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# YOUR GO-TO GUIDE TO ATTENDING (AND SURVIVING) A CONFERENCE



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# SO YOU'RE GOING TO A CONFERENCE

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## NOW WHAT?

Attending a conference can be daunting, whether this is your first one or you've been to plenty before.

You can expect long days filled with social activities, networking events and learning opportunities in a large, busy space alongside lots of other people from different roles and backgrounds.

Whether you're attending by yourself as an individual, part of a team or as a representative of an entire organisation, it's normal to feel nervous or overwhelmed before, during or even after a conference. But remember, conferences are also places of opportunity.

You'll learn new things, meet new people and can make new friends and networking contacts – don't forget that most people attending the conference are there because they share the same passion as you!

This guide will provide tips and tricks to support young people and anyone who may be feeling a little anxious about attending a conference. The information in this guide has been compiled by and contributed to by Orygen bursary recipients based on their experiences attending the 5th International Conference on Youth Mental Health in Brisbane, Australia in November 2019.

Produced by Orygen in 2020.

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### Disclaimer

This information is not medical advice. It is generic and does not take into account your personal circumstances, physical wellbeing, mental status or mental requirements. Do not use this information to treat or diagnose your own or another person's medical condition and never ignore medical advice or delay seeking it because of something in this information. Any medical questions should be referred to a qualified healthcare professional. If in doubt, please always seek medical advice.



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### GET IN TOUCH

IF YOU'D LIKE MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ORYGEN, PLEASE CALL (03) 9966 9100 OR SEND AN EMAIL TO [INFO@ORYGEN.ORG.AU](mailto:INFO@ORYGEN.ORG.AU)

[ORYGEN.ORG.AU](http://ORYGEN.ORG.AU)

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# WHAT TO EXPECT

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## BEFORE

It's normal to feel a mix of nervous and excited, especially if this is your first conference.

In the lead-up to the conference, you can expect to receive updates from the conference organisers to remind you about special events happening before, during and after the conference; updates to the program; new speaker announcements; event apps; and anything else you might need to be aware of.

“The most valuable thing I brought was my laptop so I could watch Netflix to unwind after each massive day.”

“I'm glad that I brought a portable charger because I used my phone so much to film, take photos, tweet, etc.”

## PACKING

- A portable charger
- Comfy shoes
- A book, laptop, or something else that will help you wind down at the end of each day
- Water bottle – hydration is key!
- A mix of casual, night time and conference outfits will have you covered for everything and anything
- Most importantly, make sure you pack the things that will make you the most comfortable!

## PLANNING

Plan ahead! Before you arrive, have a look at the conference program to decide which speakers and presentations you might like to see; we guarantee there'll be heaps you want to check out – so it's good to plan ahead and prioritise your sessions.

If you're attending a conference in a place you've never been before, take time to research what else is near the conference venue or your accommodation.

“I didn't allow time in my travels to explore before or after the conference. I would have liked to see more.”

“[Before the conference] I felt really excited at the prospect of meeting like-minded people from around the world... I was also nervous because it was my first conference and I wasn't sure what it would be like or what to expect.”



# DURING

## NETWORKING

Multi-day conferences will usually host networking events in the evening, or opening and closing events at or nearby the conference venue. Networking events are a great way to meet people, make connections within your field/industry, and reflect on the conference with other attendees.

“Approaching people in a networking or professional setting isn’t actually that daunting.”

“Be confident in your knowledge and expertise as a young person. If you have something you want to contribute, speak up!”

“Don’t be afraid to talk to people, get their contact details and network! If you saw a great presentation, don’t be scared to talk to them and let them know you enjoyed it. They’ll love to hear it and you’ll have a new friend!!”



## WHAT TO ATTEND

Plenary sessions, keynote addresses or presentations, and opening and closing ceremonies are attended by everyone; whereas with concurrent sessions, you can choose which ones you go to. Keep in mind that you don’t have to stick to one concurrent session the entire time; you can float around and attend multiple to make the most of the sessions.

If the conference is being held by a body or association, they may use the conference to also hold their annual general meeting (AGM). Attendance at the AGM is optional – unless you’re told otherwise.

## TAKING ON CONFERENCE ROLES

You may have been given a role at a conference, or be presenting on a topic.

For instance, chairing a session is a common role for conference attendees to take on. In this role you are generally responsible for introducing speakers, facilitating question time and ensuring that speakers keep to the time set for the room.

Whatever role you take on, expectations can be different for each conference, so be sure to try and meet others who are taking on a similar role (e.g. your co-chair, if you have one), or ask at reception to speak to a conference organiser if you are not sure what to do. Also make sure to visit the room you will be in beforehand, to see the layout and know where you need to be.

Taking on an official role can be a rewarding experience with the right preparation!

## STAYING WELL

Conferences are busy places; every day you get to meet new people, learn new things, be inspired by great ideas and intrigued by others. There are presentations, workshops, networking events – safe to say, there’s heaps going on and it’s easy to get caught up in the experience!

It is therefore important to check in with yourself every now and again and take time out if you need to. Remember, you aren’t required to attend absolutely everything.

Some conferences will have a ‘chill out’ space or similar, where you can sit down and take a break if you need it.

“I found it important to take some time alone as we were surrounded by people for up to twelve hours each day. I went for a walk in the morning or caught up on some Netflix in the evening for some quiet time.”

“Write a list of things you enjoy doing so that you can recognise the tools you need to make yourself feel better if you’re not feeling well. Try to use tools that take five to ten minutes, such as colouring, gratitude journaling, going for a walk or meditating.”



# AFTER

## CHECKING IN WITH YOURSELF

Most people return home from conferences feeling motivated and ready to tackle challenges with a fresh batch of ideas. However, as with any time away from home, it's important to allow yourself some time to settle back into your routine.

Remember the tools you came up with to stay well during the conference? They'll come in handy after the conference too.

“ I was exhausted [after the conference]. My social butterfly died and it took a while to get a new one.”

“ It took at least a day for me to settle back into my routine and focus on the world in front of me.”

“ [After the conference] I felt inspired and ready to try some things differently in my work.”

“ I felt relieved to be in the comfort of my home and to see my family again. But I also felt disappointed that [the conference] was over so quickly.”

“ I realised I wanted to return to uni to study more.”

## MEETING OBLIGATIONS (CONFERENCE-RELATED OR OTHERWISE)

If you were sponsored to attend the conference, you may come home to some responsibilities. It is common to be asked to contribute to your sponsor organisation in some small way when you return. Some organisations might ask you to write a blog post about the conference, give a presentation about your experience, or even help write a resource for other young people attending a conference! This should have been communicated to you before the conference. Some other things you can do post-conference include:

- Contact any networks you made during the conference to touch base.
- Reach out to any presenters you enjoyed but didn't get a chance to speak with.
- Complete any conference evaluations or feedback surveys.
- Reflect on your experience.

# HELP SEEKING

If you require support before, during or after the conference, please reach out to the supports around you or contact one of the services below.

If the situation is an emergency, please call 000.

If you wish to speak to someone immediately who can help call:

### Kids Helpline

1800 55 1800  
www.kidshelpline.com.au

### Lifeline Australia

13 11 14  
www.lifeline.org.au

