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Unhappy first year ^[1]

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,

The first year at college can be rough. After all, there are so many 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'll 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 school band, attending extracurricular workshops, 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 start to feel like you're having a "swingin'" time at college. Search your school's website for student organizations and groups you might be interested in joining. Also keep in mind that it's

common to meet new people throughout your time in college, in new classes and by living in different places (such as a new residence hall, fraternity/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 transferring to another college? After all, what may have appealed to you as a high school senior may not meet your needs now. If this avenue appeals to you, asking yourself what you want out of your college experience may be a helpful guide. A competitive atmosphere? Excellent academics? A nurturing environment? Large or small campus? Liberal or conservative? 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 for you.

No matter the environment, it may make you feel better to know that many people share your experience with having "trouble running up to people and introducing yourself." In order to address this, it may be helpful to come up with ways for feeling more accustomed to interacting with people that you don't know. Discussing this with a close friend may be able to give some advice. And speaking of leaning on a friend, perhaps you can use the buddy system (a.k.a. bringing a good friend along) when checking out a new student club or team to meet people. 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. Regardless, 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.

As isolated as you may feel at college right now, you're not the only one who feels, or has felt, this way. You deserve some extra credit for taking the first step to reach out for suggestions.

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

Alice!

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