

University challenge

Sara Eames discusses remedies to help new students cope with being away from home – and suggests a few for parents too

When children grow up and leave home there are all sorts of challenges and changes to be confronted, both by the children and their parents who may feel left behind. Fortunately homeopathy can come to the rescue in many ways both for physical and emotional problems. This is a particularly pertinent topic at this time of year when so many teenagers are embarking on their university careers.

It is well known that all life events, however pleasurable, come with extra stress and the time when offspring flee the nest is no exception. In fact it is often only one of many important changes happening at the same time. Parents are often taking stock of their own lives and relationships and may also be encountering physical deterioration and illnesses for the first time. This is often compounded by the caring for or loss of elderly parents and some are unfortunate enough to have to contend with redundancies, financial worries and the stark reality that they will not progress further in their careers. Add to this mixture a teenager who might well have been rebellious and a worry for a number of years and who then suddenly disappears and it is not hard to see why problems can occur.

Although there are these multiple challenges this transition time can also be very rewarding. Relationships can be developed and strengthened and new plans can be made for the next stages of life. More space in the house can often be an advantage and I have yet to meet a parent who seriously misses the old take-away boxes and dirty washing strewn around the house, or the disturbed nights when children come home later than planned. Most of all however must be the satisfaction of slowly realising that your children can actually manage on their own and to see them maturing and planning their own futures.

Remedies for the teenagers

I thought it would be useful to suggest a small box of remedies which can be prepared for children when they leave. Even if they don't need them all themselves I have often seen children brought up on homeopathy offer remedies to their friends as well.

The most important remedies for an individual are the ones that they have responded well to in the past, so if your child is lucky enough to have found their constitutional remedy that has to be in the box, and it's not a bad idea to give a dose a week or so before they leave so that they are in good health for the challenges ahead. Similarly if they have some remedies which always help in acute situations, such as early stages of infections or for anxieties, then these should be included too.

Otherwise it's probably best to think about the sort of problems your child might encounter and put in some of the more common remedies that can help. When students first arrive at university they are usually thrown in to a fairly manic programme of activities. They meet the people who they will live close to and study with and are offered all sorts of entertainments and diversions, usually by folk who want them to sign up and join things and part with their money. The average first year student will drink and spend far too much in the first few weeks away from home. However during this same time they will have to navigate their way through often complicated registration processes and make choices about modules which can have quite an effect on their whole university career. It is not uncommon for students who arrive late, or unprepared for the registration process, to find their first choice modules already full. That's a really disappointing start, so if you can it's probably a good idea to try to get your child to think about what they want to do and where they will have to go.



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The average first year student will drink and spend far too much in the first few weeks away from home

Probably the most useful remedy for the first few weeks will be *Nux vomica*, the homeopathic standard for over indulgence of all sorts. It can also be an anxious time and *Rescue Remedy* can be a great help. Other more specific anxiety remedies can include *Silica* which is useful in a shy child who finds it daunting to meet and talk to so many new people, *Lycopodium* which is indicated where the person looks confident on the outside but is petrified that people will discover his inadequacies and *Arsenicum album* for someone who has a tendency to be a perfectionist and will become more restless, anxious and meticulous when under stress.

In spite of all the activity, many students have periods of home-sickness, especially if it their first time away from home. This is quite normal and a few phone calls and the passage of time are

usually enough to see them through. Remedies which can also help include *Capsicum*, *Ignatia* and *Phosphoric acid*. Others may find it hard to sleep with all the frenetic activity around and *Coffea* is the remedy which can help with sleeplessness from over-stimulation.

Once the initial excitement has worn off there are the new challenges of time management with much less structured academic work, learning to look after oneself, survival on a small income and new relationships to be explored. All students will manage some of these better than others. For the student who finds it very hard to organise themselves, get out of bed and make it to their lectures in spite of good intentions a dose or two of *Sulphur* can work wonders. Others may find it hard to join in with the general swing of things at university and start to feel that they are missing out on the fun.

They can become rather resentful, self-pitying and withdrawn and then *Nat mur* can often make things much easier.

Academic challenges can also cause problems. Many teenagers who go on to university are used to being one of the high fliers at their school and can find it hard to adapt to being more average amongst their new peers. Again *Arsenicum* or *Natrum mur* can be useful, depending on how the person reacts and another very useful remedy in this situation is *Lycopodium*. For them it is extremely important to be seen in a good light and they have particular difficulties in accepting a slightly less perfect view of their achievements.

The average student does not have a lot of money or time to be spent on cooking and looking after themselves, especially now that self-catering is more common, so as well as homeopathic



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remedies it is a good idea to pack a good multi-vitamin and mineral supplement which they might remember to take at least some of the time! “Freshers’ flu” is a common occurrence due to the combined pressures of a new environment, hectic lifestyle and mixing with many new and different people, so vitamin C and an immune booster such as echinacea can also be a great help.

Case studies

James aged 19 has gone straight from school to university. He has always been a sociable and successful boy, keen on sports and able to pass exams fairly easily. After two months away from home he is finding life a bit more of a struggle. He has made good friends since he started at uni, but is gradually missing more and more of his classes. He fully intends to go to them, but each morning stays in bed. He is already behind with his coursework, but seems

incapable of doing anything about it. He is sharing a flat with three others in a hall of residence and his room is becoming increasingly chaotic. When his parents visited him, they were concerned about him and brought him to see me. He gave an extremely plausible account of what he planned to do to improve things, but somehow I doubted that he would. I prescribed three doses of high potency Sulphur and within a week he was able to get out of bed by nine in the morning. In fact he felt so much better in himself that he now takes the Sulphur himself when needed and it has not been

necessary to see him again.

Emily a 20 year-old girl has had a year off after school which was spent working and travelling. She had a serious relationship while on her gap year which did not last when she returned home. Since going to uni she has become rather more withdrawn and has not socialised much. She is feeling rather sorry for herself but does not talk to anyone about it as she hates people to feel sorry for her. She has also developed headaches around her period time. I have treated her parents in the past and her mother rang me. We managed to persuade her to talk to me on the phone as she was not in London and I prescribed her high potency Nat mur. There was not an immediate response, but gradually over the next two months she became more engaged in university life and when she came to see me on her next vacation, she seemed to be coping much better and I gave her another course of the Nat mur which she was to take if she began to feel worse again.

Both these cases reminded me of how a timely dose of a homeopathic remedy can make a tremendous difference to the life of an individual.

Remedies for parents

When children leave home parents can react in as many varied ways as their children, but there are a few basic remedies which can often help. Ignatia is the classic remedy for acute loss and grief and may well help if you are feeling weepy, or have a very changeable reaction and are finding it hard to sleep at night.

There are often mixed feelings when children leave and some parents feel angry that they have been left and that their children only contact them when they want something. Staphisagria can often help then. Others may feel purely abandoned and be very weepy and then Pulsatilla can really change things.

Some parents can feel relieved when they have a bit more freedom again, but don't enjoy it too much as a large percentage of children come back home after they have finished at college and can't afford to live independently!



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