

How to Help Your Student Deal with Homesickness

When we feel overwhelmed with change, our first instinct is often to seek familiarity. For new college students, this can mean wanting to come home on the weekends, to eat favorite home-cooked meals, and to return to the comfort of an old familiar bedroom. Your student may even have feelings of sadness or anxiety, which are also very normal responses to change. So what can you do as support for your student through the natural emotional bumps that come with separating from home?

Validate your student's feelings. Let them know that you understand and agree that it must be hard. While your first instinct may be to reassure them by telling them not to worry and that everything will be okay, it may be more helpful to let them know that you understand that this is a difficult time.

Be an active listener. Your student is likely experiencing a wide variety of feelings as they navigate this transitional time. One of the most important ways that we work through homesickness is to talk about our feelings. Do what you can to create a safe space so that your student can openly express their feelings. If your student does not want to share, that's okay too. Just let them know that you are available if they want to talk.

Let your student know that feelings of homesickness are normal. Your student may think that they are the only one who is feeling this way. Let them know that these feelings are quite normal and are a natural response to such significant changes. Remind them that even the students down the hall who are laughing and seem to be doing great probably have times when they feel homesick too.

Strike a healthy balance. While your inclination may be to talk to your student multiple times a day, or to text throughout the day, finding a balance of communication is important so that your student has space to branch out and develop new relationships. Of course, your student should know that they can always call in times of distress, but setting up a weekly "phone-home night" allows for a sense of stability and consistency, and also sends the message that you have confidence in your student to build new friendships. You may also try other forms of communication (e.g., emails, snail mail, care packages).

Encourage your student to seek campus resources. Bellarmine's campus is filled with opportunities for support. Get familiar with campus resources so that you can encourage your child to seek additional support during this transitional time. Such resources include RAs, Residence Hall Coordinators, Campus Ministry staff members, the Student Success Center staff, and the Counseling Center (502-452-8480), which provides free and confidential therapy services to Bellarmine students.

Adapted from Amy Wendell, Psy.D., Assistant Director of the Counseling Center (2009).