

CULTURE SHOCK AS A SOCIAL ISSUE

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Annotation. This article explains the meaning of culture shock, its causes and the solutions for culture shock in today's society. In this article you can take information about culture shock and become aware of some conflicts that cause because of culture shock.

Key words: culture shock, new culture, homesickness, common feelings, stress, cultural customs.

What Is Culture Shock? “Culture shock” is a normal process of adapting to a new culture. It is a time when a person becomes aware of the differences and/or conflicts in values and customs between their home culture and the new culture they are in. Common feelings may be anxiety, confusion, homesickness, and/or anger. Coping with Culture Shock

There are many strategies to cope more effectively while adapting to the changes of a new culture. Different things help different people and often trying more than one strategy can be helpful. The following are some suggestions:

*Spend time listening and talking with someone from the U.S. who can explain common behaviors, language, and customs.

*Connect with other international students (more than likely they are experiencing, or have already experienced, similar situations).

*Stay connected with your home comforts such as foods, activities, rituals, etc...

*Community activities can be a way for you to get involved with other people and feel more involved in the community and culture in which you are in. Connecting with a Resident Assistant, host family, or other individuals may be a way to get you started.

*Balance academic and leisure activities.

*Keep Active. By getting outside of your house or apartment, you are able to experience what other Americans and international students are doing. If you visit public spaces, such as downtown or a sporting event, you will be able to observe cultural customs and behaviors. *Finding an activity or hobby you enjoy may dramatically reduce stress for you.

*Patience. Keep in mind that culture shock is a normal process which most people experience. Give yourself time and remind yourself that it will not be permanent.

*Collaborate with a mental health professional for support.

It is natural for people living in a different culture to feel sad and lonely at times, and to miss their home culture, friends, and family. Sometimes, however, the stress of adapting to a new culture may reach a level in which added support is useful.

Culture shock is triggered by the anxiety resulting from being out of touch with familiar environments and social contacts. While some people experience no problems in settling in, other people experience significant stress. What Is Culture Shock? Culture shock refers to feelings of uncertainty, confusion, or anxiety that people may experience when moving to a new country or experiencing a new culture or surroundings. This cultural adjustment is normal and is the result of being in an unfamiliar environment. There are four stages of culture shock:

1. The honeymoon stage The first stage of culture shock is often overwhelmingly positive. Travelers become infatuated with the language, people, and food in their new surroundings. At this stage, the trip or move seems like the greatest decision ever made and an exciting adventure.

“In the beginning the whole process will seem weird for you. Open your mind, observe, try not to compare everything with what you have seen in your country,” said Iryna, a former Ambassador Teacher from Ukraine. On short trips, the honeymoon phase may take over the entire experience as the later effects of culture shock don’t have time to set in. On longer trips, the honeymoon stage will usually phase out eventually.

2. The frustration stage Frustration may be the most difficult stage of culture shock and is probably familiar to anyone who has lived abroad or travels frequently. At this stage, the fatigue of not understanding gestures, signs, and the language sets in and miscommunications may be happening. “For me, it was difficult at the beginning, but then it became the best experience I have ever had,” said Esmelin, a former Ambassador Teacher from Costa Rica.

Small things – losing keys, missing the bus, or not being able to easily order food in a restaurant – may trigger frustration. And while frustration comes and goes, it’s a natural reaction for people spending extended time in new countries.

Bouts of depression or homesickness are common during the frustration stage.

3. The adjustment stage Frustrations are often subdued as travelers begin to feel more familiar and comfortable with the cultures, people, food, and languages of new environments. Navigation becomes easier, and friends and communities of support are established. Details of local languages may become more recognizable during the adjustment stage. “When I got here, the people that I interacted with made a world of a difference. The fear that I had when I came to the United States was made easier by the people I met, especially at my school,” said Romaine, an Ambassador Teacher from Jamaica.

4. The acceptance stage Generally – though sometimes weeks, months, or years after wrestling with the emotional stages outlined above – the final stage of culture shock is acceptance. Acceptance doesn’t mean that new cultures or environments are completely understood. Rather, it signifies that complete understanding isn’t necessary to function and thrive in the new surroundings. During the acceptance stage, travelers are able to draw together the resources they need to feel at ease. Though it can be one of the hardest parts of traveling, culture shock is just as integral to the experience as

food, people, and scenery. By recognizing it for what it is and finding ways to cope, you can prevent culture shock from ruining an otherwise enriching experience abroad.

How to Overcome Culture Shock

Time and habit help deal with culture shock, but individuals can minimize the impact and speed the recovery from culture shock. Be open-minded and learn about the new country or culture to understand the reasons for cultural differences. Don't indulge in thoughts of home, constantly comparing it to the new surroundings. Write a journal of your experience, including the positive aspects of the new culture. Don't seal yourself off—be active and socialize with the locals. Be honest, in a judicious way, about feeling disoriented and confused. Ask for advice and help. Talk about and share your cultural background—communication runs both ways.

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