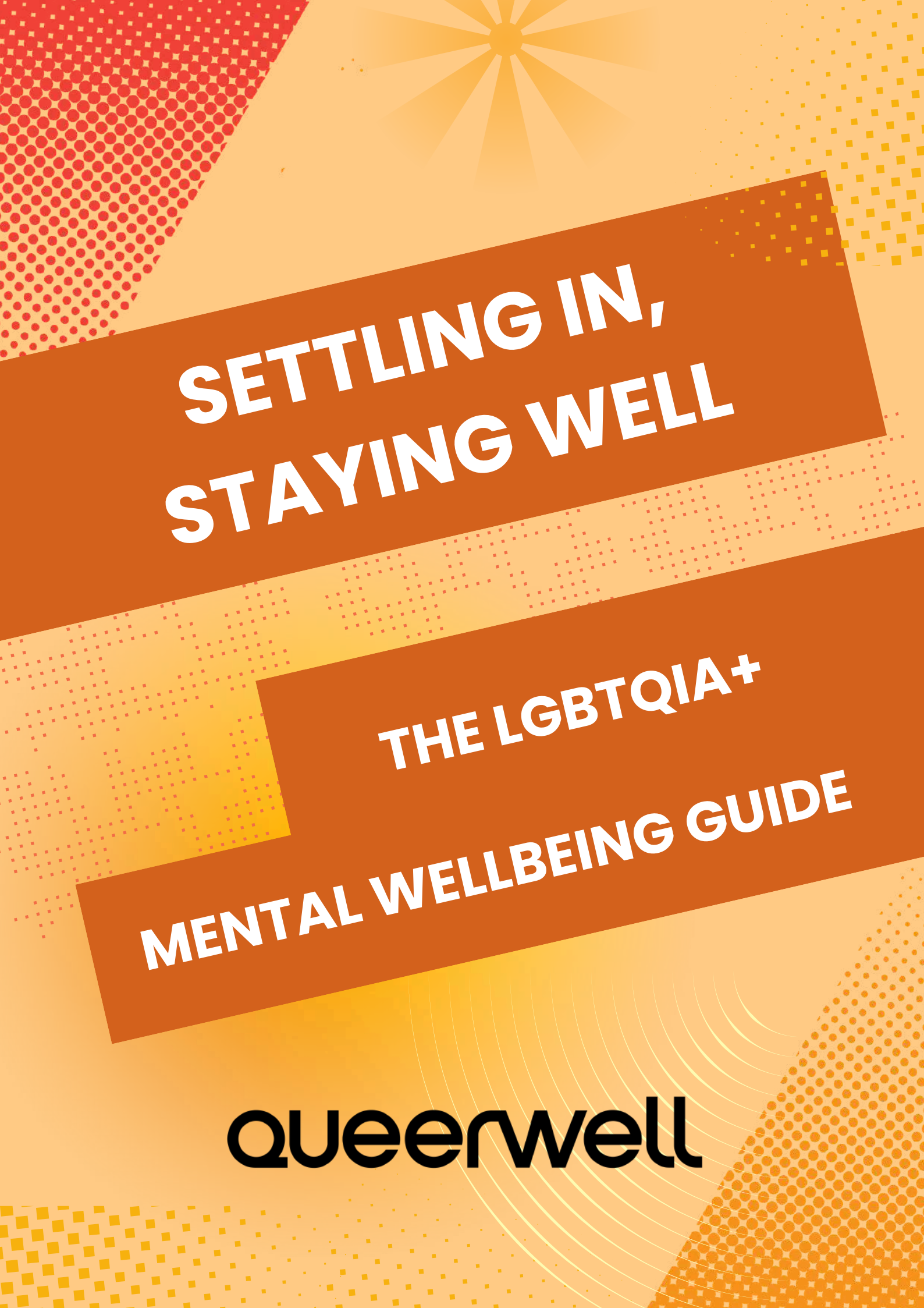




SETTLING IN, STAYING WELL

THE LGBTQIA+ MENTAL WELLBEING GUIDE

queerwell

Hello, we are Queerwell, your Community-led LGBTQIA+ Mental Health and Wellbeing Charity. We champion positive mental health within LGBTQIA+ communities by delivering prevention-focused mental health and wellbeing support: free or at low-cost. We are committed to prioritising those most in need with the fewest resources, and those who face discrimination on many levels.

So, you're about to start university as a queer fresher? Congratulations! Making it to uni is a major achievement. In the next few years, we hope that you find a strong queer community, get to celebrate your queer identity in this new environment and make friendships and memories for life.

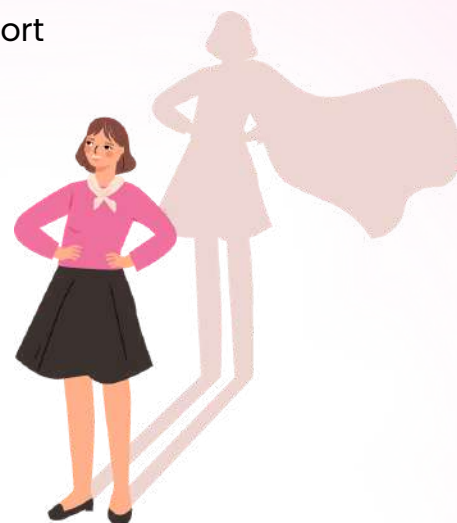
University can be a steep learning curve, though, especially for queer students. For many of us, it's our first real access to queer nightlife and community, and if you're also moving somewhere new, it might be your first time navigating identity, safety, and independence all at once. These new experiences can be exciting and nerve-wracking in equal measure.

To ensure you have the best experience as an LGBTQ+ fresher, we have compiled our top tips for finding queer joy, comfort and community throughout your uni experience. We've also put together a Resource Hub packed with more information – [Queer Hub](#)

All Good Wishes,

queerwell

A few honest tips for building queer community, comfort and joy in your first year from the Queerwell team of therapists, coaches, facilitators, and undergraduate students.



1. BE TRUE TO YOU

Before your first weeks at uni, consider what your ideal queer experience looks like.



You don't need all the answers now, but noticing what excites you (and what doesn't) helps.

2. START WITH A SIGN-UP

Where do you even begin with so many options? Society schedules feel rigid, but they're not. Fresher's Fairs are a great way to get on the mailing lists, group chats and social media pages for any societies that interest you.



You're free to try things without burning out or committing forever.

Associate Queerwell practitioner and life coach Bobby Jones has shared one of his top tips for finding the societies and safe spaces for you:

“

If you are feeling overwhelmed by the amount you are trying to do, it's okay to say no to things and stop doing things that aren't helping you anymore.

One way to work this out is to notice which activities are 'topping up' your energy levels and which are 'depleting' them; not just in the moment, but for the rest of the day and the following day too. This might help you to work out what to keep and what to let go.

”



Emily's Insights:

You can join a club or society at any point in the year, so do not feel like you've missed out if you didn't join in Freshers. Also, there is often financial support to join clubs and societies (depending on the SU), as memberships can sometimes come with a fee - speak to your Students' Union about this.

3. START THE CONVERSATION

Universities are much bigger than secondary schools, so you'll have far more ways to meet people. Feeling overwhelmed at first is completely normal, especially if you're neurodivergent.



Whatever feels authentic to you makes finding your community less intimidating.



Emily's Insights:

Please just roll with the awkwardness – sometimes making that first step feels awkward and weird, and there is fear of rejection, but more often than not it can lead to a lovely conversation and blossom into friendship and community.

A good way to take a friendship from just saying hi to becoming proper friends is looking at an event you would like to go to together or agreeing to go for a coffee or eat lunch together after a lecture.

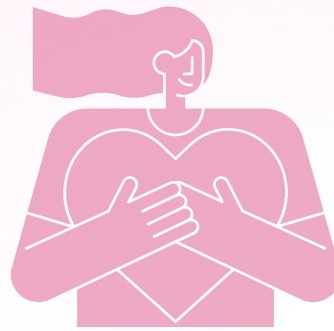
4. ALONE DOES NOT MEAN LONELY

Your first weeks are a lot: new people, activities, and deadlines all at once. Staying busy to dodge FOMO is tempting, but a few nights in won't cost you friendships.



Being well-rested helps you show up as your true self.

5. THE PRACTICAL ASPECTS



Uni admin can feel especially overwhelming if you're trans or genderqueer navigating transition-related paperwork, especially alongside neurodivergence or disability. When anxiety hits, step back, try breathing, a body scan, or reaching out to a friend.



You don't have to throw yourself into anything while feeling dysregulated.



Emily's Insights:

Most Student Unions have free, confidential, impartial Advice Services that tend to be more queer-friendly and understanding than other University services can sometimes be. Advisors can help you understand complex policies and procedures and help you challenge any decisions made by the University that you feel are discriminatory and unfair.

Created by Caitlin Newman, Undergraduate Student and Emily from Salford University Student Union Welfare Team

You've Arrived: A 10-Point Action Plan

Here are practical steps to help you settle in, find steady ground, and look after your mental health this year, built with care, in consultation with therapists and coaches.

Build your "landing crew" in week one

1

Join at least one LGBTQIA+ society or group before freshers' weekend; don't wait to feel "ready." Community isn't a nice-to-have; it's a protective factor against isolation and mental health decline. If your uni's group feels wrong, try a city-wide LGBTQIA+ young adults' group instead.

Find your two anchors: one professional, one personal



Identify a named contact in student wellbeing services and one trusted person (friend, family, mentor) you'll check in with regularly. Do this in the first fortnight, before you need it, not in crisis.

2



3

Come out on your own timeline, at your own pace

You don't owe anyone your story on day one. Test the waters in low-stakes settings first. Being selectively out to some people and not others is a valid, sustainable strategy, not a failure of authenticity.

Name your “safe and unsafe” spaces early

Within the first month, mentally map which spaces on campus feel affirming versus which ones make you brace yourself. This isn't paranoia; it's practical energy management. Where you study, socialise, and relax should include at least one place that fully feels like yours.

4



Watch for “minority stress” burnout, not just generic stress

5

The extra cognitive load of navigating pronouns, assumptions, or explaining yourself repeatedly is real and tiring, even without a single hostile incident. Build in recovery time after socially demanding days, just as you'd rest after a workout.

Keep one thread to home identity alive

Whatever grounded you before- uni, chosen family, an old friend, a community, a hobby tied to your queer identity, keep a thread to it. New environments can pressure you to reinvent yourself entirely; you don't have to discard what already worked.

6

Learn the difference between healthy adaptation and masking

7

Adjusting communication style to different rooms is a normal social skill. Constantly suppressing who you are to avoid discomfort is masking, and it has a cost. Check in with yourself weekly: am I adapting, or am I hiding?

Set a “check the pulse” ritual

Weekly or fortnightly, ask yourself: sleep, appetite, mood, connection, motivation, any two dropping together for two-plus weeks is your cue to reach out, not push through. Use a simple 1–5 rating so you can spot trends, not just bad days.

8

Know your escalation ladder before you need it



9

Write down, now, what you'd do at each stage:

mild dip → self-care tools;

ongoing low mood → wellbeing service

or LGBTQIA+-specific counselling;

crisis → the urgent help section at the front of this guide.

Deciding this in advance removes decision fatigue when you're already struggling.

Redefine “making the most of it” on your own terms



10

University success isn't attending every social or performing constant resilience. Some terms will be about survival and consolidation, not thriving, and that's still making the most of it. Permit yourself to have quieter periods without treating them as failure.



Two gentle 5-minute practices to help steady you when anxiety or low mood shows up- rooted in coaching and nervous-system science.

Here's the link: [Exercises](#)



For a closer look at ten questions students commonly raise around identity, anxiety and belonging- the kind that come up in quiet moments, new friendships, or first weeks somewhere unfamiliar.

Find the full answers here: [Q&A](#)

FURTHER SUPPORT



If you need support that is not urgent, but you would like some help with:

➤ Your GP can refer you to NHS Talking Therapies (IAPT) for counselling or CBT, refer you to secondary care mental health teams if needed, and provide fit notes, medication, and continuity of care.

➤ Your uni's counselling service, self-refer via the student portal.

➤ **Queerwell:** www.queerwell.org.uk

[@wearequeerwell](https://twitter.com/wearequeerwell)

Check upcoming events:

<https://www.tickettailor.com/events/queerwell>



National: Q-Time- live online workshops and question-time sessions.

London: Sunday Sanctuary- a psychologically safe space for workshops, playshops, company and belonging to ensure and restore your mental wellbeing.

Manchester: Sunday Sanctuary Manchester- starting October 18th

➤ Student Minds:
<https://www.studentminds.org.uk/>

➤ Switchboard LGBT+ Helpline: 0800 0119 100 (10 am–10 pm)
<https://switchboard.lgbt/>

➤ Nightline: student-run night listening service
(check your university's local branch)

queerwell



SUPPORT IN AN EMERGENCY

If someone or you is in immediate distress, at risk of harm to themselves or others, or experiencing a mental health emergency:

- Call **999** if you think a life is at risk.
- Call **111** and choose option-2
- Go to your nearest **A&E** department; most have a 24/7 Mental Health Liaison Team who can assess and support.
- **NHS Mental Health Crisis Line (24/7)**
Find your local number at NHS Mental Health Helpline



Free, confidential helplines (24/7 unless noted)

- Samaritans **116 123**, for anyone in distress or needing to talk, day or night
- Shout Crisis Text Line: text **85258**, free confidential text support with trained volunteers
- **Mind Infoline:**
0300 123 3393: information and guidance on mental health support and services
- **NHS:**
111 (option 2) for urgent mental health support and crisis advice



Switchboard LGBTQ+ Helpline:

0800 0119 100 (10 am–10 pm), or chat online at <https://switchboard.lgbt>

If someone feels unsafe but not in immediate danger



Stay with them in person or via phone/text.



Help them call Samaritans (116 123) or text Shout (85258).



Remove access to anything that could cause harm.



Encourage them to go to a safe place: a friend's home, an open public space, or A&E if they feel unsafe alone.

For further information on Trans and Non-binary, Black, Brown, and People of Colour support services, and more, please see our support directory in the [Queer Hub](#).

A Final Word



You don't have to have this figured out by week two, or even by year one. Struggling sometimes doesn't mean you're doing university "wrong,"; it means you're human.

Reach out early, keep your people close, and be as kind to yourself as you would be to a friend going through the same thing.

Don't forget to explore our Resource Hub for even more information:

[**Queer Hub**](#)

Acknowledgements





Your Community-led LGBTQIA+ Mental Health and Wellbeing Charity

Registered Charity Number: **1210152**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

- Bobby Jones (Associate Practitioner, Queerwell)
- Caitlin Newman (Communications Intern, Queerwell)
- Emily Lovett (Connections Lead, Salford University)
- Tim Spoor (Chief Executive, Queerwell)
- Amulya Divakar (Design, Queerwell)

© Queerwell Charity 2026

Content may be reused with credit to Queerwell Charity