

Five things that can help autistic students settle into university

August 20 2024, by Harriet Axbey



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As the summer draws to a close, the start of your very first term looms if

you are starting university. You will hopefully be looking forward to going, although you may be feeling a little apprehensive and may even be very nervous, especially if you are autistic.

Autistic people often love change, and the excitement that comes with it, but unexpected or uncontrolled change can really throw us. And that's what university often is—unpredictable.

Many universities offer tailored support packages for their autistic students, such as more choice of accommodation, guaranteed second and third year accommodation, specialist one to one study skills tutors and additional counseling sessions. Every university is different, though. Additional support through avenues like the disabled students' allowance in the UK is available to autistic students.

My new book, [University: The Autistic Guide](#), looks at the entire autistic student experience, from applying to moving in, studying, and graduating. Here are five things you can do to help ease yourself into the student experience if you are new to university and autistic.

1. Move in early

If you are able to, get to your accommodation as early as possible. This will allow you a little extra time to get used to your new surroundings, and familiarize yourself with important places such as the shops and the library. It may even help you nab the best shelves in your new kitchen.

Most universities will allow students to move in ahead of time, or even actively encourage autistic students to do so. You can contact the university in advance and ask whether you can move in a few days early to allow you to settle in.

2. Don't bring too much stuff

Many students bring items to university that they will never use. Some prime examples are ironing boards, irons and fancy kitchen tools. There is no need to bring all these things, especially when space is at a premium in most student accommodation. In fact, it helps if all the belongings you are bringing with you fit into one car, with space for you left in it.

There are some essential items you should bring, such as bedding, a laundry basket and basic kitchen utensils.

But every student is different, of course, and what is essential to one person may not be to someone else. Always bring a toilet roll with you, however, as nothing is worse than getting out of a hot car after a long journey, and your new bathroom not having any loo roll or soap.

3. Get to know other autistic people

[Research](#) shows that neurodivergent people often get on well with other neurodivergent people.

So, meeting others in a similar situation to yourself will help you feel less alone. You can also bond over similar experiences such as feeling overwhelmed with your new environment.

Many universities have societies or networks for neurodivergent or disabled students, and these are a good place to meet others. I also recommend joining clubs and societies for your interests, sports and hobbies. You will probably meet students there that you get on with too.

4. Don't expect to find your 'forever friends' straight

away

Freshers' week, or induction week, can be a whirlwind of experiences and emotions. Students can get very close very quickly to those with whom they live. Having chats and nights out together can be a great bonding experience, and a chance to get to know the people you will live with for the next year.

But remember, this is only a very small sub-section of the university population. You are unlikely to find your best friends among the six to ten people who are living in the same accommodation as you. If you don't click immediately with these people in the first days, weeks, or even terms of university, it doesn't mean you will never find "your" people. They are out there but you may have to look further than the end of your hall.

5. Keep in contact with home

University can seem like a world away from home, and this distance may at times feel isolating. Keep in touch with someone from back home, whether that is your family, guardian, or an old friend. This will help you feel less alone and remember where you came from.

You may find that you drift apart from your school friends. This is normal as you all discover your new lives, and you may not want to keep in touch if they remind you of a less happy time in your life. But try to stay in touch with someone who doesn't go to your [university](#) because it will help to make the world feel less small.

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