

**“I WANT TO GO HOME!”  
TIPS FOR BATTLING HOMESICKNESS  
WHEN STUDYING ABROAD**

Studying abroad can be filled with excitement, expectation and adventure. It can also be marked by homesickness, which can often take people by surprise but also make people quite miserable and unsure of themselves.

In our conversations with people struggling to overcome homesickness, we often hear about creative ways people have come up with to manage this transition. One student's ideas are presented below, followed by some other suggestions.

- Be open-minded and curious. Challenge any pre-formed ideas you had of what it would be like. Be active in engaging with the place you've come to, including tourist activities.
- Remember that travel is not always easy. Times of feeling low are part of the normal adjustment to living in a new culture. The 'curve of adjustment' model suggests we often feel initially happy, then go through a period of feeling lonely and unhappy before feeling settled, confident and content.
- Make some connections with people from your own or similar culture, if possible.
- Keep active and healthy – Physical activity often lifts your mood, and eating well and sleeping well will help your body adjust from jetlag and reduce stress.
- Establish some kind of routine so that life takes on a sense of normalcy, and keep busy with extra-curricular activities. Try a completely new activity while you're away!
- Read something fictional or light hearted, even possibly connected to the place you are.
- Keep in touch with friends and family – have regular, planned contact.
- Be intentional about socialising – remember you may need to make more of an effort socially and not rely on it all just falling into place.
- Don't hesitate to talk to a counsellor about your feelings – they will listen objectively and be in your corner. There may be a counselling service at your university or resources in the local community.
- Break up your away period into smaller parts by getting a year planner or calendar so that you can mark off the days until next holidays, first assignment due date, etc. This helps the time go faster.
- Keep busy – check out what extra-curricular activities are available.
- Pick and choose which social events to participate in – you don't have to go to all of them, but it is helpful to go to one or two. Some activities may put less pressure on you to talk to new people, e.g. sports or movies.

## Some other ideas...

- Be kind to yourself – living abroad is a big step and needs some time to adjust to.
- Write down some reminders about why you made the decision to study abroad in the first place – What made this an attractive option? What got you thinking this was the place for you?
- Feeling lonely is a key factor in feeling homesick – even if you are surrounded by lots of people you can still feel lonely. Having planned, intentional contact with friends and family who you know well and who know you well can help this.
- Establishing a regular routine which involves enough sleep, exercise, being outside, eating well and a mixture of social and creative time can help structure your day.
- Observe the times you feel most homesick and notice whether there is a pattern to when it occurs the most – Is it stronger in the evenings? When you're stressed? When there are things going on at home that you can't get to? Noticing a pattern and labelling the feelings as homesickness can help you anticipate and manage times that might be more difficult.
- Keep a journal or scrapbook with thoughts, stories and sketches about your new experiences.
- Experiment with defining some short term goals for while you are away, as well as longer term goals connected to what you hope this experience will bring out for you in different areas of your life – friendships, study, work, leisure, health and wellbeing.
- Make an effort to notice better times and write them down in a gratitude journal – For example, when is the homesickness even a little less strong. What is different at those times? What are you doing? Who are you with? What clues does this give you about how you could strengthen or build on the things that are working?
- Send photos home so that your friends and family have can have some sense of what your everyday life in a new context looks.
- Be safe in using alcohol as being in an unfamiliar environment may place you at greater risk. It is wisest to avoid using drugs as this can lead to an increase in psychological symptoms such as feeling low, unmotivated or paranoid. Also, some countries carry the death penalty for importing, exporting or possession of drugs.
- Make your room your own! Create an environment that's comfortable and familiar.

The **ANU Counselling website** has other resources you might also find useful, including: Listening to our Talking Tip on *Adjusting To Life At ANU For International Students* Plus other relevant information sheets: *Battling homesickness*, *Homesickness while travelling*, *Adjusting to life in Australia*

This handout has been adapted from our general handout on managing homesickness.