

Adjustment, homesickness and loneliness

When you move to a new place, even if it is by your own choice, you need to make adjustments. These adjustments are necessary ones, but may seem difficult at first. Tertiary education presents new routines and a new environment which may cause you to feel lonely, isolated, and homesick.

It is important to be aware that adjustment is a normal process. You are not alone in this experience. Behind other students' smiles may be a person feeling lonely or homesick just like you. Some research has found that 35% of new students experience homesickness.

Patterns of adjustment vary from student to student. You may find that you are anxious from the start about moving away from home and this continues for a few weeks until you begin to settle into a new routine. Or you might find the first few weeks exciting and new, and then begin to experience loneliness and homesickness as you miss significant dates such as your birthday, and start to experience the stresses of university life.

You may live on campus and have lots of people around you, or live in a small share house or on your own. No matter what your living arrangements you may feel lonely and isolated.

Adjustment can be particularly difficult if you are from a different country and must adjust to an entirely new environment, language and culture.

Thoughts and feelings of adjustment that you may experience include:

- Feeling miserable or crying for no reason
- Feeling like a prisoner in your own room
- Feeling like things will never be normal again
- Not liking meal time because the atmosphere feels different
- Wondering what people at home are doing and feeling as if you are missing out
- Wanting to go straight home after you have arrived somewhere
- Not liking coming back after the holidays
- Thinking you are the only person feeling homesick or lonely

- Getting anxious or upset about things that usually wouldn't bother you
- Getting fed up with new food, new smells, new scenery, and wanting the familiar
- Finding the values or behaviours of people around you different or possibly confronting

What can you do?

Connect with others. Making connections with other people can assist you with loneliness and homesickness. You don't have to make 'forever friends'; making some connections can help you to feel more positive about yourself, your studies and make the adjustment to university a little bit easier.

Ways to connect:

- Check out the O Week program and attend as many information and fun sessions as you can. This will give you an opportunity to meet other new students.
- If you live on campus, connect with your Residential Assistant (RA).
- Join social, sporting or club society groups through Halls/Colleges, through the JCU Student Association, or as advertised on student bulletins.
- Attend study groups, Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS), tutorials, etc. and try to make some connections in your course if possible.
- Take opportunities to interact with other students and attend university events. Find out what's on via the JCU Events website (<https://www.jcu.edu.au/events>) or go further afield and attend events in the broader community where you can meet new people (<https://whatson.townsville.qld.gov.au/>).

Seek support

There is always someone available to support you.

Learn about the following Support Services available on campus:

- Student Equity and Wellbeing – incorporating AccessAbility Services, Counselling, Wellbeing and Support, and JCU Multifaith Chaplaincy

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<https://www.jcu.edu.au/student-equity-and-wellbeing>

- Careers and Employment
<https://www.jcu.edu.au/careers-and-employment>
- JCU Student Association
<https://www.jcusa.edu.au/>

Survival tips

- Set your room up with something familiar from home
- Make an effort to talk to someone new
- If you live on campus or in a share house, 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 help you to create new memories
- Talk to someone else about how you feel – any new student will probably feel much the same as you do
- Respond to the invitations of others to places or events where you will meet more people and have shared experiences

- 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. It takes time to adjust. It's ok to have a good cry; it's nothing to be ashamed of
- Jot down thoughts, experiences and dreams in a journal, and try to make some sense out of the different pieces
- Break up the university semester into smaller chunks by getting a calendar or planner so that you can mark off the times for visits home, the next holidays, and things like assignment deadlines

If your feelings of homesickness or loneliness are not getting better, or are getting worse, or are concerning you, you can seek help. Contact JCU Student Equity and Wellbeing. Alternatively, contact your GP or doctor, or other mental health professional. Support is also available 24 hours a day through Lifeline (Phone 13 11 14) and Headspace (Phone 1800 650 890).

Further information and support

Headspace – online and phone support <https://www.eheadspace.org.au>

Student Equity and Wellbeing

James Cook University

Web <https://www.jcu.edu.au/student-equity-and-wellbeing>

Email studentwellbeing@jcu.edu.au

Phone Townsville (07) 478 14711 or Cairns (07) 423 21150

In person Level 1 of the Library in Townsville and Cairns

CRICOS Provider No. 00117J

- Wellbeing
- Counselling
- Accessibility
- Student Equity
- Multifaith Chaplaincy