

Myths about settling in

1. *"Feeling homesick means I'm not coping. "*

In fact homesickness is a normal feeling. Research shows that up to 70% of students feel homesick in their first two or three weeks at university¹. Many students continue to have short bouts of homesickness throughout their time at university, for example on returning after a vacation at home. This can occur even when the student is settled and happy in the new environment. Homesickness is a natural response to transition and is not a sign of anything more.

2. *"Going home every weekend is a bad thing. "*

It is very common for RHUL students to go home at weekends and have jobs, relationships etc based at home. It is absolutely possible to have a happy, settled university life which includes going home every weekend, or very often. There is no reason to have to cut off all your ties to home and the people at home - each student needs to find the style that suits them best.

3. *"No one else is homesick: "*

No, everyone has moments of not feeling happy or settled. However, people often think they have to hide these feelings and not show anyone else - so everyone ends up mistakenly thinking that everyone else is fine! Research has shown that telling someone else about homesick feelings can be very useful in overcoming them².

4. *"I should be having 'the best time of my life' now that I'm at university. "*

This time of life includes lots of difficult adjustments, lots of pressures and worries, and lots of challenges. Just like any other time of life, it also has the potential to include lots of fun, enjoyment and achievement. Few times are 100% worry free, no matter how good.

5. *"I shouldn't feel lonely when there are so many people around. "*

It is quite common to feel even more lonely when you are surrounded by people, but don't yet feel comfortable with them. Remember that friendships take time to develop.

6. *"It is vital to look busy. "*

When we avoid eye contact or pretend to be absorbed in a book (or whatever) in order to give the impression that we are 'fine', we tend to put others off from making contact with us. Next time you are in a lecture (or wherever), feeling that you are the only one alone and everyone else has friends, look around. There are probably others on their own, or at the edges of things, who might welcome a smile and a chat, or you sitting next to them.

7. *"Eve!)Jone has already got into friendship groups - it's too late now. "*

Groups formed very quickly in the early weeks of the first year soon grow less tightly-knit, as people relax and settle in. New friendships and groups form and change throughout the three years of university.

¹ See University of Reading Counselling Service website at www.rdg.ac.uk/counselling

² Willis, H, Stroebe, M & Hewstone, M (2003) Homesick blues. *The Psychologist*, vol 16 no 10.