

Culture Shock



Dealing with Culture Shock

Wherever you go you will experience some degree of culture shock. The greater the cultural differences between you and the new culture, the more you will feel the affects of culture shock. Dealing with cultural differences may be difficult; however, by being educated about culture shock you can turn something negative into a positive. Linguist and anthropologist Peter Adler (1972) defines culture shock as:

“Culture shock can be viewed positively as a profound cross-cultural learning experience: a set of situations or circumstances involving intercultural communication in which the individual, as a result of the experiences, becomes aware of his own growth, learning and change. As a result of the culture shock process, the individual has gained a new perspective on himself, and has come to understand his own identity in terms significant to himself. The cross-cultural learning experience, additionally, takes place when the individual encounters a different culture and as a result (a) examines the degree to which he is influenced by his own culture, and (b) understands the culturally derived values, attitudes and outlooks of other people.”

There are four stages of culture shock:

Stage 1 (honeymoon/fascination) - Period of excitement and euphoria over the new surroundings. You may notice that a lot of things are similar to your own culture.

Stage 2 (emptiness/frustration) - Culture shock emerges as individuals feel the intrusion of more and more cultural differences into their images of self and security.

Stage 3 (slow acceptance) - Slowly people are beginning to see the differences in thinking and feeling that surround them. You may understand more of the culture and begin to like some of the customs, make friends and become more relaxed.

Stage 4 (acceptance/fulfillment) - This stage represents near or full recovery - either assimilation or adaptation, acceptance of the new culture and self-confidence in the new person

that has developed in this culture.

The stages present themselves at different times and will vary in duration from person to person. Signs and symptoms of being in the most difficult stage (slow acceptance) include the following:

- Sadness, loneliness, melancholy
- Aches, pains, allergies
- Preoccupation with health
- Insomnia, desire to sleep too much or too little
- Changes in temperament, depression, feeling vulnerable, feeling powerless
- Anger, irritability, resentment, unwillingness to interact with others
- Identifying with the old culture or idealizing the old country
- Loss of identity
- Trying too hard to absorb everything in the new culture or country
- Unable to solve simple problems
- Lack of confidence
- Feelings of inadequacy or insecurity
- Developing stereotypes about the new culture
- Developing obsessions such as over-cleanliness
- Longing for family
- Feelings of being lost, overlooked, exploited or abused

As severe as this may seem there are things you can do to overcome this stage. You can not avoid culture shock, but you can definitely lessen its negative affects.



Some ways to overcome culture shock are:

- Bring your hobbies and interests with you overseas
- Make your home comfortable and symbolic of who you are
- Establish a routine as soon as possible
- Keep busy
- Participate in extracurricular activities at school
- Take advantage of the language lessons or other cultural classes that are available to you
- Do some sight seeing
- Make new friends
- Remember why you left your home country to begin with
- Consider yourself part of the new culture contributing to its society

Keep this lesson in mind

Exercise:



Make a list of your hobbies and interests and think of ways that you can take these overseas.

Make a list of things you hope to accomplish outside of your teaching, such as learn the language, while you are there. Include these in your journal for future reference and make it your goal to follow through.
