

Homesickness

What is homesickness?

Most people feel homesick at some time in their lives, perhaps when they were younger, and it is easy to forget just how overwhelming it can be.

Beginning your experience here at the University of North Florida may generate excitement and anxiety about the move, academics, or meeting new people. Some students will quickly overcome this apprehension as they adapt to a new environment. For other students, the transition takes longer and sometimes emerges as homesickness; homesickness can be a preoccupation with home-focused thoughts. Students yearn for and grieve over the loss of what is familiar and secure: family and friends, places and routines, and the realization that family life continues without you.

If you are homesick, you may notice an increase in depressed feelings, anxiety, obsessive thoughts, or even minor physical ailments. Some students may feel mildly depressed and anxious several weeks before leaving home, in anticipation of the impending change. Others may find themselves feeling homesick later in the academic year, even after Winter break or the start of their second year. But commonly it is the first few days or weeks after arriving at university which are the most difficult.

Vulnerability to homesickness is affected by:

- The distance from home
- A sense of anticlimax at finally arriving at college after working towards it for so long
- Whether the student was responsible for the decision to attend the college
- Unhappiness due to expectations of college being met
- Job strain (work overload and low control over it)
- Whether family members at home are well and happy
- Contrast in lifestyle

Those who are homesick often feel they have no control over their environment, and that they are not identified with it or committed to the university or their place in it.

Transition to College

There are two tasks involved in starting college:

1. Leaving familiar things, people and places,
2. Adapting to new things, people and places.

Individuals have different levels of tolerance to change and have learned different ways of coping with new situations. But what can make transition so hard? In a familiar place, people generally feel accepted and secure. Away from the familiar, they are without their usual sources of support, and in unfamiliar surroundings, their tried and tested methods of coping and working are challenged.

What might help?

1. Talk to someone. If you haven't yet made friends here, then try a counselor, your RA, your roommate, or a professor.
2. Maintain relationships with those you left at home. Arrange times to go back and visit, perhaps after a few weeks. Don't forget, though, to give yourself time to get involved here. Don't let looking back actually hinder moving forward.
3. Encourage friends and family to come and see you in your new setting (for example, during Parents and Family Weekend).
4. Remember that many other people will have similar feelings, although you may assume that they are doing fine! (You can't read their minds - just as they can't read yours!)
5. You are allowed to feel sad and homesick! But you are also allowed to enjoy yourself - it isn't being disloyal to those you miss!
6. Be realistic about what to expect from student life and from yourself. Establish a balance between work and leisure. You don't have to work ALL the time; you would soon burn out. On the other hand, if you don't put in enough time on work, you can very quickly get behind, which only adds to the stresses!
7. If work too difficult, try to improve your study skills or your organization of time and work. There may be people in your classes or in your residence hall that can help in this area.
8. Remember to get enough food and sleep! These affect us emotionally as well as physically.
9. Make contacts and friends through shared activities such as sport or other interests. Go to programs in your residence hall and on campus. Join a club.
10. Give yourself time to adjust: you don't have to get everything right straight away. Nor do you have to rush into making major decisions about staying or leaving.
11. Check out that you do really want to be at this university, in this college, studying this subject, at this time. Most people come become adjusted to college life and in time, feel less homesick. But for some it can be right to leave and take another direction.
12. If you stop being able to do normal social and academic things, seek professional help either from your doctor or the counseling service. Don't wait until the problems have grown impossibly large!

We hope that some of these suggestions will prove useful. There are many things you can do to help yourself, but don't hesitate in seeking out the help of others. Homesickness is not unusual, and it can be conquered!

Adapted from the University of Cambridge, England.