

## Culture Stress – What Is It?

1. Culture stress: the negative feelings or reactions that we experience as we try to adjust to life in a new culture.
2. Suddenly the way we are used to interacting with people and the way we are used to doing things is different, sometimes very different.
  - Culture stress comes from being cut off from familiar cultural cues or signals.
  - Cultural cues help us orient ourselves to daily life:
    - ✓ When to shake hands or bow, how low to bow
    - ✓ What to say to people when we meet them
    - ✓ How to communicate - directly or indirectly
    - ✓ When to take statements seriously and when not to
  - Values differ from the new culture; the rules of behavior are often unclear to us, and those annoying behaviors.
    - ✓ For example in Asia it is considered almost rude to say no to someone, whereas in the US if you can't or don't want to make an appointment with someone it is okay and preferred to let them know you are not able to go. Many an American is left standing at a train station in Asia waiting for a friend who will never show up.
3. Culture stress can include things like irritability, anxiety, bitterness, being very critical, impatience, resentment, homesickness, and depression. People can also experience some kind of physical illness.
4. Not everyone will experience severe culture stress and not everyone will experience all of these things.
5. But what is important for you to know is that everyone experiences culture stress to some degree, and in some form when they go overseas for an extended period of time.
6. Knowing this and understanding the stages of culture stress will help you to recognize what is going on when you begin to experience these things. And that will better prepare you to deal with it.
7. Stages of Culture Stress
  - First Stage: Honeymoon/ "How Quaint"
    - ✓ Excitement, everything is new, you have great expectations. However, often the expectations are actually too high or unrealistic.
    - ✓ This stage can last from a week or two even to the third month.
  - Second Stage: Doubt and Reservation – "It's just not like home"
    - ✓ Suddenly differences seem to be everywhere and they really start to get to you - you begin to experience frustrations and irritations
  - Third Stage: This can lead to "Disillusionment or even despair"
  - Fourth Stage: which can lead to "Withdrawal"
    - ✓ This hits during the 3rd-6th months
    - ✓ It hits right when you are in the middle of your mid-terms and finals
    - ✓ So remember this as you begin to feel irritated or down for seemingly no reason.

- Fifth Stage: Gradual Adjustment and acceptance – things start to make sense as you learn cultural cues and feel more comfortable in the new culture.
  - ✓ “I understand Phase” – you will begin to function in two cultures and find many customs, ways of doing and saying things, and personal attitudes that you begin to enjoy and will miss when you return home.
  - ✓ If stay longer than a year can often experience two dips of cultural stress.

8. Reverse Culture Shock – can often be worse than the original culture stress.
- People politely listen to your stories for a few minutes, but are not particularly interested in what happened to you overseas.
  - b. The best way to adjust is to understand that returning home involves an adjustment process similar to the one you experienced when first went overseas.
  - It doesn't matter what culture you come from or what culture you have visited, most returnees experience some feelings of disillusionment or disappointment with their own culture when they return.

### Stages of Culture Shock:

- ◆ Honeymoon
- ◆ Doubt and Reservation
- ◆ Disillusionment and Despair
- ◆ Withdrawal
- ◆ Adjustment and Acceptance

