

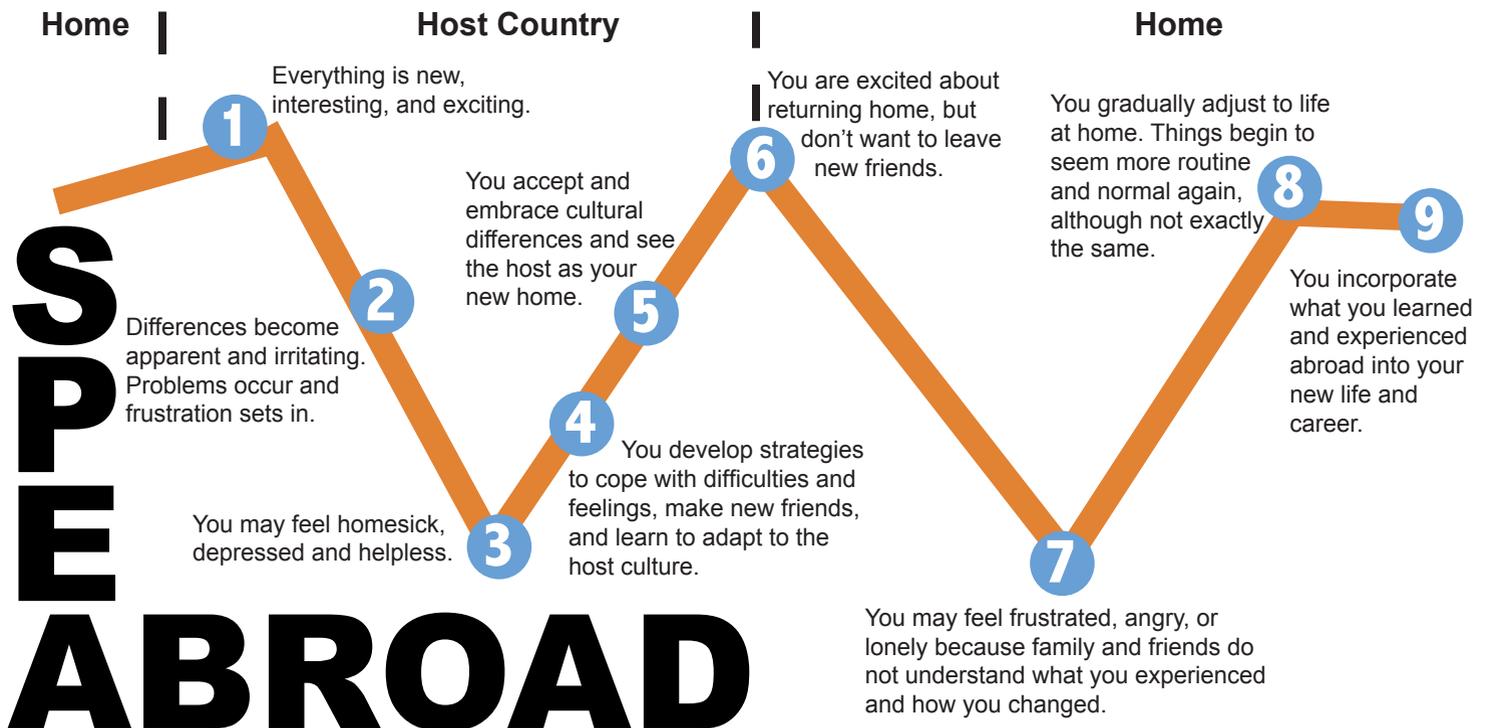
Overcoming Culture Shock



What is Culture Shock and Reverse Culture Shock?

Culture shock is a term used to describe the disorientation people experience when they encounter a different culture and country than their own. Reverse culture shock occurs once an individual returns home. You may experience symptoms to a greater or lesser degree than other people around you. Although some degree of culture shock and reverse culture shock is inevitable, most people will not suffer from all symptoms.

The Stages and Symptoms of Culture Shock



Tips for Minimizing the Impact of Culture Shock

- 1** Learn as much as you can about the host country before going, so you have a sense of what to expect. Also, make an effort to learn some key words in the local language. This increases your communication skills and it helps you to integrate with the local community.
- 2** Keep an open mind. Do not automatically perceive anything that is different to be wrong or negative. Look for logical reasons behind everything in the host culture that seems different. Withholding judgment will allow you to be an objective observer and will facilitate the process of cross-cultural understanding.
- 3** Get to know local people and how they live. Respectfully ask questions, read newspapers, and attend a variety of festivals and events. This will help you to feel more connected to your new environment.
- 4** Loosen the grip on your life at home. Limit the number of times you make contact with your family and friends each week. If you are too connected to people or things outside of the host country, you will never fully overcome culture shock and you will be unable to truly experience the local community.
- 5** Most importantly, maintain a sense of humor! Don't be too hard on yourself if you make a cultural gaffe or don't know what to do in a social situation. Laugh at yourself and others will laugh with you.

Coping Strategies for Dealing with Reverse Culture Shock

One of the biggest challenges you will face is re-adapting to the realities of home. This involves examining your priorities, values, and what you think of yourself and the United States. Students often expect to be able to pick up exactly where they left. A problem arises when reality doesn't meet these expectations. Things may have changed at home while you were gone, but you will have also changed. Home may now feel foreign.

- 1** Reverse culture shock can be toned down by integrating your new interests and cross-cultural skills with your life in the United States. This can be done through your involvement with international groups, tutoring or services in the community or on campus.
- 2** Your family and friends will not be as interested in hearing about your adventures as you will be in sharing them. This is not a rejection of you. Once they have heard the highlights, they'll feel like they've heard everything. Spend time with others who have been abroad and are more able to relate to your experiences.
- 3** You may get frustrated by the lack of opportunity to apply newly gained social, linguistic and practical skills that appear to be unnecessary or irrelevant. Rest assured: The cross-cultural understanding you gained is an enormously valuable tool in our society, and opportunities for you to put it to use will certainly arise.

On Campus Resources

SPEA Study Abroad & Re-Entry Course

Coming Home: Study Abroad and Re-Entry, This 1-credit, 8-week course asks students to examine their overseas experience and to seek further personal growth.

IU Office of Overseas Study (Returning to IU)

<http://overseas.iu.edu/return/transition.shtml>

IU Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

<http://healthcenter.indiana.edu/counseling/>

Additional Resources

How to Overcome Culture Shock

<http://www.wikihow.com/Overcome-Culture-Shock-in-a-Foreign-Country>

Challenges Faced With Reverse Culture Shock

<http://www.state.gov/m/fsi/tc/c56075.htm>

SPEA

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