

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers visit <http://www.djreprints.com>.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/do-parents-play-a-role-in-homesickness-1449617619>

LIFE | HEALTH | BURNING QUESTION

## Do Parents Play a Role in Homesickness?

How to Increase or Decrease a Child's Risk

By **SUE SHELLNBARGER**

Dec. 8, 2015 6:33 p.m. ET

**Q: I read your column about homesick students with great interest. What is the impact of hovering parents? Are they the ones suffering from a child's absence and transmitting it to the student?**

—*H.K*

**A:** Homesickness is a timeless affliction that predates the helicopter parent. And it can trouble students regardless of their readiness to separate from parents, or parents' willingness to let go. Many homesick students aren't yearning for Mom and Dad, but for the comfort of familiar places, sights and sounds. Vulnerability is linked more closely in research to innate tendencies such as social anxiety, or to personality traits such as introversion or neuroticism—a tendency to feel a lot of negative emotions.

Parents increase the risk of homesickness, however, if they don't arrange for teens to get some experience living away from home before college. They also can hamper students' efforts to get over it if they imply the students can't handle homesickness on their own, for instance, by promising to come pick them up if it gets too bad, says Christopher Thurber, a researcher on the topic and a psychologist at Phillips Exeter

Academy, an Exeter, N.H., boarding school. When one student in a recent study said during a phone call to her mother that she missed home, her mother replied, “Great. Pack your bags, we’re coming to get you,” according to the 2015 study of 34 homesick people in the journal *Environment and Behavior*. The student stopped talking to her parents about the issue.

Parents also get in the way if the time they spend talking or texting with students eclipses opportunities for teens to make new friends or get involved with campus activities. Conversations with parents can be helpful in lending support and lifting students’ mood, however, especially if parents let students air their feelings, then help them shift their focus to solutions, Mr. Thurber says. Talking about homesickness might seem at first to make the anxiety worse, but it actually opens the door to building confidence and figuring out healthy ways to adjust.

—*Email [sue.shellenbarger@wsj.com](mailto:sue.shellenbarger@wsj.com).*

**Write to Sue Shellenbarger at [sue.shellenbarger@wsj.com](mailto:sue.shellenbarger@wsj.com)**

Copyright 2014 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our Subscriber Agreement and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit [www.djreprints.com](http://www.djreprints.com).