

Homesickness

Leaving home, very often for the first time, can be daunting. There are lots of mixed emotions. Coming away is something you may have looked forward to for a long time and it may come as a surprise that you are feeling homesick.

Missing family and friends is a natural reaction, felt by many people.

Moving away to university is a time of transition. Suddenly, instead of being an important member of a small unit of people, with familiar routines and activities, it can feel that you have become an anonymous person in perhaps the biggest community you've ever lived in. You may also feel that the relationship between you and your family changes dramatically.

Paradoxically homesickness can often 'hit' after Christmas, in the second semester, when you come back after the break and the newness of university life has worn off.

Causes

You've taken a big step in leaving home and coming away to study. The impact of this decision may hit in the form of homesickness. You have left all that is familiar and come away to work in a new and much larger environment.

Beliefs about homesickness

These are some of the thoughts which people often have when they are homesick:

- I'm the only one suffering like this
- Feeling like this means that I must be weak/childish/inadequate
- I've lost part of my identity
- I've made the wrong decision to come away
- I'm going to get it all wrong
- Nobody is going to like me here
- I'm not going to fit in at all

It's important to recognise that these thoughts may be affecting the way you are feeling. Can you change these negative thoughts into more positive and realistic ones? E.g.:

- Other people will be feeling like this
- Feeling like this is quite a natural view of the change in my life

Symptoms of homesickness

These are normal symptoms of homesickness:

- Tearfulness
- Sadness
- Anxiety or panic
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Loneliness or feeling isolated
- Feeling out of control

- Feeling more irritable than normal/less tolerant of others
- Being angry with parents or family members
- Jealousy of siblings at home
- Changes in sleeping patterns – not being able to sleep or sleeping too much and hiding away in bed
- Changes in eating patterns – overeating or not eating enough
- Feeling generally unwell or sick
- Not being able to concentrate or focus
- Using drugs or alcohol to block things out

Things that hinder

The list below may highlight things that are making you feel worse:

- Not admitting that you feel homesick to yourself or anyone else
- Being unfamiliar with your surroundings
- Bottling up your feelings instead of talking it through with friends, family or a counsellor
- Isolating yourself from others
- Avoiding contact with home
- Too much contact with home
- Going home too often so you never feel settled in one place
- Not going home enough so you feel you are losing contact with those you love back home

Things that help

By beginning to take control of small things you can start to help yourself feel better.

Begin with small manageable goals. Think of little things that you could do to alleviate some of the symptoms of homesickness. Only you really know what makes you feel better but there here is a list of things that others have found worthwhile:

- Bring small things from home that make you feel comfortable in your surroundings
- Familiarise yourself with campus and city, so that it begins to feel like home
- Try joining in some of the clubs and activities. Although you may not feel like it, this may add to a sense of belonging
- A lot of people will be in the same boat as you, so perhaps you could make the first offer of friendship in your halls
- Try and keep long term goals in mind; this will help you remember the point of it all
- The Student Union is a good place to keep yourself informed about what's happening in the university.

Homesickness is a normal and real feeling. If you think that you would like to talk to someone then please contact the Student Counselling and Mental Health Service via email cmh@worc.ac.uk or phone 01905 54 2832. The Services' web page (www.worc.ac.uk/counselling) gives more information and tells you how to make an appointment.

The Services are located in Woodbury Building on the St John's Campus.