



## Top Tips for Staff

We live in a society that values family, but what about people who have difficult family situations, or have lost or broken contact with parents and/or other family members i.e. they are **estranged** from them?

**Estrangement** — often society misunderstands and attaches shame to it. Many estranged students feel unable to speak openly about difficult family situations at university for fear of judgement or rejection.

**As a staff member**, you're a role model for students — both in terms of the hard work you do to ensure their university/college experience is high quality, and also in terms of how you act. By personally and professionally stepping up as an ally to students experiencing family difficulty or estrangement, you can make a big difference!

**Follow these top tips to help create a space where estranged students are welcomed, accepted, and able to get the best out of their time at university/college:**

**1. Normalise talking about estrangement:** Estrangement is often unfamiliar to people because it's not talked about very often. By talking about estrangement in your work, you can let estranged students know you are including them whilst also making the concept more familiar to other potential allies.

**'Halls of Residence remain open over university closures for international students, estranged students, and others who wish to remain on campus during this period.'**

**2. Mind your everyday language:** We talk about families a lot, which can be uncomfortable for students experiencing estrangement. Sometimes even seemingly innocent questions can put estranged students in a position where they feel excluded. Ask open questions and be led by the individuals you're speaking with.

Read Sam's open letter to those wishing to become allies to estranged students:

<https://bit.ly/3mG30RP>



I feel the isolation of family estrangement more keenly. I am very aware of friends and others talking about Zoom calls with their families. There is always coverage on the news etc about what families would usually be doing, and the compromises they are all making, and the painfulness of my situation is heightened

I don't have a "safety net" if something goes wrong with studies / work and I can never really just take break. I think that makes me more anxious about the future and generally more stress-prone.

Estranged students

**'Be an ally to estranged students,**



### Stand Alone Podcast: Voices of Estrangement

<https://bit.ly/2HrTuBF>

Share your thoughts, experiences, comments on twitter and follow what else is going on during Stand Alone ESS Week **#WithEstrangedStudents**

<https://bit.ly/3mL9Qp8>

Instead of asking ‘**What are you doing for Christmas?**’, ask ‘**What are you looking forward to over the next few weeks?**’ This also keeps the conversation inclusive of students who do not celebrate Christmas!

**3. Talk to students:** You know it’s best to be led by the student voice, and this is no different! Work with your SU/SA to consult estranged students and hear directly from them what you can do to make their lives easier. Small actions can go a long way, and there may be things they need that are specific to your environment and/or their own personal experiences.

When reaching out to students, remember that some students may not use the word ‘estranged’ to describe themselves. Keep the invitation open and offer the choice of anonymity.

**4. Make funding accessible:** Do you look after your Hardship Fund, Access to Sport Fund, or other funding for students? Explicitly encourage estranged students to apply and ensure your application processes and any means-testing accommodate all circumstances.

**5. Enable connections:** Consider what could be done on campus, online, or in the local community to make offers more accessible and inclusive to students who will be on campus over university/college closures.

Provide incentives and ideas for student groups who get together over a closure period — whether this be in person or digitally.

**6. Speak your university/college:** Make sure you know what support is on offer for estranged students. Is there a dedicated member of staff for estranged students? Has your university/college taken the Stand Alone Pledge? If not, why not lobby them to do so?

[www.thestandalonepledge.org.uk](http://www.thestandalonepledge.org.uk)



**Please be aware:**  
estrangement can be a sensitive issue for some and talking about it might be uncomfortable for them. Please make sure you use content warnings appropriately.

‘Be an ally  
to estranged  
students,’