

## **Making Your Home Away From Home**

No matter what your age, you can likely remember a time when you would have given anything to be free from your family and hometown. You may have longed to finally go to college which you always heard described as the best years of your life. You were probably eager for more responsibility and greater challenges. What you may not have expected, though, as you started college was becoming homesick – longing intensely for the comforts and familiarity of home. Whether you are a native Chicagoan, from out of state, or a new international student, you will probably experience homesickness to some degree.

This new academic year brings many new students to Roosevelt University. The weeks leading up to the beginning of the Fall semester can be a whirlwind of activities including moving into residence halls, attending orientations, registering for classes and meeting with advisors or professors. It can take months of planning and preparation to begin college. When the day finally arrives to jump in the car, train, or airplane and walk through the doors of Roosevelt University, students of all ages and backgrounds undoubtedly experience conflicting emotions. Feelings of anticipation can turn into feelings of fear, anxiety, and doubt. Memories of home may come flooding in – your friends and family, the pets you had to leave behind, the car you didn't bring to Chicago, your favorite restaurant. It would be great if the transition to Roosevelt University went smoothly for everyone, but individual experiences will differ.

### **Causes of Homesickness**

Facing unfamiliar situations without your usual supports can be challenging. Homesickness can even be triggered by certain events like a birthday, or stressors such as traffic or waiting for the bus. Being homesick isn't just about missing the people or physical location of home, but also possibly the change in expectations others have of you, and that you have of yourself. There are many decisions college students have to make, often under a great deal of pressure from family and peers. Balancing independence and assertiveness with familial and cultural expectations can be difficult. Longing for "the good old days" is an understandable response when so much responsibility and maturity is expected of you.

New freshmen aren't the only people who will experience homesickness. Even though graduate students may be a little older and wiser, they are not immune. Starting a graduate program is a significant event that can be challenging in a number of ways. For many students, graduate school is the first time they venture away from home. Others have taken some years off after undergraduate work to work full time, start a family, or travel. New grad students will have to take care to adjust to a new location and routine, readjust to the role of student, and try to balance work, school, and family obligations. Homesickness can be especially tough for international students who do not have the potential luxury of short, affordable visits home, or the convenience of being able to call long distance for lengthy conversations. International students have the challenge of adjusting to a totally new language and culture which can exacerbate the longing for home. Reaching out to meet new friends can sometimes be particularly intimidating to international students who may feel insecure when speaking English.

### **Ways to Cope**

For a lot of people, homesickness diminishes greatly or disappears altogether after a few weeks. In the meantime, here are some tips on how to overcome homesickness:

**Acknowledge your feelings.** Realize that homesickness is understandable and that it takes time to adjust to new situations. Talking to someone can be one of the most helpful things you can do. Classmates, coworkers, and resident assistants (RAs) will probably be

happy to lend an ear. They might even offer some great advice about how they managed when they felt homesick.

**Become involved at Roosevelt University.** One of the best ways to not only overcome homesickness, but also ensure a positive college experience, is to know about and utilize the many services available to you as a student. Becoming more familiar with your surroundings, and the people at Roosevelt, will make you feel more at home. The Center for Student Involvement (CSI) is a great place to start. There are 30 student organizations at Roosevelt which you can become involved with. There are also events happening regularly that are ideal for meeting new people such as lectures, concerts, leadership programs, and service opportunities. Ask someone to join you in one of these activities. Chances are they are also looking to meet new people and expand their circle of friends.

**Stay connected to home.** Let your family and friends know what you are going through. Keep them informed of how you are adjusting to your new surroundings. Send them pictures, and ask them to send you some things that remind you of home, too. Most people enjoy receiving mail! You can also start to plan a visit home, if possible, even if it is far in advance. The upcoming trip will give you something to look forward to.

**Take care of your health.** The body affects the mind, and vice versa. Mental health and physical health are both important to overall wellness. Exercise is a great way to combat feeling depressed, stressed, or lethargic. The Marvin Moss Student Center (MMSC) in Chicago and the Fitness Center in Schaumburg are available to all Roosevelt students. Avoid trying to drown out your feelings with drugs, alcohol, or other risky behavior. While your homesickness might temporarily subside, it often leads to other problems, and ultimately deeper feelings of isolation and sadness.

**If faith is important in your life, join a spiritual or religious community.** Getting together with like minded people in a positive, supportive environment can be very uplifting and help you feel at home again.

**Focus on the opportunities for growth.** When you are feeling homesick you may second guess your decision and think to yourself, "I shouldn't have come here" or "I should move back home". Realize that although your newfound independence isn't easy, you are gaining new life experiences from which you will most certainly gain wisdom.

**If you are experiencing severe homesickness, seek help.** Severe homesickness is more intense, continuous, and debilitating. If you are having trouble getting to class, are not making friends, or feel sad or depressed, drop by The Counseling Center.

Moving away from home and establishing your independence is an important part of growing as an individual, which is almost never easy. Facing new challenges, though, is often a precursor to change. Hopefully, you now have a better idea of some ways to deal with feeling homesick. Have a great semester, and welcome to Roosevelt!