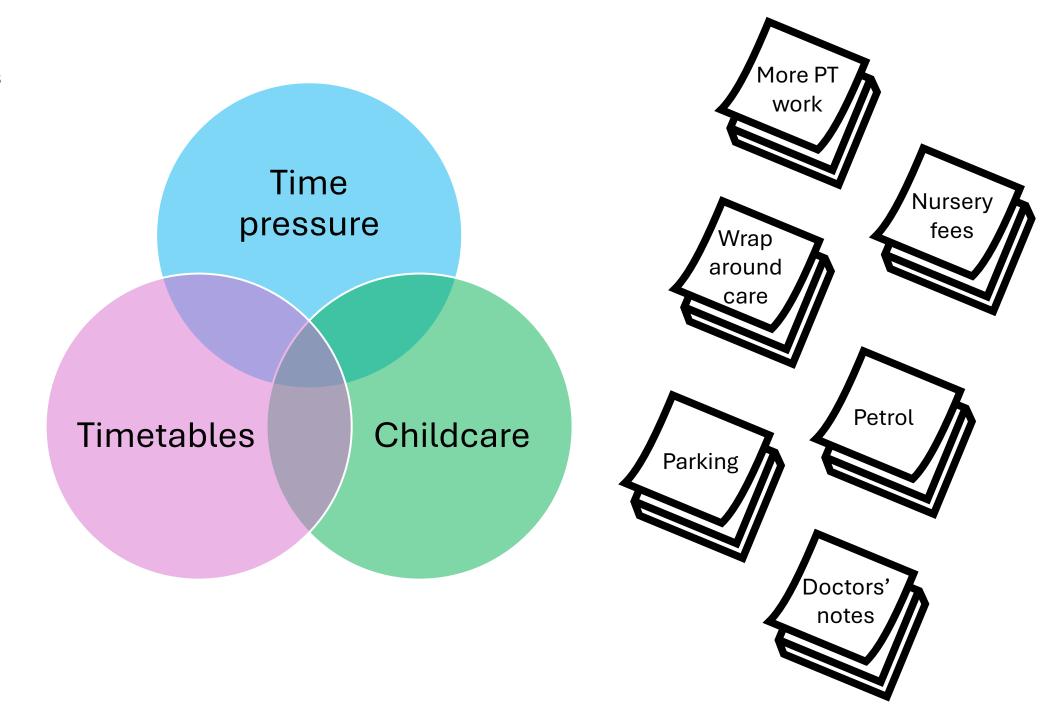
Seminar swaps

Catch up plans

Evidence requirements

Mitigating Circumstances

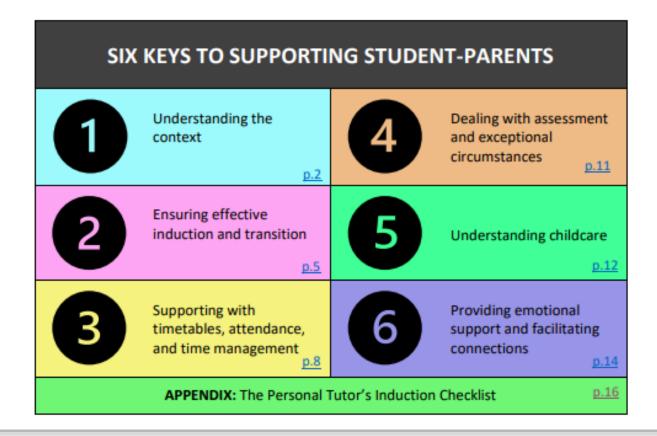
Bursaries



PRACTICAL GUIDES

THE PERSONAL TUTOR'S GUIDE TO SUPPORTING STUDENT-PARENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A research-informed, evidence-based¹ guide to help you provide effective support to your student-parent personal tutees.



https://www.ukat.ac.uk/media/yfnnsfjq/the-personal-tutor-guide-to-supporting-student-parents-a-todd.pdf



UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

From 2023 entry, UK universities will know, via information from a tick box on UCAS forms, which of their incoming students have parental responsibility. They will be in a better position to put in place appropriate support to help student-parents succeed. The role of personal tutor is crucial to this support.

1.1 WHY DO STUDENT-PARENTS NEED ADDITIONAL SUPPORT?

Here are some reflections from our student-parent survey group which underline why studentparents need additional support:

'Parenting can be challenging, so mixing that with the challenges of being a student can be overwhelming'

'Children are an entire commitment that impacts absolutely everything'

'Students with children have a lot of extra responsibilities and tend to put themselves last' 'As parents we must consider school hours, school commutes, emergency calls, childcare can let us down and our capacity is stretched whilst participating in academic study.'

1.2 WHY IS MY PERSONAL TUTOR ROLE SO IMPORTANT?

The role of personal tutor is critical to supporting student-parent belonging and success at university. Indeed, some student-parents attribute their remaining in, and succeeding at, university

to their personal tutor's support...

'I could not have [made it] through my undergraduate without her being by my side.' 'Without [their] support I could not have continued'

1.1 WHY DO STUDENT-PARENTS NEED ADDITIONAL SUPPORT?

- 1.2 WHY IS MY PERSONAL TUTOR ROLE SO IMPORTANT?
- 1.3 HOW DO STUDENT-PARENTS FEEL?
- 1.4 WHAT DO STUDENT-PARENTS NEED PRACTICAL SUPPORT WITH?
- 1.5 HOW OFTEN SHOULD I CONTACT MY STUDENT-PARENT TUTEES?



ENSURING EFFECTIVE INDUCTION & TRANSITION

Now that UCAS invites students to disclose their parental status, your department should receive a report on which students in the new cohort are student-parents. From this, ideally the student-parents from the list would be allocated to personal tutors in groups, to ensure an early sense of connection with fellow student-parents, as recommended by Step 2 of the institutional-level Practical Toolkit³.

2.1 SHOULD I CONTACT MY NEW STUDENT-PARENTS BEFORE THE START OF TERM?

'My personal tutor is super supportive. I wish I had known about her before I started though as I think I would have been more relaxed knowing that support was coming' If you are informed of the members of your personal tutor group prior to term starting, we would recommend reaching out to student-parent tutees before they arrive at the university. It may be that your department does this for all personal tutees, and it may also be the case that student-parents, and/or mature students, are invited to specific institutional pre-induction sessions before term starts. Even so, it would be worth taking the additional step of reassuring your student-parent tutees that you are aware of their personal circumstances and will be there to support them through their university journey.

- 2.1 SHOULD I CONTACT MY NEW STUDENT-PARENTS BEFORE THE START OF TERM?
- 2.2 WHAT SHOULD I THINK ABOUT DURING INDUCTION?
- 2.3 HOW CAN I EASE STUDENT-PARENTS' TRANSITION BETWEEN ACADEMIC YEARS?
- 2.4 HOW CAN I HELP TUTEES WHO BECOME PARENTS DURING UNIVERSITY?



SUPPORTING WITH TIMETABLES, ATTENDANCE & TIME MANAGEMENT

'Being a parent is so integral to my life and therefore anything I do has to fit in around child caring responsibilities.' 'Being a parent is a responsibility that goes above and beyond and cannot be paused'

Student-parents are time poor. They will need support in 'As parent-students we rely heavily on extended family, external childcare settings, after school clubs which are not always available, close without notice, change operating hours and point blank let us down.'

balancing their university and home commitments. Below are some examples of how this support can be provided by personal tutors.

3.1 TIMETABLES

University timetables are generally released very close to the start of the academic year. However, schools and nurseries often require confirmation of wrap-around requirements months in advance. This causes a significant practical *'timetables are often*

challenge for student-parents.

Where the student-facing timetable will not be available until early

September, consider the extent to which details of any drafts of the timetable could be shared with your student-parents. Any information that can be provided earlier than the start of term - even regarding days on which particular modules will not run due to staff working patterns - will help in giving student-

late and that makes organising childcare hard'

3.1 TIMETABLES

- 3.2 TIME MANAGEMENT
- 3.3 MISSED SESSIONS AND CATCHING UP
- 3.4 SUPPORT FOR NON-ATTENDANCE
 - 3.5 EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS



DEALING WITH ASSESSMENT AND EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Assessment deadlines, particularly when bunched together, pose a significant issue for parents whose family commitments still need to be met during times when students without such commitments may be able to clear their diaries to concentrate on assessment.

4.1 ASSESSMENT PLANNING

'concentrating on an intense workload is difficult with children in the house' We recommend sitting down with your student-parent tutee in the first few weeks of term to consider the assessment timetable and how this fits with their childcare commitments. It may be that your tutee can see at this early stage that **expected events**, such as school holidays, will interfere with assessment preparation.

It may be that where coursework is released early in the year, students can work on this well in advance of the deadline, in order to manage this workload. However, this will not be possible for time constrained assessments e.g. those released only weeks in advance of the deadline, or which need to be completed on a particular day or within a short window. As such, childcare for these assessment windows.

'[The Winter break] is stressful, when assignments are due, as I want to do well but be there for my children'

or within a short window. As such, childcare for these assessment windows will need to be considered and factored into your student-parent tutee's plans at an early stage.

4.2 MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES

Student-parents are likely to need to apply for a deferral or extension for a piece of work for unforeseen circumstances related to their child.

'things are more likely to take an unexpected turn [...] especially if children get ill' It will be important to explain the rules around

mitigating circumstances at a very early stage (during induction is ideal), so student-parents are aware in advance of what needs to be done to gain an extension or deferral for a piece of work.

'unexpected events can occur more often to a student-parent than a non-student-parent'

5

UNDERSTANDING CHILDCARE

5.1 EMOTIONS AROUND CHILDCARE

'it broke my heart seeing her cry when I dropped her off [at nursery] before going to university for the day. I would count the hours down until I could pick her up.'

> 'I was scared of missing out on time with my son'

It is important to understand the emotions experienced by student-parents when they place their children into childcare settings to study.

In discussions with your tutees, it will be important to ask, and make a note of, where any help comes from outside of formal childcare settings (partner, family, friends etc).

These sources of help will be especially important during assessment periods.

5.2 SETTINGS

We recommend ensuring you have a list of nurseries available locally (Student Support services within your institution should be able to provide this to you). If your institution has a nursery it is a good idea to familiarise yourself with its location, opening times and contact details so you can assist your tutees with this.

5.3 FUNDING

Funding arrangements can be a significant source of stress for student-parents and so it would be beneficial to ensure you are aware of the rules around eligibility for, and the operation of, funding streams designed to assist student-parents with the costs of childcare (this will differ depending on where your institution is based).



PROVIDING EMOTIONAL SUPPORT & FACILITATING CONNECTIONS

6.1 MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Significant mention was made in the national survey responses of the need for emotional support for student-parents. Providing mental health services is beyond the scope of a personal tutor's remit, but it will be important to ensure your student-parent tutees are aware of the **university's mental health support offering** so passing these details on both during induction and during any subsequent discussions will be important.

6.2 PEER SUPPORT

If your setting has an **institutional student-parent support group**, ensure your studentparent tutees are aware of how to join this and check in with them as to whether they have done so. It is worth familiarising yourself with the activities of the student-parent support group and advertising any such events via your departmental Student-Parent Teams site (or other platform) as they come up.

Whether or not your setting has an institutional support group, consider setting up, if not already in existence, a **Student-Parent support group for your department** which operates via Teams chat group or similar online platform, and which student-parents from all years can join and share the highs and lows of studying the same degree course. This would require one member of staff to create the group and add new members as they get in touch to join. It is important to host this primarily on an online platform given that student-parents are time poor and appreciate the ability to either post quick practical queries on the group to be answered by fellow students, to share news, to share stories and photos of their children, or to just observe the chats passing between peers without needing to become actively involved. A departmental offering can be important as students may prefer to engage with a smaller group of peers and/or a group of students experiencing the same academic experience as them.

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6.1	MINIA	I HFALLF	LSUPPORT

6.2 PEER SUPPORT

6.3 PRACTICAL SUPPORT

6.4 PERSONAL TUTOR: EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Induction Checklist

Student Name:

Name(s) and age(s) of child(ren):	
Childcare setting (where appropriate) [e.g. nursery, school, after school clubs, family help?]	
Timetable provided?	
Timetable discussed?	
Seminar swap policy (where relevant) provided and discussed?	
Swaps possible/made?	
Extenuating circumstances policy provided and discussed?	
Funding (where appropriate): - In receipt of childcare funding? - Has it arrived? - Discussed (and provided information on) institutional bursaries/grants?	
Discussed assessment deadlines where available?	
Discussed importance of planning to ensure sufficient time can be allocated around assessment deadlines?	
Considered potential clash of university holidays and children's holidays (where appropriate)?	
Frequency of personal tutor meetings set up?	
Provided student with my email and other contact details?	
Explained how to access wellbeing and mental health services?	
Explained how to access departmental student support Teams site?	
Explained how to access institutional student support group?	
Permission provided to tell fellow lecturers of parental status?	
·	

The Student-Parent's Guide to Navigating University¹

The advice in this five-step guide comes directly from a **nationwide survey of student- parents.** Their voices have been captured to help you navigate your university journey.

We hope the Guide will help you to **settle into university**, **manage the challenges** that you will face as a student-parent, and help you **understand the level of support** you can expect from your university.

If you have any **comments** about this Guide, if you have any **tips or advice** to add, and/or if you'd like to join a **national online community** of student parents, **please click** the link on the right and let us know!

Click link here!

If you are interested in hearing more about life as a student-parent, please do subscribe to

The Student-Parent Podcast, available on Spotify here

(Also available on Apple podcasts, Audible and Amazon Music)



STEP 1: STARTING UNIVERSITY

What our student-parents say:

'Parenting can be challenging, so mixing that with the challenges of being a student can be overwhelming'

The Emotions:

university.

We hope you are feeling **excited**, you start university. Congratulatio feeling these positive emotions wh

If you are also feeling any of the en word cloud shows the most commexperiencing when they started

OVE



STEP 2: MAKING ACCESSING

What our student-parents say:

'I would not have finished my course with the grades I did without [my personal tutor]' 'Linking in with or parents who face same struggles [..., offer a support net for each other



YOUR PERSONAL TUTOR

As a student-parent, your relations important, as they should be able to deal proactively with any absences around assessment time.

You should spend time getting to know your personal meetings they invite you to. If they are not already a



STEP 3: GETTING – AND STAYING - ORGANISED

What our student-parents say:

'university is a very independent learning environment organisation is key'

'I was stressed due to poor time management 'Stay organised, students who aren't parents need to do this anyway but with a child it really is vital'

'Half terms are always difficult as the university runs through these periods'



CHECKING YOUR UNIVERSITY TIMETABLE WORKS WITH CHILDCARE

Your university timetable may show that you are in university for only a few hours per week, spread across several days. This is normal for a university timetable. The timetabling team within a university are usually separate from the academic departments and they will have hundreds of modules, and thousands of students,

to timetable into a limited number of rooms.

The first thing you need to do when you receive your timetable is work out how your timetable fits with your childcare arrangements. If the timetable does not work for your childcare, you can speak



STEP 4: MANAGING ASSESSMENTS

What our student-parents say:

'unexpected events can occur more often to a studentparent

'thin likel unex es chil



WORKING

The assessme run up to the a the start of ter expected to do

block for a traditional exam). You your childcare) to make sure you made clear on the assessment tireach assessment is released, so



STEP 5: REMEMBERI

THIS!

DEDCOMAL TUTOR DETAILS

We hope that the advice in this guide will help you to **get orga** assessments, **feel confident** about your relationships with you and be encouraged to **ask for help** when you need it.

Despite the advice in this guide, life as a student-parent is har will feel pressure and you may feel **disheartened** at times. You that you cannot complete the university journey. This is **all** or recommend that you locate, and keep to hand, the details of health teams, and, if they have one, your university's helpline hours.

Our student-parents - who are on, or have completed, their u thoughts which we hope will encourage you on your own jour



'Do not be afraid to say y experience that offers so

'Don't be scared to return to e school you went to or how we

APPENDIX 1: MY INDUCTION CHECKLIST

TENSONAE TOTON BETAILS	
Name and email address of personal tutor:	
How do they prefer to be contacted?	
How often will my personal tutor contact me	
formally?	
What is the best way to set up a meeting outside of	
these times if I need one?	
DOCUMENTS - do I have (in paper format or via an	
online link):	
Teaching timetable	
Assessment timetable	
[do I know how long in advance each assessment is	
released, so I know how much time I have to spend	
on it?]	
Programme Handbook	
Module Handbooks	
Seminar swap policy	
Extenuating circumstances policy	
SUPPORT SERVICES – do I have the details of what is	
offered by, and contact details for:	
Wellbeing services	
Academic Skills team and Library team	
Finance office	
FORWARD PLANNING	

WEEKLY TIME PLANNING TABLE

Timetabled Time:	
How many hours of lectures do I have this week?	
How many hours of seminars do I have this week?	
Independent Work Time:	
How many hours of preparation time will I put aside for seminars? ⁶	
How many hours will I put aside for consolidating (checking over and making sure I understand) the work we have done in seminars?	
When is the next assessment deadline? How many weeks is this from this week?	
Will I put time aside this week to work on this assessment? [yes/no] If so, how many hours?	
Adding these up, how many hours of independent work do I have for this week? ⁷	
Committing to Dates and Times	

Committing to Dates and Times:

What else do I need to plan in this week? Children's pick up/drop off/other activities? List them below:

Which blocks of time will I spend with family this week? List days and times you are blocking out:

When will I fit in my independent work?⁸ [note the days and the times of the blocks you will put aside for this – we recommend blocks of at least one hour, ideally longer]

Where will I do this work? [e.g. at home, in the library on campus between timetabled sessions]

Can I make time for myself (even an hour to grab a coffee with a friend on campus)? When can I fit this in? Commit to a time and a date to make sure you take this break!

WEEKLY CALENDAR

We have prepared **an example** of how a weekly calendar might look. This is for a student who has three seminars this week (for modules A, B and C), a seminar next Monday (for module D) and an assessment (for module C) due in four weeks. We assume that when on campus, all independent work is done in the university library.

Your calendar will depend on your own university timetable, childcare plans and other commitments – this is just an example to show you the sorts of blocks you will need to think about. As a rule, it is helpful to plan to block out evenings, and some full days, when you are not doing university work to ensure you get some down time.

When making your weekly calendar, start by deciding where you will be each day (at home or on campus). Then insert the sessions you have been timetabled to attend (highlighted in green in the example below). Next, decide where you will be able to slot in your seminar preparation (highlighted blue in the example) and consolidation (highlighted yellow in the example) for sessions that week and the following week. If appropriate, add in any assessment preparation (highlighted pink in the example). Make sure you build in travel time to get to and from campus (have a campus map to hand - and a plan for where you will park if you are driving!).

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
ON CAMPUS	AT HOME	ON CAMPUS	ON CAMPUS	AT HOME	Block out	Block out
9.30-10.30: Lecture module B 10.30-11.30: Lecture module A	9.15 – 10.15: Finish Prep for module B seminar on Weds 10.15-1.15: Prep for module A seminar on Thurs	10.00 – 11.30: Seminar module B	10.00-11.30: Seminar module C	9.15 – 12.00: Consolidation of module A seminar and module C seminar	Saturday all day	Sunday daytime
11.30 - 12.15: Break	1.15-2.15: Break	11.30-12.15: Break	11.30-12.30: Break	12-12.30: Break		
12.15-2.45:	2.15-4.45:	12.15-1.45: Consolidation of	1.00-2.30:	12.30-3.00:]	
Prep for module B seminar on Weds – in library	Assessment prep for module C assessment (due in 4 weeks)	seminar module B 2.00 – 3.00: Lecture module C 3.00 – 5.30: Prep for module C seminar on Thurs	Seminar module A	Prep for next Monday's module D seminar		Sunday evening: 30 mins to write next week's
3.15: school pick up	5.00: after school club pick up	6.00: after school club pick up.	3.15: school pick up	3.15: school pick up		planning document.
Block out evening: time with family	Block out evening: time with family	Late evening: if necessary, finish prep for module C seminar Thurs 11am	Block out evening: time with family	Block out evening: time with family		document.

Do you think you'll use today's guides?

