**Culture shock**

The term, culture shock, was introduced for the first time in 1958 to describe the anxiety produced when a person moves to a completely new environment.

This term expresses the feeling of not knowing what to do or how to do things in a new environment, and not knowing what is appropriate or inappropriate.

We can describe culture shock as the physical and emotional discomfort one suffers when coming to live in another country or a place different from the place of origin.

It is an anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. Often, the way that we lived before is not accepted as or considered as normal in the new place.

Everything is different, and for example, we don’t speak the language, don’t know when to shake hands and what to say when we meet people, when and how to give tips, when to accept and when to refuse invitations, when to take statements seriously and when not.

Like most ailments, culture shock has its symptoms and cure. The symptoms of cultural shock can appear at different times.

Symptoms:

Sadness, loneliness, melancholy

Preoccupation with health: aches, pains, and allergies

Insomnia, desire to sleep too much or too little

Anger, irritability, unwillingness to interact with others

Lack of confidence

Longing for family

A desire to depend on long-term residents of one’s own nationality

Culture shock has several stages. The 1st stage is the incubation stage. During the first few weeks most individuals are fascinated by the new. This time is called the "honeymoon" stage, as everything encountered is new and exciting. This stage may last from a few days or weeks to six months, depending on the circumstances.

Afterwards, the 2nd stage presents itself. It is characterized by a hostile and aggressive attitude towards the host country. This happens due to the difficulties a person faces in daily life, such as communication or transportation problems.

In this stage one criticizes the host country, its ways and the people.

The 3rd stage is characterized by gaining some understanding of the new culture. A new feeling of pleasure may be experienced and sense of humor begins to exert itself.

Instead of criticizing, they now jokes about people around them and even crack jokes about their own difficulties. They are now on the way to recovery.

In the 4th stage, the adjustment is complete. The visitor now accepts the customs of the country as just another way of living. They realize that the new culture has good and bad things to offer.

The feeling of anxiety is lost.

Some ways to combat stress produced by culture shock:

- Learn the language of the host country

- Develop a hobby

- Be positive

- Don't forget the good things you already have!

Questions

Have you ever experienced culture shock? Describe your symptoms.

I experienced culture shock when I went to the USA in the 11th grade of school at the age of 16. I was taken straight from my family, school and town to a totally strange, different environment. I had to leave with an American family and study in an American high school, where not a single person spoke Russian.

First, I was surprised and fascinated by everything: I loved the food, the way my host parents spent their leisure time, I enjoyed the house I lived in, my school and classes were wonderful and interesting, I never remembered to call my parents or e-mail my friends.

However, in a few weeks I became really depressed. I hated the way those Americans pronounced words, I couldn’t stand the food, the fact that every time they were free from work my host parents did the same things drove me crazy; the way supermarkets looked and people behaved made me sick. I started to call my parents and my sister every day; having done my homework I e-mailed my friends every night. I was so much concentrated on the negative emotions that the things and people surrounding me gave me, that I stopped noticing the good things around me and enjoying my life.

What advice do you have for people who suffer from culture shock?

First, I would recommend the person finding a hobby. Doing some interesting thing could really distract one from the irritation, negative emotions and depressive feeling.

Second, in such a situation what would really help is thinking positively. One should at least try to notice the good things around them and to enjoy their life. Very often we are in the foreign country not for good and not even for a long time. Therefore, there’s too little time to be upset and frustrated, you have to cherish every moment and appreciate the opportunities that life gives you.

It is also very useful to try to get as much knowledge of the language as one could from the very beginning. When you are fluent in the language of the host country it’s a lot easier to get around by yourself, to communicate with people, to share your feelings and impressions with them and be understood.