



# Background

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## What is estrangement?

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?

**Estranged** students are those studying without the support and approval of their parents and often the wider family network. Students in this position often have no contact at all with their family, have removed themselves from a dysfunctional situation or have been disowned.

**Estrangement** can take many forms. Some people experience a finite, sudden break in the relationship with immediate cut-off. For others, estrangement is a process or experienced as a journey. Some students may be going through this process of distancing themselves from their parents/family. Most will not use the label of 'estrangement.' Keep in mind that some students may decide the word does not suit them, others may not realise that what they are going through has a name.

## Why do students experience estrangement?

Abuse, and particularly emotional abuse, is a key cause of family estrangement, alongside clashes of values and beliefs and mismatched expectations about family roles. Issues connected to honour-based violence, forced marriage and family rejection of LGBTQI+ students are common. There are also a proportion of estranged students who have been disowned for pursuing education against the wishes of their family or extended family network.

Research with estranged students indicates abuse, and particularly emotional abuse, are the key causes of family alienation, alongside clashes of values and mismatched expectations about family roles. More specifically, issues connected to honour based violence, forced marriage and family rejection of LGBTQI+\* and transgender students are common.

<https://bit.ly/2G2c02G>



I think the thing that frustrates me is seeing others with support in daily tasks like cleaning and cooking. Even just having a chat to someone who cares. Also, financial support is a massive thing, especially as a student with reduced income. You only have yourself to rely on so you need to be on it 100% all the time, there's no respite.

**Estranged student**

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



### What challenges do estranged students face at university?

Because our society values family so much, estrangement is often misunderstood and stigmatised. Many estranged students feel unable to speak openly about difficult family situations at university for fear of judgement or rejection.

Students who are estranged from their parents / family often feel unacknowledged, invisible and sensitive to judgement and stigma around their family situation. 28% of students told us they did not feel comfortable accessing support within their institution. Many students who are estranged suffer over the university holidays and the summer period when most students can traditionally 'go home.'

Students who are estranged from their family struggle with retention in Higher Education: Our study showed that 41% of students had considered withdrawing from their course or suspending their studies due to money pressures, stress and mental health struggles, 14% actually had — a rate three times higher than the average student!

**If you or any student would like further support, please contact your University Student Services or Health & Wellbeing services.**



**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.

Read Chloe's blog  
'Experiencing university  
as an estranged student'

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

Stand Alone Podcast:  
Voices of Estrangement

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

Other Stand Alone  
sources of information

Research reports:

[www.standalone.org.uk/reports/](http://www.standalone.org.uk/reports/)

Information for students:

[www.standalone.org.uk/students/](http://www.standalone.org.uk/students/)

The Stand Alone Pledge

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

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