

Student Counseling Services

[Outreach & Consultative](#)

[Services](#)

[Services](#)

[Guerrilla Theatre Troupe](#)

[Workshops](#)

[Requesting Workshops](#)

[Classes Offered](#)

[Self-help Topics](#)

["Coping with College" Articles](#)

[SCS Home](#)

Coping with College Series

Homesickness Won't Last Forever

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Student Counseling Services

So, you're sitting in your dorm room, alone, on a Friday night. Your roommate is out and your dorm floor seems deserted. Sitting there, listening to music, you can't stop thinking about your friends from home, your family, your old room, your dog. You feel completely alone and somewhat depressed. What's going on?

These can be early signs of homesickness. Though homesickness is very difficult to endure, most of most everyone has experienced it at some time in their lives.

Homesickness is a common reaction to being uprooted and moving away from all that is comfortable and familiar. Just when you had established yourself at home, had a wonderful group of friends, things to do on the weekends, a mom to take care of you, all of a sudden you have to go to college. Wham! You find yourself in a strange place where you don't know anyone! You have to live in a cubicle with a total stranger, eat food that is definitely not mom's, even learn to do your own laundry. This kind of transition is bound to cause some distress.

What can one expect to feel when he or she is homesick? Well, loneliness seems to come with the territory. Moving to a place where you don't know anyone is bound to be a lonely experience at first. Along with this loneliness may come some feelings of depression. It may be hard to feel upbeat and happy when you are alone much of the time and are pressed to try and meet people. Similarly, the need to make new friendships and meet new people can cause stress for some individuals. This may be the first time in your life you have to make the effort to make friendships. This can cause doubts about self-esteem and self-worth. And if that is not enough, there is the additional pressure of higher demands from your college course work and professors who don't know you to add even more stress and anxiety to your already confusing feelings. Even good students can feel unsettled as they confront the need to "prove themselves" all over again.

Yet, there is a positive side to homesickness - it represents growth. You are trying new things, placing yourself in the unfamiliar and it is a stretch to accommodate all the change. Remember, no pain, no gain? Maybe that fits here. Chances are that in time you will meet people and make friends but it takes time.

While homesickness will, in most cases, cure itself, there are some strategies that may help speed up the process. The most important thing to do is to get involved in your new home. One of the best ways to do that is to meet people. You may want to try low risk behaviors such as dropping by a neighbor's open door near dinner time in the residence hall to see if they'd like to go down and eat together. Talking with people after class, going to floor activities, or joining a club on campus can also be really quick ways of meeting people. It can be difficult to be "outgoing like packing up and moving home, but some small steps toward building friends are important. The more social

opportunities you place yourself in, the better your chances of meeting people and making friends.

One question often asked is, does it help to go home on the weekends or should I just tough it out at school. The answer to that really depends on how much you are hurting, and how much energy you are investing in your new home. If you're having trouble concentrating, listless and sad, maybe a brief visit home, or a phone call would help you gently adjust. However it is usually a mistake to run off campus every chance you get since this prevents you from ever making friends for yourself here. Finding a balance is important as you honor your feelings of loss, while also trying to get established at school.

For most people, homesickness is a concern that lasts only briefly. For others however, these symptoms may not go away. When feelings like this persist, it may be a sign that there are other cause-s and concerns operating. If you find that your feelings are more than just homesickness, it is important to talk to someone and get help. Talking to a friend or family member may help you to handle your feelings, and counselors are available at the Student Counseling Center to provide individual or group services. Making the transition to college life is not always easy, but with some strategies and support it can be successful.

▲ BACK TO THE TOP ▲

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