

MANAGING CULTURE SHOCK

Information for International Students

WHAT IS CULTURE SHOCK?

Culture shock is a term used to refer to the overwhelming feelings and adaptation process experienced when someone moves to a new place. It is a term often referenced in travel articles and journals, but it can be sometimes difficult to recognise when you are going through it yourself. Also known as Acculturative Stress, Culture shock can affect the body in many ways and often be unique to the individual experiencing it. However, there are some common features of Culture shock that people may experience when they move to a new place and are adapting to living there.



Some of the feelings you may experience are –

- Missing the familiar, being around people who "make sense" and you identify with;
- Irritability and frustration (things not working how they should, or taking more effort required to do a basic task than usual);
- Feeling more anxious and emotional than usual;
- Hypersensitivity and alertness;
- Suspiciousness/paranoia;
- Not being able to regulate your emotions
- Physical and mental exhaustion;
- Physical/somatic symptoms: headaches such as digestive problems, sleep difficulties, headaches, joint pain and more frequent illnesses (lowered immunity).
- Excessive worry with cleanliness of drinking water, food and surroundings, fear of being cheated or robbed, reluctance to learn host country language;
- Feelings of hopelessness;
- Reduction in creative thinking; problem solving and spontaneity.

These experiences might happen immediately when you arrive at a new place, but some people often experience delayed culture shock - sometimes weeks after a big move. In these times it's important to go easy on yourself and other people (for example, family and friends at home) who may also be adapting to your absence. Remember that adjusting to living in Glasgow is a process, one that is fluid and ever changing. Try to be patient and compassionate. If you experience any of the things mentioned above, keep in mind that it is a natural part of this process. Our brain is built to assess situations, and it is natural to crave familiarity and comfort; whether that is a familiar language, familiar foods or familiar faces. On the positive side, these experiences of culture shock are usually temporary and there are things that you can do to help you manage and cope with them when they arise.





Ways to manage stress related to Culture Shock and to enhance your experience of living abroad are:

- Practice respect for differences – embrace the comparisons and learning that comes from this experience.
- Speak to your guidance lecturer, Students Association and Student Services if you are experiencing difficulties in class. The classroom environment might feel different and you may notice different approaches to learning and teaching from what you are used to. Check out our Knowledge Hub Resources and Representation info for what to expect in a classroom setting and guidance on respectful behaviour.
- Avoid comparisons as much as possible - instead, be aware of your surroundings - assess and note differences and describe and experience without judging. Observing the situation can help you separate yourself from the difficult emotions that it can cause.
- Take responsibility for understanding the nature of your new surroundings- learn about the culture and history. Check out our companion section on the SA website for more info about things to do in Glasgow and your local community.
- Avoid generalizations ("Scottish people are... English people are... Indian people are..."). Consider how you wouldn't want to be viewed as a generalisation of the culture you grew up in, and vice versa.
- It is OK to crave for food or people and it is OK to look for them in your new environment. It is a natural way of preserving your own confidence, abilities and identity.
- Recognize and accept it is an up and down process... you are bound to experience good and bad times before you adjust. It is part of the process so be patient with yourself!
- Create new rituals - for example, finding a place you like to go for a coffee at the weekend or a shop that you like buying your fruit and veg from regularly. It can help create a feeling of familiarity, routine and community .
- If you practice religion, you may want to find a local place of worship and connect with the community surrounding that.

CULTURE SHOCK DURING HOLIDAY PERIODS

Holidays may offer opportunities for you to see friends and family back home. However, if you've not had the opportunity to go to your international home, you may have struggled with your mental wellbeing over the holiday period.

We wanted to give you some tips on how to cope at this time and when you return. You may feel unsettled, disconnected, struggling with the language once more and experiencing the stress of adjusting to Scottish culture all over again. Combined with thinking about the situation back home; expectations of the upcoming year and the prospect of going back to college this can be a tricky time. Balancing two geographically distance communities and groups of people as well as the encompassing culture is challenging for many.

BE SELF-COMPASSIONATE

When we feel homesick this is related to our instinctual need for love, protection and security so when you are not experiencing these it is natural to miss home, particularly if you have recently returned or maybe not been able to take part in special occasions with family and friends due to living abroad. What you are feeling is entirely normal, and indeed, expected.

By giving yourself a hard time about experiencing these feelings you are adding to their negativity and making it more difficult for you to move through them. Acceptance that you feel a little sad is a necessary part of moving forward. Be patient with yourself.





CONNECT WITH YOUR SURROUNDINGS

It can be very tempting to increase communication with family and friends back home when you are feeling homesick. However, while it is important that you still maintain this communication be mindful to also invest in connecting with the friends that you have made and continue to build a support network in Glasgow. We have some tips for socialising on the SA site, and indeed there are many opportunities in College to take part in group activity.

Connecting with your surroundings allows you to get used to being away from home and reduce the effects of culture shock. Make an effort to visit galleries, museums, places of worship and parks to help you to feel connected to Scotland and remind you of the positive reasons that you have moved here as well as giving you some head space from negative thoughts associated with homesickness and culture shock.

You can also make your immediate environment more homely by putting pictures up and by printing some of your favourite quotes - an inspirational quote can be helpful in reminding you of the reasons why you are away and what you want to achieve. It is important that you feel 'at home' where you live to enable you to study and enjoy your experience of being in Glasgow.



FOCUS ON THE HERE AND NOW

Focusing on the present allows us to appreciate where we are now and enable ourselves to be more open to new experiences and people.

Creating new rituals can help you focus on the present and also enable you to feel more 'at home'. For example, playing a team sport at the weekend or buying your food from the same shop - this can make you feel more secure and 'at home'.

If you are dreading going back to College after a break, try to undertake some preparation for your upcoming week to help you feel ready and more connected with your studies.

These are just some of the ways that you can help yourself to settle back into your life in Glasgow after being away, the key is allowing yourself time to adjust and try to be pro-active in re-connecting with your present home.

For more information and support check these links –

Big White Wall

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