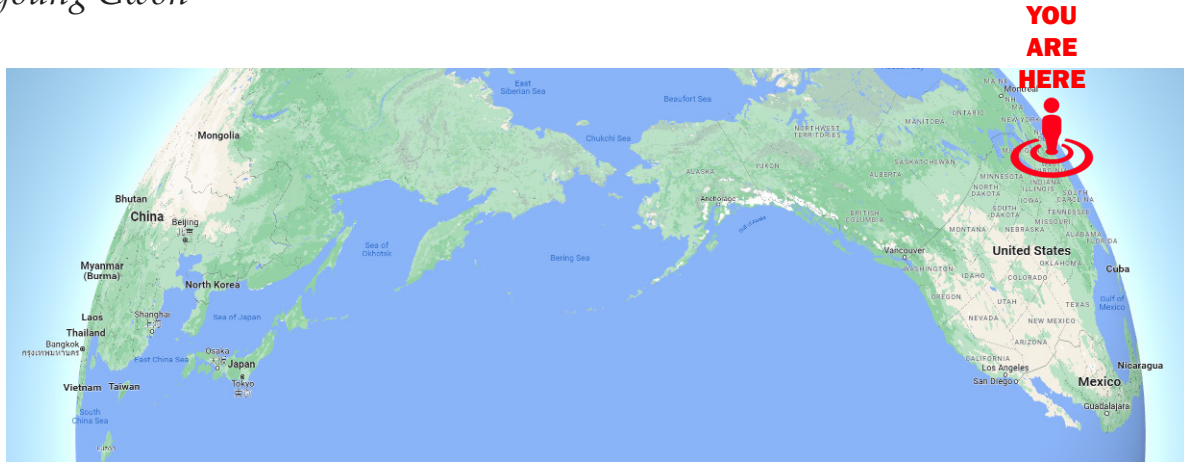


# How Can I Settle into this Here?

Hwiyoung Gwon



## BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Study the title. What does it mean to “settle into” something? Describe a time you have settled into a new home, school, or job. What made it go well? What was challenging?
2. Think about the phrase “break the isolation.” What does the word “break” mean in this sense? Describe a time you helped yourself or your family feel less isolated.

## Community Equals Survival

My goal is to settle in this country. I want to make friends and live a normal American life. Trying to

make a community in this country is equal to survival to me. Many people make friends with co-workers. But I don’t have a job, and my husband works at home. We don’t know

anyone. Nobody helps us. I need to learn how moms can get information in this country.

## I Felt Like an Island in the Ocean

When I first arrived in the U.S., I felt afraid to talk to other people. Every day, I came to the

playground with my son. I looked for someone who spoke the same language as me. There were many people, but no one spoke my language! I felt isolated, like an island in the ocean. I asked myself, “What if my whole life is like this? How can I make a friend?”

How can I improve my English?”

After a few weeks,

I made a plan. My

first step was to try to act like a normal mom and make some friends. My second step was to look for some ESL classes to improve my English.

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**After a few weeks,  
I made a plan.**

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**Trying to make a community in this country is equal to survival to me.**

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## What is “Small Talk”?

Small talk is light, informal conversation. Here are some examples:

- I heard there is a storm coming.
- Aren’t the flowers here beautiful?
- Did you hear about the parade next weekend?
- This line isn’t usually so long. I wonder what’s going on.
- I have two children, too. How old are yours?



Hwiyoung's first step was to talk to other moms at the playground. She started out by making small talk. Photo from [www.pexels.com](http://www.pexels.com).



Hwiyoung's second step was to look for an ESL class. She says, "Being a student made me feel like I was in a community." Photo: Shawn Read, Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center.

## What Did I Do to Break the Isolation?

### Step 1:

At the playground, I decided to ask questions to the other moms. For example, I said, "Your kid is so cute. How old is she?" I asked parents, "Where do you live? Where do your kids go to school?" I made small talk with people. Sometimes people just said, "Goodbye." But I didn't give up. Finally, some other immigrants asked for my phone number, and I made some friends.

### Step 2:

I searched for English classes, and I found one at the Boston Chinese Neighborhood Center. Being a student made me feel like I was in a community.

Being part of a community makes me feel safe. Now I have more friends than my husband, even though his English is better than mine.

Soon, I will work on Step 3 of my plan – look for a job!

Hwiyoung Gwon came to the United States in 2021 because of her husband's work. She is a student at Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center in Boston, MA. (She also participated on the editorial board for this issue, and this photo is from a screenshot of our Zoom meeting.)



## Hwiyoung's Three-Step Process

In your own words, describe Hwiyoung's three-step process. Try writing your own multi-step process for breaking isolation.

Step 1: \_\_\_\_\_

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Step 2: \_\_\_\_\_

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Step 3: \_\_\_\_\_

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