



Key Findings for Friends and Family

First in Family: Friends and Family of FiF Students

YOUR SUPPORT IS CRITICAL

FiF students place a huge emphasis on support from family and friends to get them through university. The encouragement of family and friends is crucial in helping FiF students decide to attend, and continue at, university.

"I had friends who said 'Look you're smart enough, you should go to uni, you're actually a really smart guy, you should just go on and do whatever you want to do.'"

If no one else in their family has been to University, your friend or family member is more likely to seek out information about university from other sources including their school teachers or university websites.

"We've come from a very blue collar kind of family, growing up I didn't even really know what university was, our family saw university as being for rich people, not for people like us."

What does this mean for you?

Encourage: If you are the parent/primary carer of a school age child who has shown an interest in going

to university, encourage them to go and speak to their school's career counsellor or their teachers regarding their university prospects.

Support: You could encourage your family member to think seriously about going to university. Go with them to the University Open Days to find out more and support them to make their decision about what to study.

Have an open mind: You may not agree with or understand why your friend or family member wants to go to university but if you try to see things from their perspective this may help them feel supported and you can also be a positive influence on them.

UNIVERSITY CAN CHANGE PEOPLE

"I'm much more confident than when I started uni. I can talk and think to a lot deeper level than what I could back in high school. And my understanding of people, socially, has developed immensely."

"I think that my university journey has been about making me a more well-rounded adult."

BACKGROUND

- FiF students are the first member of their immediate family, including siblings, to attend university.
- This research explored the in-depth stories of eighteen FiF students across the three South Australian universities and analysed the expectations and experiences of over 5,300 FiF students.
- Students who are the first member in their family (FiF) to attend university may find they need to take time to get to know and understand the university environment and what is to be expected of them.



Many students find that they experience positive change in their attitudes and beliefs and see things from different perspectives as a result of attending university. While most find their existing views become stronger and they may become better at expressing themselves, some may find their views actually change, and this can potentially create conflict with friends or family who may not agree with them.

"I did keep in contact with my high school friends in the first year and part of the second year and quite regularly we'd catch up and that sort of thing. But then I guess as the degree progressed I became closer to people in the degree that had similar interests and just a bit more in common."

"My wife and I can converse at a different level now that I couldn't have done before. Not on science but on life, the universe and everything. We might even stop a TV program and discuss that point and this point – play with the drama and relate that."

What does this mean for you?

Learn from each other: Knowing that your friend or family member may strengthen their personal views and opinions after going to university, and that this might mean you no longer see eye to eye on everything, means that you are half way there. You might even enjoy talking through the reasons why they feel more strongly about certain things and you can learn from each other in the process!

Don't judge: If your friend or family member has changed their perspectives, attitudes or beliefs, and if you show some understanding and take an interest in their new views and don't judge them for it, then it may be easier to remain close to each other.

UNIVERSITY CAN BE CHALLENGING

In order to succeed at university students need to spend between 10-12 hours per week on each course they are studying. Hence doing a full time load of four courses requires the same time commitment as a full time job.

Many FiF students find it more difficult to balance their studies with existing demands of work, family and friends. Managing their time and staying healthy can be a big issue for many FiF students.

"Initially I struggled because I couldn't find a 'healthy' balance between my employment, spending time with friends, eating healthy, study and exercise. After the first term I started to learn you have to say 'no' to your friends at times and remember your priorities. Attending as many lectures and tutorials as possible was also important."



UNIVERSITY MAY BE OVERWHELMING

FiF students may find the transition to university more challenging given that they are unlikely to have someone close to them to tell them what it will be like and what will be expected of them.

"I felt isolated, and certainly felt like I was out of my depth, I did feel like I didn't belong here."

"I sort of started as a lone wolf, I suppose. So that was the tough side of things I think that I struggled with the most."

The first six months are often the hardest, but once settled in most FiF students go on to be highly successful students.

"In first year I didn't have that kind of support network behind me. It was probably half way through first year that I felt really part of uni and felt really comfortable. I made some great friends and then it was just so easy."

What does this mean for you?

Help if you can: If you are able to help your friend or family member juggle their demands of work, family and friends, this will help them get through their studies. For example, you could offer to babysit if they have young children, go for a walk with them or make them a healthy meal.

Keep an eye on them: Your friend or family member who is studying may appreciate you keeping an eye on them and encouraging them to exercise or take some time out from study or work if they are feeling overwhelmed. This may also show them how much you care about their health and wellbeing.

"If I didn't have my friends and family to lean on, I would have failed a long time ago."