

DEALING WITH HOMESICKNESS AT SEA



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THE LIFE OF A SEAFARER COMES WITH ITS OWN SET OF CHALLENGES AND HOMESICKNESS CAN BE ONE OF THEM. SPENDING MONTHS AT SEA CAN BE AN EXHILARATING AND FULFILLING EXPERIENCE, BUT IT CAN ALSO BE INCREDIBLY ISOLATING. MISSING HOME AND LOVED ONES CAN SOMETIMES ONLY BE CURED BY A RETURN HOME, BUT SEAFARERS DO NOT HAVE THIS LUXURY. HOMESICKNESS IS A COMMON AND POWERFUL EMOTION THAT MANY SEAFARERS GRAPPLE WITH ON LONG VOYAGES.

UNDERSTANDING THE CAUSES

Homesickness is a natural human response to being separated from one's familiar surroundings and loved ones. For seafarers, it can be triggered by several factors:

ISOLATION: Being at sea for extended periods often means limited social interaction. This isolation can intensify feelings of loneliness and homesickness.

MISSING LOVED ONES: Most individuals can cope with relatively short periods away from home, but the absence of family and friends can be one of the most significant triggers. Seafarers often miss important life events such as birthdays and other special occasions.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES: Being in unfamiliar cultures and environments can exacerbate feelings of homesickness, as seafarers might find it challenging to adapt to new customs and norms.

THE IMPACT OF HOMESICKNESS

Homesickness can have a profound impact on a seafarer's mental and emotional well-being. The emotional strain can affect their job performance, contributing to decreased concentration and productivity. Moreover, homesickness can lead to:

ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION: The constant longing for home and loved ones can cause anxiety and depression, which can further hinder a seafarer's ability to perform their duties.

PHYSICAL HEALTH ISSUES: Homesickness can manifest in physical symptoms such as headaches, sleep disturbances, and decreased appetite, impacting a seafarer's overall health.

DECREASED MORALE: Low morale and emotional distress can result in reduced job satisfaction, potentially affecting team dynamics on board.

COPING STRATEGIES FOR SEAFARERS

If you are feeling homesick, you need other distractions to maintain your mental, physical and spiritual welfare.

- 1 HOBBIES:** Embrace your time at sea as an opportunity to explore new hobbies or interests. Reading, exercising or learning a new skill can be a welcome distraction from homesickness.
- 2 MINDFULNESS:** Mindfulness exercises and meditation techniques can help you manage stress and anxiety.
- 3 CREATE A ROUTINE:** Establish a daily routine that gives structure to your days. This can include exercise, leisure activities, and self-care practices to maintain a healthy body and mind.
- 4 STAY CONNECTED:** In today's digital age, staying in touch with loved ones has never been easier. Utilise satellite communication, emails, and social media to maintain a connection with your family and friends. Regular conversations can provide a sense of closeness and comfort.
- 5 PROFESSIONAL HELP:** Sometimes, homesickness can become overwhelming, and seeking professional counselling or therapy can be beneficial. Many shipping companies provide access to mental health services for their crew members.

Homesickness is an emotional challenge that seafarers face during their time at sea, but it is not unbeatable. By understanding its causes and impact, and by implementing the coping strategies mentioned above, seafarers can better manage this natural emotional response. Staying connected with loved ones, creating routines, and building a support network are essential steps in navigating the emotional storm that is homesickness. In doing so, seafarers can lead fulfilling and successful lives while spending months at sea.

