



## Culture Shock Information & Tips

With its own section in the Homestay Family Handbook, culture shock is a very real psychological process everyone experiences upon arrival in a new country. There are four stages of culture shock and they affect everyone differently. The key to coping with culture shock is to understand the stages and that the feelings associated with each one are normal.

Some students become frustrated with how different things are in Canada, and how tired they become having to use English all day, every day.

The good news is that almost all students get past these feelings and end up having the time of their lives in Delta.

The 4 stages of culture shock are explained below, followed by tips for minimizing and overcoming culture shock. At the end there is a useful visual called the Cultural Iceberg. It does a good job of showing how many cultural differences are “hidden below the surface” and hard to detect right away.

### The 4 Stages of Culture Shock

#### The Honeymoon Stage:

When students first arrive in Canada, everything that is new and different is also wonderful and interesting.

This is the only stage most tourists experience because they never have to settle into a new culture. This stage can last anywhere from a week to a month or more.

#### The Distress Stage:

This is the stage where the reality of being abroad for a longer period of time hits home. Cultural differences that students found interesting earlier in their stay can become taxing.

They may feel confused, isolated, and/or overwhelmed during this stage. This stage can be exhausting, particularly if learning English is proving a challenge as well.

Students may begin to spend more time in their rooms or with same-culture friends.

## The Transition Stage:

This is the most important stage to understand.

During this stage, some students become angry or frustrated with Canadian life. They constantly compare it to their home culture and begin to lament the differences.

Don't worry, this is normal. The key is to recognize the symptoms of this stage and not give in to them.

## The Integration Stage:

Cultural challenges and language issues begin to subside as students accept and embrace the differences that previously frustrated them.

This is the stage when their study-abroad experience becomes everything they hoped it would be; they feel confident and relaxed in their community, their school, and in their homestay.

While it is important to be aware of the stages listed above, it is equally important to point out that not everyone goes through every stage.

Some students arrive and are immediately homesick, while others never experience the frustration of the transition stage and skip quickly to the integration stage.

The key is to be aware of what is happening and to remember that people are available to help you and your student.

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## Tips to Help Minimize Culture Shock

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Help your students to:

- **Be open-minded.** Tell them not to judge or compare. Canada is different from their home country. That's one of the reasons they chose it for their study-abroad experience! They should challenge themselves to learn about different ways of doing things, instead of dismissing them as wrong or inferior.
- **Get involved.** Encourage them to participate in school clubs and/or sports teams and, if possible, to become active in the community.
- **Be patient.** Help them to adapt to their new surroundings and to make new friends. Remind them not to put pressure on themselves; it takes time to acclimate.
- **Keep active!** Feeling good physically will help them to feel good mentally. Encourage them to make physical activity part of their daily routine and/or school timetable.
- **Relax.** Make sure their day includes time set aside for mental rest. Studying, speaking English, and navigating the day-to-day realities of a new country and culture require a lot of energy. It is okay for them to spend some "down time" each day listening to music, surfing the internet, or reading a book in their first language.

- **Manage their connections to home.** Keeping in touch with family and friends is vital and can be a valuable support during an overseas stay. Too much contact, however, can be counterproductive. They should keep in touch but not at the expense of making new friends, participating in activities, and/or keeping up with their studies.
- **Stay healthy.** They should eat meals that are healthy and well-balanced. Encourage them to get enough sleep at night. They shouldn't wait too long to visit a clinic if they are feeling ill.
- **Ask for help.** If they are feeling sad, lonely, or frustrated, encourage them to talk to their International Coordinator, their teachers, or counsellors at their school.

Most important of all: Remind them why they came to Canada!  
It is supposed to be different and challenging!  
If Canada was the same as their home country, there would be no reason to come!

## The Cultural Iceberg

