

Suggested Coping Strategies:

- Try to avoid isolation- talk to your friends, your host family or others about what you are feeling. Remember, these are normal reactions to stress and are nothing to be ashamed of.

Others might be experiencing the same feelings or may have experienced them in the past. If you really feel overwhelmed by stress, perhaps an advisor in the Office for International Students and Scholars or a counselor in the Counseling Center can help you.

- Keep your sense of humor. Try to laugh off situations that are confusing
- Try to withhold judgment on something until you understand it
- Don't be afraid to ask people about situations you do not understand
- Take care of your health, exercise, and eat well.
- Do things you enjoy doing: paint, play music, etc.



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International Coffee Hour

Join us every Friday from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm for the International Coffee Hour. It takes place in the International Center (Spartan Rooms B and C) and is a great place to make friends, be involved and start the weekend....and the coffee is free!



EVERY FRIDAY
4:00 PM to 6:00 PM
INTERNATIONAL CENTER,
SPARTAN ROOMS B & C

**TRANSITION
EXPERIENCES**
*Adjusting to a
New Culture*



Office for International Students & Scholars

**MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY**

Living in a new culture presents students from abroad with many challenges. You will face new patterns of taking care of life's daily activities, new ways of meeting people, and new ways of doing nearly everything. Life is not predictable and you may be unsure of yourself for a period of time. This can be stressful for a time.

There are generally several phases that new international students experience during the period of adjusting to a new culture. Please note that different people will be affected by the transition to a new culture in varying degrees. Listed below is a general pattern of cross cultural adjustment. Your own experience might be weaker or stronger based on a variety of personal characteristics and previous life's experience.

STAGE ONE: Cultural Surprise

The first days in a new culture are filled with observing all the things that are new to you. These differences are perhaps superficial, but they are the basis of your first impressions. People dress differently, signs are in a different language, and people's nonverbal communication is different (gestures, eye contact, touching behaviors, etc...an example of this might be that people smile or are friendly to you even though you do not know them- what does this mean?)

STAGE TWO: Cultural Stress

After a short time, the feeling of everything being new fades into a period of more in depth encounters with the culture. You find yourself more involved in the activities of the "new" culture and you are forced to respond to the behaviors of people whose actions you do not fully understand. It is often easier just to blindly follow and do what you are told

even though the activity may not make sense to you. Examples include finding out what is expected of you both in and out of class, registering for classes, and shopping for yourself. Just speaking the language that is not your native language all the time can be exhausting and adds to your fatigue of trying to understand other parts of the culture.

STAGE THREE: Culture Shock

Over time the stress of living in an environment that is unfamiliar to you wears you down both physically and emotionally. As with any stressful situation, it is normal to either want to withdraw into yourself, or resist what you perceive to be threats to you (reactions called "flee" or "fight"). Culture shock does not come at one shocking moment, but is a gradual process both leading up to it and coming out of it.

Culture shock is a normal psychological reaction to the stress of living in another culture. You experience feelings of tension and anxiety because you have lost familiar cultural signals. The behavior of those around you may not be predictable based on your life's experiences. Your actions do not always get you what you want and your inability to communicate effectively with others is frustrating.

STAGE FOUR: Confidence Regained

At some point you find out how to become effective and regain your self confidence that can be lost during the period of culture shock. At this point, you only know how to get around your own culture, you have acquired the confidence and ability to get around in the new culture as well.

Physical symptoms of culture shock:

- Fear of physical contact with host national
- Health and safety are over stressed
- Absent-minded, far away stare
- Food from home is craved
- Use of alcohol/drugs
- Work declines in quality
- Unsuccessful performance of basic daily tasks

Psychological symptoms of culture shock:

- Anxiety and irritability
- Frustration and disorientation
- Loneliness and sense of isolation
- Rejection of others from host country
- Hostility toward host country
- Excessive fear of being robbed, cheated, or injured
- Misinterpretation of other's gestures and body language
- Self doubt
- Aggressive attitude
- Mood swings
- Feeling of helplessness and despondence
- Feelings of being rejected