

# Managing Adjustment to College

Gustavus Adolphus College Counseling Center

Most of us have a connection to a place we call home, some place familiar, or where we grew up. It can be challenging and, at times, even painful to move some place new and experience a longing to feel the comfort of home.

Homesickness, like many other concerns that students face, is relatively common.

When you left home, you may or may not have experienced homesickness. Some students get caught up in activities early in the semester or become so involved in new friendships that they nearly forget about their former lives. Others may start out feeling very excited about beginning college, then experience homesickness after a few weeks. Still others find changes and the unfamiliar to be frightening from the very beginning and may experience homesickness from a few days up to an entire semester. It can be challenging to try and replace or continue your search for supports that you need.

Homesickness can be experienced by any of us when we find ourselves faced with trying to satisfy our needs in new surroundings with new people. Each of us has ways we usually cope with change, as well as different tolerances for change. Homesickness refers to the many feelings associated with leaving home, including: fearing change, grieving losses, fearing the future, feeling sad and feeling alone, among others.

Homesickness has no simple cure, but it also doesn't have to last forever. At times, simply being able to talk about your experience of leaving home can help. What follows are some strategies students have used in the past to make the transition from home to Gustavus smoother:

- **Acknowledge That You Feel Homesick.** Missing family and friends and feeling sad are natural responses to leaving home.
- **Talk About It.** Talk with your C.F., a friend, a parent, a brother or a sister who has experienced leaving home.
- **Keep in Touch.** You may call home a lot during the first week or two. Share with your family the fact that you miss them. Then, try to decrease phone calls and increase writing letters and e-mail messages describing your activities and experience. Share how important it is for you to hear back from loved ones.
- **Bring Familiar Items.** Bring pictures of family, friends and animals. Bring plants, stuffed animals, old comforters, etc. to help ease the transition from home to campus.
- **Give Yourself Time.** To expect to stop missing home immediately may be unrealistic. Realize that new situations take time to get use to and that you will probably always miss home to some extent. Over time, feelings of homesickness will decrease in intensity and number of episodes.
- **What Do You Expect From Yourself?** We would all like to be popular, well-adjusted and get nothing less than a 'B'. That doesn't happen, even for those who look like they have it all together. Give yourself permission to make mistakes and to not be perfect.
- **Invite People To Explore With You.** Ask someone you've eaten with, had class with or lives in your hall to go along with you as you explore the campus. Start to make Gustavus familiar to you.
- **Set Dates To Go Home.** Make arrangements for rides in a way that reduces your ability to impulsively go home.
- **Do Something.** Don't ignore your feelings by just wishing they would go away. If you bury your problems now, they will often return disguised as something else—stomachaches, lack of motivation, fatigue, increased drinking, depression, anxiety, etc.
- **Get Support & Get Involved.** The more places you go and the more things you do, the more people you will meet. Get involved in your favorite activity or try out a new one. Ask how different offices and committees support students.