

Culture Shock



Culture shock might occur after you have been on-site for a sufficiently long enough period to see some of the elements of the region/country's culture, and begin to feel the difference between this new culture and your "home" culture. Even if you have already been on several mission assignments, some element of culture shock is to be expected. It is a normal human response as our bodies, minds and spirits adjust to the rhythms of another part of the world.

Toward the end of the adaptation period, culture shock begins to subside, and most likely you will acclimate to the surroundings. Part of adaptation will involve creating a different relationship with your family, friends and colleagues at home, and incorporating these newly defined relationships into your life on mission.

Honeymoon Period



This is the first phase in a new culture and you may feel fascinated by the new experiences. Everything in the new culture is interesting and exciting. Everything is wonderful and you are having a great time learning about the environment. During this phase you may tend to see the new experiences through the lens of your home culture and may rely on what you are used to in order to comprehend the host culture.

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With time difficulties start to set in and you find that things are different, and that frustrates you. Your initial enthusiasm has drifted away. You find that there is a lot to learn and there is so much that you do not understand about your new surroundings.

Gradual Adjustment



In phase three you start to deal with the differences between the old culture and new one. You learn to integrate your beliefs with those of the new culture.

Adaptation



At phase four you are able to adapt to the new culture. You accept both cultures and follow the values of the home culture outside of your work place.

Reactions to Culture Shock



Different people react differently to culture shock. Common signs and symptoms include changes in temperament, depression, feeling vulnerable, powerless, anger over minor inconveniences and resentment. Preoccupation with health: aches, pains, and allergies are common. Insomnia, the desire to sleep too much or too little. You may feel sick much of the time, having headaches and stomach upset. You also may experience extreme homesickness and intense feeling of loyalty to own culture, identifying with the old culture or idealizing the old country and, therefore, develop stereotypes about the new culture. The person can manifest unwillingness to interact with others, lack of confidence, feelings of inadequacy or insecurity, longing for family, sadness and loneliness, and marital or relationship stress.

Coping with Culture Shock



The most effective way to minimize signs and symptoms of a culture shock is to anticipate its occurrence and get to know more about that phenomenon. Do not isolate yourself. Share ideas and thoughts with others. Take time to adapt to the new working and living environment. Remember, cultural adjustment is a process! Take actively part in social welfare and practice stress management activities. Stay in contact with family and friends from your home: write letters, send e-mails or make telephone calls when possible. Seek help and support when needed. The Staff Counsellor will always assist you in managing problems.