

I spoke the language, so I didn't expect to feel as unhappy as I did. I thought I had made a mistake in my decision to come to Yale, but it turned out to be all part of getting used to life in America.

- Visiting Scholar from Great Britain

CULTURE SHOCK

Source: *Beyond Language: Cross-Cultural Communication*; Levine, Deena R. and Adelman, Mara B., Prentice Hall, 1993.

When moving to a new culture, you will eventually experience a period of ups and downs as part of the adjustment process. The onset of symptoms can occur almost immediately or sometimes it can take up to a year before the individual in the new culture feels the effects of culture shock. Moreover, the severity of the symptoms can vary from person to person. A newcomer may go from elation to depression in a short period of time, or may simply feel a general sense of discomfort, sometimes emotional, sometimes physical. The feeling of being a *fish out of water*, occasionally confused or disoriented — is to be expected.

Some students and visiting scholars, in their struggles with the new language and culture, have expressed the feeling of being *like a child*. In some of the more difficult moments of the cultural adjustment period, an individual may have unusually strong emotional reactions to what in the native country would be everyday, normal frustrations. A person may go through periods of extreme loneliness. Sometimes students will have physical reactions and may cry, or feel like crying, or there may be other symptoms such as stress, fatigue, headaches, stomach problems, or difficulty with sleeping. The important thing to remember is that even though everyone experiences culture shock in some way, it will be different for each person. Some people find it more difficult to adjust than others.

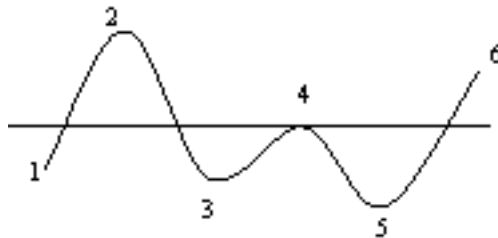
Culture shock is to be expected. It is a normal part of the adjustment process, and with time, the symptoms will dissipate as the newcomer integrates into the new culture. However, anyone who feels he or she is having difficulty coping, or experiencing severe symptoms of culture shock, should seek counseling immediately. In U.S. culture where individuals often live apart from the social support network of family and friends, it is normal to seek counseling services in times of emotional distress. There are many qualified professionals such as social workers (MSW), psychologists (Ph.D. or Psy.D), or psychiatrists (M.D. in psychiatry) who have excellent training in mental health services. Contact the *Mental Hygiene Department* at 432-0290 to schedule an appointment. For *emergency mental health care* after normal business hours call *Urgent Care* at 432-0123.

SIX STAGES OF CULTURE SHOCK

Source: *Beyond Language: Cross-Cultural Communication*; Levine, Deena R. and Adelman, Mara B., Prentice Hall, 1993.

Culture shock can be described as having six stages. After arrival in the new country, everyone normally experiences two low periods (stages 3 and 5) before finally

reaching the final level of adjustment. It is possible for some people to skip some of the stages or move through them rather quickly. It will depend greatly on the individual's personality and previous experience. Change is more difficult for some than others. It is important to be patient and with time everyone reaches the final stage of adjustment and integration into the new culture.



Stage 1 - Anxiety about leaving home and what you will find in the new country.

Stage 2 - Sometimes referred to as the "honeymoon" stage. Everything is so exciting and fascinating. You may feel elation in this period. Everything is new and different. You can't believe you are really here. Wow!

Stage 3 - The first low symptoms of culture shock. The individual realizes that everything is quite different in the new culture. There are so many things to cope with: language, setting up house, shopping, transportation, classes, homework, lab work, and more. You may feel lonely, or you could feel exhausted from constant struggle to understand a new language and culture.

Stage 4 - Initial adjustment period. You begin to feel better as you learn to cope with everyday routines and problems. Language may or may not still be a problem, but you can now handle basic interactions, and have no problems conducting daily business such as shopping, banking or going to the post office. You should feel initial satisfaction and a sense of overcoming problems.

Stage 5 - This second low stage is normally the most severe stage of culture shock. The individual typically experiences a loss of self-esteem. The language is not as easy as you thought, and you may *feel like a child*. Your sense of loneliness and isolation has deepened as you have been away from family and friends for a long time now. There is often the feeling of being an outsider, and everything may be viewed in a negative light. You don't like the new culture. People are unfriendly. You are not what you were before, and you may feel angry and resentful.

Stage 6 - Your sense of well-being and humor

I had just joined a local choir group and wanted to blend in quietly without being noticed. I was horrified and embarrassed when the conductor singled me out during a break and told everybody there my name and where I was from. I realized later that this was how Americans welcomed a new group member, but at the time I wanted to run away.

- Post-doctoral Fellow from Germany

In one word, the thing I miss most about my country is everything. In China, I would wake up at 7:30 every morning and listen to the radio and would feel relaxed and very glad to start a new day. But in America, even though I understand all the words, and there are similar programs on the radio, I just can't feel the same relaxation - nothing at all. . . . Maybe it's because I am unfit for the U.S.

- Student from China

Most of the time I feel uncomfortable when I have to speak in English. I know that is expected that a university student be able to speak at a university level and I cannot. I wish I could be the same person in English that I am in Spanish.

- Student from Argentina

I am not saying that I don't like the American way of life, it's just a big change for me to come from so distant and different a country.

- Student from Brazil

TYPICAL SYMPTOMS OF CULTURE SHOCK

Excerpt from: *Beyond Language: Cross-Cultural Communication*, Levine, Deena R. and Adelman, Mara B., Prentice Hall, 1993

- Homesickness
- Inability to work well
- Too much eating, drinking or sleeping
- Anger towards the members of the new culture
- Glorifying the old culture and emphasizing the negative in the new culture
- Withdrawal and avoidance of contact with people from the new culture
- Lack of ability to deal with even small problems

begins to return as you establish comfortable routines and learn to understand the habits, customs, foods and characteristics of the people in the new culture. You have made some friends, and are beginning to enjoy things about your new life. You realize that the problems, and negative aspects of the new country are not reserved for foreigners, but that even natives find certain things difficult. Your perspective becomes more balanced as you have now begun to see that there are good things and bad things about your new life. Some things you may never like, but you accept it as part of life, the same as we accept both the positive and negative aspects in any relationship.

ADJUSTMENT & COPING

Here are twelve suggestions for adjustment and coping in your new life at Yale.

1. Gather information. You might begin by observing the new culture as much as possible. "When in Rome, do as the Romans do," is a common saying in English. Watch how the natives do or don't do things.

2. Get to know the community. Learn about your environment through exploration. Get a map and find out what's beyond the campus. Take a walk in the park. Do some window shopping. Try a local restaurant. Go to the movies. Sit in a local coffee shop and people-watch.

3. Ask questions, and don't be afraid to try. To experience a new culture and learn from it, it's important to be open to new experiences, try new things, and be curious about the way things are done. If you are confused by something, ask how it is done in the U.S. Most people will be pleased to teach you about their country and customs.

4. Find a balance. Cross-cultural adjustment and integration means adapting to the new culture while retaining your own identity. Extremes of completely giving up one's own culture or refusing to accept anything about the new culture and clinging fearfully to old ways are unhealthy. Learn to recognize cultural differences and modify the behaviors that are necessary to live comfortably in the new culture.

5. Find people to interact with. Don't live in isolation from others. Give them a smile or a small gift. Invite them to have coffee or take a walk outside. By taking an interest in other people, you shift the focus from yourself to the outside world.

6. Put your situation in perspective. Many international students and scholars have come to Yale and not only survived, but have learned to be quite happy here. With time you will adjust too.

7. Talk with experienced members of the international community. They have been where you are and can offer advice and support. Ask them what has helped them the most, and what they have found to be most difficult. The OISS and the McDougal Center run host programs and will connect you to community members who are happy to talk with you.

8. Establish a routine. There is comfort in the familiar. Eat and sleep normal hours. Have regular mealtimes. Join a sports club or a discussion group or do at least one activity you look forward to on a regular basis at the same time each week.

9. Get physical exercise. A healthy body promotes a healthy mind.

10. Take it easy. Slow down and make your daily tasks as simple as possible. Don't overwhelm yourself with too many details. Get used to all the newness. Take things one day at a time.

11. Work on improving your English. Small successes with the new language can boost your confidence. Go to the Center for Language Studies, and the English conversation groups regularly. Try to find time for a language exchange partner or even take an English as a Second Language course.

12. Visit the Office of International Students & Scholars. The OISS staff is here to help answer your questions and concerns. This is your office.

After being here for four years, I am getting used to this country. Just like other countries, the U.S. has not only good things, but also many problems. I hope this country will stay economically strong, but decrease racial discrimination.

- Student from China

After being in this country for a couple of years, you realize you have been rude to people without even knowing it.

- Student from Italy

When I didn't speak to people, my English was not good. I was just afraid that I wouldn't be able to understand and speak clearly. Later, when I started speaking, with lots of effort I gradually started thinking in English. Conversation really helped my English.

- Student from Japan