



## CULTURE SHOCK

Even though you might have been planning your study abroad period for a long time, leaving your country and moving away from home can be difficult and very stressful. It is quite normal to experience feelings of anxiety, sadness and discomfort in the process of adapting to a new culture. This is a result of being in a new, unknown and different environment, meeting new people, adapting to new foods, customs, language, social norms, etc., while at the same time being separated from your family and friends. Culture shock can affect anyone, including international students.

### What are the symptoms of culture shock?

- Homesickness
- Sadness and loneliness
- Headaches, stomach aches, tiredness
- Insomnia or sleeping more than usual, eating problems
- Feelings of anger or irritability
- Withdrawal from people or activities
- Reduced work or academic performance, difficulty concentrating
- Finding small problems overwhelming
- Feeling lost or confused
- Questioning your decision to move here

### Stages of culture shock

Many people go through the different stages of culture shock, although every person is different and will experience things in their own way. The usual stages are:

1. Honeymoon stage - When you first arrive in a new culture, the differences make you feel excited. You are interested in discovering new things.



2. Disintegration stage - As time goes by, the cultural differences may no longer seem exciting and instead make you feel confused, insecure and isolated. You may also miss your family's support.
3. Adjustment stage - At this stage you might feel irritated and frustrated with the cultural differences you come across in your daily life. You might feel angry or hostile towards the new culture and make constant negative comparisons with your home culture. This is a normal process of assessing your own cultural values, making sense of them in your new culture and reconnecting with what you value about your own culture.
4. Autonomy stage - You start to accept the differences and adjust to your new environment, you know how to interact with people, make friends, and you feel more confident and better able to cope with new situations. You may start to appreciate the values of your new culture.
5. Independence stage - You start to feel a sense of belonging and confidence. You are able to value the differences and similarities between the two cultures. You no longer feel alone or isolated. You start to feel at home.

<b>What can I do?</b>
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Although culture shock is uncomfortable, it is a normal process of adjustment to a new culture. Here is some advice to help you cope with culture shock:

- Understand that what you are experiencing is normal. Be aware of the symptoms and the stages.
- Keep in touch with home but also try to develop friendships in your new country. It might seem difficult to maintain friendships with people from a different cultural background, but it can be a good way to understand the new culture. You might also find support in people from your own or a similar culture.
- Meet other international students.



- Do things which you enjoyed doing in your own country (sports, volunteer work, music, community projects, etc.).
- Read and learn about the new culture. This will help you to understand it better.
- Relax. Don't worry too much about misunderstandings or other difficulties you may encounter. Just try and move on, think of it as a learning experience.

Finally, remember that most people experience culture shock in one way or another. Don't consider it as a sign that you have made a mistake, that you are weak or that you can't cope. The symptoms of culture shock will pass after a while and you will be able to see them as a useful learning experience.

If this advice is not enough for you or you are struggling with culture shock, you can make an appointment to speak with a counsellor at the Counselling Unit of the University Rovira i Virgili. If Spanish or Catalan is not your native language, counselling in English is also available.