

Homesickness and Loneliness Among International Students

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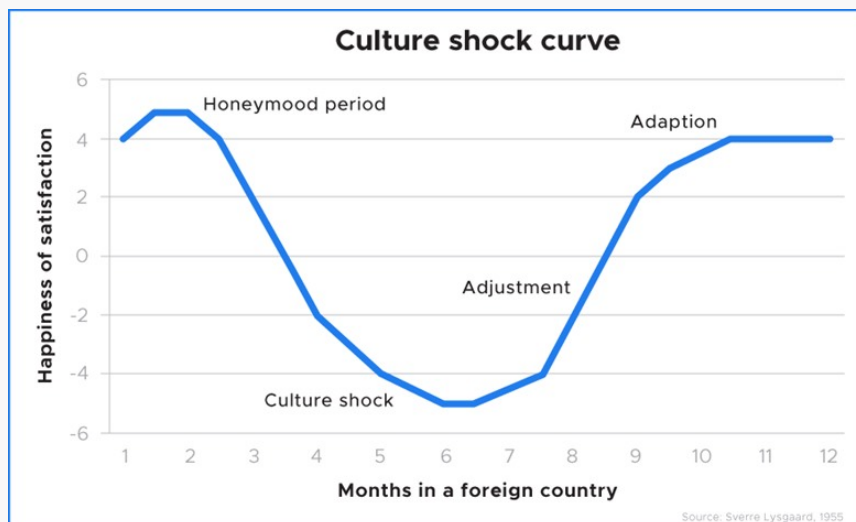
By Swati Kumari, Peer Wellness Ambassador

Being an international student in Canada is not easy.

At home, we are surrounded by the love and warmth of our family and friends.

The sudden change in our environment, lifestyle, weather, food, and language can make us homesick. This sudden exposure to a foreign culture and way of life is what we call Culture Shock.

What is Culture Shock?



According to *Participate Learning*, there are 4 stages of Culture Shock that newcomers and international students may experience:

1. **The Honeymoon Stage**

This is a "positively overwhelming phase" where you start admiring the new lifestyle.

2. **The Frustration Stage (Culture Shock)**

As the name suggests, this stage is filled with frustration and anxiety over things you are unable to understand. It can be language or communication gestures that you are

not accustomed to. It is at this stage that you begin to feel homesick and idealize the life that you had there.

3. **The Adjustment Stage**

At this stage, you get more comfortable with your new lifestyle.

4. **The Acceptance Stage**

At this last stage, you accept the new culture and environment by understanding how to function in your new surroundings even when you are unable to understand everything.

Being open-minded and embracing the new changes can help you acclimate and manage your homesickness and culture shock.

What is Homesickness:

Homesickness can be described as the feeling of stress and anxiety caused by the separation from people and places, we are accustomed to. According to Prospects, leaving home to go to college can be a common cause of homesickness.

Factors Leading to Homesickness in International Students:

1. **THE BIG CHANGE**

Moving to Canada causes a profound impact on your daily routine and lifestyle. This can lead to anxiety and distress. Cultural differences can make it even more difficult to adjust, which can cause a lack of interest in your new surroundings. Further, if there is a language barrier it can cause shyness and nervousness in most newcomers. As a result, they may choose not to interact with people which can further develop feelings of loneliness.

2. **EXTREME COLD**

Cold weather and the lack of sunlight during the winter season can be depressing. As a result of the weather, people are less likely to be outside and tempted to stay indoors which can exacerbate feelings of isolation. According to the CEO of the *Canadian Mental Health Association*, it is quite common for newcomers to Canada to experience "a decline in their mental health" during the winter.

3. **HIGH EXPENSES**

According to *The Varsity*, students in Toronto are suffering significantly due to growing housing, food, and transportation prices. To make ends meet, many students

work longer hours which leaves very little time for studying. This causes stress and anxiety and affects students' mental health and academic performance

4. **DIFFICULTY IN ADAPTING**

For some of us, it might be difficult to adapt to new changes in our lifestyle. We may tend to stick with our old routine even in those situations that require us to adapt to new changes. Personally, I had a tough time adapting to the new time zone. I used to attend my classes in the morning and sleep during the entire day time and wake up at midnight. I missed many opportunities to socialize and explore the city. Habits like this can make us feel lonely and homesick. Eventually, I adapted to the new time zone and found my rhythm, and began engaging more.

Common symptoms of Homesickness:

Homesickness can affect you both mentally and physically.

Impact on Mental Health:

- Loss of interest
- Lowered productivity.
- Depression
- Feelings of Isolation
- Low Self-Esteem
- Feeling nervousness, anger, and/or sadness

Physical Impact:

- Trouble in Sleeping
- Lack of Appetite
- Feeling Nauseous

How to Manage Homesickness:

1. **GIVE YOURSELF SOME TIME TO ADJUST**

You have gone through a substantial change in your life and so it is important that you allow yourself to adjust. Homesickness is very normal, especially among students. So instead of feeling guilty or beating yourself up, face it. If you feel like crying, then cry. Sometimes a good cry is what we need.

2. **SURROUND YOURSELF WITH SOME “HOME COMFORTS”**

It can be a small gift that your parents gave you when you were 8 or your favorite comfy blanket that makes you feel at home. Try to surround yourself with anything from back home that cheers you up and ultimately makes you feel at home. For me, it's the hand-woven sweaters that my grandmother made for me.

3. **EXPLORE THE CITY & ITS CULTURE**

Staying alone in your room can make you feel lonelier. It can increase your tendency to think more about home and be homesick. It's time you explore the City of Toronto. Canada is a diverse country and so is its culture. Here are some **unique activities** that you can do in Toronto. Also, there are many exciting workshops, events, weekly activities, and trips organized by **International Transition Coordinator Team** at Seneca College itself, including trips to Blue Mountain and Niagara Falls.

4. **GET INVOLVED WITH ON-CAMPUS ACTIVITIES**

This can be the best way to socialize, make friends and enjoy your student life. Seneca has a wide range of activities. If you are into fitness, Seneca **Athletics & Recreation** has many planned activities including hip-hop, kickboxing, yoga, etc. You can also check out the Seneca Student Federation (SSF) **calendar** they organize some very exciting events every other day. The Seneca Student Federation also has many **clubs** that you can join. Apart from that you can also check out the **Student Life Calendar**, there are many exciting events planned just for Seneca students.

5. **BE ACTIVE**

Our mental health is greatly influenced by our physical health. One of the most effective ways to deal with homesickness and loneliness is to start being physically active. It can be done in any form that you are comfortable with. Taking a brisk walk or involving yourself in sports, whatever fits you, start doing it. Personally, being physically active gives me a sense of purpose and positivity.

6. **SOCIALIZE**

Cultural shock can make socializing with others seem scary. However, once you start doing it, it will take away a lot of the tension. You will not only learn from others but also gain self-confidence. According to the *Mayo Clinic* – *“Socializing not only staves off feelings of loneliness, but also it helps sharpen memory and cognitive skills, increases your sense of happiness and well-being, and may even help you live longer”*.

7. **TALKING TO YOUR FAMILY**

It is a good idea to be in touch with your family and friends back home. It can help you to let out your feelings and emotions. However, it is important to find the right

balance, as too much contact with those at home can make you feel more distant from them thus leading to further homesickness. It can even prevent you from socializing with others around you.

Resources available at Seneca

Homesickness is a phase, and it is good to give yourself some time to adjust. If you find yourself troubled or facing ongoing feelings of loneliness or distress, it's always a good idea to 'Ask for Help'. Seneca has great counseling services that are free and confidential. Book an appointment with the service [HERE](#)

My Take as an International Student:

There is a song that I love listening to and am really drawn to the lyrics, "*You only need the light when it's burning low*".

It's true that nothing can compare to the love of our home, and we will always miss our loved ones back home. However, Canada is a beautiful country and there are lots of things to explore, lots of friends to make and lots of memories to be created.

Don't allow the fear of change to stop you. Step out of your comfort zone and make the best use of every opportunity. No matter how difficult it is, in the end, it always works out.

The content was adapted from the following resources:

- [EduCanada](#)
- [Save the Student](#)
- [Girl with the Passport](#)
- [Mayo Clinic](#)
- [New Canadian Media](#)
- [The Varsity](#)
- [Webmd](#)
- [Now Health](#)
- [Participate Learning](#)
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