



Top Tips for Student Officers

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 Students Officer, you're a representative of students, a force for change. By learning how you can be an ally to students experiencing family difficulty or estrangement, you can make a difference wherever you fight for positive change, whether that's campaigning on campus or advocating in committee rooms!

Follow these top tips to ensure your activities are inclusive of estranged students' interests, ensuring they are not forgotten by your college or university:

1. Normalise talking about estrangement: Estrangement is often unfamiliar to people because it isn't often discussed. Speaking about estrangement in your representation lets estranged students know their experiences are seen and understood, makes the concept familiar to others and ensures their issues are on the radar of management.

'While students in halls of residence are in lockdown, we have to be mindful of those who cannot rely on outside family support, such as those who are estranged from their parents.'

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,



2. Keep your language inclusive: As officers you know how to keep your language inclusive of liberation groups and other vulnerable cohorts, and you can do this for estranged students too. Sometimes even innocent comments can exclude estranged students, especially regarding family. Ask open questions and be led by the individuals you're speaking with.

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 and empower your students: As a student officer you know student led campaigning is more powerful. Reach out to estranged students, listen to their concerns and encourage them to get involved. Use your influence to advocate for them in forums where they aren't present but make space for them in your campaigning and seek opportunities for them to speak directly to decision-makers. Remember some students may not use the word 'estranged' to describe themselves so talk about what that means, keep your campaigning open and always offer them anonymity if they get involved.

4. Fight for funding, make it accessible: Is your institution's hardship fund advertised? Does your SU/SA have a participation fund? Fight for funding for vulnerable students and encourage estranged students to apply! Ensure that your SU/SA's application processes minimise means testing and are designed compassionately, and challenge your institution to match that ethos in their's.

5. Consider isolation: Consider what can be done by your SU/SA, institution or in the local community to make activities accessible and inclusive to estranged students, especially during periods of campus closures. Provide incentives and rewards for student groups who offer activity over closure periods!

6. Know where their support is: 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

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>



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,’**