



# Culture Shock



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## Student Wellness Centre

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**306-966-5768**



UNIVERSITY OF  
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# What is Culture Shock?

Culture shock refers to the challenging process of **adjusting to a new country or culture**. You may experience a range of emotions when encountering unfamiliar settings and conditions.

## Symptoms of Culture Shock

- Irritated,
- Fatigue,
- Unfocused,
- Compulsive eating and/or drinking,
- Sleeping a lot and/or tiring easily,
- Feeling isolated and helpless, and
- Negative feelings towards new culture/country.

# The Stages of Culture Shock

Adapting to a new culture takes time and often involves going through the following stages, possibly a number of times:

1. Newness and excitement.
2. Disenchantment and homesickness.
3. Rejection of host culture.
4. Growing understanding of the host culture.
5. Reverse or re-entry culture shock.



## Newness and Excitement

At first everything is new - people, sights, food, climate, language, social customs, and expectations. The **initial excitement usually overrides the stress and anxiety** of being in a new country and culture.

## Disenchantment and Homesickness

As the excitement wears off the realities of living in another country sinks in. Speaking another language all day, being far from home, and missing the support of friends or family may drain you. You may begin to feel sad, critical and frustrated, and doubt your ability to adjust to this new place.

# **Rejection of the Host Culture**

Things frustrate you more than usual and you find yourself disliking and withdrawing from the new culture. You may develop an “us versus them” view and want to return home.

# **Growing Understanding of the Host Culture**

With time, a growing understanding of the new culture usually develops. Social customs, norms, and expectations become clearer. You begin to settle in and start to feel confident and successful.

# **Reverse or Re-entry Culture Shock**

Returning home to your home country may also involve a significant adjustment. Difficulties adjusting to life back home are not unusual.

# How to Manage Re-entry

Initiate activities to help you reconnect with family and friends. Ask about and show an interest in what has happened in your home country while you were gone. If appropriate, keep in touch with friends from your host country. Give yourself time to integrate your experiences before making important decisions.

## Homesickness

Homesickness is the **distress or anxiety** one may feel when they are **separated from home**. Feeling homesick is kind of like grieving: we feel like we've lost something important to us. Like grief, homesickness **is natural** and, with effort, **can resolve itself over time**.

### Symptoms of Homesickness

- Idealizing home
- Feeling isolated
- Crying and sadness,
- Difficulties sleeping,
- Difficulties concentrating,
- Headaches, dizziness, and/or nausea,
- Change in appetite, and
- Negative thoughts (e.g., "I miss my family so much" or "People here don't like me").

# How to Cope with Homesickness

Many of the coping strategies for dealing with culture shock can also help with homesickness. Below are other strategies you can use to overcome homesickness:

- **Take care of yourself.** It's easy to hide away in your room with your computer, but isolating yourself won't help. Maintain or start a fitness regimen. Exercise has shown to improve one's mood and overall outlook. Plus activities like Campus Rec can help you get exercise and meet new people.
- **Avoid the "victim mindset."** When you're down it can be easy to blame other people or circumstances for your situation. Instead, be proactive. Remind yourself why you're here and decide every day to make this experience the best it can possibly be.



# How to Cope with Culture Shock

- **Talk with others** about your experiences of adjusting to the new country. Talking may help you make sense of these experiences and may help you feel less alone. Other international students are likely to have similar experiences. As well, friends and family back home may find it easier to provide support when they know what you are going through.
- **Be patient** with yourself as you adjust. Remember to take care of your body, mind, and spirit.
- **Make a conscious decision to succeed and adapt.** Tell yourself positive things like: “I will give myself time to adjust,” “I will keep trying,” “I will adapt,” “I will learn,” and “I will succeed.” Develop endurance and also resiliency: the ability to adapt.
- **Trust that you will make the needed adjustments.** Believe that you will come through this as a more rounded, more experienced, and more international person than you were before.
- **Try new things.** Invite others to join you. This will help build new

relationships and a “future” of shared experiences together.

- **Stay in contact** with friends and family back home. Talk to them about your experiences and keep up to date on what is happening for them.
- **Do something that reminds you of home.** Make your favourite food, listen to music, or practice a hobby. Doing something that reminds you of home can help boost your spirits.
- **Do your research.** Many countries have very different views and expectations about specific genders or LGBTQIA individuals. Doing research about what to expect when travelling to other countries can help you prepare before arriving (check out the Brown University ‘Men and Women Abroad’ page and the ‘Maps of anti-LGBT Laws Country by Country’ page).



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# Additional Resources

## International Student and Study Abroad Centre (ISSAC)

Location: Room 80 Place Riel

Contact: 306-966-4925.



Did you know that ISSAC offers an **Introduction to Intercultural Communication** course?

You'll find this non credited self-directed course on the International Student and Study Abroad Centre main webpage

## Student Wellness Centre

Location: 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> floor Place Riel.

Contact: 306-966-5768.

## Drop-in Peer Support

Location: Usask Community Centre

Visit: [facebook.com/UsaskDropIn](https://facebook.com/UsaskDropIn)

## Faith Leaders Council

Visit: [wellness.usask.ca/faithleaders](https://wellness.usask.ca/faithleaders)

## Global Gathering Place

Visit: [globalgatheringplace.com](https://globalgatheringplace.com)

Contact: 306-665-0268

## Open Door Society

Location: 100-129 3rd Ave N,  
Saskatoon.

Contact: 306-653-4464.

**Saskatchewan Intercultural  
Association**

Visit: [saskintercultural.org](http://saskintercultural.org)

**Saskatoon and Community Supports  
Newcomer Information Centre**

Location: 106-129 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave N,  
Saskatoon.

Contact: 306-343-8303.

**Government of Canada website:**

[https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/living-  
abroad/culture-shock](https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/living-abroad/culture-shock)



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