

Overcoming Isolation and Homesickness

When you move into a new environment, such as studying abroad or coming to University for the first time, you need to adjust many parts of your life to this new environment. Studying at ECU presents new routines and environments that may cause you to feel overwhelmed, isolated, and even homesick.

Adjustment is an often normal and healthy part of transitioning to study at the tertiary level, and your mind and body will take time to adjust to this transition. This occurs because the routine and familiarity that comes from home, is no longer there and our psychological systems assume that our new environment may not be safe. This can sometimes lead to feelings of separation anxiety, grief over losing our support network, isolation, and homesickness.

Adjustment to your new environment is different for everyone. Some students experience feelings of isolation and homesickness in the initial few weeks of their adjustments which reduce once they get settled into their new environment. Other students feel excited and engaged in the first few weeks, which may slowly change to feelings of isolation and homesickness as they start to miss home and the comforts that they once had.

With the current global climate, adjustments can be even harder for students who are unable to return home to connect with family and friends.

Whilst adjustment can be hard and will take time, you are not alone in feeling isolated and homesick.

However, feelings of isolation and homesickness will ease over time, and with commitment to making your transition to this adjustment.

Some common experiences that you may have when feeling isolated and homesick include:

- Feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and worthlessness
- Depressed and/or anxious mood
- Becoming irritated with others for no apparent reason
- Experiencing unhelpful thinking styles like catastrophisation or mind reading
- Finding simple tasks overwhelming
- Experiencing difficulties with concentration and motivation
- Decreased self-confidence and increased self-doubt
- Disrupted sleeping and eating patterns
- Heightened levels of procrastination or perfectionism
- Physical symptoms such as light-headedness, muscle tension, headaches, racing heartbeat and detachment from your body



Recent research indicates that anywhere from

25-70%

of students experience homesickness at some point in their studies.

Give Yourself Time and Space to Feel

This is an important and often forgotten step in managing feelings of isolation and homesickness. Missing home when you are away from your supports is a normal part of being human, it shows how much you care for the relationships in your life. Giving yourself time to be homesick, leads to acceptance of your adjustment experience and gives you an opportunity to practice being self-compassionate. Importantly, give yourself a realistic period to feel your emotions, thoughts and sensations and then follow the below steps to manage your adjustment in healthy and adaptive ways.

Connect

Whilst not always easy, making connections is a way to assist you in managing feelings of isolation and homesickness. Connections foster a sense of community that is important in regulating our self-esteem, emotions and mood and makes the adjustment to ECU that little bit easier:

- Attend as many sessions during Orientation Week as you can, where many of your peers will be in the same phase of their tertiary journey as you.
- Join a social or sporting club run through the ECU Student Guild, a support service run by students for students.
- Take time to attend the various events run throughout semesters across all three of ECUs' campuses, where students and staff come together to interact and connect on a variety of interests and causes.
- Attend lectures, tutorials, and Peer Assisted Study Sessions and try to connect with your fellow peers in your course.
- Seeking connection external to ECU is also a way for you to connect and assimilate into Australian culture. This can be through volunteering activities, attending religious services and events, joining a sporting/leisure/interest club or through casual and part-time employment.

Active Steps

- Set your room or house up with things that are familiar to you as they are back home.
- Explore your new campus and city and aim to try something new and exciting for the first time, or reconnect with your culture through a familiar meal, activity, or event.

- Limit isolation as often as you can. If you live with roommates, keeping your door open or spending time in common spaces invites healthy interactions. If you live alone, coming on campus will provide opportunities for you to connect with others in small, but meaningful ways.
- Staying connected with your support system back home is important and encouraged. However, don't let this become a barrier to adjusting to your new environment. Setting up a routine of balanced contact with those back home, will allow you to meet new friends whilst still getting support from those back home.
- Start to practice active coping strategies such as daily mindfulness, progressive muscle relaxation, or mindful/reflective journaling.
- Practicing self-care will help you to manage internal feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and homesickness. True self-care is more than taking time out to watch Netflix or zone out. Self-care involves deliberate planning of activities and behaviours that bring you a sense of emotional nurturance, self-compassion, and pleasure. This demonstrates to us that we are worthy of being cared for. Planning regular exercise, consistent sleep schedules, active coping time and activities we find pleasurable is key to a healthy adjustment to your new environment.
- Setting up daily and weekly routines is a great way to balance your university commitments with other responsibilities such as work, volunteering, and pleasurable activities.

If your feelings of isolation and homesickness aren't getting better and you are concerned about your mental health, ECU is here to help. The ECU Psychological Counselling Support offer free and confidential support to all actively enrolled ECU students. You can contact us directly through the channels below.

Scan to access
additional tip
sheets



Want to chat to someone?

For a confidential – and free – chat about your general situation, please contact our ECU Psychologist, or the Psychological Counselling Support Team service to make an appointment at any of our campuses.

 counselling@ecu.edu.au

 (08) 6304 6706

Alternatively, you can discuss study techniques and tips with a Learning Adviser in our Academic Skills Centre.

 learningadviser@ecu.edu.au