

Tips on How to Adapt to A New Culture

When people come to a new environment they experience different feelings. They sometimes feel happy and like this environment but after that, they begin to not only hate it, but also hate even people and everything else in the new culture. However, when they stay for enough time, they begin to adjust to this environment and enjoy their life more. These feelings are called culture shock. Here are the stages of culture shock.

Stage	Situation	Approach	Reaction
Honeymoon	First contact with the new culture.	Observe, and check out preconceptions to understand the new culture.	Excitement; curiosity; slight anxiety.
Initial Confrontation/ Rejection Phase	First intensive interaction or problems with new culture, must solve some basic survival problems. Negative reactions may surface	Respond behaviorally as one would in own culture, solve problems in familiar ways.	Surprise and confusion; may not know how to handle problem effectively; can't understand why our own behavior doesn't produce the desired results; puzzled about others behavior. Frustration and depression may surface.
Adjustment Phase	Ongoing confrontation with the new culture; problems may intensify.	Respond now with a mix of old and new ways of doing things; some tentative experimentation with new behaviors.	Becoming judgmental about new culture; feelings of anxiety, embarrassment, frustration, anger; confusion about own identity.
Adaptation/ Recovery Phase	Accommodation with the new culture replaces confrontation; sense of belonging to culture emerges.	Creative use of a variety of coping strategies to help one function effectively.	Regain confidence; feeling that the culture is understandable; very positive sense of personal accomplishment; enjoy many aspects of this culture.

Coping Strategies	Ineffective forms	Effective Forms
Avoidance	Frequent or complete withdrawal; no interaction with the culture. Using no resources.	Temporary, occasional withdrawal to overcome "cultural fatigue".
Participation	Fighting against the culture (aggressive behavior).	Working to learn the ways of the culture (assertive behavior).
Utilizing	Becoming totally dependent on others and never	Using resources to promote learning and self-reliance.

Resources	<i>Learning to cope on your own.</i>	
Studying the Culture	Fitting new culture into old framework; rejecting new insights, perspectives. Utilizing the	Striving to acquire cultural insights; learning new perspectives.
Utilizing the Culture	Totally adopting new culture and rejection own culture and identity.	Developing effective coping strategies; enlarging skills; maintaining own identity. Incorporating both perspectives to broaden personal identity.
Utilizing Stereotypes	Using as a complete guide to the culture; never testing them. Never seeing differences.	Using only as tentative guide to the culture; constantly challenging them; seeing individual differences.

Many students bring unrealistic expectations to a foreign culture.

A set of cross-cultural effectiveness guidelines would include:

- Don't assume problems will go away by themselves = seek help.
- Don't exclude yourself from being part of the problem = learn new behavior or ways of thinking Don't expect cross-cultural differences and problems to be obvious = talk and discuss feelings.
- Don't isolate yourself = keep connected to peer group and meet new people.
- Don't try to understand everything immediately = learning comes with time.
- Expect people to think, behave and feel differently about things = open your mind to new ideas and ways of being. Prepare for the cross-cultural experience = step out of your safe experience and try new things and meet new people.
- Try to find cultural informants who can help you to learn = use campus resources.
- Expect the unexpected = know that you can prepare for everything.

Certain personality characteristics which are useful to development would include:

- Flexibility
- Tolerance of ambiguity or living with uncertainty.
- Tolerance of difference.
- Non-judgmental attitudes.
- Patience.
- Ability to discuss feelings.
- Being ok with making mistakes and learning from mistakes.
- Realistic expectations
- Sense of humor.
- Risk taking behavior.

Issues that international students discuss in therapy:

How to deal with loneliness, depression, anxiety, culture shock, roommate conflict, homesickness; fitting in to a new culture; dating or meeting new people; not doing well in school.