

HOMESICKNESS

Beginning life at University naturally produces feelings of anxiety as well as excitement. Concerns about the move, the course and meeting new people invariably generate apprehension. For many, these feelings are quickly overcome as they adapt to the new environment. For others the transition can take longer and develop into a feeling of homesickness where there is a preoccupation with thoughts of home. There may be a yearning for and a grieving over people, places and routines left behind.

Sometimes the feelings of homesickness can be overwhelming. You may feel isolated, tearful and anxious. You may notice an increase in feelings of depression. Perhaps you can't sleep and have lost your appetite or are drinking excessively. You may experience increased anxiety, obsessive thoughts and minor physical ailments. It may be hard to strike a balance between spending too much time on your own and being overly busy in order to avoid being on your own. You may feel shaken and lonely and long for the secure and familiar.

It is really important to realise that you are not the only one feeling homesick and it is a normal and common reaction to the transition to University. Whilst some students feel homesick on arrival, others will be fine initially and then, to their surprise, find themselves feeling homesick later in the academic year, perhaps after the Christmas break or on their return for the second year. This can happen to students even if they have successfully left home before.

What factors affect homesickness?

Some factors can make the transition to University harder and may contribute to a student's vulnerability to homesickness:

- The distance away from home
- A sense of anti-climax at finally having arrived at University
- Whether the student was responsible for the decision to come to University
- Doubts about the course or choice of University
- Unhappiness due to expectations not being met
- Relationships at home
- Whether family members at home are well and happy
- The amount of control a student has over their environment

What might help?

1. Believe that the feelings will pass. They almost always do. Homesickness is not unusual and it can be conquered!
2. Share your feelings. Talk to others who are probably feeling the same as you. (You can't read their minds, just like they can't read yours!) If you haven't yet made friends, talk to a tutor, supervisor, chaplain or counsellor
3. Give yourself time to adjust. You don't have to get everything right straight away
4. Decide whether the best policy for you is to have frequent contact with home (because it makes you feel better) or less contact (because it makes you feel worse)
5. Think carefully about whether to go home at weekends (if this is possible). Some students feel it helps but also give yourself time within the University to get involved. Don't let looking back hinder moving forward
6. Encourage friends and family to come and see you in your new setting
7. Remember, you are allowed to feel sad and homesick. And you are allowed to enjoy yourself – it isn't being disloyal to those you miss!
8. Make a real effort to join societies/activities and to make at least one or two new friends. This may be difficult at first, but the more you feel part of campus life the less homesick you will feel
9. Volunteer to help with something – there are plenty of groups looking for volunteers. Ask the Students' Union, they will put you in touch with someone if you are looking for ways to get involved
10. Get enough food and sleep. These affect us emotionally as well as physically
11. Try to establish a routine as soon as possible and ensure a healthy balance between work and leisure. You are NOT expected to work all the time, you would soon burn out. On the other hand, if you don't set enough time aside for work, you can very quickly fall behind, which will add to your stresses

Most people come through times of homesickness and go on to do well and enjoy their time at the University. Sometimes it can be right to leave and take another direction. Check out that you really do want to stay at this University studying this subject at this time. Your tutor may be able to help you decide.

Homesickness can resurface at any time during your studies, but if it persists and stops you from doing normal social and academic activities, contact the Counselling Service to arrange an appointment.

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