

STUDENTS LEAVING HOME

Parents' guide to empty nesting

Includes helpful tips from expert, Dr Thompson, and Unite Students' own colleagues. Plus, additional information and support tools for parents.'



“So much of what we did bringing up our kids was to prepare them for moments like these”

Joe Lister, Unite Students Chief Executive has three daughters. One who's been and finished university, one who started university two years ago and one who started university this year. Here he shares his thoughts on why this [parents guide to empty nesting](#) is so important.

When our first daughter went to university, we really felt the anxiety in the run up to her starting university and moving away. Those first few weeks before she went were a mixture of excitement and worry.

The worst was actually the day when I dropped her off. We drove up to Sheffield - it was three hours - she's a very chatty young person but about half an hour before we got there, she just went quiet and I could tell that the nerves were kicking in. So were mine.

But actually, the moment she walked into her flat and one of the boys who was already living there just came out and said hi and the big smile returned to her face and that just eased all those initial anxieties that she had.



Joe Lister, Unite Students Chief Executive

Bringing kids up and the way we did it, actually you're preparing them for these moments when they do leave home. All those sleepovers and all those play dates that they have is about building up that confidence to be away from you and for us to feel comfortable with them going off and doing their own exciting things.

You'll never be able to totally ready yourself for that full on experience when a child moves away. On the day and then those first few weeks, it's always going to be really hard. To help parents come to terms with their child leaving for university for the first time, Unite Students has created this handy guide.

It includes ten helpful tips from Dr Thompson, as well as our own team members, along with other useful information and support tools for parents.

A stylized, handwritten signature of the name 'Joe' in black ink.

Joe Lister, Unite Students Chief Executive

“One of the great things about Unite Students is that there is that wrap around support for students and knowing that there's a safety net.

Not all students will need that additional layer of comfort and support. But it's wonderful knowing that there's people around if anything does go wrong, that there's someone there just to help and to have a chat and to help direct them wherever they may need to be directed to.”

OUR ADVICE ON EMPTY NESTING

Our teams understand what it's like to be a parent, waving their child off to university. Four of our colleagues share their experience of empty nesting, and their advice for other parents.



Tonia Lewis, Unite Students Finance, Risk & Assurance Director

"It definitely gets easier. They say you never stop worrying about your children and I think that's probably true. But don't let it become all embracing. If they're not contacting you, it's because they're busy having fun, or studying. **Don't catastrophize the simple things.** They can generally cook and clean. It definitely, definitely gets better. Particularly if you stay in touch. They say boys never call home, but they do. They call home a lot."



Amanda Morby, Unite Students Brand Manager

"It was a whole mixture of emotions from the moment my son decided he was going to university, right till he left. Even after a few months of him leaving, it didn't get any easier. If anything, I probably missed him even more. Don't underestimate how hard it's going to be. Don't expect that feeling to go away straight away because actually it's hard. It is like losing somebody, even though they're coming back. **Be kind to yourself** and let yourself have those feelings."



Joe Lister, Unite Students Chief Executive

"My advice would be to just **keep talking to your kids.** See what they're worried about and try and just figure out any information you can. And I think connecting to flatmates or other people in the building helps as well, which is something we offer with our new app. It just takes away a little bit of the mystique."



Helen Arber, Unite Foundation Head of Operations

"I think it's going to be really difficult. I'm finding it difficult now. What I'm trying to do at the moment is compartmentalise. I'm feeling a bit emotionally fragile all the time, but I found if I **separate it out into really practical things** like lists and packing, and then separately just taking a little bit of a moment to myself to deal with my emotions - although I'm not doing so well today - I find that's really helpful."



Watch our teams share their experience of empty nesting, and their advice for other parents

“It’s hard. It is like losing somebody, even though they’re coming back.”

Amanda Morby, Unite Students Brand Manager

Research has shown that Empty Nest Syndrome hits parents hard, with 98% left feeling a sense of real grief once their young person has left home to go to university for the very first time.

While this heightened sense of loss might feel overwhelming as a parent or guardian, rest assured it’s very common to feel this way – especially once you consider the increased amount of time you’ve spent with your loved ones during the pandemic.

At Unite Students, we know those first few weeks after your child has flown the nest can be hard. As the UK’s largest provider of student accommodation, we’ve teamed up with Dr Dominique Thompson - a GP, young people’s mental health expert, TEDx speaker, author and educator - to offer help and support for anyone who’s struggling to cope without their child living at home.

Just remember, you’re not alone. In fact, a poll of 1,000 parents of first-time university students revealed:

20%

feel like a part of them is missing.

17%

are now questioning the future of their marriage or other relationships now their child has left home.

30%

say they’re drinking alcohol more, or have started drinking.

87%

wish they’d thought about the impact of their child leaving home in advance or sought advice.

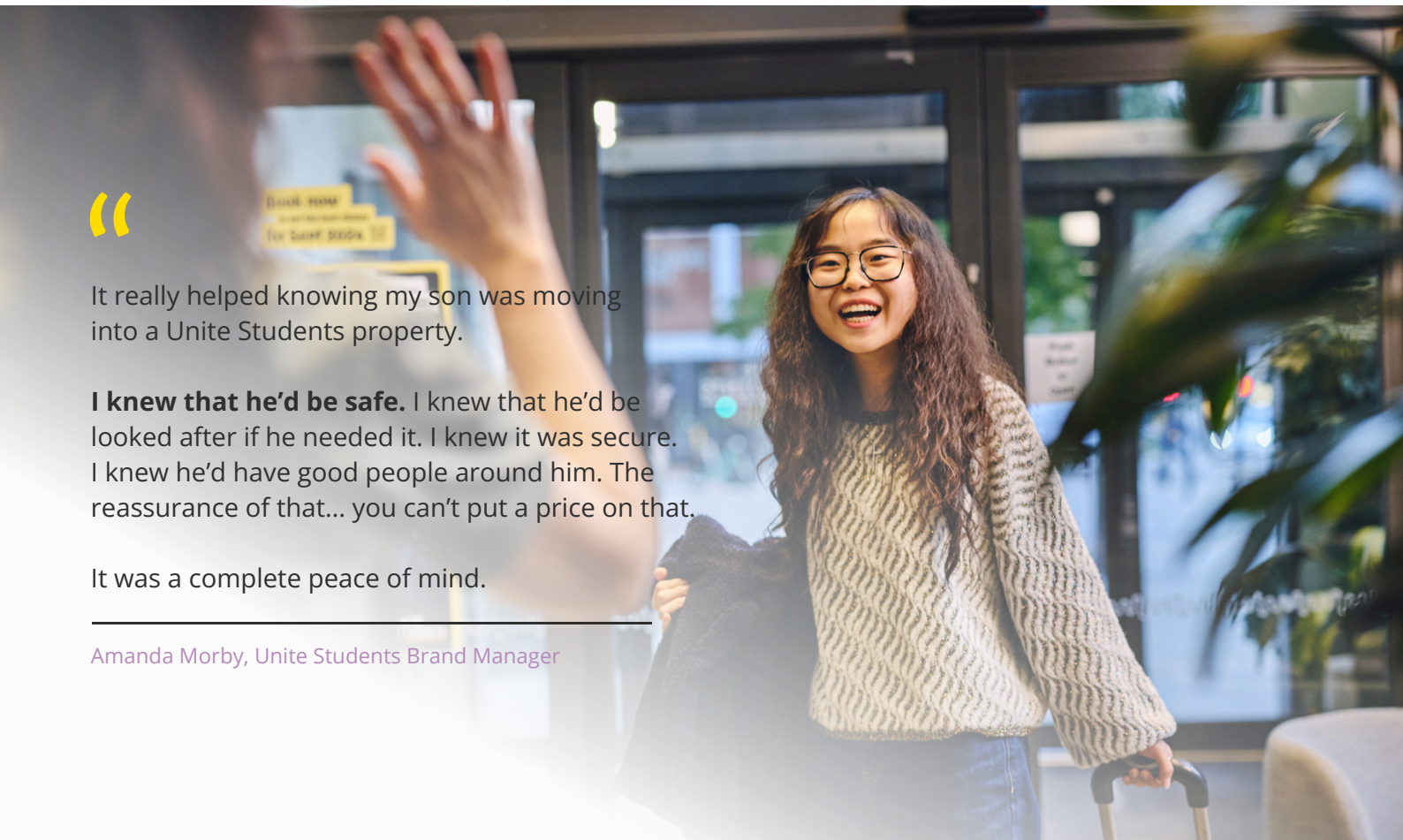
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It really helped knowing my son was moving into a Unite Students property.

I knew that he’d be safe. I knew that he’d be looked after if he needed it. I knew it was secure. I knew he’d have good people around him. The reassurance of that... you can’t put a price on that.

It was a complete peace of mind.

Amanda Morby, Unite Students Brand Manager



EXPERT TOP TIPS: COMING TO TERMS WITH AN EMPTY NEST



About Dr Dominique Thompson

Dr Dominique Thompson has over 20 years of clinical experience caring for students, most recently as Director of Service at the University of Bristol Students' Health Service. She is also a clinical advisor.

It's natural for parents and guardians to feel at a loss when their young person leaves home for the first time. Here, Dr Dominique Thompson provides ten top tips for those dealing with Empty Nest Syndrome:



1 Find a new purpose:

Having a new reason to get up every day is vital for wellbeing and provides structure and meaning. Why not help a neighbour, try volunteering, or even get a pet or plant to nurture?



2 Establish new routines:

Loss of routine and daily structure can throw you. Establish routines that makes you feel good. A peaceful morning coffee or evening walk will help ground you and reduce anxiety.



3 Address sensory loss:

You may miss their voice, their smell, and even their movement around the home. Photos can remind you of happy times, while a bottle of their scent or aftershave can trigger sensory memories. It's normal to miss their presence, so wean yourself off gradually.



4. Address other issues:

Rather than making life-changing decisions in throes of empty nest sadness, use time to sort things out. Talk to people you trust, take time to ponder options and decide when you're ready.



5 Give it time:

If the loss of their presence feels like a bereavement, remember it takes time to adjust and recover. However, as with grief, it happens in small steps, and you might need support to get there.



6 Focus on you:

Take time to address health issues, tackle weight loss, increase fitness, investigate a hobby, or learn something new.



7 Avoid loneliness:

Actively plan to spend time with your family, friends or partner. Make sure you see or speak to someone every day if you need companionship.



8 Stay in touch:

Pre-arrange how often you'll speak to your child, and plan when you'll see them next. For anything in-between, set up a WhatsApp group for pictures and banter.



9 Don't make them feel guilty:

Instead, let them know they're missed. Send a picture of their empty room with a joke about how tidy it is, rather than a crying face emoji! They'll know that you miss them but want to feel reassured that you're coping.



10 Ask for help:

If you're still struggling after four to six weeks, try not to overburden your child with worries. Talk to your support network and ask your GP for help. You're not alone - help is out there.

FURTHER RESOURCES AND TIPS

By Dr Dominique Thompson



Websites

- growingagrownup.com
- studentminds.org.uk/supportforparents.html
- theuniguide.co.uk/advice/advice-for-parents
- <https://www.savethestudent.org/student-finance/parents-guide-tips-university.html>



Communities of support

- For single parents – Gingerbread – [gingerbread.org.uk/ community/online-forum/topic/empty-nest-cant-stop-crying](http://gingerbread.org.uk/community/online-forum/topic/empty-nest-cant-stop-crying)
- For all parents and carers – Facebook – The Growing a Grown Up private community created by Dr Dominique Thompson



Books

- 'How to Grow a Grown Up' by Dominique Thompson Book and Fabienne Vailes
- 'The Empty Nest: Your Changing Family, Your New Direction' by Celia Dodd



UNITE STUDENTS: WE'VE GOT YOUR BACK

For 30+ years, we've watched thousands of parents and guardians wave goodbye to their students at the start of a new academic year. During this time, we've learned a thing or two about providing you with the reassurance you need.

If your student has flown the nest this year, it's normal to have lots of questions and concerns. That's why Unite Students is here to provide you with reassurance and support that you – and your child – need at this time of transition.

1. We're keeping your student's home safe

Our properties are only accessible with a secure fob or card system, and every student room has its own individual lock. We have CCTV in every property and an overnight team in each city, who can respond to incidents.


2. You can contact us 24/7

We have an Emergency Control Centre which is open 24 hours a day 365 days a year - please ring

0300 303 1611

We'll always follow up on any concerns raised.

If things are tough, residents can get help at the touch of a button – directly contacting our **24/7 student assistance helpline** through the Unite Students app – or they can access our Support for You resources, including FAQs and contact details.

 To download the App, search **Unite Students** in your app store.


3. We'll support your student through their studies

We'll be there when they need us. Each city has several welfare leads who are trained listeners and can signpost students to sources of support. Resident Ambassadors are also there to help students to settle in and meet friends.

4. Our App can help your student connect with their flatmates, attend events and request help

Flat chats on our Unite Students app allows our residents to write bios that tell their flatmates who they are before they start chatting. Chats have safeguarding features embedded to prevent abuse of the messaging function.

The app also offers property communities. These chats help residents to stay up-to-date with the latest events and alerts in their building. It makes it easy for residents to know about and get involved in community-building events. It also makes it easier to get to know Resident Ambassadors and residents in neighbouring flats, and means recommendations and advice are only ever a message away.

 To download the App, search **Unite Students** in your app store.



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