



Culture shock

When you leave home to travel to your new country, you naturally take your own personality and cultural ways with you. When you arrive in a new country with a different culture you can experience a wide variety of feelings and reactions. For example, you may feel confused, nervous, irritable, uncertain and dependent on others. If you experience these things, then you probably have **culture shock**.

Culture shock is a normal reaction and most people experience it in one way or another upon their arrival in Australia. Remember, many Australians were born overseas. These Australians come from approximately 200 countries around the world. You are not the first newcomer and you are not alone.

Coping with culture shock requires a special effort, but it is important to remember that you are not alone in your feeling of distress. Most people in their first weeks and months in a new country experience similar reactions – it is a normal response to a drastic change in your physical, social and cultural environment.

Usually there are four phases of culture shock. By understanding them, you will be able to better manage your feelings and experiences.

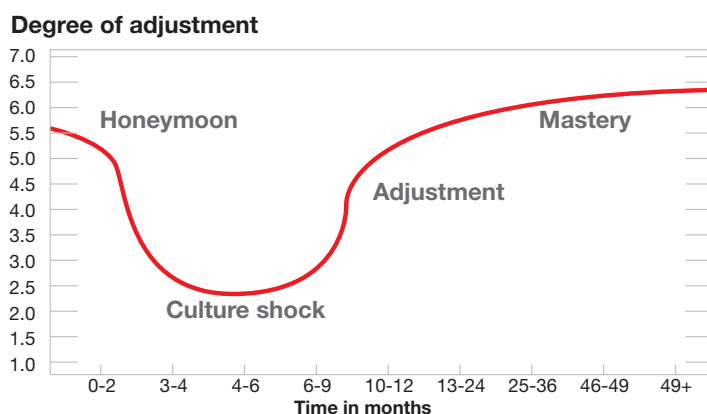
Phase 1: Honeymoon (euphoria): Upon arrival in Australia you may have high hopes and great expectations. Everything is fascinating and exciting to you.

Phase 2: Culture shock/crisis (frustration): You are absorbed in many practical problems, such as finding housing and employment or enrolling in language classes. Feelings may include disappointment, frustration, embarrassment, fear, anger, guilt, nostalgia, irritability or depression. You may also suffer from sleeplessness, fatigue, loss of appetite and apathy.

Phase 3: Adjustment (recovery): You start feeling more in control as your English improves and you have more experience in Australia. You may still have some uncertainty and self-doubt. Your expectations are not easily met.

Phase 4: Mastery (biculturalism): A routine has been established. You have become more accustomed to the language, habits, customs, food and people of your new country. You feel more comfortable and accept Australia as your home. It may take five years or more to get to this stage. Be patient and remember you are not alone.

U-Curve Model of Adjusting to a Foreign Culture



Everyone can be proud of and comfortable with their own cultural background. With an open mind and awareness you can learn to respect and appreciate Australian society as well as share your culture with Australians. Below is a list of suggestions for ways of coping with your new situation.

Listen, observe and keep an open mind

You may be unfamiliar with the social rules in Australia. Try to listen carefully to what people say and observe their body language. You will learn how to communicate both verbally and non-verbally in appropriate ways.

Ask questions

Ask yourself if the behaviour you are seeing makes sense in the Australian culture, even if it seems strange or wrong to you. If you see or experience something you do not understand, remember, it may be because you did not have enough information. Ask questions of someone you trust. Your caseworker will often be able to help, or they can refer you to someone who can.

Keep your sense of humour

It is likely that you will make mistakes as you explore your new culture. If you are able to laugh at some of these mistakes it will help you learn, adapt and enjoy the overall experience.

Anxiety and frustration

Learning to function effectively in a new culture is not easy. Meanings in cross-cultural situations may sometimes be unclear. In these situations, it is natural to feel anxious and frustrated. If you recognise that these feelings are a normal part of the resettlement experience, you might be able to deal with them better.

Become involved in your community

There is great value in experiencing and understanding a new way of life in a different culture. Try to make an effort to meet people and get involved in your community. This will help you learn about Australia and share your culture with Australians. Get out, volunteer and keep busy with community activities.

Participate in activities that build your hopes for a better future

Try to look at the initial period as just one phase of your life – the beginning of your hopes for a better future. Attend language classes. These classes provide more than just language; they provide access to your community and improve self-esteem.

Do something special for yourself regularly

Get some exercise. Get out and go for a walk, run or ride a bike. Meet with friends. Take up an old hobby or start doing something you have always wanted to try but haven't had the opportunity to do, for example, planting a vegetable garden, learn to play a musical instrument, paint or learn to play a sport.

