

Do you have young people in your groups heading off to university? Here are some top tips to send them off well...

Talk to the young person about it

Discuss what their fears, worries and excitements are. Talking about it can help and it may be that you can offer practical assistance or advice about some of their concerns. You could run some sessions to help the young people in your group think about the university experience – Student Christian Movement (SCM) offers a resource for leaders with a number of session ideas, such as busting myths about uni, dealing with finance, and exploring the person you should be at uni (www.movement.org.uk/gtuleaders).

Put together a starter pack

This might be something you create yourself – a small box with some essentials like teabags, chocolate, and an encouraging book for example. Or there are organisations, such as SCM or Fusion, that already have resources that you could purchase to give to your young person. Fusion's starter pack is here: www.fusionmovement.org/resources/product/box. SCM has a number of resources, such as prayer books and guides to mental wellbeing: www.movement.org.uk/resources-grid.

Explain about chaplaincy

Most universities will have a chaplaincy. Chaplains are people appointed by faith communities to work at the university to care for the staff and students. The chaplaincy is the building on campus where the chaplains are based. It is good for students to connect with the chaplain (many universities have specific Methodist Chaplains) as they will be a good source of support for the student and may help them to connect to Christian groups or relevant churches. You can find out who the Methodist chaplain is at the university your young person is going to, by visiting the chaplaincy pages of the Methodist website: www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/chaplaincy/chaplaincy-contacts/higher-education-chaplaincy-contacts. If appropriate you can contact the chaplain in advance and put them in touch with your young person.

Involve the congregation

Try and create some time in a service in September where the congregation can pray for the young person who is starting university. If appropriate the young person could tell the congregation a little of where they are going and what they are studying. Having the support of their congregation and knowing that they are being prayed for can be very helpful and will help them to feel connected to that congregation when they return in the holidays. Some churches have encouraged the congregation to create/knit a prayer blanket to give to the student. Another idea is for the congregation to write prayers and put them in envelopes for the student to open throughout the term. Get creative with how the congregation can pray for your young person as they leave and throughout the time they are there.

Keep in touch

As the youth worker you will have played an important role in the young person's life and it can be a strange time to have left the youth group and moved on. Mental health is an important issue for students and many will struggle with being away from home for the first time. Keep in touch, with an occasional card in the post, email or message to help them feel connected and to reassure them that they still have a support network at home should they need it (whilst also encouraging them to find local support networks at university).

There are other resources and info available on our webpage for students, plus a 'Top Tips' that you could print and give to your students: www.methodist.org.uk/forstudents.