

Coping with Homesickness

Perspectives on Homesickness:

From a college-bound Yurok student from Two Rivers: *“To be away from my family is a big thing. I have tons of relatives, at least 80 first cousins alone, and I’m around them constantly. They live within 20 miles of me, and that’s going to be hard to get used to, not having my family around because they support me”* (Fann, 2004).

From a Lakota student in his second year of college: *“I think if you didn’t have some type of support, you wouldn’t make it. Because, you know, we grew up in an extended family, we’re used to being, having lots of our people around us. Our aunts, you know, are all concerned about our welfare and there’s that constant support. You leave that and come to this totally new place”* (Huffman, 2008).

From a Huffington Post parenting blog: *“Homesickness is really about the transition: between two worlds. [College students] are displaced for the moment. They are anxious not just about leaving the familiar, but facing the great unknown. If [a student] is unhappy, it’s not that they are in the wrong place. Until they have located themselves in their new context, they’re not going to feel totally at ease”* (Chansky, 2014).

DISCUSSION: What have your experiences been with being away from home? What is most difficult? What has been helpful in coping with missing and being away from home?

Risks and Protective Factors (Thurber & Walton, 2012)

RISKS	PROTECTIVE FACTORS
Little previous experience away from home	Some experience away from home
Low perceived control	Feeling capable or empowered
High perceived distance from home	Feeling welcome in and connected to the university
High reliance on family	Maintaining connection to home
Feeling unsupported by family	Feeling supported by family
Perceived discrimination	Developing deeper friendships and having people confide in
Social anxiety	Self-compassion
Acculturation stress	Feeling connected to sense-of-self and Native identity

When to Reach Out

Although feeling homesick from time to time is NORMAL and EXPECTED when away from family and friends, you may want to think about taking action to cope if you are experiencing several of the following symptoms:

- difficulty with day-to-day functioning (going to class, doing laundry, spending time with friends or meeting new people, etc.)
- feeling sad or “down” more days than not
- loss of interest in activities that you normally enjoy
- loss of appetite and/or emotional overeating
- sleep problems (whether sleeping too much or too little based on your usual habits)
- low energy or feeling easily worn-out
- feelings of intense worthlessness or guilt
- your mind going “blank,” difficulty concentrating, difficulty making minor decisions
- worries that seem difficult to manage
- increased irritability
- social isolation or feelings of loneliness that don’t seem to improve

Coping Strategies

- Normalize and accept feelings of homesickness— recognize that the feeling itself is common to college students. You are NOT alone!
- Try to think of homesickness as a positive reflection of the loving attachment you have to the people, places, and things at home.
- Stay in touch with home while also making time to forge new relationships and social support.
- Reduce acculturation stress by engaging in the native student community here on campus. Take opportunities to celebrate cultural and religious traditions.
- Understand that you can take steps to feel better. Try: exercising, going to a club meeting, watching a funny movie, or having a heart-to-heart conversation with someone you trust.
- The more you can get invested in and take charge of your college experience, the less homesick you will probably feel. Consider joining a club, participating in the NAS student council, getting a mentor on campus, visiting the student center in Wilson Hall, or attending Talk Circle.
- Remember that treatment for homesickness is a gradual process, not an immediate fix. Make a sustained effort to focus on the positive aspects of the new school, to nurture social connections, to recognize and use your strengths/skills, and to maintain a healthy connection with home.
- You can always make an appointment at Counseling and Psychological Services 406.994.4531

References

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- Thurber, C. A., & Walton, E. A. (2012). Homesickness and adjustment in university students. *Journal Of American College Health, 60*(5), 415-419. doi:10.1080/07448481.2012.673520
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