Culture Shock

Adjusting to Life in America:
Survival Skills

When you leave your home country and all the people and things that are familiar, you will encounter many new, exciting, challenging, and confusing situations. The differences in language, climate, food, educational system (such as how students relate to teachers) and relational norms (such as how people express emotions and resolve conflicts)—naturally creates stress. The stress caused by these changes is heightened further by the distance from family and close ties at home. The name for this type of stress has been called “culture shock”. This term expresses the feeling of not knowing what to do or how to do things in a new environment.

The Adjustment Process:
Stages of Culture Shock

These stages are general. We all have our own way of reacting and not everyone experiences all these phases or experiences them in the order they are listed.

Honeymoon Stage: Everything encountered is new and exciting. With so much to absorb and learn in the new culture, the initial period of settling in may seem like an adventure.

Rejection Stage: This is when you begin to have more problems. Differences may begin to seem more irritating than interesting. You may have difficulty communicating and being understood. You may wonder why you ever left your home country and feel critical of your host country.

Adjustment Stage: You begin to understand the new culture, it feels more familiar, and you can move around without a sense of anxiety. You may be able to reflect back and laugh at mistakes made earlier. You are more likely to recognize and appreciate the differences between your culture and the host culture.

Adaptation Stage: At this point, you have a sense of belonging and enjoy living among the people here. There is often a realization that the new culture is not better or worse than your home culture—just different.

Re-entry stage: When you return home after being away for a long time, you may find that many things have changed or that you are no longer completely comfortable in your home country. It may take time to feel at ease again and time to adjust and integrate your new perceptions.
How to Ease the Adjustment Process—Coping Tips

- Allow yourself to feel sad about family, friends, places and things you left behind.

- Be patient. Give yourself time to adjust.

- Acknowledge your progress in adjusting to the new culture. Think of all you have learned since the day you arrived.

- Maintain confidence in yourself. Follow your ambitions.

- Understand that there are and will continue to be uncertainties and confusion. Try to see the humor in confusing situations that you encounter.

- Avoid judging things as either right or wrong; regard them as merely being different.

- Practice your English. Ask when you don’t understand.

- Be active—get outside your room or apartment. Go to public places, participate and observe others.

- Make American friends. Ask them questions. Answer their questions about your country.

- Introduce yourself to other international students. Ask them how they are coping.

- Join in community events, like Counseling Center and Student Activities programs, and City of Chicago offerings.

- Take good care of yourself. Eat good food and get plenty of sleep. Do things you enjoy. Have a regular form of physical activity. It will reduce your stress. Relaxation techniques (deep breathing, visualization, yoga, etc.) are proven to be very effective as well.

- Remember the ways you have been able to reduce stress in difficult situations in the past and apply those methods in your present circumstances. For example, you might take a long walk, go to a movie, or write a letter to a close friend or relative.

- Recognize the advantages of having lived in two different cultures. Your life will be enriched in many ways, including developing a better understanding of yourself.

- Know that help is available. Feel free to come to the Counseling Center located on the 5th floor of the Herman Crown Center, Room 502, or contact us at 312-341-3548.
How do I know if I should talk to a therapist?

At times, everyone feels stressed out, depressed, anxious, angry or confused. Often talking to a good friend or relative can help. However, there are times when feelings are not easily resolvable, when our usual ways of handling problems isn’t working as well, and we end up feeling overwhelmed. Consider seeking therapy if:

- You feel a prolonged sense of helplessness and sadness.
- You worry excessively, expect the worst, or are constantly on edge.
- You are finding it difficult to carry out everyday activities. For example, you are unable to concentrate on assignments at work or school.
- Your actions are harmful to yourself or to others. For instance, you are drinking too much alcohol, abusing drugs, or becoming overly argumentative and aggressive.
- People are telling you that they are worried about you.
- You are experiencing signs of physical stress such as headaches, stomachaches, or other aches and pains.

About the Counseling Center

Roosevelt University Counseling Center provides a range of services including:

- Individual counseling
- Group counseling
- Couples counseling
- Consultation
- Mediation
- Crisis counseling
- Referrals to local resources
- Skill-building workshops
- Wellness programs
- Information on a variety of psychological topics

Feel free to come in during any of our drop-in times. No appointment is needed for your first session. The Counseling Center, Herman Crown Center 5th Floor, has convenient drop-in hours Monday through Thursday. At Schaumburg, Room 114, there is a drop-in hour on Wednesday and on Thursday. The times are posted outside our office or on our web site, [www.roosevelt.edu/counseling](http://www.roosevelt.edu/counseling). If these times are not convenient for you, just call 312-341-3548 and request an appointment at another time.

Counseling services are free and confidential