



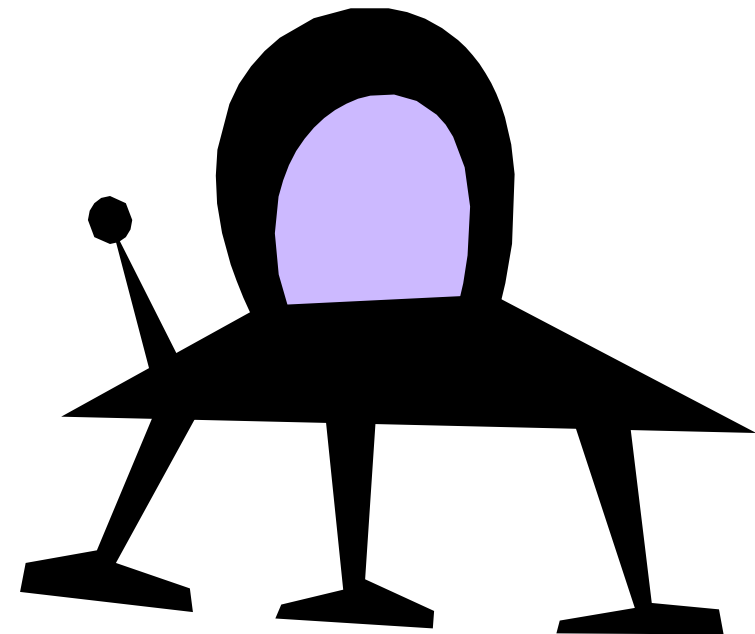
### My home was like . . .

- love
- exciting
- chaotic
- stressful
- sheltering
- humorous
- dominating
- peaceful
- violent
- relaxing
- criticising
- open
- punishing
- ...
- ...

### Being away from home is . . .

- independence
- unable to cope
- exciting
- difficult
- demanding
- new
- sad
- adventure
- able to choose
- empty
- challenging
- lost
- a fresh start
- fun
- ...
- ...

# SURVIVING HOMESICKNESS



**...WHEN HOME FEELS A LONG WAY AWAY**

## INTRODUCTION

So here you are at UNE. You've been planning and thinking about it and looking forward to it for ages. Maybe home was good or bad; maybe until recently the only homesickness you knew about was being sick of home. And suddenly — or not so suddenly — here you are feeling blue or anxious. This wasn't how it was meant to be in the plan! It might be hard to admit, with everybody else seeming to be so together, and having a good time, but you are feeling homesick. How uncool!

You're not alone. Behind some of the smiles you see are other people feeling homesick too. Research suggests that nearly 70% of university students feel homesick at some time or other, and in a recent American study two-thirds of the students reported that it lasted more than one week, while for 18% homesickness lasted for more than eight weeks.

This booklet is meant to help you to chart a path through the common experience of homesickness, if you are one of the 70%, or to help your friend when he or she goes through the same experience.

Remember, help is not far away; you don't have to do it on your own.

## A SPECIAL WORD TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

A particular welcome to you who have come from overseas. We thought of greeting each of you in your own language, but didn't want to leave anybody out. So (in English) WELCOME!

If you have come from far away, life may be extra difficult for you. Even these words may be in an unfamiliar language. Our ways of talking about things may not be your ways. You may have to deal with strange food, a different climate, an unfamiliar landscape. And home is so far away; arranging to go home for a weekend is not a possibility for you.

We have an idea of what it may be like for you, and are here to help. Be patient with us if our attempts to help seem odd in terms of your culture. The experience of moving into another culture is sometimes described as 'culture shock'. The International Office is here specifically to help you, the Armidale International Association runs activities to help you to settle in and have fun, but there are other people you can talk to, too.

We hope that ultimately your stay at UNE will be rewarding and enjoyable. Please remember, the student support staff are here to help you, wherever you come from.

*And now let's get down to business...*

### **For undergraduate students UNE Students' Association (UNESA)**

Ms Jenny Teece (Student Support and Welfare Officer) - Monday, Wednesday and Friday only  
Phone: 6773 5108  
email: [jteece@unesa.une.edu.au](mailto:jteece@unesa.une.edu.au)

### **For postgraduate students UNE Postgraduate Association (UNEPA)**

Ms Jane Davies (Research/Liaison Officer)  
Phone: 6773 3419  
email: [ddavies3@metz.une.edu.au](mailto:ddavies3@metz.une.edu.au)

### **For those living in colleges and the Wright flats**

The Wright flats and each college have a student support network. Don't be afraid to use it!!

And don't forget—  
if you're feeling homesick, you're one of the  
majority.  
It goes away eventually  
but talking about it helps heaps!!!

*This brochure is adapted from one produced by Rev Hugh McCafferty, who was at the time chaplain to the University of Otagao, Aotearoa New Zealand  
It was adapted for use in Australian universities, with permission, by Rev Judy Redman (UNE's Uniting Church Chaplain)  
with suggestions from Mr David Abbott, Head of Student Services, Monash Gippsland  
The graph on p3 is from Chris Kenyon, More Than G'Day and is used by permission of the publisher, The Good and Better Group, Cavanagh House, Cavanagh Close, Queanbeyan, NSW, 2620*

'Home! That is what they meant, those caressing appeals, those soft touches wafted through the air, those invisible little hands pulling and tugging.'

*Mole and Rat turn back and find Mole's house, and although at first it is disappointing, they eventually share a delightful evening together. Mole finds joy and contentment in re-experiencing his familiar surroundings. But now he also recognises its limitations. . .*

'He saw clearly how plain and simple - how narrow even - it all was; but clearly, too, how much it all meant to him, and the special value of some such anchorage in one's existence. He did not at all want to abandon the new life and its splendid places, to turn his back on sun and air and all they offered him and creep home and stay there; the upper world was all too strong, it called to him still, and he knew he must return to the larger stage.'

**May you, like Mole, find your balance between the pull of home  
and that of the adventures that wait for you along the road  
and by the riverbank.**

## WHERE TO GET HELP

**For all students:**

### Chaplains

Rev'd Judy Redman (Uniting Church Chaplain) (Tuesday-Friday)

Drop in to the Oorala Building near Safety and Security or phone or email to make an appointment

Phone: 6773 3739

e-mail: jredman@metz.une.edu.au

Rev'd Martin Trotman (Anglican Chaplain)

Drop in to the Oorala Building near Safety and Security in the mornings

Phone: 6773 2092, 6772 4339, 6772 1372

email: mtrotman@metz.une.edu.au

Fr Bernard Flood (Catholic Chaplain)

Chaplain's Residence, St Albert's College, 'Bottom D'

Phone: 6773 6240

### Counselling and Careers (including Financial Assistance)

Seeing a counsellor will normally require an appointment although provision is made for urgent matters to be dealt with quickly. Your first contact when you phone or visit will normally be with Eileen Humphreys, the administrative assistant. Counselling is located in the white weatherboard building south of the National Bank on the path to Mary White College

Phone: 6773 2897

Phone: 6773 2897

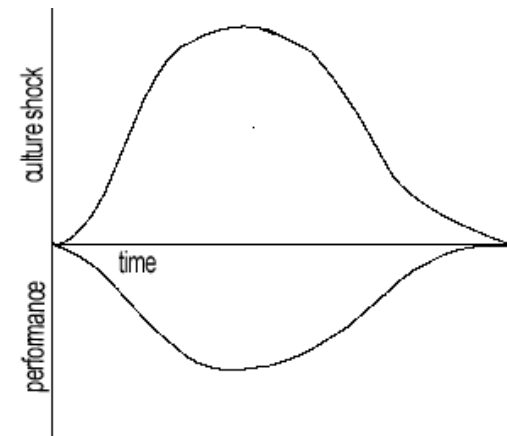
email: counselling.service@metz.une.edu.au

## THE NATURE OF HOMESICKNESS

When we move to a new place, even if it is by our own choice, there are adjustments to be made. These adjustments are necessary ones, but may seem difficult at first.

We have said that homesickness is not unusual. Tertiary education presents new ways of living your life. As you try to cope with new routines and a new environment you may experience homesickness. That is because the familiar and known has been displaced by the new.

Homesickness is about adjusting to new relationships. Most, if not all, of the known and comfortable relationships are back at home. In this new place there can be a struggle to become accepted. This adjustment may be felt as even more difficult if you are, say, a foreign student, deeply religious, a homosexual, or a member of any minority group within the majority culture of this new tertiary world (including being the only one from your school or social group on campus). Even if you are Australian, what you are experiencing is a form of culture shock, and research has shown that culture shock has a direct effect on your performance, as shown in the graph below.



It is important to be aware of homesickness as a normal process which you may go through. It is a time of letting go. You are not alone in this experience.

What is this experience like?

### HOMESICKNESS CAN INCLUDE

- being miserable without knowing why
- feeling like a prisoner in your own room
- being unable to get into a reassuring routine
- not liking meals at the flat or the college because the atmosphere doesn't feel right

- wondering what people at home are doing; feeling as if you are missing out
- wanting to go home straight after you have arrived
- not liking coming back after the holidays
- being conscious you are doing things out of character
- thinking you are the only person on campus with homesick feelings
- being unable to settle anything
- crying for no reason
- getting anxious or upset about little things that used not to bother you
- finding the values of people around you strange and vaguely threatening
- getting fed up with new food, new smells, new scenery, and wanting the familiar
- an experience, a state of feeling that will pass, sooner or later

*Is this how it is for you?*

### **COMMENTS BY STUDENTS WHO HAVE LIVED AWAY FROM HOME**

*(Note that we do not necessarily recommend what these students tried!)*

“I came from a quiet family. The lining up for showers, the queuing for meals and the noise nearly sent me up the wall.”

“Because I didn’t know the people who make the noise I found it difficult to say anything to them. I felt like a prisoner in my own room.”

“Homesickness began when I started missing the regular and routine things around home. Certain noises, smells, food leave a lot of memories.”

“Not knowing English very well made me long not only for home but for my homeland.”

“I organise my timetable so I can be around to check the mail. When a letter doesn’t come I get a real ache inside.”

“I had to work hard at remembering other people’s names, but it made a real difference in building friendships.”

“Orientation Week activated my scaredness: it was horrible.”

“I found Orientation Week a great way to draw me out. I had to mix. It helped build up some real good memories.”

“I’ve been tempted to find substitute solutions for the pain of homesickness. Drugs and sex have been two ways for me.”

“I had thought that I had moved away from home and was my own person. But I couldn’t move away from my parents’ expectations.”

“Little things can tip you into homesickness. Someone called me by another name and I felt so cut off.”

*So what can be done to deal with homesickness?*

### **SURVIVAL TIPS**

- set your room up with something familiar from home
- make an effort to talk to someone new
- try to leave your door open sometimes when you are sitting in your room; someone might pass by and say ‘hello’
- get into activities which build up a storehouse of good new memories for you
- talk to someone else about how you feel – any new student will probably feel much the same as you do
- if you live in college, make use of all the support structures there
- respond to the invitations of others to places or events where you will meet more people
- if you have been involved in a religious or other national or international group at home, see if you can contact the local branch in Armidale
- it is hard to let go of home, but ringing home too often in the first few weeks may prolong homesickness for you
- recognise that this is a grief experience. Have a good cry; it’s nothing to be ashamed of, when you’re really feeling down.
- jot down thoughts, experiences and dreams in a journal, and try to make some sense out of the different pieces
- be kind to yourself – it is OK to miss home and perfectly normal. After all, you have spent most of your life there until now, so tears can be cleansing.
- the counsellors in Counselling and Careers, the Chaplains, the Student Support and Welfare Officer at UNESA and the Research/Liaison Officer at UNEPA can all be of assistance in helping you work out creative ways of dealing with homesickness, as can the resident tutors and other support staff if you are living in a college. (See the last section for addresses.)
- if you are finding that managing money is a problem, the Student Financial Assistance Officer can help.

*Time for a story (you may know it), from The Wind in the Willows. by Kenneth Grahame. The Rat and the Mole are on their travels when the Mole catches a whiff of home. . .*

‘It was one of those mysterious fairy calls from out the void that suddenly reached Mole in the darkness, making him tingle through and through with its very familiar appeal, even while as yet he could not clearly remember what it was. He stopped dead in his tracks, his nose searching hither and thither in its efforts to recapture the fine filament, the telegraphic current that had so strongly moved him. A moment, and he had caught it again, and with it this time came recollection in its fullest flood.