

HOW TO MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME ON CAMPUS:

A Guide to Settling in During Your First Weeks



The Jed Foundation



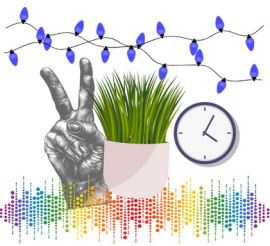
Whether you're a new student or you're returning to campus after the summer or an extended leave, the first few weeks are a big transition. It's normal to not only feel excited and hopeful, but also to have anxiety about the year that lies ahead, miss people and places you've left behind, and feel a little uprooted.

With time, you will find—or reconnect with—your people, your place, and your rhythm. To help you do that, The Jed Foundation (JED) created this toolkit with tips for making yourself at home, finding a community you connect with, and identifying resources to navigate college life. You can find many more resources for managing challenges and creating the college experience you want at jedfoundation.org/set2go.

We wish you a comfortable, connected year.

CREATE YOUR SPACE

It's really helpful to create a home base that keeps you feeling grounded and safe.



Decorate your dorm, apartment, or bedroom with touches that feel like home, such as your favorite blanket, stuffy, or pictures of people you love.

If you're commuting from home, **redecorate your bedroom to signal this new phase of your life.** Replace old photos with more recent ones, reorganize your desk, or add decorative swag from your school.

Look for cozy on-campus spaces

where you can unwind, whether it's an on-campus cafe, outdoor bench, or even a couch in the library or student center you use as a regular hang-out.



Introduce yourself to your RA

if you are living on campus. They can help you settle in and find ways to connect with other students and activities you like.



3 Stress-Relief Tools to Use On the Go

Box breathing: Exhale while counting to four, hold for a count of four, inhale deeply for a count of four, and keep your lungs full for a count of four. Repeat.

Progressive muscle relaxation: Find a quiet place to lie down. Take a deep breath and squeeze one muscle group in your body (feet, lower legs, upper legs, etc.) for five counts. Slowly release the tension for 10 counts. Move on to the next area, working your way up from your feet to your head.

Guided imagery: Close your eyes and picture a peaceful place, such as a white-sand beach, a pine-filled forest, or your favorite couch. Imagine the details of the setting, from the way the sun feels on your skin to the touch of water on your toes. Meanwhile, slowly inhale and exhale, paying attention to your breath.



FIND YOUR PEOPLE

Feeling connected to other people is one of the best things for your mental health, but it rarely happens overnight. It will probably take some time and effort to find people you truly click with.

Follow your interests. Join a club, religious group, or intramural sports team where you can find people who share your passions or hobbies.



Find groups that align with your identity. Look for LGBTQIA+, Black, Latiné, or AAPI affinity groups;

first-generation student support groups; or multicultural fraternities or sororities.

Tap into the people right around you, whether it's your roommate, hallmates, or classmates. It's not easy to make the first move, but it's a safe bet that anyone you reach out to is looking for connection too.

BE PREPARED FOR HOMESICKNESS

Feeling homesick is common and normal, but knowing you're not alone in this experience may not necessarily help you feel less alone. Taking small steps when you feel a bout of homesickness set in can make a difference.



Schedule phone or FaceTime calls with friends and family back home. Having a regular time to connect with your friends or family gives you something to look forward to when you're feeling homesick, but it also gives you time and space to make new connections at school.

Use good memories to help you feel grounded. Instead of focusing on how much you miss a person or place, try to focus on what you love about them or a particular memory that makes you laugh.



Add something from your old routine to your new day-to-day. Maybe it's going for a morning walk, finding a place to grab coffee every morning, watching a favorite show, or picking up a food item you like.

Homesickness usually goes away after a few weeks, but if it doesn't, reach out to your resident adviser, the campus counseling center, or [a mental health professional](#) for support in moving through it.

ESTABLISH A ROUTINE

During periods of change, a routine helps you feel grounded.



Pick a few “constants”—things you’ll do every day that will help you feel settled—such as grabbing breakfast at the same dining hall or going to the gym at the same time.

Create small rituals for the mornings and evenings that help you reset, such as writing in a journal, listening to a playlist you love, or taking a walk.

Be realistic and kind to yourself. It takes a while to forge new habits, and it’s OK if your new routine doesn’t stick right away. With time and practice, you’ll find your rhythm.



TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Academics and social connections are probably two of your priorities right now, but your physical and mental health are just as important. They will help you develop the other two and make all the other challenges easier.



Make sleep as important as studying. Getting enough sleep is one of the best things you can do to support your mental health. Good sleep can improve your sense of well-being and improve your studying and academic performance. Aim for at least seven hours a night.



Do things that bring you joy, such as listening to your favorite playlists, playing sports or doing a physical activity you like, making arts and crafts, reading at the end of the day, spending time outdoors, or connecting with a friend on the phone or in person. Whatever activities help you lower stress and feel good, make them a part of your new routine.

Reach out for mental health support.

You don’t have to be seriously suffering to benefit from mental health care. If you already have a therapist or care team, check in with them regularly and keep your scheduled appointments. If not, many campuses have a counseling center that may offer free sessions and support groups. Stop by to find out what your options are if—or when—you’re feeling anxious, stressed, or depressed.



Brain Breaks



If you have only five minutes:

- Put away your study materials and close your eyes.
- Breathe in slowly for six counts and out for three counts.
- Go outside for a quick change of scenery.

If you have 15 to 20 minutes:

- Go for a walk.
- Take a shower.
- Enjoy a favorite snack.
- Take a power nap for 10 to 20 minutes.
- Do a short yoga video or stretch.

Where to Get Help



Find out what support services your college offers.

Look for:

- Academic support services
- Tutoring centers
- Disabilities office
- Financial aid office
- Health center
- Counseling center
- Peer counselors

Save local emergency numbers, as well as campus security, the health center, and counseling centers.



USE THESE TIPS TO MANAGE ACADEMIC STRESS

Schoolwork can feel overwhelming—especially when you’re getting used to new course material and professors—but most campuses offer free academic support services, and faculty members are there to help you.

Ask your professors or academic advisor for their advice for managing your workload.

Take brain breaks to destress and refocus (see prior page).

Use the resources provided by your campus, such as a writing center, the library, study spaces, tutors, office of disabilities, professors’ office hours, and study groups.

Get organized.

- Make a list of what needs to get done, along with a deadline for each item.
- Rank items by order of importance.
- Determine how much time each will take and add them to your calendar.
- Cross completed items off your list.



Signs You Need Extra Support

No one expects the transition to a new living, social, or academic environment to be easy, but if it feels so difficult that it’s getting in the way of your settling in or causing some of the symptoms below, it’s important for you to connect to mental health care.

You deserve to feel better, and, with the right support, you will. Reach out to your RA, roommate, friends, campus counseling center, therapist, or [other mental health support](#) if you:

- Frequently or constantly feel sad, empty, hopeless, frustrated, irritable, or pessimistic.
- Have big changes in your appetite, such as eating too little or too much.
- Have trouble sleeping or find yourself sleeping much more than normal.
- Feel tired or low on energy all the time.
- Are less interested in activities you usually enjoy.
- Have trouble concentrating or remembering things.
- Feel guilty, worthless, or like you are not enough.
- Are having panic attacks.
- Feel overwhelmed and unable to tackle new challenges or seek help.

- Stop taking care of yourself, including skipping showers, not brushing your teeth, or avoiding other personal-hygiene tasks.
- Are using alcohol or drugs to deal with difficult feelings or situations.
- Prefer not to socialize with family and friends.
- [Frequently have thoughts of death or suicide.](#)

If you or someone you know needs help right now:

Text HOME to 741-741 for a free, confidential conversation with a trained counselor any time of day.

Text or call 988 or use the chat function at [988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org).

If there is a medical emergency or immediate danger of harm, call 911 and explain that you need support for a mental health crisis.

The Jed Foundation (JED) is a nonprofit that protects emotional health and prevents suicide for our nation’s teens and young adults, giving them the skills and support they need to thrive today...and tomorrow.

Visit us at jedfoundation.org



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