

# Stages of Culture Shock

## ***Stages 1: The Honeymoon***

When your student first arrives at college they may experience the honeymoon phase. They have made it! They have spent the last several years working toward this goal and it is finally happening! Everything is new and exciting. They are fascinated by the novelty of their experiences and enthusiastic about the opportunities before them. The college is likely spreading the red carpet for new students with special activities and support. Your student feels positive and successful.

One problem may be that they expect that this phase and these feelings will continue.

## ***Stage 2: Initial Culture Shock***

Ouch! Things begin to go wrong and it takes your student by surprise. Your student begins to fatigue and realize how different everything really is. They may begin to become frustrated and annoyed at the differences and realize how much work it takes to manage within this new culture.

This is the stage during which you may hear from your unhappy student. It is the time when many parents receive the “meltdown phone call.” Everything is awful, your student is homesick, angry, lonely, anxious and overwhelmed. They may want to come home. They feel that they don’t belong, don’t know how to make friends, don’t like the food or their living arrangements, can’t manage their classes, and don’t fit in.

During this stage your student may feel less competent and may question their decision to attend this college – or even to attend college at all. They begin to question the way everyone does everything or even question their own values and habits. They may feel helpless.

One problem may be that they don’t realize that this phase will probably pass if they give it time.

## ***Stage 3: Recovery and Adjustment***

Things get better. At least they seem to get better. Your student is able to resolve many of their conflicts and problems, they begin to appreciate the way things are done in this new environment, they find helpful resources – both internal and external – and their feelings may become more balanced. Life may not be perfect, and they still face some surprises and mixed feelings, but they begin to feel competent in their ability to function and handle themselves at college.

The problem is that this phase may be somewhat superficial and may change yet again.

## ***Stage 4: Isolation***

It is possible that this phase may take students (and their parents) most by surprise. Perhaps your student anticipated, consciously or unconsciously, initial adjustments. They may have expected that they would feel unhappy and homesick at some point and then things would get better. When they began to make adjustments during the recovery phase, they thought they had made it. Then something else happens.

During this phase your student may begin to confront some deeper, more personal differences between their values, expectations, and lifestyle. They may need to turn inward more to understand their unhappiness or discomfort. Perhaps classes aren't going the way they had hoped. Perhaps their early friendships are less fulfilling than they had hoped. Perhaps they are finding that their major or area of studies doesn't feel right.

Whatever the problems are now, they seem to be more within and have less to do with the superficial characteristics of the college culture. Your student has internal work to do. The problem may be that your student feels that these doubts mean that she has failed to adapt to the new culture. They don't have the patience to continue the adjustment process.

***Stage 5: Assimilation and Adaptation***

If your student perseveres, they may eventually find that they have truly accepted their new life at college and they feel integrated into the culture. Finally, they have a realistic understanding of what is involved in their new life and they have made some personal changes. Your student can now appreciate both their home culture and their new college culture. They are now, in effect, bicultural. They have more maturity and confidence in their abilities and the new person that they have become.

\*Retrieved from <http://www.collegeparentcentral.com/2014/11/the-culture-shock-of-adjusting-to-college/>