

ADAPTING TO CULTURE SHOCK



What is it?

Culture shock is the state of feeling disoriented or out of place when acclimating to a new setting. Culture shock presents when recognized cultural differences and inaccessibility to homelike experiences contribute to increased homesickness, frustration, and sadness.

When we experience culture shock, we may go through these phases:

Honeymoon Phase:

Feeling excited about exploring, meeting new people, and having new experiences.

Culture Shock Phase:

Becoming frustrated, anxious or sad due to increased loneliness, disorientation, or dissatisfaction with your new setting.

Adjustment Phase:

Finding a balance in coping with those feelings while developing some familiarity and comfort within your new setting.

Adaptation Phase:

Achieving integration through feelings of belonging, developing healthy routines, and adopting parts of the community into our identity.

Reflect

Culture shock can look different for everyone, and not everyone experiences culture shock each time they adapt to new settings, like a workplace or on campus. When we are aware of how culture shock shows up for us, we can more easily move to the adaptation phase. So, it is good to reflect on our own circumstances and skills to cope if we do experience culture shock.

Take some time to self-reflect and consider the following questions. Jot down your answers.

How did it affect you? Did it spark any of the following?

- Sadness or Tearfulness
- Homesickness, Loneliness, or Disconnection
- Frustration, Irritability, or Anger
- Anxiousness or Fearfulness
- Something else?

What factors contributed to it?

- Language differences
- Differences in values
- Lack of access to resources for self-care
- Having to mask your authentic self
- Concerns about burdening family or friends
- Something else?



ADAPTING TO CULTURE SHOCK

Put Into Practice

We hope taking a moment to pause and reflect on the questions above increased your awareness of potential concerns **AND** resources you already possess to cope with culture shock.

Here are some additional tips to put into play:

- **Acknowledge It:** Culture shock and its effects are real! It is natural to feel disoriented, anxious, and saddened when we are grieving and adjusting to new spaces and places. Accepting that this can be a common response is an essential step to adapting. When we are aware of what we are experiencing, we can implement practices that best support our acclimating.
- **Talk Through It:** When we are experiencing culture shock, it is easy to disconnect and go inward. Instead, we want to actively work to connect and tap into community. Finding folks we trust who are non-judgmental and supportive is an important step to working through culture shock.
- **Cultivate Your Collective:** Amid culture shock, we can easily forget that acclimating to a new community is a unique opportunity to build upon our self-understanding and collective. Homesickness begins to overwhelm our thoughts, we foster resentment toward the new setting, and consequently we further distance ourselves from opportunities to find a sense of home and community. Mapping out our existing collective, identifying new people or communities we want within it, and outlining ways to connect are important to adapting to culture shock.

Was this helpful? We encourage you to print or download our toolkits for your future reference!



Click here to follow us on Instagram!

Sources

- Black, J. Stewart, and Mark Mendenhall. "The U-curve adjustment hypothesis revisited: A review and theoretical framework." *Journal of international business studies* 22, no. 2 (1991): 225-247.
- Brown, L., & Holloway, I. (2008). The initial stage of the international sojourn: excitement or culture shock?. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 36(1), 33-49.
- Lysgaard, S. (1955). Adjustment in a foreign society: Norwegian Fulbright grantees visiting the United States. *International social science bulletin*.
- Ward, C., & Geeraert, N. (2016). Advancing acculturation theory and research: The acculturation process in its ecological context. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 8, 98-104.
- Ward, C., Bochner, S., & Furnham, A. (2020). *The psychology of culture shock*. Routledge.
- Zhou, Y., Jindal-Snape, D., Topping, K., & Todman, J. (2008). Theoretical models of culture shock and adaptation in international students in higher education. *Studies in higher education*, 33(1), 63-75.