

# CULTURE SHOCK

Learning to live in a new culture is never easy. For most people it is like riding a roller coaster with many ups and downs. You may feel very happy or excited one day and very sad or lonely the next day. You may love the United States one week and hate it the next week. You may have many mood changes. This is very common; everyone experiences some form of cultural stress. These feelings will eventually calm down or go away.



In the time it takes for you to adjust to the United States, you may sometimes feel:

- Homesick;
- Helpless or very dependent on other people, especially people from your home country;
- Depressed;
- Lonely;
- You may become angry easily;
- Unexplained crying;
- No longer interested in learning English or speaking English;
- Worried about cleanliness; or
- Drinking alcohol more than usual or using other drugs

You may also experience some negative physical symptoms, such as:

- Trouble sleeping or feeling tired all the time;
- Stomach aches or diarrhea;
- Skin rashes or acne;
- Catching colds easily;
- Headaches; or
- No appetite or hungry all the time



If you are physically ill, seek medical advice from the Student Health Services Office on campus right away. You can also speak to counselors located in Student Services Building Room-210. Your International Student Counselor (ISC) would also be happy to talk with you. She is familiar with the cultural adjustment process. All conversations with a counselor or your ISC are confidential.

It is very acceptable, and sometimes even trendy, to see a professional counselor in American culture. It does not necessarily mean you are mentally ill. No one will think less of you if you visit a counselor. They often see students about a variety of issues. Again, these conversations are confidential.

Your family and friends can often be a good source of support as well. Friends, who have been in the United States longer than you, have probably experienced the same feelings. Talk to friends who have a positive attitude about living in the United States. Your family can also be supportive, but they may also worry about you since you are so far away. If you talk to your family when you are depressed, make sure you also talk to them when you are happy so they know you are doing better.

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# ADJUSTING TO A NEW CULTURE

- Learn and observe. Learn as much as you can about your host culture and your new environment.
- Think Positively. Try not to focus on the negatives or the things you do not like about the United States. Make friends who also have a positive outlook.
- Try to look for logical reason why things happen. This may help you see things in a positive light.
- Keep your sense of humor. Look for the funny side of embarrassing situations or mistakes. Everyone makes mistakes; learn from yours.
- Keep an open mind. Do not judge what you see as right or wrong, but challenge yourself to try to understand the many behaviors you will encounter. You do not have to participate in something you don't agree with, but you should try to understand it.
- Keep realistic expectations. Movies and television do not offer a realistic view of the United States. If your expectations were different, you may need to reevaluate them.



- Set realistic goals for yourself. You may not be able to do as much as you did at home during your initial adjustment period. Re-evaluate your goals and expectations often.
  - Recognize anxiety and frustration. Learning to live in a new culture is not easy. Allow time for you to adjust. Take care of your body and your mind. Get regular exercise, eat well, and get plenty of sleep. Talk to someone if you're unhappy or depressed. Talk to a doctor if you feel sick.
  - Speak English as much as possible and don't worry about making mistakes. The more you practice the easier it will be.
  - Go out. Take initiative. Find out where people meet and socialize. Make an effort to go to these places. You may have to make the first step to getting to know new people.
  - Try to fit into the rhythm of life in your new environment. Adjust to their time schedule for eating meals, classes, socializing, and sleep.
- Maintain relationships with friends and family at home, but make friends at your new school too.
  - Keep your perspective. Hundred of thousands of international students have gone through this same experience before you and succeeded. You will too!
  - Draw upon your own personal resources for handling stress and ask for help when you need it.