

Culture Shock



What Is It?

Culture shapes the way people see the world and can be thought of as the way in which people preserve societies and meet a range of human needs. Shared belief systems, behaviors, and traditions are only a few factors that make up a culture. It is easy to be unaware of the tremendous impact culture plays in our lives when we are surrounded by individuals who share the same assumptions and shared values. We may experience “culture shock” when we find ourselves in a culture different from the one we are accustomed to.

“Culture shock” is a normal process of adapting to a new culture. It is a time when a person becomes aware of the differences and/or conflicts in values and customs between their home culture and the new culture they are in. Common feelings may be anxiety, confusion, homesickness, and/or anger.

Coping with Culture Shock

There are many strategies to cope more effectively while adapting to the changes of a new culture. Different things help different people and often trying more than one strategy can be helpful.

- Spend time listening and talking with someone from the U.S. who can explain common behaviors, language, and customs.
- Connect with other international students.
- Stay connected with your home comforts such as foods, activities, & rituals
- Community activities can be a way for you to get involved with other people and feel more involved in the community and culture in which you are in.
- Balance academic and leisure activities.
- Keep Active. Find an activity you enjoy.
- Patience. Keep in mind that culture shock is a normal process which most people experience. Give yourself time and remind yourself that it will not be permanent.
- Collaborate with a mental health professional for support.



When Should I Seek Additional Support?

It is natural for people living in a different culture to feel sad and lonely at times, and to miss their home culture, friends, and family. Sometimes, however, the stress of adapting to a new culture may reach a level in which added support is useful.

Common signs you may benefit from added support include:

- feeling homesick most or all of the time
 - feeling lonely much of the time
 - feeling sad or anxious much of the time
 - crying more often; sometimes for no reason
- experiencing a marked change in sleeping and/or appetite
 - experiencing increased unexplained physical problems
- having more "minor illnesses" such as colds, headaches, or stomach pains
 - feeling irritable or depressed
 - having difficulty concentrating
- experiencing academic difficulties not experienced before
 - feeling tension and pressure much of the time
 - feeling out-of-control in many aspects of your life

