

CULTURAL SHOCK

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Culture shock isn't a clinical term or medical condition. It's simply a comm

on way to describe the confusing and nervous feelings a person may have after leaving a familiar culture to live in a new and different culture. When you move to a new place, you're bound to face a lot of changes. That can be exciting and stimulating, but it can also be overwhelming. You may feel sad, anxious, frustrated, and want to go home.

It's natural to have difficulty adjusting to a new culture. People from other cultures (whom you'll be hanging out with and going to school with) may have grown up with values and beliefs that differ from yours. Because of these differences, the things they talk about, the ways they express themselves, and the importance of various ideas may be very different from what you are used to. The differences between cultures can make it very difficult to adjust to the new surroundings. You may encounter unfamiliar clothes, weather, and food as well as different people, schools, and values. You may find yourself struggling to do things in your new surroundings that were easy back home. Dealing with the differences can be very unsettling; those feelings are part adjusting to a new culture. But the good news is that culture shock is temporary.

Though people experience culture shock in different ways, these feelings are common:

not wanting to be around people who are different from you

sadness

loneliness

anxiety

trouble concentrating

feeling left out or misunderstood

developing negative and simplistic views of the new culture

frustration

extreme homesickness

How can you deal with it?

Learning the Language

Depending on where you come from and where you are now, you may or may not have trouble with the native language. It's a good idea to become comfortable with the language as soon as you can. Not being able to understand what people are saying is almost as frustrating as not knowing how to make people understand what you are saying.

Knowing What to Expect

A lot of the anxiety that comes with moving to a new place has to do with not knowing what to expect in your new environment. Learning things about your new environment will help you become more comfortable.

Coping With Teasing

If someone harasses you, walk away — don't give the person the satisfaction of seeing that his or her comments bother you. If you can't shake off the comments, talk about it with good friends, siblings, or parents. The people who love you and know that you're a great person can often help you understand that the bully has no idea what he or she is talking about. It also helps to find people at school to hang out with who are cool enough not to care what the bully says.

Maintaining Your Culture

Everyone feels the pressure to fit in at one time or another — whether they've lived in the area for days or years. But don't feel like you need to change everything about yourself so you can stand out less. All of your experiences before you came to your new home are part of you, and what makes you special.

It's important to be yourself. Try not to force yourself to change too fast or to change too many things all at once. You will have your own pace of adjusting. Everyone goes through changes in their life, and it may seem that you are going through more changes than the average person — but as long as you hold on to what's important to you and find a good combination between old and new, you'll be fine.