

# ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

## Settling into university life- Homesickness



### Who gets homesick?

Many students struggle to manage the transition between home and university life. There is a mass of information to take in when you arrive, as well as the practical adjustments that need to be made – such as finding your way around, meeting lots of new people, establishing yourself in your new location.

It is an exciting time but the changes can also be daunting. 50-70% of new university students get homesick during their first few weeks. Homesickness can affect anyone – male, female, younger or older – we all have attachments to our families, friendship groups and usual environments.

### Why do I feel so homesick?

- **Lack of familiarity-** It is normal to feel down from time to time when you are in a new environment. Everything may seem different and you need to put in conscious effort for daily tasks. Fortunately, if you allow yourself time to adjust to the new place, you will feel more like yourself. Things will eventually fall into place as you form routines and get used to the new environment.
- **Stretched attachment bonds-** It may feel as if you have “lost” your parents or friends when you leave home for the first time. Although you know that they are still here, they may feel distant. This may be the first time you become aware of their importance as your support system.
- **Longing for familiarity and belonging-** You may be having thoughts that revolve around loneliness, and that you do not belong here that contributes to your longing for home and familiarity. If you come from a close bonded family, left a boyfriend or girlfriend behind, haven’t been away from home before, or were sent to university rather than having chosen to go, homesickness is quite likely to happen.

### How can I make myself feel better?

- **Decorate your new room-** Make your new room feel like your own personal space so that you will have a familiar space in the midst of all the differences. You may decorate your room with things from your home such as photos and posters. You may also put on your favourite music in your personal space to create comfort.
- **Join in activities that involves being around people-** If you play chess or sport or attend church at home, find out how to continue this at university and have a go. Whatever your interest, joining in and transferring your enthusiasm across to your new environment provides you with stability and continuity to your former life. You will also have more chance to make new friends with similar interest in your new environment.
- **Spend time with a few potential friends rather than a large number of acquaintances-** Nurture emerging friendships which can become emotional substitutes for your home bonds by doing activities together. Out from lectures, explore the town together and create significant experiences such as trying out new activities in new place.



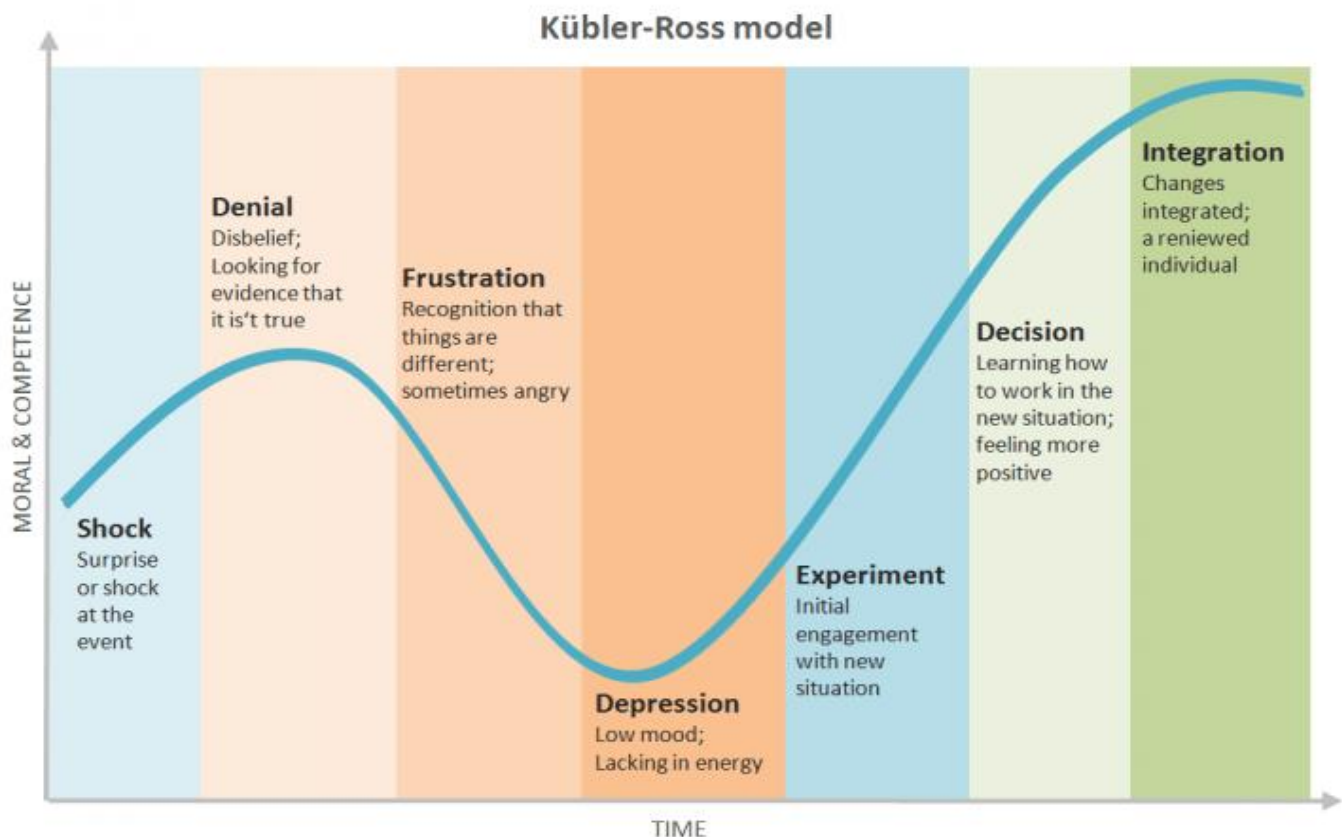
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### What's going on in me when I'm in a new environment?

The loss we feel when someone has died involves accepting that they'll never return. But, when we move away we have chosen (or feel forced) to deal with a loss that we know is reversible, so there's a temptation to retreat from the challenge. This sets up an ongoing inner conflict.

It may help to know that just as in grieving; there is a process which will work itself out if you allow it, as displayed below:



### Where can I find help?

Counsellors at the University Counselling Service are used to helping students work out their own strategies and solutions so that they feel that they can manage, and actually enjoy university life.

It's a good idea to book an appointment at

[ruok@reading.edu.my](mailto:ruok@reading.edu.my) or 0162084012 to see a counsellor if:

- Being away leaves you feeling completely overwhelmed, rather than the feelings coming and going
- You begin to think in a self-destructive manner;
- Your self-esteem is suffering;
- This is not your usual reaction in new situations and you find it hard to feel better.

