

Strategies for finding your niche

1. Make your room your own. Decorate it with things from your room at home, play your favourite music - make it a place that you feel comfortable in, as far as possible.
2. Find out what your academic time-table is and then develop a plan for how you will fit your other tasks and activities into the remaining time - something to give you a sense of structure. Make sure this plan includes time for leisure and things you enjoy.
3. Think about the activities you used to enjoy at home and look out for ways to build them into your life here - e.g. exercise, the cinema. Don't deprive yourself of these enjoyable things just because you have nobody to do them with - find ways to learn to enjoy doing some things on your own.
4. Do not wait for others to visit or speak to you - avoiding eye contact and giving off an air of self-sufficiency just intensifies isolation and puts people off from approaching you. Make a habit of talking to people you sit next to in class, at meals or in breaks. Say hello to, or just smile at, people you pass on the staircase or elsewhere in college.
5. Try to put yourself in new situations where you will meet people with interests in common, choosing activities that you are genuinely interested in and enjoy - societies, sports or voluntary work, for example.
6. Build relationships by showing interest in others. Practise being a good listener, and encourage others to speak about themselves.
7. Consider your own style and preferences. Do you prefer big group interaction, one-to-one, or small group? Look out for others who may feel similarly. Remember that, despite appearances, not everyone is interested in bars and sports.
8. Try not to be self-critical. Remind yourself that friendships often take time to develop, and relationships even longer. Do not dismiss friendships in the belief that only romantic relationships will relieve your loneliness or give you confidence or status.
9. Give university, and yourself, a chance. It takes time to get used to a new place and to feel truly comfortable and 'at home'. Don't rush yourself.
10. When you feel homesick, tell someone about it, or write down your feelings in a diary. Research has shown that acknowledging homesick feelings and seeing them as natural is useful in overcoming them.