



Being “homesick” is not a new phenomenon, it is very natural and has been experienced by almost everyone at some time in their life. So it is no surprise that parents will be anxious when they make that decision to send their teenage son or daughter away to board for the first time. Young people are remarkably resilient and even though they experience homesickness in differing degrees they tend to overcome and accept living away from home. Many students are very comfortable and eager (even if initially nervous) going to boarding school and see it as a positive move. Others, although not initially looking forward to going away, slowly but surely warm to the experience and overcome any previous difficulties. Then there are the few students who find the transition to be a very stressful and a difficult situation to be in. Of these students the experience can be very traumatic (expressed overtly or passively) and in rare cases the homesickness is never resolved and the student is withdrawn from the college.

It is the priority of boarding staff to make the transition to boarding away from home as smooth and painless as possible. There are a number of strategies employed by the college that can assist in this move;

- The college invites all new students and parents to attend an Orientation day at the end of term 4 to welcome and introduce new students and parents to the college and each other in preparation for their arrival in the following year.
- We start the school year off by having the first weekend being a “no leave” weekend. We put in place a full weekend of “icebreaker” activities run by staff and Prefects to not only occupy and distract new boarders but to assist in their assimilation into college life.
- We also conduct a Year 8 Orientation camp on the second weekend back, which solidifies the year eight group and assists in each year 8 to get to know each other as a peer group.
- We “buddy” up all new students with older current students who are hand picked to assist new students in getting to know the college routines and gives students someone outside their year group to relate too.
- Staff meet with each new student early in the term on a formal basis and informally through out the first term and second term specifically to address homesickness issues or concerns to identify those who may need additional support or intervention by the Chaplain or school psychologist. This of course is usually identified early on their arrival. Parents will always be contacted by staff when dealing with homesick issues and also to report on their progress.

What parents can do – A general guide if your child is homesick

- Provide assurance and support for their son or daughter who may be struggling with homesickness and persuade them to talk with staff or a Prefect about their situation.

- During the initial first few weeks try to limit your contact with your son or daughter (as hard as this may be) to brief phone conversations so that they can deal with any detachment with our support.
- We suggest that parents do not visit their son or daughter for the first two weeks as this can reignite emotions and delay the integration and acceptance process.
- Be aware that homesick students may resort to emotional “blackmail” to get you to come and get them from the college and tend to exaggerate or even fabricate events that are going on at the college. This has been experienced many times by staff, so it is imperative that parents seek clarification and assurance from staff.

▪ **We eventually have to let go of our children and as part of growing up and maturing it is important that adults allow young people to adopt their own coping methods and understand resilience. If we don't, we may end up with vulnerable young adults entering the big wide world unprepared and being overly reliant on their parents. Boarding is an ideal place for young people to develop their independence and self reliance. There is the space, social interaction and the need to become independent but with adult supervision and guidance close at hand.**

Some tips for Parents (Canadian Child Health News 2007)

This is an extract (with some NRC editing) from an on-line advice site for “Homesickness”. The idea is to prevent or minimise the affect of homesickness on your child before leaving home.

- Involve children in the decision to spend time away from home, so that children have a sense of control. (Visit the college before arriving so they are very familiar with the location and set up of the college)
- Tell children that homesickness is normal, but that they can use strategies like writing letters home, sharing their feelings with other people, and thinking about all the good things that the hostel is giving them, to help ease their worry.
- Arrange for a practice time away from home, such as a two- or three-day stay with relatives. If a child has reached high school without having gone to camp or for more than a night away from home, this is especially important to prepare them for college or independent life.
- Work with the child to learn about the college ahead of time, so they know what to anticipate.
- If possible, try to introduce them to other students going to the college ahead of time. A familiar face can make all the difference in the adjustment to a new environment.
- Encourage kids, even older teens heading off to college, to make friends with others and seek out trusted adults to connect to.
- Before the separation, don't make comments that express anxiety or ambivalence about the child going away. Even "I hope you'll be okay" or "what will I do without you" can leave a child worried that something bad might happen to them or their parents, and make them preoccupied with thoughts of home.
- Use a calendar to show exactly the amount of time a child will be away ie terms and school holidays and closed weekend dates, if that's known. Predictability and perspective on the length of separation is important whenever possible.
- Don't make a "pick up plan" or a deal with children to bring them home if they don't like the experience of being away. This undermines the child's sense that their parents have confidence in their ability to be on their own, and set an expectation that they won't like the new experience.
- Warn children against keeping feelings of homesickness to themselves, doing something "bad" in order to get sent home, or trying to runaway.
- If your child has special medical needs, such as diabetes or asthma, make sure that the college or school they'll be going to has staff who know how to handle day-to-day care and emergencies. Parents who have managed their child's care intensely can have an extra hard time giving up that control, and children can sense that anxiety.
- Above all, know whether your child is really ready for a separation. If not, re consider the boarding option and try again a year or two down the track.