What’s the deal with homesickness?

Going away to boarding school is an exciting time, full of new experiences and challenges. But for many people, it can also be a sad time, as for about ten weeks at a time, you will be away from your home and family. It is not uncommon for many people to feel homesickness the first couple of times they go away to school.

Some people feel homesick from their first day at school. A lot of other people feel excited for the first few days, and then get homesick for the next few days.

What does homesickness feel like?

Homesickness can be:

• Thinking about familiar things, like your family, friends, pets, home, town or community
• Missing ‘little things’ at home
• Physical signs, like headaches or stomachaches
• Feelings, like worry, anxiety, sadness

Why am I feeling homesick?

Almost everyone gets homesick from time to time!

Homesickness is often worst the first time you are away from home, but it can happen at any time. When you go away to boarding school, there are a lot of changes to deal with. These changes usually bring about feeling of loss and anxiety.

Loss: Feeling sad about being separated from family and friends; missing out on things happening at home, like celebrations, and events; not being able to do the things you would otherwise be doing

Anxiety: Feeling nervous or uptight about meeting new people; getting used to different routines; coping with differences in weather and the physical environment; worry about not fitting in

Feelings of homesickness can also depend on:

• How far away you are from home
• Who’s decision it was to go away to school
• Whether family members at home are happy and well
• How different Townsville is to your home
• Whether you are used to the same type of rules
• Whether you have been away from home before

How can I handle homesickness?

Remember—lots of people get homesickness; but lots of people manage to go away to school successfully. Important things to remember are:

1. Homesickness is normal and it usually goes away. Give yourself time to get used to your new school.

2. Get involved with other students, classes, and activities in school and boarding. The sooner you get used to your new school, the less strong the feelings of homesickness will become.

3. Call, write, or email home. Phone calls can sometimes make the feelings worse in the first couple of weeks, so be careful. Writing letters or emails can be more helpful.
4. Talk out your feelings with a friend, houseparent, or teacher. Just getting feelings off your chest can give you a new way of looking at things and make you feel better.

5. Keep active. Joining a sporting team or getting involved in activities helps you to fit in, and takes your mind off missing home for a while. Exercising is a great way to get rid of negative feelings.

6. Make a list of things that you enjoy doing. When you are feeling down, pull out your list and pick something that will cheer you up.

7. Visit family and friends in Townsville but don’t fall into the trap of going out with them every weekend. It’s important to get to know other students.

Where can I get more help?

Talking to your houseparents or PC teacher is a great place to start. If your homesickness doesn’t go away, or gets so bad that it is stopping you from going to class or getting involved in boarding, you may need some extra help to deal with it. Drop by the Health & Wellbeing Centre if you think you need some extra help.

The Health & Wellbeing Centre

You can talk to any staff at the Health & Wellbeing Centre about your homesickness.

The counsellors can help you to come up with ways to manage your feelings of homesickness, and help you cope with the changes of a new school.

The nurse or healthworker is also a good person to talk to about your homesickness, and can help you manage illnesses that might be making you feel worse.

The liaison officers can help you get in touch with important people in your community, help you meet new friends and can help you find ways to settle in to your new school.

The Deputy Principal can help you sort out problems with classes and teachers, and can make sure you are getting the support you need in school and boarding.