Section 5
Social and cultural information
Adjusting to life in Australia

While living and studying abroad may be an exciting adventure, it can also present a range of challenges. Having decided to study and live in Australia you will be undertaking adjustments in many areas of your life including cultural, social and academic. It is also important to remember that while these changes are occurring you will be embarking upon a new semester of study (for many of you in a different language) and be away from your usual supports, networks and resources. Adjustment to a new country and culture is a process that occurs gradually and takes time. The values, beliefs, traditions and customs of your home country may vary greatly from those in Australia and adapting to the Australian way of life may take some time. This advice may help:

Listen, observe and ask questions
Adjustment to a new culture and way of life takes time. Allow yourself time to observe those around you and patterns of both verbal and non-verbal communication. Don’t be afraid to ask questions if there are things you do not understand as this will reduce the chance of confusion or misunderstandings.

Become involved
Make an effort to meet people and become involved in groups both on campus and in the wider community. Maintain an attitude of openness to new situations and experiences. Establishing friendships and joining groups is the best way to experience and learn about Australian culture and will certainly mean you have a richer and more enjoyable time here.

Try to maintain a sense of perspective
When confronted with difficulties remind yourself that living and studying abroad is a challenge and it is normal to feel stressed, overwhelmed and out of your depth at times. Try to recall or make a list of the reasons you wanted to study abroad in the first place. Also, listing positive events or changes within yourself that have occurred since you arrived may also assist with getting things in perspective.

Maintain some of the routines and rituals you may have had in your home country
This can include small things such as continuing to drink a certain type of coffee or tea or eating specific foods. It may also include maintaining involvement in bigger events such as celebrating a national day in your country of origin with a group of friends.

Keep lines of communication open with those at home
Communicating with those at home regularly about your experiences of study and life in Australia, through emails, telephone and letters, is vital. Not only does it help to keep you connected with important social supports, it also assists your friends and family to understand your experiences which will smooth the transition when you return home.

Sense of humour
Importantly, remember that living in a different culture means you will inevitably find yourself in a range of unusual and often confusing situations. Being able to laugh in these situations will remind you that it takes time to understand different cultures and that it is OK to make mistakes.

Ask for help
Don’t be afraid to ask for assistance or support if you need it. In addition to the Counselling Service there are many organisations set upon campus to ensure you have a successful and enjoyable time in Australia.

Finally, relax and enjoy the journey!

(Source: Macquarie University)
Culture shock

Culture shock is the feeling of being out of place in an unfamiliar environment. The initial excitement of moving to a new country often subsides when your usual behaviour produces unexpected reactions in the local setting due to cultural differences. The potential stress of dealing with these persistent challenges can result in feelings of hostility and frustration with your host country as well as a profound longing for home.

OVERCOMING CULTURE SHOCK

Once you realise you have culture shock, getting over it and moving onto better adjustment with the host culture will depend on you. It is you who must take some positive steps to feel better, and the sooner you take them, the better!

1. Recognition:
   First, you should remember that culture shock is a normal part of your adjustment and that you may have some of the symptoms. Some of your reactions may not be normal for you; you may be more emotional or more sensitive, or lose your sense of humour. Recognising your culture shock symptoms will help you learn about yourself as you work your way through it.

2. Be objective:
   Second, try to analyse objectively the differences you are finding between your home and your host country. Look for the reasons your host country does things differently. Remember that host customs and norms are (mostly) logical to them, just as your customs and norms at home are logical to you.

3. Set goals:
   Third, set some goals for yourself to redevelop your feeling of control in your life. These should be small tasks that you can accomplish each day. For example, if you do not feel like leaving your room, plan a short activity each day that will get you out. Go to a post office or shop to buy something, ride a bus or go to a sports event. If you feel that language is your problem, set daily goals to learn more: study fifteen minutes a day; learn five new words a day; learn one new expression each day; watch a TV program in your new language for 30 minutes. Each goal that you achieve will give you more and more self confidence that you can cope.

4. Share your feelings:
   Fourth, find local friends who are sympathetic and understanding. Talk to them about your feelings and specific situations. They can help you understand ideas from their cultural point of view. (Source: Rotary International Youth Exchange.)
Australian culture

Social customs

GREETING PEOPLE
When meeting someone for the first time, it is usual to shake the person’s right hand with your right hand. People who do not know each other generally do not kiss or hug when meeting. When you first meet someone, it is polite not to talk about personal matters.

Many Australians look at the eyes of the people they are talking with. They consider this a sign of respect, and an indication that they are listening. Do not stare at the person for a long time.

You can address a new acquaintance using their title and family name. You may use their first name when they ask you to or use it in the introduction. In the workplace and among friends, most Australians tend to be informal and call each other by their first names.

CLOTHING CUSTOMS
The types of clothing that people wear reflect the diversity in our society just as much as the variation in climate. There are no laws or rules on clothing, but you must wear certain clothing for work situations. Most workplaces have dress standards.

Outside of the work situation, clothing is an individual choice; many people dress for comfort, for the social situation or the weather. Clubs, movie theatres and other places require patrons to be in neat, clean clothes and appropriate footwear.

Many Australians live close to the beach and the sea. On hot days, they may wear little clothing on the beach and surrounds. This does not mean that people who dress to go to the beach or swimming have low moral standards. It means that this is what we accept on and near our beaches.

People from other countries can choose to wear their national dress. They may be religious or customary items and include monks robes, a burqa, a hijab or a turban. As a tolerant society with people from many different cultures, clothing is a part of cultural beliefs and practices that is encouraged.

POLITE BEHAVIOUR
‘Please’ and ‘thankyou’ are words that are very helpful when dealing with other people and buying goods or services. When asked if you would like something, such as a cup of tea, it is polite to say, ‘yes please’, or just ‘please’ if you would like it, or ‘no, thank you’ if you do not.

When you receive something, it is polite to thank the person by saying ‘thank you’. Australians tend to think that people who do not say ‘please’ or ‘thank you’ are being rude. Using these words will help in building a good relationship.

Sometimes a sensitive issue may come up in conversation. Not to talk may seem rude. It is more polite to say ‘sorry, it is too hard to explain’ than to ignore a question.

Australians often say, ‘excuse me’ to get a person’s attention and ‘sorry’ if we bump into them. We also say, ‘excuse me’ or ‘pardon me’ if we burp or belch in public or a person’s home.

You should always try to be on time for meetings and other visits. If you realise you are going to be late, try to contact the person to let them know. This is very important for visits to professionals as you may be charged money for being late or if you miss the appointment without notifying them before the appointment time.

Most Australians blow their noses into a handkerchief or tissue, not onto the footpath. This is also true for spitting. Many people will also say, ‘bless you’ when you sneeze. This phrase has no religious intent.

AUSTRALIAN SLANG
Much common word usage or ‘slang’ may seem strange to people new to Australia. Slang words start from many different sources. Some words are shortened versions of longer words. Many were expressions already used by migrants who came from the north of England. If you are unsure what an expression means, it is all right to ask the person who said it to explain. Some common expressions are:

• Bring a plate—when you are invited to a party and asked to ‘bring a plate’, this means to bring a dish of food to share with your host and other guests. Take the food to the party in any type of dish, not just a plate, and it is usually ready to serve. This is common for communal gatherings such as for school, work or a club. If you are unsure what to bring, you can ask the host.

• BYO—when an invitation to a party says ‘BYO’, this means ‘bring your own’ drink. If you do not drink alcohol, it is acceptable to bring juice, soft drink or soda, or water. Some restaurants are BYO. You can bring your own wine to these, although there is usually a charge for providing and cleaning glasses called ‘corkage’.

• Arvo—This is short for afternoon. ‘Drop by this arvo,’ means please come and visit this afternoon.

• Fortnight—This term describes a period of two weeks.

• Barbeque, BBQ, barbie—outdoor cooking, usually of meat or sea food over a grill or hotplate using gas or coals. The host serves them eat with salads and bread rolls. It is common for a guest, when invited to a BBQ, to ask if they should bring anything.
• Snag—raw sausages usually cooked at a BBQ. They can be made of pork, beef or chicken.
• Chook—the term chook means a chicken, usually a hen.
• Cuppa—a cup of tea or coffee ‘Drop by this arvo for a cuppa’ means please come and visit this afternoon for a cup of tea or coffee.
• Loo or dunny—slang terms for the toilet. If you are a guest in someone’s house for the first time, it is usually polite to ask permission to use his or her toilet. ‘May I use your toilet please?’ Some people ask, ‘Where’s the loo?’
• Fair dinkum—honest, the truth. ‘Fair dinkum?’ when used as a question means, ‘is it really true?’
• To be crook—to be sick or ill.
• Flat out—busy.
• Bloke—a man. Sometimes if you ask for help, you may get an answer to ‘see that bloke over there’.
• Shout—to buy someone a drink. At a bar or a pub when a group of friends meet, it is usual for each person to ‘shout around’, meaning buy everybody a drink. Each person takes a turn at buying a ‘round’. It is also acceptable to say that you do not drink (alcohol) by saying that you are a ‘teetotaller’. This also means you are not obliged to shout.
• How ya goin?—‘How are you going?’ means how are you, or how do you do? It does not mean what form of transport you are taking. Sometimes it can sound like ‘owya-goin-mate’.


RESPONDING TO AN INVITATION

• What could I be invited to? If you get an invitation to lunch, dinner, barbeque, party, wedding, birthday, or any type of event you will usually respond with a letter or phone call. The midday meal is called lunch, and the evening meal is called dinner or ‘tea’. ‘Tea’ can also mean a cup of tea or ‘cuppa’. If invited for tea, the time of the event is a good sign of whether your host means dinner or just a cup of tea. An invitation to tea, for any time after 6 pm (1800 hours) usually means dinner.
• How are invitations made? Invitations can be written or spoken. Written ones usually ask for RSVP, (which is ‘respondez s’il vous plait’ in French) and means ‘please reply’. You should reply whether you intend to go or not. The invitation will tell you how to reply and when the reply is expected. Your host may be specific about how many people are invited. If your host invites the whole family, you should tell your host how many people would go. Usually a family is the parents and their children.
• What if I do accept an invitation? When you accept an invitation to a meal, it is also usual to tell the host what you cannot eat. It is perfectly okay to say that you are a vegetarian and do not eat meat or that you are Muslim or Jewish and do not eat pork. It is not polite to arrive late and you should make a telephone call to your host to explain if you are going to be late.
• What if I cannot accept an invitation? You may not always be able to accept an invitation. The best way to refuse is to say, ‘thank you, unfortunately I/we have other plans at that time’. To say that you are too busy may seem extremely rude, even if it is true. Once you accept an invitation, you should only cancel if something arises where you cannot go. You should also explain the reason to your host. To cancel because you got a better invitation from somewhere else can seem very rude, and can affect new friendships. Sometimes it is best not to accept an invitation right away, and to ask your host whether they would mind if you check your plans and reply to them later. (Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship)

TIPPING

Tipping is not generally expected or practiced in Australia. This is because throughout Australia, service industry staff are covered by minimum wage laws and therefore do not rely on tips for their income. However, it is acceptable to leave a small amount (perhaps 10%) should you feel you have received exceptional service.
Safety in Australia

Personal Safety Plan

Australia is a relatively safe and secure place to live and study. Like all major cities in the world it is important to consider your personal safety in relation to where you are, what you are doing and who you are with. As you would at home it is good practice to consider your personal safety and to develop a personal safety plan.

Having a plan is simple! It means thinking about what you will do in the event of various personal emergencies on campus and in your personal life if an emergency was to happen. Everyone’s situation is different, when considering your plan you can talk to other students, University Security Staff (opposite Library on Main Campus), your family and/or friends. An example of things to consider is your class timetable. If you have lectures or practical sessions that begin or end after normal hours, you will need to consider this when you are developing a plan because the circumstances such as lighting are different.

Below is a list of things to consider when you are thinking about your own personal safety plan:

ONCAMPUS

- Do you have the contact telephone numbers of people you can trust and contact for assistance stored in your mobile phone? (e.g. friends, relatives, local police, security staff)
- Save the emergency number in your mobile phone, you can assign a hot key for the emergency numbers. (Tel:000, Mobile:112, Textcall emergency—for TTY or ASCII Dial: 106)
- The Flinders 24hr Security number is 82012880
- If you drive to your institution, where is the most suitable car park located to your study area? Is the area well lit?
- Would you feel more comfortable carrying a personal alarm?
- Should you use any security escort?
- Where is the nearest public transport point?
- Is the entry/exit door you normally use to your study area the safest entry or exit to the building?
- When leaving your study area, should you prearrange to walk with a friend or a group?
- What is the safest path to use when walking to and from your study area? Is it well lit?
- Does this pathway have overhanging trees or shrubs which may provide cover for other people?
- Is there a public telephone within the vicinity? Where is it located?
- Are you familiar with your study environment? (e.g. location of toilets or nearest public telephone).

(October: Study Australia Website)

OFFCAMPUS

- Be alert to your surroundings and the people around you, especially if you are alone or it is dark.
- Whenever possible, travel with a friend or as part of a group.
- Stay in well-lit areas as much as possible.
- Walk confidently and at a steady pace.
- Make eye contact with people when walking—let them know that you have noticed their presence.
- Do not respond to conversation from strangers on the street or in a car—continue walking.
- Be aware of your surroundings and avoid using personal stereos or radios—you might not hear trouble approaching.
- Always keep your brief case or bag in view and close to your body.
- Be discrete with your cash or mobile phones.
- When going to your car or home, have your keys in your hand and easily accessible.
- Consider carrying a personal attack alarm.

(Source: Australian Federal Police)

- If you do not have a mobile phone, make sure that you have a phone card or change to make a phone call, but remember—emergency 000 calls are free of charge. If you are going out at night remember:
  - Think ahead. Consider how you are going to get home—what about pre-booking a taxi or arranging transport with a friend or family member?
  - Never hitchhike.
  - Make sure that you stay with your party and that someone knows where you are at all times.
  - Make sure you have enough money to get home or to phone.
  - Keep away from trouble—if you see any trouble or suspect that it might be about to start—move away from the scene if you can. The best thing you can do is to alert the police and keep away.
  - Walk purposefully and try to appear confident. Be wary of casual requests from strangers, like someone asking for a cigarette or change—they could have ulterior motives.
  - Try not to carry your wallet in your back trouser pocket where it is vulnerable and in clear view.
  - If you are socialising in a public place never leave your drink unattended. (See Drink Spiking in the following section titled Alcohol, Smoking and Drugs)

(October: Australian Federal Police)
Home security

House break-ins are one of the most common crimes and it appears to be crimes of opportunity with entry gained through an open or unlocked window or door. Most intruders are looking for a house left open or unlocked where they can get what they want with ease and make a quick getaway.

SOME GENERAL SECURITY TIPS

- Your house number should be clearly visible from the street in case of an emergency.
- Keep your front door locked when you are at the back of the house.
- Do not leave messages on the front door. It lets people know you are not home.
- Avoid having parcels left on the door step.
- If you have to have something delivered while you are out, have the neighbours collect it.
- When out, leave a radio or television on or a light in the evening to give the impression you are home.
- Consider taking out contents insurance for your belongings, this will enable you to replace any goods that are lost or damaged as a result of unforeseen circumstances. Look in your local telephone directory under insurance or insurance agent to arrange quotes.
- Keep cash and valuables out of sight.

Home security is an issue for you to consider when you are deciding on a place to live. Windows and doors should preferably have security screens or locks and doors should have dead-bolts, a security chain and a peep hole. If the property has an alarm system, that could increase the level of security.

Internet safety and security

The internet has now become an essential business, social, entertainment and educational resource for most Australians. The increasing level of economic transactions on the internet is making it the focus of criminal activities.

It is important that internet users protect themselves from falling prey to these activities. The following tips list some simple precautions you can take to minimise the chances of becoming a victim of online criminals.

- Instal anti-virus and other security software, such as anti-spyware and anti-spam software. Use and update this software regularly.
- Regularly download and instal the latest security patches for your computer software, including your web-browser. Use automatic software security updates where possible.
- Use a firewall and make sure it is turned on. Firewalls help prevent unauthorised access to, and communications from, your computer.
- Delete suspect emails immediately. Don’t open emails that appear to be suspicious.
- Don’t click on links in suspect emails. Visiting websites through clicking on links in suspect emails may result in malware (malicious software), such as a ‘trojan’, being downloaded to your computer. This is a commonly used and effective means of compromising your computer.
- Only open an attachment to an email where the sender and the contents of the attachment are known to you.
- Don’t download files or applications from suspect websites. The file or application could be malware. Sometimes the malware may even be falsely represented as e-security software designed to protect you.
- Use long and random passwords for any application that provides access to your personal identity information, including logging onto your computer. Don’t use dictionary words as a password. Ideally, the password should be eight or more characters in length. Change passwords regularly.
- Use a limited permission account for browsing the web, creating documents, reading email, and playing games. If your operating system allows you to create a limited permission account, this can prevent malicious code from being installed onto your computer. A ‘limited permission’ account is an account that does not have ‘Administrator’ status.

(Source: Australian Communications and Media Authority)

Making new friends

There is no magic trick to making friends. And if you are in a foreign culture it can seem more difficult than usual to find people who you really “get along” with. Be kind to yourself—remember that making friends takes time. If you make the most of social opportunities during your life in Australia, just as you would back home, it will be quicker and easier for you to fit in, make friends and feel at home.

However, when you meet people, remember to be careful. When you meet someone new, be cautious until you get to know the person better and feel you can trust him or her. If a stranger starts talking to you, they are probably just being friendly. But be safe, and don’t give them any of your personal details like your full name, your phone number or your address. With people you don’t know well; always arrange to meet them in a public place like a café or a park, instead of inviting them to your home or going to theirs, until you feel you have built a relationship with them, know more about them and feel comfortable with them.

Many international students spend time socialising with other students and people from their own country and culture while they are in Australia. These people can make you feel accepted and you may be able to communicate much more easily with them than you can with the locals, particularly when you have just arrived. When everything around you is new and different, it can feel like a big relief to find people from your own country and cultural background. But remember, you need to be careful at first until you get to know them better, just as you should with anyone else. Even though you may feel like you have a lot in common, remain cautious until you feel you know them reasonably well and can trust them. Crimes against international students are sometimes committed by people from their own culture.

If you have any concerns or questions about someone you have met, or want to talk to someone about Australian mannerisms and communication “norms” (widely acceptable behaviour), make an appointment to talk it over with your International Student Adviser.
Public transport safety

Travelling on public transport should be a safe and comfortable experience. Numerous security measures have been adopted to maximise the safety of travellers including: security officers, police, guards, help points, good lighting and security cameras. Most drivers also have two-way radios and can call for assistance.

BUSES

Waiting for a bus:
- Avoid isolated bus stops.
- Stand away from the curb until the bus arrives.
- Don't open your purse or wallet while boarding the bus—have your money/pass already in hand.
- At night, wait in well-lit areas and near other people.
- Check timetables to avoid long waits.

Riding on the bus
- Sit as close to the bus driver as possible.
- Stay alert and be aware of the people around you.
- If someone bothers you, change seats and tell the driver.
- Keep your purse/packages close by your side. Keep your wallet inside a front coat pocket.
- Check your purse/wallet if someone is jostling, crowding or pushing you.
- If you see any suspicious activity, inform the driver.

TRAINS

Many of the same safety tips when travelling by bus apply for trains. In addition:
- Most suburban trains have security cameras installed or emergency alarms that will activate the cameras.
- Carriages nearest the drivers are always left open and lit.
- Try not to become isolated. If you find yourself left in a carriage on your own or with only one other person you may feel more comfortable to move to another carriage with other people or closer to the driver.

TAXIS

Travelling by taxi is generally quite a safe method of public transport. To increase your confidence when travelling by taxi, consider the following suggestions:
- Phone for a taxi in preference to hailing one on the street. A record is kept by taxi companies of all bookings made.
- You are entitled to choose the taxi/taxi driver of your preference. If a driver makes you feel uncomfortable you are within your rights to select another taxi.
- Sit wherever you feel most comfortable—however we recommend women sit in the back.
- Specify to the driver the route you wish to take to reach your destination. Speak up if the driver takes a different route from the one you have specified or are familiar with.
- Take note of the Taxi Company and fleet number. This will help in identifying the taxi if required. If you are walking a friend to catch a taxi, consider letting the driver know that you have noted these details e.g. “Look after my friend, Mr/Ms Yellow Cab No. 436”.
- Stay alert to your surroundings and limit your conversation to general topics.
- If you don’t want your home address known, stop a few houses away from your destination. If the driver harasses you when travelling in a taxi your options include:
- Ask the driver to stop. You may choose to makeup an excuse to do so.
- Leave the taxi when it stops at a traffic sign or lights.
- Call out to someone on the street to attract attention and seek assistance. This may also cause the driver to stop.
- Read out the fleet number and advise the driver you will report him/ her if they don’t stop.

(Source: Queensland Police Service)

Hitchhiking

A person who waves at unknown drivers from the side of the road to request a ride with a driver further along the road is called a hitchhiker. Hitchhiking is illegal in Queensland and Victoria. Elsewhere in Australia it is illegal to hitchhike on motorways (where pedestrians are prohibited and where cars are not allowed to stop). Some travel companies promote hitchhiking as an inexpensive means of travelling around Australia.

However, many crimes have been committed against innocent hitchhikers including violent personal crimes and abductions. You do not know anything about the person whose car you get into.

Our advice to you is, don’t hitch hike! It simply is not worth the risk.

Avoiding dangerous areas and activities

It is important to always be alert and aware of your surroundings and to avoid dangerous areas and activities, particularly at night.

A public place can vary through the course of the day. It may be used by different groups of people at different times. It may be busy at certain times and isolated at others. It may be different during the day than it is at night. These differences can have a very different impact on the way you feel when you are in them.

For example, the street outside a hotel in the morning is likely to be used by people going to and from work or shopping. At night however, the people most likely to be on the street are hotel patrons. Alcohol consumption has now become a factor in these places, and for many (particularly for women), some areas may become less safe.

A public park or garden is often busy during daylight hours, particularly in the mornings, lunch time and on Saturday and Sunday or public holidays. Before 7am and after 6pm a public park or garden is often isolated and usually very dark.
Alcohol, smoking and drugs

ALCOHOL
Alcohol use is legal for those aged 18 years or over. There are laws governing how alcohol may be used in each State and Territory of Australia.

STANDARD DRINKS
The use of standard drinks can help people to monitor their alcohol consumption and exercise control over the amount they drink.

Different types of alcoholic drinks contain different amounts of pure alcohol. A standard drink is defined as one that contains 10 grams of pure alcohol.

These are all equal to approximately one standard drink: a schooner of beer (285ml) = a nip (30ml) of spirits=a small glass (100ml) of wine=a small glass (60ml) of fortified wine such as sherry.

Please keep in mind:
• Some hotels don’t serve standard drinks—they might be bigger. Large wine glasses can hold two standard drinks or even more.
• Drinks served at home often contain more alcohol than a standard drink.
• Cocktails can contain as many as five or six standard drinks, depending on the recipe.
• Pre-mixed bottled drinks often contain more alcohol than a standard drink.

SMOKING
Australian law makes it an offence to sell or supply tobacco products to a person under the age of 18 years. It is illegal for anyone under 18 to purchase tobacco products. There are also a number of laws regulating and restricting the advertising, promotion and packaging of tobacco products. Regulations have been introduced to restrict smoking in public areas such as shopping centres, hotels, restaurants and dining areas, and in some workplaces.

DRUGS
Each State and Territory has laws governing the manufacture, possession, distribution and use of drugs, both legal and illegal. Drug laws in Australia distinguish between those who use drugs and those who supply or traffic drugs. The Federal Customs Act covers the importing of drugs, while each State has laws governing the manufacture, possession, distribution and use of drugs, both legal and illegal.

DANGER: Drink Spiking! Whether you are drinking alcohol or not, keep your drink close to you and watch it at all times. Drink spiking (putting extra alcohol or other drugs into a person’s drink without their knowledge) is an unfortunate risk to people who are out trying to have a good time. Drink spiking can happen to anyone: male or female, young or old whether they are drinking alcohol or not. Never accept an open container of drink if you did not see it being poured. If you suspect you or your friends have had a drink spiked, call 000 immediately to report it and get help.

(Source: Australian Drug Foundation)

Sexual assault
Sexual assault is a criminal offence. It includes sexual harassment, unwanted touching, indecent assault and penetration of any kind. It is important to remember that it can happen to anyone and at any time but certain precautions may make it more difficult for a possible perpetrator.

• When socialising, be smart. Drink in a way that leaves you in control. Leaving drinks unattended leaves them open to being spiked quite easily.
• Walk with confidence and purpose.
• Avoid lonely or dark places.
• Be wary of strangers, whether they are on foot, in cars or at parties.
• Be aware of the people around you.
• Respect your intuition.
• If placed in a situation where you feel uncomfortable say “no!” loudly and with conviction.
WHAT DO I DO IF I AM ASSAULTED?

It is very difficult to tell someone that you have been sexually assaulted. It is important to remember that sexual assault is a serious crime and can happen to people regardless of their gender or sexuality. Your first point of contact should be the Police or your closest Sexual Assault Service. Yarrow Place is a leading public health agency responding to adult rape and sexual assault in South Australia. The contact details are:

Yarrow Place: Level 2, Norwich Centre, 55 King William Rd, North Adelaide 5006 Tel: 8226 8777 or Toll Free in SA: 1800 817 421 After hours and Emergency: 8226 8787 Fax: 8226 8778

1. From a public phone or mobile phone, ring the police on 000.
2. Do not wash, shower, change clothes or clean up in anyway until after talking to the police and going to the hospital. You could destroy vital evidence. Don’t drink alcohol or take tranquillisers or other drugs as you will have to give a clear account of what has happened. Try to remember everything you can about your attacker.
3. Remember, you are the victim. You have nothing to feel guilty or ashamed about.

Police officers are aware that a person who has been assaulted, sexually or otherwise, is likely to be suffering from emotional shock. They will do all they can to make things as easy as possible for you. It is likely they will provide a female police officer for a female victim. If not, you have the right to request one. You can also ask the police to contact a friend, family member, interpreter or religious adviser to be in attendance with you when you are dealing with the circumstances surrounding the report of assault.

Please also contact Flinders Health, Counselling and Disability Services for counselling purposes.
Fire safety

International students are increasingly appearing in statistics related to fire incidents and deaths in Australia. Sadly, most of these fires are preventable. You can follow some simple steps to reduce the risk of fire in your accommodation. Follow the fire safety tips below to help you reduce the chance of fire in your accommodation.

Smoke alarms

Smoke alarms are devices that detect smoke and sound an alarm. Smoke alarms alert and wake people allowing valuable time to get out of a house during a fire. When you go to sleep, your sense of smell also goes to sleep. If there is a fire, toxic fumes may overcome you before you wake up. For your protection, a smoke alarm must be installed in your home.

Smoke alarms can be powered by disposable or long life batteries or they can be hardwired into the 240 volt power supply. Hard wired smoke alarms ( mains powered) also have back-up batteries. The back-up battery can be a 9 volt disposable battery, a long-life battery or a constantly recharging battery. (Check with the manufacturer’s instructions).

ONLY WORKING SMOKE ALARMS SAVE LIVES!

- Once a month you should check the battery by pressing the test button on the smoke alarm. If you cannot reach the button easily, use a broom handle to press the test button
- Keep them clean. Dust and debris can interfere with their operation, so vacuum over and around your smoke alarm regularly
- Replace the batteries yearly. Pick a public holiday or your birthday and replace the batteries each year on that day.
- When the battery is low the smoke alarm will sound a short ‘BEEP’ every minute or so. This is to alert you the battery is low and needs replacing
- Smoke alarms must never be painted
- If cooking and smoke sets off the alarm, do not disable it. Turn on the range fan, open a window or wave a towel near the alarm
- Do not remove the batteries from your smoke alarm or cover your smoke alarm to prevent it from operating.

(Source: South Australian Metropolitan Fire Service)

Electricity

The safe use of electricity assists in preventing house fires.

- Improper use of power boards and double adaptors can lead to fires. A double adaptor or a power board plugged into another double adaptor or power board creates a danger of overloading the system. For safety, use a single extension cord rather than joining shorter cords. Leaving an extension cord coiled while in use or placing a cord under floor coverings can cause overheating.
- Be careful to keep electrical appliances away from water. A hair dryer takes time to cool down. For safety, allow this to happen on an on-flammable surface before storing it.
- Computers, monitors and TVs can overheat and cause fires even when not in use. They should be turned off after each session. Good air circulation is necessary around TVs and videos. TVs should be turned off at the set, not only with the remote control.
- Light globes can become very hot. It is dangerous to cover a lamp with any type of fabric. To dim a lamp it is recommended that a lower wattage globe is used.
Heaters

It’s nice to keep yourself warm in the cooler weather, but remember heaters are a major cause of house fires.

• Read and follow the operating instructions for your heater.
• All clothes and curtains should be at least one metre from the heater.
• Turn off all heaters before you leave your room or go to bed.
• Before you go to bed at night or leave your home, ensure heaters are turned off at their power source and fires are extinguished.

Candles, oil burners and cigarettes

Candles, oil burners and cigarettes can all be dangerous fire hazards.

• Do not smoke in bed.
• Dampen cigarette butts before putting them in the rubbish.
• Make sure your candles are on properly designed candle holders.
• Don’t leave your room when a candle or oil burner is a light.
• Don’t go to sleep when a candle or oil burner is alight.
• Do not put candles or oil burners near windows; be careful, curtains can catch fire easily.

Plan your escape

In a fire:
1. Get down on the floor. Crawl to the door.
2. Get out of your room.
3. Close the door. This prevents smoke and fire from spreading.
4. Alert others.
5. When outside, stay out.
6. Call 000.


Cooking

Most house fires start in the kitchen.

• Prepare food only in the kitchen.
• Always stay in the kitchen while food is cooking.
• Hot oils and fats catch fire easily.
• Don’t use water to put out an oil fire.
• Use a dry powder extinguisher, fire blanket or saucepan lid to extinguish, if safe to do so. These items can be purchased at a local hardware store such as Mitre10, Bunnings or Home Hardware.
• Turn off the cooking appliance before you leave the room or go to bed.
Australia has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world. In fact, one in every two Australians will be diagnosed with skin cancer at some point during their lifetime. The good news is, it can be prevented. By minimising your exposure to the sun’s damaging ultraviolet radiation (UVR), you can protect your skin and prevent the development of skin cancer.

**Sun safety**

**Sun protection**

Skin cancer and skin damage are caused by being exposed to the sun’s harmful ultraviolet radiation (UVR). The key to preventing skin cancer is to protect your skin from the sun by practising sun-safe behaviours.

There are six simple steps you can follow to reduce your risk of skin cancer and protect your skin:

1. Minimise your time in the sun between 10am and 3pm.
2. Seek shade.
3. Wear suitable clothing that provides good sun protection.
4. Choose a broad brim, legionnaire-style or bucket-style hat that will protect your face, neck and ears.
5. Wear UV protective sunglasses.
6. Apply SPF30+ broad spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen 20 minutes before you go out into the sun.
Beach safety

Understanding the ocean is very important—the more you know about how waves, wind and tides affect conditions in the water, the better able you are to keep yourself safe or even rescue others from danger. Recognising danger signs and awareness of surf conditions is an essential part of life saving.

Remember the F-L-A-G-S and stay safe

F Find the flags and swim between them—the red and yellow flags mark the safest place to swim at the beach.
L Look at the safety signs—they help you identify potential dangers and daily conditions at the beach.
A Ask a surf life saver for some good advice—surf conditions can change quickly so talk to a surf life saver or lifeguard before entering the water.
G Get a friend to swim with you—so you can look out for each other’s safety and get help if needed. Children should always be supervised by an adult.
S Stick your hand up for help—if you get in to trouble in the water, stay calm, and raise your arm to signal for help. Float with a current or rip—don’t try and swim against it.

And remember:

- Never swim at unpatrolled beaches
- Never swim at night
- Never swim under the influence of alcohol
- Never run and dive into the water
- Never swim directly after a meal

The surf environment

RIPS
A rip is a strong current running out to sea. Rips are the cause of most rescues performed at beaches. A rip usually occurs when a channel forms between the shore and a sandbar, and large waves have built up water which then returns to sea, causing a drag effect. The larger the surf the stronger the rip. Rips are dangerous as they can carry a weak or tired swimmer out into deep water.

IDENTIFYING A RIP
The following features will alert you to the presence of a rip:
- Darker colour, indicating deeper water
- Murky brown water caused by sand stirred up off the bottom
- Smoother surface with much smaller waves, alongside white water (broken waves)
- Waves breaking further out to sea on both sides of the rip
- Debris floating out to sea
- A rippled look, when the water around is generally calm

Surf skills

ESCAPING FROM A RIP
If you are caught in a rip:
- Don’t panic—stay calm.
- If you are a strong swimmer, swim at a 45 degree angle across the rip and in the same direction as the current until you reach the breaking wave zone, then return to shore.
- If you are a weak or tired swimmer, float with the current, don’t fight it. Swim parallel to the shore for about 30-40 m until you reach the breaking wave zone, then swim back to shore or signal for help.
- Remember to stay calm and conserve your energy.

NEGOTIATING THE SURF
Before entering the surf, always make note of a landmark such as a building or headland that can be seen from the water and used as a guide for maintaining a fixed position. Also check the depth of any gutter and the height of any sand bank before diving under waves—this will help prevent spinal injury.

When going out through the surf, negotiate the shallows by a high hurdle type of stride until the breakers reach your waist or until your progress is slowed.

Waves of any size and force should not be fought against and should be negotiated by diving underneath, giving you time to reach the bottom and lie as flat as possible on the sand while the wave passes over.

Your hands can be dug into the sand in front at arm’s length for stability and as a pull forward when ready to surface.

If the water is deep enough, bring your knees up under your body so you can get a good push off the bottom, like an uncoiling spring. This gives added force to your next dive. Repeat this process until in chest-deep water, then start swimming.

If a broken wave approaches when the water is not too deep, dive down and run or crawl along the bottom. In deep water, do not use extra energy trying to reach the bottom; instead duck dive to just below the turbulence. Wait for the wash to pass and then push or kick to the surface (off the bottom, if possible). Stick to your predetermined path on the swim out.

Check your position by occasionally raising your head for a quick look when swimming on top of as well.

(Source: Surf Lifesaving Australia)
Bush and outback safety

Australia has many extraordinary and beautiful places to explore. If you are going on a trip, travel with other people, make sure someone knows where you are at all times and stay on a road or a walking track.

In the bush

Be prepared if you plan some time in our bush land. Plan your hike. Always tell someone where you are going and what time you expect to return. Let them know when you return safely.

- Check the weather forecast and be prepared for unexpected changes in weather.
- Check the length and degree of difficulty of your planned walk. Consider using a local guide when taking long or difficult walks.
- When walking or exploring outdoors drink plenty of water (allow at least one litre of water per hour of walking). Wear sturdy shoes and socks, a hat, sunscreen lotion, comfortable clothing and insect repellent. Other handy items for long bush walks include food, warm clothing, first aid supplies, a torch and a map.
- Never walk alone. Read maps and signs carefully. Stay on the track and stay behind safety barriers.

- Never dive into a rock-pool, creek, lake or river. Stay away from cliff edges and water falls.
- Do not feed or play with native animals. You might get bitten or scratched.
- Limit your use of fire. Use a fuel stove for cooking and wear thermal clothing to keep warm. Never leave fires unattended or unconfined.
- Visit the ranger station or park information centre to obtain details on the best places to visit and any additional safety tips for that park.

ADVICE FOR MOTORISTS CAUGHT IN BUSH FIRES

Bushfires are common occurrences in Australia during our often long hot summers. If you are in smoke and fire affected areas, you should stay off the roads. If you must get in the car, put your head lights on, dress in protective clothing and footwear and make sure you take food and water—you could be stuck for long periods if your journey is blocked by road closures. Turn the car radio on and keep it tuned to local stations for bush fire updates.

- If you are caught in the middle of a bushfire, park the car immediately and remain calm.
- Look for a 'clear area, preferably off the road. Areas clear of grass or bush are safest—they will not sustain fires of high intensity.
- Do not leave the vehicle. Many people have lost their lives by exiting the vehicle only to be trapped on foot in the open. Your vehicle will help protect you from radiant heat, the chief danger.
- Switch the ignition off. It is unlikely that a vehicle’s fuel tank will explode from the heat of a passing bush or grass fire.
- Close all windows and vents or turn vents to recyle.
- Put the headlights on so that the car is as visible as possible, especially to fire tankers.
- Every one must get down on the floor, below window height and cover all exposed skin with a wool or cotton blanket. Do not use synthetics, which may give off toxic vapours or melt.
- Stay in the vehicle until the fire front has passed. Generally this will take between 30 seconds and one minute. During this time it will be hot, noisy and frightening. It will last a short time even though it may seem longer.
- If you have water, drink it.
- Never attempt to drive through smoke or flame. Crashes can occur when drivers run off the road, striking trees or other cars.
- Once the fire front has passed, exit the vehicle and inspect it for damage before proceeding.
- Do not proceed until you are satisfied that the fire has passed and that you are not likely to be trapped a second time.
- Falling trees and branches are a hazard during and after intense fires. Do not park or drive under trees.
- Exit the area as quickly as possible. Remember fire vehicles may be trying to enter the area and your presence may hinder fire fighting operations.

(Source: NRMA)
Bushfires

IN THE OUTBACK

Australia’s outback is vast. Our remote wilderness areas have few towns and facilities, often with large distances between them, so be aware and plan your trip.

- When planning each day of travel spend some time to calculate how long it will take to drive between destinations. Be realistic about how far you can drive in a day.
- Inform family and friends or the local police of your travel plans. The local police can also provide helpful advice on facilities and road conditions.
- Always carry a current road map.
- Make sure your vehicle is in good working order and has been serviced recently.
- Use a four-wheel drive vehicle on unsealed roads in remote areas. Take extra care when driving these vehicles. For example, drive at reduced speeds on unsealed roads.
- Always carry a spare tyre, tools and water. If travelling to remote areas off major highways take extra food, water, fuel and tyres. Do not over load your vehicle and never carry spare fuel inside an enclosed vehicle.
- If you have trouble with your vehicle, don’t leave your vehicle because it will provide you with shade and protection from the heat. Wait for help to come to you.
- Hire appropriate emergency communication equipment, such as a satellite phone or an Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon device (EPIRB).

- Obey road closure signs and stay on recognised routes.
- Fires in desert and bush areas can spread very quickly. If required, be prepared to evacuate the area immediately.
- Australian wildlife and livestock often graze on the roadside and can stray onto the road. Be very careful when driving at sunrise, sunset and at night, when animals are most active. If an animal crosses in front of you, brake gently, do not swerve wildly to avoid it.
- During daylight hours always drive with your headlights on low beam, as outback conditions can make it difficult to see oncoming vehicles.

(Source: www.visitvictoria.com)

Storm safety

Storms can happen anywhere and at any time of the year. Storms are more common during storm season—from October to the end of April, but it is important to be aware all year round.

Severe storms can cause major damage. They may be accompanied by torrential rain, strong winds, large hailstones, loud thunder and lightning. Storms can cause flash flooding, unroof buildings and damage trees and power lines.

You can also be indirectly affected by storms even if your property is not damaged; such as losing power, or access roads being cut.

The State Emergency Service (SES) is responsible for managing the clean-up and assisting people during and after a storm.

During a storm, there are some things you can do to stay safe:

- Stay indoors and away from windows.
- Unplug sensitive electrical devices like computers, televisions and video recorders.
- Listen to your radio for weather updates.
- Don’t use a landline telephone during an electrical storm.

If you are caught outside during a storm:

- Get inside a vehicle or building if possible.
- If no shelter is available, crouch down, with your feet close together and head tucked in.
- If in a group—spread out, keeping people several metres apart.

For storm or flood emergency, please phone 13 2500.

For life-threatening emergencies: Telephone 000 Mobile: 112 Text call emergency — for TTY or ASCII Dial: 106
Dangerous animals and plants

Australia is home to a variety of native animals. Even if they seem friendly to you, do not touch or feed them—they are not used to close contact with humans and may hurt you.

If you are visiting any of Australia’s beautiful parks or forests:

- Be wary of animals in their natural habitat. Stay well back from goannas, crocodiles, snakes, dingoes, cassowaries, and also wild pigs, cattle, horses and buffaloes. People have been seriously injured or killed by wild animals. Be very careful about approaching any injured animal, such as kangaroos or possums. They are likely to bite and scratch if you attempt to touch or move them.

- Never feed or play with wildlife. Native animals are by nature timid, however, having been provided food from people, may become aggressive in pursuit of food. You may get bitten or scratched. In addition, human foods may be harmful to native animals.

In the warm waters of Tropical Queensland:

- Take care to avoid marine stingers.
- Do not enter water where crocodiles may live.

Bites and stings

The majority of insects in Australia are not harmful to humans. Some insects bite and sting if they are threatened so it is best to avoid touching them if you want to avoid being stung or bitten.

The Australia-wide Poisons Information Centres have a common telephone number: 13 1126.

Some people are allergic to certain insect bites or venom. In the case of an allergic reaction to bites or stings, medical attention should be sought immediately. Call a doctor or hospital for guidance, or for an ambulance on 000 Mobile: 112 Text call emergency—for TTY or ASCII Dial: 106

Anaphylaxis — allergic reactions

Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction that can occur in sensitive individuals from exposure to any chemicals foreign to the body including bites and stings, plants, or medications. Parts of the body, for example the face or throat, swell up so much that the patient can’t breathe. In severe cases the patient may go into shock within a few minutes and the heart can stop. For any patient who shows signs of anaphylaxis, call an ambulance, and have the patient taken immediately to the emergency department of the nearest hospital. Call 000 Mobile: 112 Text call emergency—for TTY or ASCII Dial: 106

GENERAL FIRST AID FOR BITES AND STINGS

For bites or stings from the following creatures, seek first aid assistance straight away and stay as calm and immobile as possible:

- All species of Australian snakes, including sea snakes
- Funnel web spiders
- blue-ringed octopus
- cone shell stings

For all other bites and stings seek or apply basic first aid:

- Wash with soap and water and apply an antiseptic if available.
- Ensure that the patient’s tetanus vaccination is up to date.
- Apply an ice-pack to reduce local pain and swelling.
- Pain relief may be required e.g. paracetamol or an antihistamine (to reduce swelling, redness and itching). The patient should seek medical advice if they develop any other symptoms or signs of infection.

http://access.health.qld.gov.au/hid/AccidentsInjuriesandPoisonings/BitesAndStings/bitesAndStings_is.asp
(Source Queensland Health)