

Culture Shock and Homesickness

Culture shock is the physical and emotional discomfort experienced when living in a culture with different values, perceptions, cultural norms and beliefs that “threaten” a person’s understanding of what he or she thought to be “right.”

Some of the symptoms of Culture Shock are:

- Homesickness
- Sadness and frustration
- Boredom and withdrawal
- Desire to sleep too much or too little
- Lack of motivation
- Depression, anger, feeling vulnerable, feeling powerless, resentment
- Idealizing ones own/previous culture
- Developing stereotypes about new culture
- Lack of confidence
- Feelings of inadequacy
- Crying
- Physical discomfort (i.e. headaches, stomachaches, etc.)



Culture shock is a normal, inevitable response among exchange students. Students will experience culture shock to varying degrees and for varying lengths of time, but all will experience it at some time. If you are aware of what the student is facing, the symptoms can be better recognized and understood. Your student **MAY** go through various stages of adjustment throughout the year. An awareness of these phases will help you to understand why the student behaves in certain ways during the year, and should enable you to respond in a supportive manner. **Please understand the each student is unique and not every student will experience each stage or in the same order.**



Phase One - The Honeymoon Stage: At first everything is interesting and exciting. Your student is the center of attention. To the student, similarities stand out more than anything else.

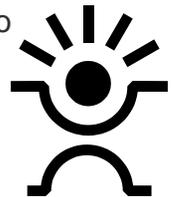
Phase Two - Tough Times: This is the stage in which Culture Shock happens. The student’s focus shifts to differences rather than similarities and some of the symptoms described above occur.

Phase Three – A Little Understanding: The student begins to feel more comfortable in the new environment. What was once “threatening” and unknown has become acceptable and familiar.

Phase Four – Adaptation: The student has learned to function in the new culture with confidence and has developed a sense of belonging. The student may enjoy and appreciate things he or she was highly critical of during Phase Two. The student may not want to return home and could experience “reverse culture shock”.

If your student is experiencing Culture Shock you can be supportive by discussing adjustment and working together to identify the problem. There are a number of strategies to counter Culture Shock and with your support the challenges of the adjustment process can be overcome. These are some ideas you may want to discuss with your student:

- Have Realistic Expectations:** Accept that culture shock is part of the exchange student experience and a difficult challenge. Give yourself some time to adjust!
 - Be Open-minded:** Avoid judging things as either right or wrong; regard them as merely different.
 - Appreciate Differences:** Recognize the advantages of learning to live in a culture different from your own.
 - Be Curious:** Observe how people in your new environment act in situations that are confusing to you.
 - Don't Be Too Hard On Yourself:** Don't constantly focus on the difficulties. Regain energy by doing something you enjoy (i.e. cook; listen to music, read, etc). But don't just keep taking constant time-outs!
 - Remember Your Strength:** Remember the ways you have been able to reduce stress in difficult situations in the past and consider applying those methods in your present circumstances.
 - It's Okay to Make Mistakes:** Everyone fails at something when trying to adjust to living in a different country. Mistakes are one of the best opportunities to learn!
 - Keep Your Sense of Humor:** Try to see the humor in confusing situations that you encounter; laughter is often the best “medicine”.
 - Give Yourself Credit:** Acknowledge your progress in adjusting to the new culture and recognize that, like other people who have lived in an unfamiliar country- you can and will make a successful adjustment.
- Some active steps to overcome culture shock are:
- Reach Out:** Ask people for help. We all reach a time when we need some assistance.
 - Get involved:** Although you might feel like being alone, seek out contact with people. This way you will improve your language skills and make new friends.
 - Be an Ambassador for Your Country:** Think about how you can educate your host family, host community, and students at your school about your country.



If your student does not seem to be able to overcome Culture Shock, **please inform your local coordinator** so that he/she can offer additional support.