Dear Alice,

It's past Thanksgiving vacation and I am still not happy my first year at college. I don't feel like I have a solid routine and yet I feel like I'm in a rut. I have a few friends but they're not really people I want to spend my next four years with and I feel like the cliques have already been decided and I have trouble running up to people and introducing myself anyway. I'm bored all of the time and I sleep an ungodly amount of my life away, and all the literature says that I should be adjusted and having a swingin' time by now. And I'm not. I just want to take control of my life and make it, y'know, START, but I don't have the energy and I wouldn't know where to begin anyway.

Sincerely,

Sufferin' Sucka-tash

Answer

Dear Sufferin' Sucka-tash,

Transitioning to the college environment can be tough given all the adjustments to make in a brief amount of time. Being away from home, leaving old friends and support networks behind, meeting new people, and being responsible for yourself may all be stressful in one way or another. You may feel as though the college experience you’re currently having doesn’t exactly live up to your previous expectations, but rest assured, your first-year experiences don’t necessarily dictate your experiences in the following years at college. Everyone adjusts at a different pace, but you may be happy to know that there are a variety of options for getting into the groove of college life.

College offers many opportunities to meet new people. Joining clubs that focus on a common interest (poetry, yoga, or animal rights, anyone?), playing on sports teams, joining a band, attending school events, volunteering, writing for the school newspaper, or participating in (or starting your own) study groups are just some of the ways in which you can engage in your school community. You might start by searching your school’s website for student organizations and groups you might be interested in joining. Some groups may have open meetings you can
attend to learn more information. It’s also good to keep in mind that you’ll likely meet new people throughout your time in college, in new classes, and by living in different places (such as a new residence hall, fraternity or sorority house, or apartment).

You also mentioned being in a "rut" and sleeping a lot. You may want to ask yourself when you started feeling this way. For example, did you feel this way prior to college? Have you ever felt this way before? If you don't feel better after trying some of the tips for meeting new people, would you consider talking with a mental health professional? Your school may have a counseling center or can make referrals to local counselors, who may be able to help you sort through the source of these feelings. They can also help you build skills for navigating some of these emotions in the future.

Another potential option you may consider is whether you would want to transfer to another college. After all, what may have appealed to you as a high school student may not meet your needs now. If this avenue is of interest, you might want to think through what you want out of your college experience. Excellent academics? A nurturing environment? Large or small campus? Urban, suburban, or rural? Far away from or close to home? The answers to these types of questions may help to determine what school environment might be a better fit.

No matter the environment, it’s worth noting that you’re not alone when it comes to the difficulty of meeting new people — there are plenty of other students who probably feel the same way. To address this, it may be helpful to come up with strategies for feeling more comfortable interacting with people that you don’t know. You might consider brainstorming ideas with a friend or asking them to go with you to check out a new student club or team. Having an ally nearby may make you feel more comfortable with starting up a conversation when you don’t know anyone. If your pal is more of the chatty type, maybe they can help introduce you to some folks as well, thereby easing you into a new social situation. You could also reach out to friends who don’t go to your school for some outside perspective or to a mental health professional to talk about your concerns further. Though it may feel difficult now, there are folks out there who can help you think of additional ideas to meet people, make friends, and to feel more confident in the process. You’ve already taken the first step by reaching out for support, so kudos to you.

Whatever you decide to do, best of luck to you,

Alice!

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