HELPING AN OTEN TVET STUDENT: WHAT CAN PARENTS / CAREGIVERS DO?

What is TVET?
TVET stands for TAFE-delivered Vocational Education and Training. This means that the student is studying, through a TAFE Institute, a Vocational Education and Training (VET) course that counts towards their HSC. Studying courses like this gives students a head start, by making them more “work-ready” and more suitable for potential employers.

What is OTEN?
The Open Training and Education Network - Distance Education (OTEN) is aligned with Western Sydney TAFE Institute. When a student undertakes a TVET course through OTEN, they are taught by teachers who are also specialists in distance education. When students study through OTEN, they study in their own time, using printed or online materials, and are supported online or by e-mail, telephone, fax and mail contact with their OTEN teachers.

The OTEN TVET Teacher
A teacher will be allocated to each TVET student. This teacher will be the student’s main contact person for the duration of the course. Within a few days of enrolment, the student will receive a welcome letter from the teacher, which will contain the assessment schedule for the course, and the dates on which assignments are due throughout the year. This letter is followed up with a phone call to the student from the TVET teacher, during which the teacher and the student discuss the most effective ways of keeping in regular contact.

Learning materials
The student will have a package of learning materials mailed to them. Although OTEN can break down the package into “chunks” for TVET students, the size of this package may look rather daunting at first. If the student has not studied by distance education before, you may need to give them some reassurance and encouragement. Encourage them to break down the course into bite size chunks.
**Assignments**
An OTEN student will have a number of assignments to do during the course. Your support and encouragement will really help, especially for that first assignment. It is the first assignment that is often the biggest hurdle for any OTEN student. It takes some getting used to distance education. The hardest thing to do is to actually get started. You can help the student to do this by allocating a time to sit down and go through the work, giving small rewards (not necessarily financial) for completing an assignment, encouraging and motivating the student, setting achievable goals.

**Practicals/workshops**
Some TVET courses have practical aspects to them that may be conducted at a venue away from the student’s home. This may require the student to be away from home for some days during the year. Be aware that this can be a trying time for both the student and their family as routines may be disrupted. The student will be informed of any practical requirements and workshops, the venue and approximate timing of these, early in the course.

**Work placement**
Some TVET courses have a work placement component that students must do in order to satisfy the Board of Studies requirements for the HSC. When they enrol, students will be informed whether or not a work placement is part of their course. TVET teachers will use the Workplace Learning Coordinators in the local region where the student lives, to find suitable work placements. If students have contacts in the industry in which they are studying, they are able to organise their own placement. In some instances, TVET students need to travel and stay away from home for some days during the year, to undertake their work placement.

**Exams**
Some OTEN TVET courses have written exams. As with most exams, this may be stressful for the student. You may need to give extra consideration and support over the exam revision periods. Most people cope with the stress of exams, but extra support is available through OTEN if needed. Contact the TVET teacher, to discuss any extra assistance that may be needed.
**Time**
As well as being timetabled for their TVET course during the school day, as with most other subjects an OTEN TVET student will need to put aside a certain amount of time each week, and probably each night, for study. Occasionally, students may need to put in extra study time, especially if an assignment is due or an exam is coming up.
Everyone has their “best” times when they find it easier to study. Some students may find it easier to study in the early evening, others after they have had a break from the day, while others may study best in the early hours of the morning.
You and the student may need to negotiate how to fit in both study and other shared activities and responsibilities.

**Organisation**
Students will need to have a place to keep their learning materials together and a study ‘space’ that is relatively quiet and free of distractions.
It need not be anything elaborate, simply a book-shelf or a box for books and a quiet space with a table or desk.

**Stress**
There are ways in which you can help to help take pressure off the student. Here are some suggestions:
- Offer to read through an assignment after the student has drafted or completed it. Ensure you tell the student you are reading it through so that you can offer constructive suggestions.
- Make sure any children in the house are occupied at critical study times
- Help organise the student’s rest and relaxation times.
- Advise the student to go for a walk or exercise.

**Motivation**
At some point most students begin to wonder if it’s all worth it. Your role could be to ask them to think about why they chose to do the course in the first place and check if it is still an important goal. Sometimes the right decision will be to take time out, and that’s fine. Students will need to let their TVET teacher know and are welcome to re-enrol in the course whenever they are ready.
**Seeking help**

Some students find it difficult to seek help when they are stuck. Their teacher is there to provide help, but students may need encouragement to contact the teacher. Remind them that this is what their teachers and other student support staff are there for! The student’s school will be in touch with OTEN, so the student may be assured that both the student’s base school and OTEN staff are working together in the best interests of the student.

**The Pay-off**

The final goal of an OTEN TVET student is to finish the course and receive their award. However, many students will achieve their personal goals well before this in terms of their own learning, development and satisfaction. Students may also have the opportunity to receive their awards at OTEN’s Annual Awards Night ceremony. This is a special occasion and it is their chance, and ours, to say thank you for all the support and encouragement you have given them throughout their course.

**Further help**

At any time, you or the TVET student can get help and advice from OTEN staff. After enrolling, the first point of contact should always be the student’s TVET teacher. However, if that person is not available or if the query relates to a non-study issue, please contact:

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