

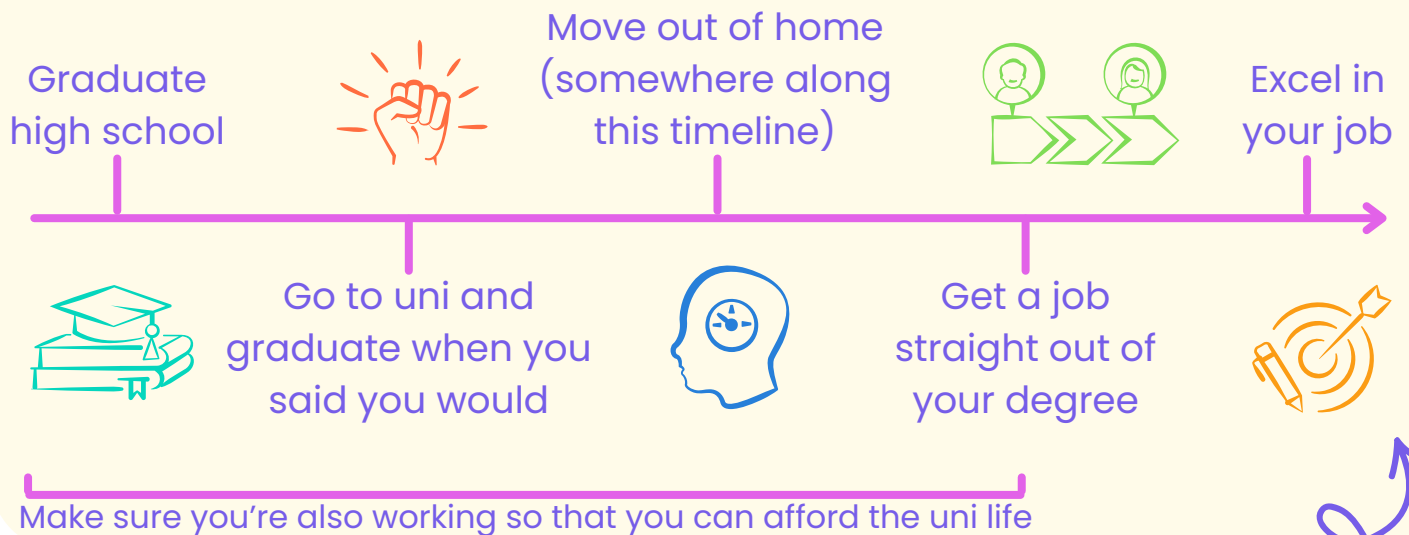
Feeling behind in life

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This is for anyone who has ever felt “behind” in life, because trust me, you are not alone! Navigating your teenage years and twenties can be difficult.

It often feels like there’s this “*perfect*” timeline or journey that you’re *supposed* to follow... but why? And how??

The “*Perfect*” Life Timeline



The reality is that *most people's lives do not follow this "perfect" timeline*

Nonetheless, 18 year old me thought that I'd follow the 'perfect' timeline. I finished school, went to uni, was studying full time, working a hospitality job, and trying to maintain the social connections and “party life” that uni students are known for. But this so called 'perfect' timeline was not working for me.

Over the next few years my timeline strayed so far from what I imagined...

At times I was annoyed and scared of what other people were thinking. But ultimately, I'm proud of where I am today and how much I've made it through. I think younger Zoe would be proud of me too



My Realistic Life Timeline

2021: • graduated high school



2022: • started uni

- dropped to part-time uni
- discovered I was queer and met my girlfriend
- dropped out of uni and quit my job because I was really struggling with my mental health



2023: • focussed on my mental health

- ventured into the advocacy space and joined two youth/mental health advisory boards based on my psychologist's recommendation



2024: • started TAFE

- commenced work placement
- mental health took a down turn and I dropped out of TAFE
- (tried to) radically accept that my mental health challenges were likely going to be part of my journey for my whole life

2025: • went back to TAFE to study a different course (Cert. IV Mental Health Peer Work) – and loved it!

- did some cool research consultations
- offered a LIVED EXPERIENCE RESEARCHER job (literally so wild)
- successfully started and finished work placement
- offered a Peer Work job where I did work placement



2026: • working 1 day a week as a Lived Experience Researcher

- working 2 days a week as a Peer Worker
- member of awesome mental health advisory boards/groups



Chapters of my *Realistic* Life Timeline

Leaving uni

After leaving uni, I remember seeing countless Instagram posts of people at parties or out clubbing with their new friends and feeling like I was missing out.

"Maybe if I'd stayed at uni longer, I would've gotten more into it."

But the reality was I didn't even like partying!

Euro summer (or my lack of one)

Then the Euro summers started hitting my feed. While my focus was on my mental health, the whole rest of the world seemed to be sunbaking on picturesque islands *#notanisa good tan* (or at least that's what I told myself as the sunburn pictures hit my feed). It felt like I was missing out on a fundamental milestone of my twenties. After all, "your twenties are the only time that you'll have the flexibility to go adventuring". Right...? Not quite.

Internal shame about TAFE

Although I consider myself open-minded, I felt embarrassed and slightly ashamed admitting to others that I studied at TAFE. Despite championing others who studied at TAFE, personally, it felt like I ended up at TAFE because I'd "failed" at uni. But the reality is, TAFE is often a *more accessible* form of tertiary education, *offers courses that unis don't* provide and is often *much quicker* to complete than a uni degree (which felt waaaaay out of reach to me).

Watching other people graduate

Slowly the graduation posts started infiltrating social media and Linked In. That's when I really started feeling like I was behind. How was it that people had travelled the world, completed degrees, made new friends, learnt new languages and were getting "real" jobs, while I was trying to hype myself up to brush my teeth ([check out my other blog post about self-care hacks HERE](#)) and stay out of hospital?



Where I thought I'd be **vs** where I actually am

The dream was that this year I was supposed to have my own classroom... I was supposed to be decorating a kindy class with cute décor and planning fun art activities for the little cherubs that would run in each morning to say "hi Miss W-B". Or at least that was the plan. But instead of starting 2026 with a completed Bachelors and a fulltime job as a primary school teacher, I have a girlfriend I love, a new assistance dog Ari, two supportive and flexible jobs where I get to empower people on their own mental health journeys, a small group of amazing friends, and a strong sense of who I am and what I stand for.

Grieving the life I planned

There's a part of me that still grieves the life that high school me had planned, and what I missed out on because of my mental health, AND that's okay! What I've come to learn is that **very few people's lives go to plan.**

Reminders and words of wisdom

It is perfectly okay to:

- leave school and get a job
- have time off after school before studying or working
- take longer to complete your studies than it says
- change what you want to study or do for work
- fall out of touch with school friends who you thought you'd be besties with forever
- have a small group of friends
- not like drinking or partying
- not travel overseas in your twenties

There is no 'right' path.

There is no 'right' timeline.

You are doing a great job!



You are exactly where you need to be right now.

Sending you calm and content vibes,
Zoe