



Supporting a Mentee Experiencing Cultural Shock

Exploring cultural shock with your mentee

- Ask the mentee to consider their recent emotional, behavioral and physical state and highlight the categories below where they are currently situated.
- It may be easier to discuss specific events or challenging situations and then explore together.
- If appropriate, discuss their partner / family situation as well, as they play a key role in providing support.
- This is a guide only – every person’s journey through culture shock is different and feelings / behaviors may come and go.

Time	At home	Early arrival	Weeks to months	Months (to years)		
General attitudes and feelings	Anticipation	Exhilaration	Bewilderment Impatience Disenchantment	Discouragement Irritability	Gradual recovery (or not)	Normal
Significant events	Preparation Planning Packing Partying	Welcome events New housing New job Sights, shops	Experiencing Unfamiliar sounds, smells, food, language, customs, communication	Search for reassurance Need for security Need for recreation	Settling in ED culture Training requirements Routines Home life	Normal Job performance Home life and routines
Emotional responses	Positive Excitement, enthusiasm Some fear of the unknown Concern about leaving family and friends	Preparing Sense of mission or purpose Enthusiasm Adventure	Uncertainty Restlessness Frustration Feeling lost or confused/ bewilderment The smallest problems seem overwhelming Feeling shy or insecure	Discouragement Anger/ Critical Concern about health Overwhelming home sickness Sadness/ Loneliness Questioning decision to move to this place	Interest in new culture	Equilibrium
Behavioural responses	Withdrawal Loss of interest in current home activities Much stress on family members	Curiosity Avoids negative hostility Enthusiasm for new work, colleagues and new home	Scepticism Search for familiar activities Increase in smoking Some social withdrawal Invokes stereotypes	Avoidance Avoids contact with local people Withdrawal Unexplainable crying	Resignation	
Physical responses	Normal health Possible weariness	Unsettled health Intestinal disturbances; Insomnia; Colds; Headaches; Sore throat; Weight loss; Skin problems Other minor/serious illness; increased visits to doctor		Constructive Accommodation of cultural differences	Equilibrium Integration of old and new	
					Negative Complete rejection Idolising home culture	
				Normal health or ongoing unsettled health Depression		Normal health

How to help a mentee who is dealing with cultural shock

Positive actions	How these actions can help	How to respond to people experiencing culture shock
Within the mentoring relationship		
Work satisfaction	Positive work experiences, feeling valued and having a respected role can mitigate negative culture shock experiences	Ensure the mentoring relationship celebrates work place success and validation
Having Australian friends	By having friends to talk to, people are able to ask questions without feeling vulnerable or foolish	Allow cultural questions within the mentoring relationship Start a 'buddy' system with another trainee/doctor
Access to support	Helps to inform and reduce isolation	Formal support programs – in-hospital; doctors health programs IMG support programs
Meeting others in the same situation	Other staff or IMGs may be experiencing the same problems. By talking to them, various ways to cope with problems can be shared	Extend an invitation to go to a social event on campus, or IMG support/social groups Community based groups of same culture can also help
Patience	Patience and encouragement demonstrate understanding, respect and acceptance	Reassurance that their feelings are not permanent will help, as will acknowledging that it takes time to adjust and accommodate
Other support ideas		
Social activity	Encourages people to observe and learn how different customs are practised in a non-threatening atmosphere	Encourage as much involvement as possible, so as to experience first-hand what others are doing Encourage activities such as shopping or supporting events etc
Exercise	Reduces stress and depression. Sports clubs and societies provide valuable social link to meeting new people and understanding local culture	Encourage participation; assist with where and how if appropriate
Community involvement	Community activities, religious services or volunteer opportunities can help someone become a member of the community	Talk about their interests and suggest alignment with community involvement of people within the local culture
Keep in contact with family	Generates excitement, lessens isolation and helps to maintain an individual's culture	Encourage contact with friends and family from home

Reference: Adapted from Flinders University "Passage for Staff/Students/Families Experiencing a New Environment", General Information Folio 5, Understanding & Supporting People Experiencing Culture Shock, flinders.edu.au/cdip

Additional resources

- Supporting a mentee experiencing culture shock
Indigenous Health and Cultural Competency Program – Podcast Series
Go to the [ACEM IHCC webpage](#)
Scroll down the page and select the tab: International Medical Graduates: A Diversity of Experience
Video - Part A Communication in the ED
Video - Part B ED processes
- [The Expat Curve](#) by LIVING INSTITUTE
- [ACEM Welcome to working as a medical practitioner in Australia](#) – 5 part module series