



Dealing with reverse culture shock

WHAT IS REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK?

Reverse culture shock, or reentry shock, refers to the difficulty sometimes experienced when returning to your home country and culture after you have had experiences in another country. While a wide range of responses is normal, some may be unexpected.

Your re-entry is a process that may involve some or all of the following stages:

1. An initial excitement about returning home
2. Subsequent disenchantment and disillusionment with your home culture
3. A rejection of the home culture
4. A deeper understanding of your home culture

WHAT ARE SOME SYMPTOMS OF REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK?

Emotions:

- Confusion
- Disappointment
- Anger
- Excitement
- Anticipation
- Guilt
- Sadness

Questions:

- What have I missed?
- Am I understood?
- How do I fit in?
- What's important to me?
- Where do I go from here?

Behaviors:

- Withdrawing from others
- Reflecting on your time away
- Talking a lot about your experiences
- Doing things in new ways
- Spending a lot of time with friends/family

RESOURCES:

ON CAMPUS:

- International Student and Study Abroad Centre (ISSAC)
Tel: 306-966-4925
- International Student Associations see ISSAC for details
- University of Saskatchewan Language Centre
Tel: 306-966-4351
learnenglish.usask.ca
- Student Learning Services
Tel: 306-966-2886
usask.ca/ulc
- Student Counselling Services:
Tel: 306-966-4920
students.usask.ca
- Student Health Services:
Tel: 306-966-5768
students.usask.ca

COMMUNITY RESOURCES:

- Global Gathering Place
Tel: 306-665-0268
globalgatheringplace.com
- Saskatoon Open Door Society
Tel: 306-653-4464
sods.sk.ca
- Saskatchewan Intercultural Association
Tel: 306-978-1818
- International Women of Saskatoon
Tel: 306-978-6611
- Tourism Saskatoon
Tel: 306-242-1206
tourismsaskatoon.com
- Newcomer Information Centre
Tel: 306-343-8303

WHAT MIGHT I EXPERIENCE?

- A sense that you have changed. Your values, experiences and habits may be different now. Your friends and country may also have changed. Fitting in with family, friends and work may not be as easy as you anticipated.
- A sense that others cannot understand what you have been through. You may struggle with putting some of your experiences into words and may not want to talk about your experiences. Or, you may find that you do not stop talking about your experiences and want to share everything. Others may tire of listening and shut you down.
- Questions about who you are and where you fit into your culture and the world in general. You may decide that you want to change careers, study areas, or institutions.
- Questions about the values, norms and expectations of your original culture. You may find yourself embracing parts of your home culture that you previously rejected or found unimportant.
- Homesickness for the friends and positive parts of the country that you've just left.
- Negative thoughts about the culture, place and people you've left and relief that you're not there anymore.
- Comparisons of the level of privilege in your country and your host country. You may experience guilt and shock at the abundance in your home country or dismay at the lower standard of living in your host country.
- Different expectations from people in your home country. There may be pressure to 'perform' in some way and 'share' what you have learned and experienced. You may be expected to be the 'expert,' or the 'ambassador' and you may not feel up to these roles.

HOW CAN I MANAGE THE RE-ENTRY PROCESS?

- Give yourself time to overcome jet-lag. Take care of yourself by eating well, getting enough rest and exercising.
- Initiate activities to help you reconnect with family and friends. Ask about and show an interest in what has happened in your home country while you were gone.
- Many people find it helpful to talk about the experiences (positive and negative) that they have had in another country and the re-entry process. This may help you and others to better understand the impact of the time you spent living in another culture.
- On return, some students enjoy pursuing an international connection by meeting with international students, Canadians who have been to the same country, or those who are planning to travel abroad. Volunteering may be one way to get involved.
- If appropriate, keep in touch with friends from your host country.
- Give yourself time to integrate your experiences before making important decisions.
- If your travel experiences have led you to consider new career goals you may find it helpful to pursue career counselling.
- Trust that you will integrate your travel experiences over time and will appreciate what you've learned.
- Some people struggle with the re-entry process and find it difficult to reestablish themselves in their home country. If this is the case it may be helpful to seek counselling.

A person once said that, "the sum of all of our travels is often to return to the place from where we started, and to see it for the first time." Give yourself time to adjust to the "new seeing."