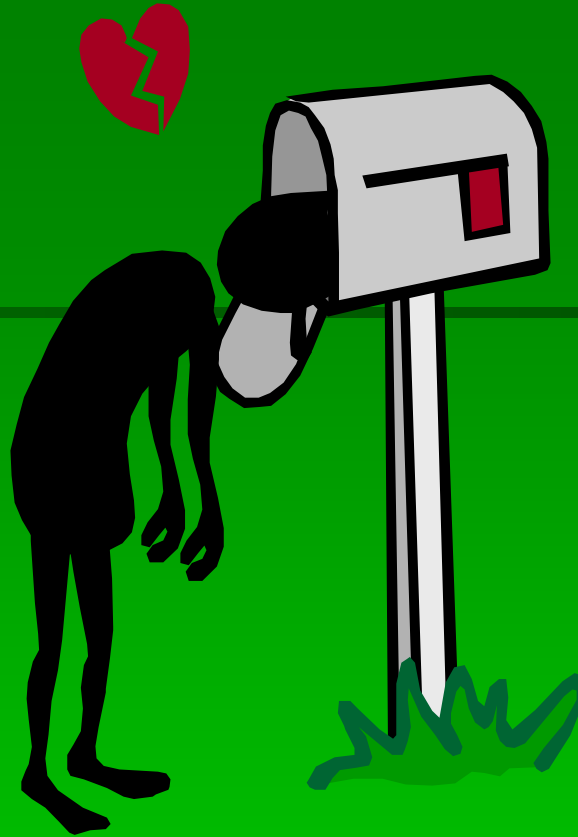


A College Guide to Overcoming **HOMESICKNESS**

Penn State Erie, The Behrend College
Personal Counseling





Main Entry: **home-sick**

Pronunciation: 'hOm-"sik

Function: *adjective*

: longing for home and family while absent from them

- **home-sick-ness** *noun*

Symptoms of Homesickness

- Feelings of anxiety about separation from loved ones.
- Anxiety about one's performance.
- Feelings of isolation and loneliness.
- Feeling different from others we think are having a good time.
- Feeling depressed/sad with low motivation to study or make friends.
- Yearning for a connection to someone who will "take the pain away and make things seem alright."
- Constant thinking about home.





When students leave their homes to attend college, many leave behind their support system, a sense of familiarity, and level of comfort.

Most of us feel a strong connection with the place of our birth or the place we have learned to call home. At times we may find it distressing if we can't physically go there when in need of security and comfort.



More About Homesickness.....

Homesickness is universal. Psychologists refer to it as “separation anxiety” and note that few people are immune.

Homesickness can impact any of us when we move to new surroundings and experience new situations, people, and demands to which we are not accustomed.



There is a myth many students and families hold which suggests that if the student has successfully experienced leaving home in the past (i.e. camp, travel, etc.) the student will not be vulnerable to experiencing homesickness in college.



How is **Homesickness** different from depression?

Students who are depressed do not experience relief from their symptoms - even if they go home for the weekend or engage in their favorite activity.

Students who are **homesick** find that when they leave school and spend time at home, their depressive symptoms disappear.

Homesickness can hit at any time:

Some students will experience mild symptoms of depression and anxiety several weeks before leaving home.

Other students feel fine at first, but as the excitement wanes several weeks into the semester or at semester breaks (sometimes even the beginning of their second year), they start experiencing homesickness.

Homesickness is not just reserved for the young. It can impact any of us throughout our lives whenever we encounter a change in our environment.



Contributing Factors:

- The distance between home and school.
- Not feeling prepared academically to meet the challenges of college.
- The decision to attend college or come to a particular school was made by someone other than the student.
- A sense of anticlimax at finally arriving at college after working towards it for so long.
- Contrast in lifestyle such as differing cultural values or traditions, sexual orientation or geographic differences (i.e. moving from a big city to a small city).
- Financial issues that require the student to work immediately.

Why Homesickness?

- We tend to gravitate toward the familiar and comfortable and avoid things that may cause pain or discomfort.
- Change always presents a challenge – even positive change creates a level of uneasiness.
- Our ability to cope with change breeds different degrees of tolerance depending upon past experiences; different learned methods for coping with unfamiliar surroundings also contribute.
- In familiar settings, people generally feel more accepted and secure and are therefore likely to feel more confident in meeting challenges successfully.
- In new surroundings, we do not have past experiences to fall back on and as a result we are more likely to experience lower levels of confidence and self-esteem.
- Tasks that were once easily “second nature” now become a challenge and sometimes feel insurmountable.

The good news about Homesickness

- **While homesickness can be painful, it also presents us with an opportunity to grow beyond what we are.**
- **It represents a challenge to take charge of our life and learn new skills for dealing with our emotions and others.**
- **When we work to master homesickness, we can increase our range of comfortable experiences which usually leads to increased self esteem and a sense of independence.**

Overcoming Homesickness

Working with your thoughts...

If you are engaging in negative thoughts about yourself, your new environment, and your life in general, more than likely your symptoms of homesickness will intensify rather than subside.

So....instead of saying: “ I don’t fit in here. I want to transfer.”

You might want to try saying: “I am learning how to adjust here. More practice will make this easier. It’s already easier to do some things here then when I first arrived. This feeling is normal and I want to give myself more time before I make any big decision to leave.”

Instead of saying: “I hate making changes. I’m too nervous to relax here.”

Try saying: “I can calm down and take this one step at a time. I’ve been upset and anxious before in my life and I’ve managed to get by and even have more self-confidence for hanging in there.”

- If you work at shifting your thoughts from negative to positive, more than likely your uncomfortable feelings of homesickness will decrease.
- **Remember:** This takes a lot of practice! Be gentle with yourself when you notice you’re in the midst of saying something negative.

How to cope while creating a
second home at Behrend...

Accept that you are feeling a sense of loss and discomfort. It may take some time for you to feel as comfortable here as you do at home. But you are capable of surviving these feelings if you allow yourself to calm down and get oriented.



Do not try and bury feelings of homesickness. Drinking more, partying more, or having sex will not make these feelings go away.





Talk to someone. If you haven't made friends yet, try talking to your RA, roommate, suite mate, neighbor, Campus Ministry or a Personal Counselor.

- Take action. Structure your time. Participate in student activities.
- Limit the amount of time you consciously think of home. Focus on what you can do **NOW** at Behrend.
- Ask yourself what experience, thing, or person are you missing the most. For some, it is a parent or friend who will listen. It can be the presence of children, people with similar values, or a tropical climate. Ask yourself how you can begin to experience these things here. Who else can listen? How can you find people with similar values?



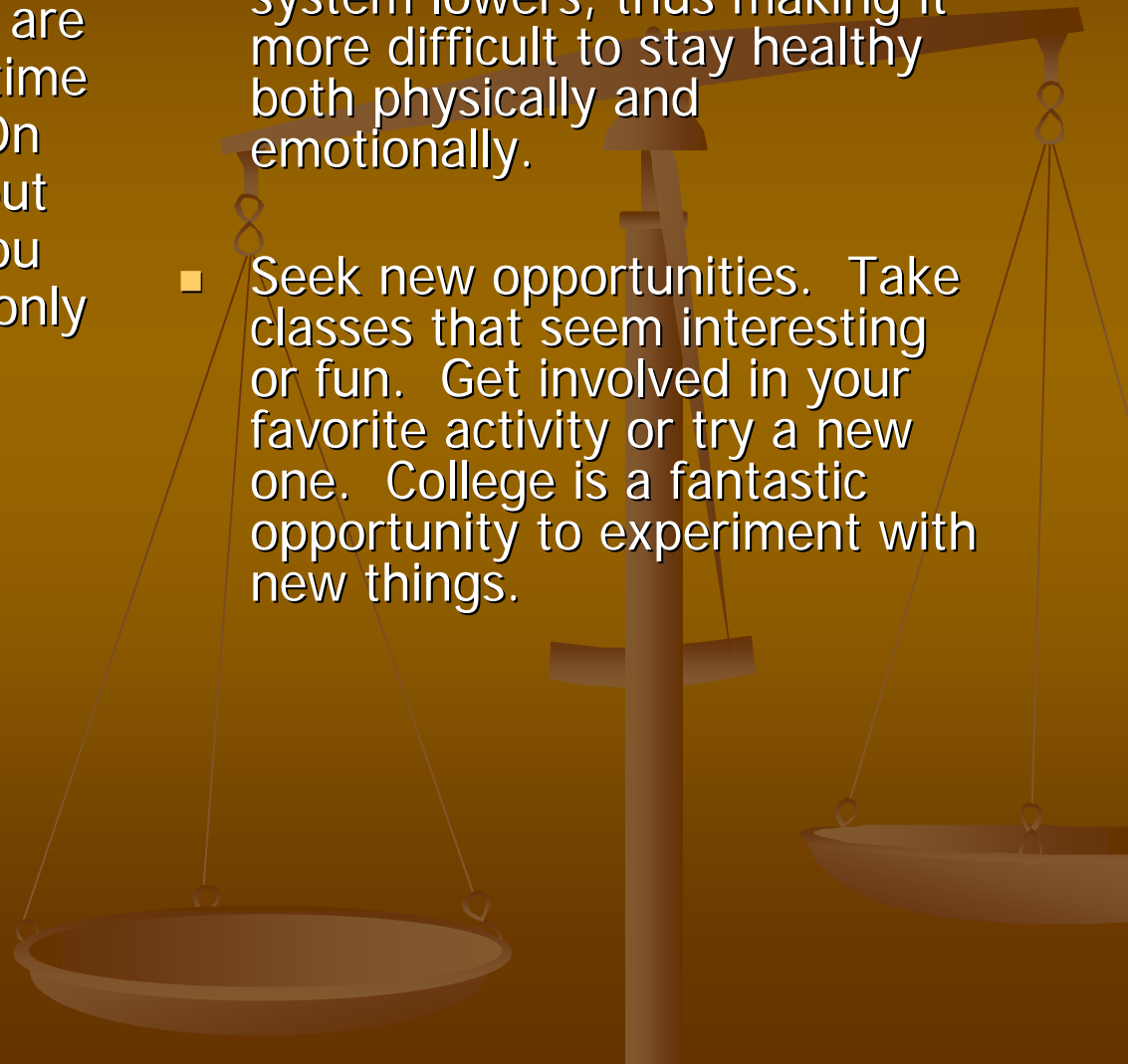
Focus on things that relax you: deep breathing, listening to music, going for a walk, exercising, or talking with a friend.

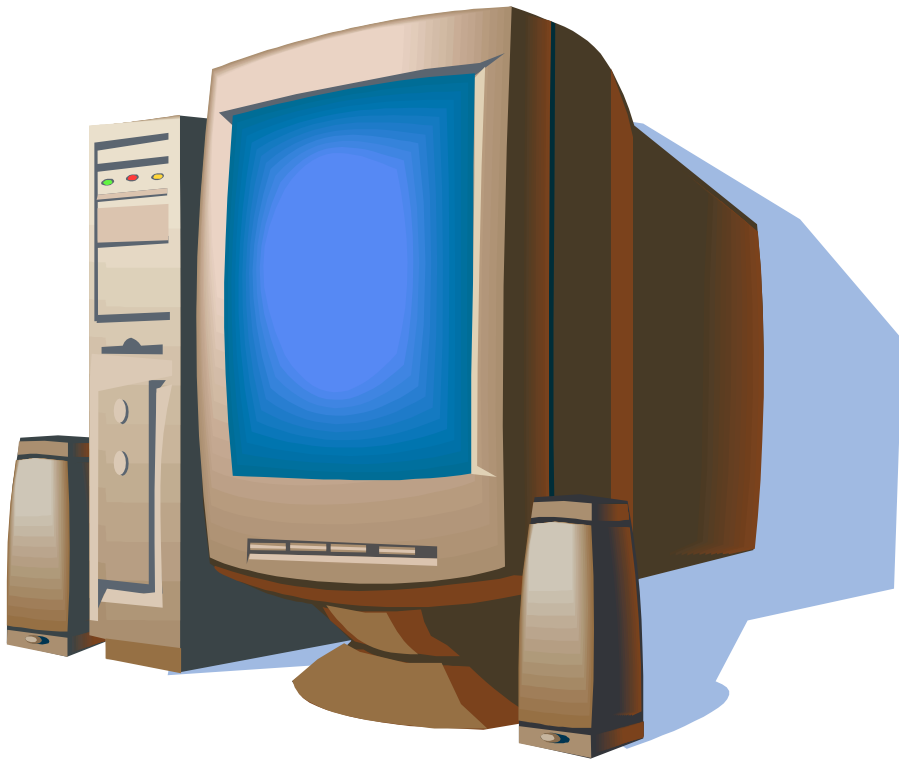
Try to make new friends by talking with those on your floor or in class. Participate in orientation activities or other activities designed for students to meet one another.



- Be realistic about what to expect from student life and from yourself. Establish a balance between work and play; you are not expected to work all the time – you would soon burnout. On the other hand, if you don't put enough time into studying, you can easily get behind, which only compounds the stress!

- Try to maintain healthy eating and sleeping habits. If we ignore our health, our immune system lowers, thus making it more difficult to stay healthy both physically and emotionally.
- Seek new opportunities. Take classes that seem interesting or fun. Get involved in your favorite activity or try a new one. College is a fantastic opportunity to experiment with new things.





Once you get your student account and PSU email address look at your LIST SERVE for upcoming activities and ways that you can get involved on campus.

- ✓ Check out the Junker Center. Exercise and sports are a great way to meet new people and reduce stress. Sign up for Intramurals!
- ✓ If you want to get involved in religious activities, Campus Ministry (located in the Chapel) will be able to connect you and give you the information you need.

Remember...

- You are not alone! Homesickness is experienced by most college students.
- It's okay to feel sad and homesick. You are also allowed to enjoy yourself – it isn't being disloyal to those you miss.
- Be gentle with yourself and give yourself time to adjust. The transition to college is difficult and requires one to be patient and forgiving of oneself. Laugh at your mistakes. You're learning!



Use your supports

- If you continue to feel distress, do not hesitate to talk to your RA or one of the Personal Counselors. Seeking and receiving support early on can help alleviate symptoms of homesickness.

“The only way to make sense out of change is to plunge into it, move with it, and join the dance.”

--Alan Watts

