

Adjusting to Culture Stress

Positive steps you can take to minimize the impact of culture stress:

1. Everyone who goes overseas for a substantial period of time experiences culture. Knowing this fact will help in your adjustment.
2. Learn important lessons. An in-depth encounter with another culture is one of the best ways to learn that one's own culture does not necessarily possess the single right way of doing things.
3. Steps to understand a new culture:
 - a. Observation – Listening and noticing
 - You need to listen to communication, and observe attitudes, behaviors and nonverbal communication carefully. There may be new rules, norms and cues of behavior.
 - b. Understanding – Making sense and understanding your observations.
 - Consciously looking and understanding the reasons for and the cultural values behind what you have observed.
 - Initial assumptions can be wrong, so keep moving toward true understanding.
 - c. Validation – Assumptions checked for validity
 - It is easy to misunderstand the meaning of something and make inaccurate generalizations and conclusions when you are in a new and different culture.
 - Ask questions and check assumptions by finding at least a couple of host national friends that you can ask questions about these things.
 - You may need to do additional observation, interviewing, and experimentation.
 - d. Application – Applying this new accurate knowledge to your life in the new culture.
 - 'How will this affect my communication in this culture'
 - 'How will this affect my living in this culture?' – this will help you be more effective and successful in the new culture.
4. Make friends with host nationals and try to build deeper, more intimate relationships with at least one or two of them.
5. Maintain a healthy sense of humor.
6. Make a list of the positive things that you can identify about your present situation.
7. Avoid those from your country or other foreigners who are in a permanent state of culture stress and who spend their time belittling the host culture. This won't help you adjust.
8. Don't give into the temptation to belittle the host culture yourself.
9. Follow these suggestions and you will make it to cultural adjustment!

Common Reactions to Culture Stress

Overall Symptoms	Withdrawal Symptoms	Aggressive Symptoms
Anxiety	Physical/psychological withdrawal	Compulsive eating/drinking
Homesickness	Excessive time reading	Irritability
Helplessness	Excessive need for sleep	Family tensions
Boredom	Time spent only with home country	Marital stress
Fatigue	Avoiding contact with host nationals	Stereotyping
Confusion	Short attention span	Hostility toward host nationals
Self-doubt	Diminished productivity	Verbal aggressiveness
Inadequacy feelings	Loss of ability to do work/study effectively	Physical aggressiveness
Unexplained crying	Quitting/returning to home country early	Deciding to say, but permanently hating the country and people
Paranoia		
Physical/psychosomatic illnesses		