

OVERCOMING HOMESICKNESS

He iti hau marangai e tū te pāhokahoka
A little storm and then a rainbow appears



Welcome, Nau mai, haere mai

Welcome to Otago! Leaving home and settling into a new environment can be exciting – new friends, new room, new things! Change can also be unsettling, especially when coupled with homesickness.

Homesickness is very common, affecting approximately 70% of students. It is the feeling of sadness or discomfort after leaving home. While it is difficult to avoid, there are some things you can do to ease the discomfort and make the transition to life away from home easier.

In this booklet you'll find information to help you understand more about homesickness – what it might feel like and look like. You'll also find tips for helping ease the discomfort while you adjust to your new environment.

If your homesickness becomes overwhelming, consider reaching out to the chaplains or someone else on the resources page. You are not alone and there are people ready to support you. We wish you well.



A resource provided by the Otago Tertiary Chaplaincy Whānau

www.otago.ac.nz/chaplain

See also:

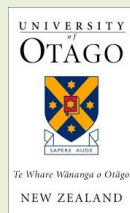
University of Otago Healthy Campus website

www.otago.ac.nz/healthy-campus/index.html

Otago Polytechnic Well-being Information

<https://studentservices.op.ac.nz/health-and-wellbeing>

24hr Free Counselling: Text or Phone 1737



Homesickness can be...

Homesickness can look very different for each individual. Below are some common signs and symptoms that you may identify with. There are likely others that you may experience that are not listed here. Read on in this booklet to learn ways of working through homesickness and who to reach out to.

- Missing the place and people you know so well
- Feeling nostalgic for familiar things, e.g., family, friends, pets, house or belongings
- Feeling miserable and crying, seemingly for no reason
- Not wanting to venture out of your bedroom, feeling trapped
- Being unable to establish a routine
- Not liking meals or smells at the flat or the College
- Wondering what people at home are doing; feeling as if you are missing out
- Wanting to go straight back home after you have arrived
- Ringing home multiple times per day
- Not wanting to return to Uni/Polytech after the holidays
- Doing things out of character
- Thinking you are the only one on campus feeling homesick
- Being unable to feel settled
- Getting anxious or upset over little things that didn't used to bother you
- Finding the values of people around you strange and vaguely threatening



Self-help

If you read this before you embark on your journey, there are some practical things you can do before leaving and once you arrive which may soften the feelings of homesickness.

Before leaving for your new/temporary home, consider:

- Tell yourself that homesickness is a realistic possibility and it is nothing to be ashamed of if it does happen
- Become familiar with the place you are going to, e.g., plan a pre-visit, checking it out on google maps/earth, research things to do or see in the area.
- Make a plan of at least two things to do when you arrive, e.g., set your room up, buy some necessities, visit somewhere, go for a run etc...
- Bring something meaningful from home. It could be a your duvet/pillow, a piece of art, photos, or a plant. These items may make home feel a little closer to help ease the transition.
- Make contact with people or groups and plan a meet up.

Upon arrival at your new/temporary home, consider:

- If you are in a residential college, introduce yourself to your neighbours and subwardens, and leave your door open while you are getting settled. Attend the events and mealtimes, while sitting with other people. Eventually you will make a social connection with someone who you relate well to.
- Unpack and decorate your room.
- Get outside and have a look around. The exercise and fresh air are just as important as familiarising yourself with your new surroundings. Take a campus tour.
- Introduce yourself to people on your floor, or in your neighbourhood or course. Join a club, faith community or group where you can relate to others who share similar interests.
- Make yourself aware of the support services on your campus (see pages 12-13).

Ongoing throughout the year, consider:

- Join clubs or undertake hobbies that you also did back home. You can also try some new endeavours.
- Establish a daily/weekly routine, with elements of your previous home-life.
- Positive self-talk. Reinforce to yourself that these hard feelings will subside, holiday breaks aren't far away and there is plenty to be thankful for in life.
- Reflect on the reason you came here to study and the sense of passion and purpose you had when making that decision.

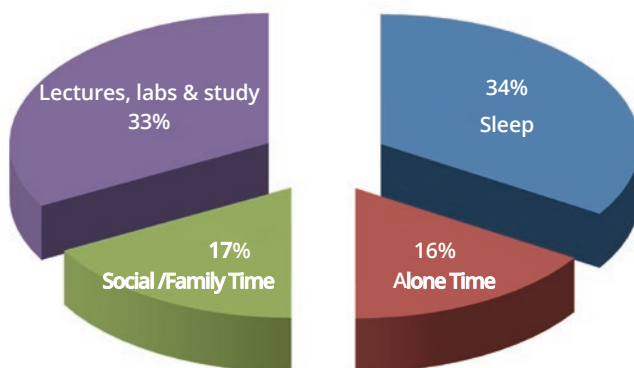
Practical tips from past students

- Set your room up with something familiar from home, such as a duvet cover, nostalgic item, photos/posters or even a cuddly toy.
- Make an effort to talk to someone new.
- If you're in a Residential College, leave your door open sometimes when you are in your room; someone might pass by and say "hello".
- Try activities which will create new memories – take up a new interest, sport or recreational pursuit where you can have fun and make friends. Unipol and OUSA Clubs & Societies provide plenty of options (contact details on page 12).
- Sign up with Unicrew to volunteer, meet like-minded people as well as get to know Dunedin. (contact details on pages 12-13)
- Check out the Personal Plan on page 11.
- Talk to someone else about how you feel – many other students will feel similar to you, and it may help establish some new friendships.
- Respond to the invitations of others to places or events where you will meet more people.
- Recognise that this is a grief experience. Be kind to yourself. Have a good cry and remember, it's nothing to be ashamed of when you're really feeling down; the tears can be cleansing.
- Jot down thoughts, experiences and dreams in a journal or at the back of this booklet
- Organise your next home visit in advance – to give you something to look forward to (and to save money as booking in advance is cheaper).
- Prayer and/or meditation can help. Both campuses provide prayer and meditation rooms, upstairs in the University Union Building and on 3rd floor of G Block at Polytechnic. Email chaplains@otago.ac.nz to arrange access to the University rooms.
- Talk to a tutor, or someone in your department you are familiar with.
- Talk to the Chaplains, someone at Student Health or someone at the OUSA/OPSA Student Support Centres (contact details on pages 12-13).
- Explore your new city. The exercise, the inquisitiveness, and the familiarity you'll gain will help you on many levels.
- Have some alone time. Sometimes we need to give ourselves a chance to process everything that has been happening. Go for a walk or watch your favourite TV show.
- Maintain regular contact with home - enough but not too much. Mix it up, try writing a letter (an actual letter) or encourage them to visit you.

Finding Balance

You may be feeling overwhelmed from the move so keeping healthy is important. Getting a good amount of sleep and practicing good nutrition can help combat this.

Try to keep a good balance in your life. Below, is a suggested way to allocate your time. Everyone will have different priorities, and some times of year will require adjustment to your schedule. Nevertheless, it is important for everyone to have enough time to reflect, relax, unwind, and to connect with others.



Also, try to incorporate all five aspects of the "5 ways to wellbeing" into your life.



Connecting with others in your new environment is important, though it can often feel like the last thing you want to do when experiencing homesickness.

Sometimes it will take courage to do this. Not everyone will share your values and customs, and this is OK. But you do deserve to be treated with kindness.

While homesickness can be hard, in most situations you should be able to continue with everyday life. If you aren't able to leave your room, function well, or your workload is becoming too overwhelming, you should talk to someone who can help (see pages 12-13).

Reaching out to others: Advice for friends and Subwardens

If a friend, student or family member is homesick, the goal is not to fix them or speed up the process. **Your presence and friendship**, in itself, is reassuring and comforting.

Make sure you **care for yourself** and not spend excessive time helping them - which could become detrimental to both their and your health.

Some ideas for supporting your friends include:

- Tell them you are there for them
- Listen to them and respect their need to have some time alone
- Share with them things that helped you, or are helping you, deal with homesickness
- Help them decorate their room, get outside, or join a club
- Gradually, introduce them to others
- Ask them about their home town, country, family and experiences
- If it's causing an impact on their health, direct them to professional support - refer to the support services on pages 12-13



Ākonga Māori - Tēnā koutou katoa

Nāu mai, haere mai, tauti mai

*He pōkēkē Uenuku i tū ai
Supporting you to achieve your goals*

POLYTECHNICSTUDENTS

*It is important to know that homesickness is very normal and can be managed over time. The Staff of **Te Pūnaka Ōwheo** are here for you! We can also help with connecting you with your whakapapa, which can help you feel more grounded.*

~ Visit Te Pūnaka Ōwheo on the Otago Polytechnic Campus. In our Poho building we provide free lunches for students on Wednesdays.

~ Contact Te Pūnaka Ōwheo advisors to chat or arrange a time to meet.

Email: tepunakaowheo@op.ac.nz

Web: www.op.ac.nz/students/maori-students/

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

The difficulty of being away from whānau support networks can become overwhelming very quickly. The consequences of homesickness can sometimes affect your personal well-being, academic performance and your environment. WE CAN AWHI / HELP YOU.

~ Call or visit the Counsellor at the **Māori Centre** at 515 & 519 Castle Street North

Phone: 479 8283 or Email: maori-centre@otago.ac.nz

~ Visit **Te Roopū Māori** (Māori Students' Association) at 523 Castle Street North Phone:

479 8563 or Email: teroopu.maori@otago.ac.nz

~ Check out other support services for Māori:

Web: www.otago.ac.nz/services/maori

CHAPLAINCY - ALL STUDENTS

The **Māori chaplain** is available to all Māori students at both the University and Polytechnic. Often our wairua also needs attention during these tough times.

~ Contact the Māori Chaplain:

Email: maori.chaplain@otago.ac.nz

See pages 12-13 for more support services.



International Students

A particular welcome if you have come from outside of New Zealand. Life in NZ is likely different than your country. The vocabulary, food, weather, scenery, and housing are all new and might take time getting used to. Home is probably too far away or expensive to visit for holiday breaks, so regular contact with family and friends might not be possible.

The experience of moving into another culture can be both exciting and challenging. The difficult feelings that can arise are often described as culture-shock. Many international students experience culture-shock and there are many services on campus where you can safely discuss your experiences. See pages 12-13 for contact information.



There are also overseas student associations for you to join. Check out the OUSA website <https://www.ousa.org.nz/clubsandsocs/clubs/clubs-list> and click "international."

Pasifika Students

Talofa Lava, Malo e lelei, Fakaalofa lahi atu, Kia orana, Malo ni, Fakatalofa atu, Mauri, Bula Vinaka and warm Pacific greetings!

Whether you have come to Otago directly from the Islands or already live in NZ, you may still experience adjustment challenges moving to Dunedin, such as being away from home, church, family, familiar food and even warmer weather!

Getting connected with fellow PI students, who are sharing similar challenges, is important, as well as making new friendships through your accommodation, courses, sports teams etc...



Otago has experienced and dedicated Pasifika community leaders at both University and Polytechnic who are committed to your academic success and personal well-being. Get along to the many community events that are organised. Contact them before you move down, as it will help preparing for the adjustment.

University of Otago - pasifika@otago.ac.nz

Otago Polytechnic - pasifika@op.ac.nz

Students who have lived away from home say ...

- 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 for me was like I was not myself. Anything others said in trying to help didn't touch that deep inner split.
- Homesickness began when I started missing the regular and routine things around home. Certain noises, smells and food leave a lot of memories.
- I couldn't go into the dining room on Sunday because I missed so much the home Sunday dinner of big roasts and real family time.
- I found my normal sleep patterns were disturbed.
- Not knowing much English made me long not only for home but for my homeland.
- I had to work hard at remembering people's names, but it made a real difference in building friendships.
- Orientation Week activated my fear: it was horrible.
- I found Orientation Week a great way to draw me out. I had to mix. It helped to build up some real good memories.
- I was sick for a whole day and no one knew. This would never have happened at home.
- I've been tempted to find substitute solutions for the pain of homesickness. Drugs and sex have been two ways for me.
- Homesickness is crying on your own.
- Little things can tip you. Someone called me by another name and I felt cut off.
- Some students come with crazy TV-generated ideas of how good life here will be. The reality knocks them for six.





Two Homesickness Poems by University of Otago Students

Different country, different time....
Different people, different food....

The only sameness is me.

I can take off my bag
I can take off my mood
I can take off my fear ...

But I can't take off my homesickness

I can get brave
I can get sense
I can get friends ...

But I can't get a hug from home

By Kuan Ting HUANG
Taiwan

Sometimes I feel homesick
I miss my family and friends
If I feel homesick at night
I'll not sleep

Sometimes I remember
my family's smile...
my friends' smile

But I've got to get over my homesickness
Because it's my destiny!!

By Hiroyasu Hanaki
Japan

A Personal Plan to cope

modified from the University of Worcester's webpage

This plan may help you measure how you're feeling, decide whether or not you need to seek help or help you find your own way for getting through the next few weeks.

Below is a list of possible signs of homesickness. Tick any that describe how you feel.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Tearfulness | <input type="checkbox"/> 11. Not being able to sleep |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Feeling sad | <input type="checkbox"/> 12. Oversleeping & hiding away in bed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Feeling anxious or panicky | <input type="checkbox"/> 13. Changes in eating patterns |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Feeling overwhelmed | <input type="checkbox"/> 14. Not eating enough |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Feeling lonely | <input type="checkbox"/> 15. Overeating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6. Feeling out of control | <input type="checkbox"/> 16. Feeling generally unwell or sick |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 7. Feeling more irritable than normal | <input type="checkbox"/> 17. Feeling isolated and lonely |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 8. Being angry with family members | <input type="checkbox"/> 18. Not being able to focus |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 9. Feelings of jealousy towards siblings | <input type="checkbox"/> 19. Using drugs and alcohol to cope |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 10. Changes in sleeping pattern | <input type="checkbox"/> 20. Spending too much time on screens |

As you look at what you've ticked, are there any you can help yourself with? E.g., if you're not eating or sleeping properly, are there things you could be doing that would help?

Are you doing enough to relax your body and mind?

Perhaps using some of the suggestions in this booklet, list here some practical steps you could take to improve your wellbeing:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

As you assess what you've ticked, are there things you can't tackle on your own? If your well-being is being compromised, then it might help to talk to a friend, a flatmate, your Subwarden, a chaplain, a GP, a counsellor, or any of the contacts listed on pages 12-13. Some of these people will be able to provide the advice and support you need.

Or you might want to consider this...

"If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change" (thanks to Wayne Dyer)

Support Services – Contact Details



Te Whare Wānanga o Ōtago
NEW ZEALAND

University of Otago

Emergency contact 24 hours, Campus Watch 0800 479 5000

Student Health (Health & Counselling Services) - 3 Walsh St 479 8212 or 0800 479821
Email student-health@otago.ac.nz

Chaplains - The Upper Room, University Union Building 03 479 8497
Email chaplains@otago.ac.nz Web www.otago.ac.nz/chaplain

Māori Chaplain *Muslim Chaplains*
Email maori.chaplain@otago.ac.nz Email muslimchaplaincy@otago.ac.nz

Ask Otago (Academic, Course and Fees Enquiries) - Central Lib 0800 808098 or 479 7000
Email university@otago.ac.nz

Disability Information & Support - West lane, ISB
Email disabilities@otago.ac.nz

International Student Support 03 479 8235
Email international.support@otago.ac.nz

Māori Centre/Te Huka Mātauraka - 515/519/523 Castle St Nth 03 479 8490
Email maori-centre@otago.ac.nz

OUSA Student Support Centre - 5 Ethel Benjamin Pl 03 479 5449
Email help@ousa.org.nz

OUSA Clubs and Societies Centre - 84 Albany Street 03 479 5960
Email recreation@ousa.org.nz

Pacific Islands Centre - 1 Leithbank 03 479 8278
Email pacific@otago.ac.nz

Proctor's Office - St David's Street Lecture Theatre 03 479 4880

Student Accommodation Centre - 109 St David's Street 03 479 5100
Email accommodation@otago.ac.nz

Student Learning Development 03 479 8801
Email hedc@otago.ac.nz Web otago.ac.nz/hedc/students/firstyear

Te Whare Tāwharau (Sexual Violence Support Centre) 03 479 3790
Email tewharetawharau@otago.ac.nz

Unicrew Volunteer Centre - ISB East Wing, beside Careers 03 479 8631
Email volunteer@otago.ac.nz Web www.unicrewotago.org

Unipol Recreation Centre - 130 Anzac Avenue 03 479 5888
Email unipol@otago.ac.nz

Support Services – Contact Details



Otago Polytechnic

Tel 0800 762 786

Web www.op.ac.nz

Emergency contact 24 hours, Campus Watch **0800 479 5000**

Student Health and Counselling - Level 1, Manaaki Building (03) 479 6082
Email studenthealth@op.ac.nz

Chaplains - Room H106, "The Hub" (03) 479 3743
Email chaplain@op.ac.nz
Web www.otago.ac.nz/chaplain

Customer Services/Programme Enquiries & Enrolments/ Fees Advice - Level 1, F Block 0800 762 786
Email info@op.ac.nz

OPSA (Otago Polytechnic Students' Association) - "The Hub" (03) 477 6974
Email opsa@op.ac.nz
Web www.opsa.org.nz

Te Punaka Ōwheo (Maori Student Support)
Email tepunakaowheo@op.ac.nz
Web www.op.ac.nz/students/maori-students/

Student Success (all other student services)
Auckland Campus aicstudentsuccess@op.ac.nz 0800 111 212
Central Campus censtudentsuccess@op.ac.nz 0800 765 9276
Dunedin Campus: studentsuccessdn@op.ac.nz (03) 479 3743

- Career Services careers@op.ac.nz
- Counseling Services studenthealth@op.ac.nz
- Disability Support disability@op.ac.nz
- Former Refugee Support refugeeandmigrants@op.ac.nz
- Homestay homestay@op.ac.nz
- International Student Support intlss@op.ac.nz
- Learning Advisors studentsuccess@op.ac.nz
- Pasifika Student Support pasifika@op.ac.nz
- Student Advisors domesticstudentsupport@op.ac.nz
- Well-being Support wellbeing@op.ac.nz

Or you can make an appointment online by visiting studentservices.otago.ac.nz and clicking on the tile "Book an appointment with Student Success".



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A little storm and then a rainbow appears



For further information about services for students
explore online at these websites:

Otago University
www.otago.ac.nz/services



Otago Polytechnic
www.op.ac.nz/students

This booklet has been produced by the chaplains serving the Otago tertiary education campuses. It is published by the Otago Tertiary Chaplaincy Trust Board, who gratefully acknowledge the financial and administrative support of Student Services at the University of Otago and Otago Polytechnic.

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