**WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE FIRST FEW WEEKS**

**The Stages of Cultural Adjustment**

It is very normal to go through a period of cultural adjustment as you experience change in your routines, roles, relationships, and everyday living. But you may experience it differently from other exchange students. Each student can react differently depending on their individual personality. The information below describes some of the emotions you may experience as you adjust to the program.

**Initial Euphoria: ‘Honeymoon’ Phase**

The Individual:

* Is very positive about the culture.
* Is overwhelmed with impressions.
* Finds the culture exotic and is fascinated by it.
* Is largely passive; doesn't confront the culture

**Rejection: Discomfort Begins – The Honeymoon is Over**

The Individual:

* + Begins to interact with the culture.
	+ Begins to dislike aspects of the culture.
	+ Finds the behavior of the people unusual and unpredictable.
	+ Feels anxiety, stress and anger.
	+ Begins to criticize, mock or show animosity to the people
	+ Wants to go home.

**Adjustment: Understanding the differences**

The Individual:

* Begins to understand the behavior of the people.
* Feels more comfortable living in/encountering the culture.
* Feels less isolated.
* Regains his/her sense of humor.

**Adaptation: Cultural competency**

The Individual:

* + Enjoys being in the culture.
	+ Functions easily in the culture.
	+ Prefers certain host country behavior to that of their own culture.
	+ Adopts certain behaviors.

|  |
| --- |
| **Possible Symptoms of Transition Stress**: |
| Homesickness | Irritability | Boredom |
| Lethargy | Hostility towards locals | Mockery |
| Irrational behavior | Excessive sleeping | Withdrawal |

**THE 5 R’s OF CULTURAL CHANGE**

There are five changes, listed below, that you will likely face during your exchange experience in the USA. These changes have many positive aspects, but they also often create **transition stress**. Transition stress is normal, natural, and will surface in different ways for different people. It is critical to prepare yourself to manage the possible stresses in your transition. Read through each of the five R’s of culture change to get started.

**What changes Common feelings and reactions**

**Routines**

Schedules, meal times, how you travel around, Tired or stressed, without a homework, amount of free time, even the basics like how clear cause

to turn on a faucet and light switch. Not ‘anchored’ or ‘grounded’

**Reactions**

The way people interact and communicate, which

includes greetings and facial expressions, along with appropriate behaviors and reactions in different situations.

Confusion and uncertainty

Less confidence

Withdrawing or isolating

Criticizing host culture

**Roles**

Roles you are used to playing (being a student, being a family member) look and feel different in your host culture. You may assume new roles, which you may have mixed feelings about being labeled as (“the exchange student,” “the European”). Roles back home can also become harder to fulfill (e.g. friend, daughter, etc.).

Mixed emotions!

Excitement for new desired roles

Defensiveness for unwanted roles

Sadness for lost or lessened roles

Confusion for changed roles

**Relationships** Relationships around you can change. You may drift apart from certain relationships back home. You may also experience a deeper connection with some friends and family despite the distance. At the same time, you have to invest energy in creating relationships in your new environment so you have a sense of community and support.

It takes a lot of energy to build relationships—but it is also satisfying

A sense of loss, often initially, with less communication back home

**Reflections**

**about Yourself** You may start to notice that you change in subtle and not so subtle ways. You may adopt new behaviors, clothes,

and a different lifestyle. You may learn a lot about what you value most. You are growing and developing, becoming more aware of who you truly are. This has many benefits, but also often involves confusion and uncertainty.

Sometimes adopting, sometimes rejecting host culture ways of being or doing

Who am I?

What’s most important to me?

Where do I feel at home?

**Which R’s of culture change do you think may cause you the most transition stress?**

Use the boxes, on the right, to rate how much stress you expect you will have on a scale of 1‐10 (1 = no stress and 10 = high stress) for each ‘R’. Then, circle those feelings and reactions that you think you may experience. Come back and review this list in a few months—you may find what causes you stress may change over time, and therefore so do your reactions.

Adapted from: Berardo, K. “The 5 Rs of Culture Change” in Berardo, K., and Deardorff, D. (2012) *Building Cultural Competence: Innovative Activities and Models*. Stylus Publishing**.**

**THE 5 R’s OF CULTURAL CHANGE**

**Now reflect on stress generally. What typically happens to you under stress?** Write in your responses below.

**What typically**

**causes me** *example:* Not feeling

**stress:** like I have control

**When I am**

**stressed, I generally:**

*example:* Am more

emotional, lose sleep, eat more

**What helps me**

**to manage** *example:* Getting

**stress:** exercise, talking with friends

**How can you best manage transition stress?** For starters, make sure to do the things above that help you to manage stress generally. Here are specific ways to manage stress for each ‘R’ of culture change:

•Expect things to take more

time and energy, especially at the start

* Eat healthy food, exercise, and get plenty of rest

•Proactively create new routines by doing the most important things first.

**Routines**

* Learn as much about the

culture as possible

* Ask students, your host family, or your AR to help you understand others' reactions and act appropriately
* Be curious toward differences you experience

•Take a deep breath

**Reactions**

* Expect roles to be different
* Have conversations about what it means to be a student, young person, family member or other roles in your host culture

**Roles**

* Know it will take time to build

new relationships.

* Take initiative ‐ reach out, join a club, and build new connections.
* Create rituals to keep relationships back home going (Sunday Skype calls, a blog, online photo album)

**Relationships**

* Acknowledge that these

changes are natural during transitions

* Note your feelings. Write in a journal and reflect on what you are learning about yourself
* Seek out support from other people who can relate to your experience and share

**Reflections about**

**Yourself**

Adapted from: Berardo, K. “The 5 Rs of Culture Change” in Berardo, K., and Deardorff, D. (2012) *Building Cultural Competence: Innovative Activities and Models*. Stylus Publishing**.**

**COMMON DO’s and DON’Ts**

When entering a new culture, it is perfectly normal for a person to make some mistakes; this is often how a person learns. However, it’s also helpful to be prepared and know what strategies one can use to be successful. There are some things that many students commonly do when going through the cultural adjustment process that don’t really help them. We have listed them here and also provided tips for what you can do instead to help you through the adjustment process and have a successful program.

**DON’T**

**Just nod your head**: Nodding implies you understand and can get you into trouble if you don’t actually understand what’s being said.

**Spend too much time alone or on the computer with natural family/friends:** If you spend too much time in your room, you’re not bonding with your host family. Talking too much with your family and friends back home can also make you more homesick and can prevent you from improving your English.

**Wait to be invited:** Making friends and forming new relationships can be hard. If you wait for your host family or someone at school to ask you to do something, you might be waiting for a long time. This also can apply to doing chores; waiting to do something until you are asked can be perceived as lazy and unappreciative.

**Call your natural family right away when there’s a problem:** Your natural family is not there with you so they don’t understand the full situation. They won’t be able to help you solve the problem and they will end up worrying.

**DO**

**Ask questions**: No one expects you to understand everything; it’s ok to say you don’t understand and ask them to repeat it! If you still don’t understand, ask them to write it down or show you.

**Spend time with your host family:** It’s important to build new relationships with your host family and focus on the present moment. Set time limits for yourself on how much time you spend on the computer. Schedule activities with your host family. This will help you overcome homesickness.

**Take the initiative**: You need to take the initiative and create opportunities to get to know others. Introduce yourself to people, get involved in activities at school, or volunteer in your community. If your host family hasn’t assigned you specific chores to do (or even if they have), ask them what you can do to help.

**Talk to your Area Representative and host family:** Your Area Representative is there is to help you with any problems you might have. It’s also important to openly communicate with your host family about your concerns.

These are just some of the common issues students may encounter; you will probably learn more along the way. Which of these strategies do you want to focus on? Circle them on your sheet.

Refer back to this sheet throughout the program and use these tips and strategies to create a successful program for yourself. Your Area Representative is also a great resource and is always there to help you with any problems you may have.

**HOW DO YOU USE TECHNOLOGY?**

Take our Digital Dozen; a simple 12-item quiz to see how you interact with technology in your life. Our short quiz may help you see if you may just be bit too digitally connected and that you might connect with your world better by disconnecting some of the time! Just check yes or no for each question and add your responses at the end.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Questions | Yes | No |
| 1. Do you find yourself spending more and more time online or on your digital devices (computer, laptop, tablet or phone) than you realize? |  |  |
| 2. Do you find yourself mindlessly passing time on a regular basis by staring at your phone, tablet, or computer even when there might be better or more productive things to do? |  |  |
| 3. Do you find yourself spending more time with ‘virtual friends’ as opposed to real people nearby? |  |  |
| 4. Has the amount of time you spend on your digital devices and the internet been increasing? |  |  |
| 5. Have other people in your life ever asked you to stop checking your phone while you are talking to them? |  |  |
| 6. Do you sleep with your phone under your pillow or next to your bed regularly? |  |  |
| 7. Do you find yourself viewing and answering texts, tweets, and emails at all hours of the day and night—even when it means interrupting other things you are doing? |  |  |
| 8. Do you text, email, tweet or browse the internet while doing homework, watching a movie or doing other similar activities that require your focused attention and concentration? |  |  |
| 9. Do you feel your use of technology negatively affects your schoolwork at times? |  |  |
| 10. Do you find yourself feeling somewhat uncomfortable when you accidentally leave your phone or other device at home, if you have no service, or if it is broken? |  |  |
| 11. Do you feel reluctant to be without your phone or other devices, even for a short time? |  |  |
| 12. When you eat meals is your phone always with you at the table? |  |  |
| **Totals:** |  |  |

*Adapted from The Center for Internet and Technology Addiction:* [*http://virtual-addiction.com/*](http://virtual-addiction.com/)

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Is there any question you said “yes” to that you would like to change? How?
2. What are some of the positive benefits of technology and social media?
3. How can technology negatively affect our relationships with those around us?

**TIPS FOR TECHNOLOGY USE**

1. Instead of spending time on your phone, pick something else fun you want to do! Sit down and brainstorm with your host family and decide what activities interest you. It could be sports, cooking, school clubs or more.
2. Consider creating an electronic and media-free environment in your bedroom.
3. Keep family time media free by banning digital devices from the dinner table.
4. Charge devices each night in a central location, not your bedroom, where they can’t interrupt your sleep.
5. Create a schedule and stick to it. Work with your host family on technology usage rules and go over the “Student and Host Family Technology Contract” together. Be sure to ask them about it!

**Strategies for responsible -- and safer -- online life**

* **There’s no such thing as “private” online.** Anything posted can be seen by or forwarded to strangers, college admissions officers, and potential employers.
* **Know what’s okay to post.** This means no embarrassing or cruel posts, no hate speech or groups, no compromising pictures you wouldn’t want the whole world to see. **Be a good digital citizen.** Online cheating is still cheating. And flagging inappropriate content isn’t tattling – it’s keeping the Web a place where people want to hang out and where they can feel safe.
* **The Golden Rule applies in cyberspace.** If you wouldn’t do it in real life, you shouldn’t do it online. **Use critical thinking.** Ask yourself, “Who posted this? Why?” Thinking this way will help you find trustworthy information, and it will also help avoid online scams that deliver spyware and viruses directly to your computer. Also think critically about your own posts. Ask yourself, “Why am I posting this? Who will see it? Could it be misunderstood?” **Better safe than sorry.** If anything menacing or cruel happens, inform an adult that you trust.

*Adapted from* [*www.commonsensemedia.org*](http://www.commonsensemedia.org/)

**EIGHT SIMPLE SAFETY TIPS**

Being an international student is an exciting experience that offers endless possibilities to learn more about another culture and yourself. As an exchange student, there will be times where you are confused by American culture and your surroundings. Please know that your host family and Area Representative are there to help you feel comfortable and “at home” during your stay. You too can help PAN ATLANTIC make your stay comfortable and safe by following our advice below:

* 1. **Learn your address and phone number as soon as possible.** Make sure you are familiar with your neighborhood. Ask your host family to take you for a tour of your neighborhood and the area around your high school. Ask them to show you places you can go and numbers you can call if you are lost, need help or feel uncomfortable.
	2. **Check with your host family before giving out your personal information,** including your address and phone number, to someone you and your host family are not familiar with.
	3. **Check with your host family before riding in a car** or going to the house of someone new.
	4. **Do not** give out your host family’s contact information online.
	5. **Remember, safety is in numbers!** Don’t go out by yourself alone. Surround yourself with individuals with whom you feel comfortable.
	6. **Speak up if you are uncomfortable**. Your host families and friends may express affection through actions such as hugging or putting their arm around your shoulders. If you should ever feel uncomfortable with your hosts’ or friends’ displays of affection, please express this to your host family and/or Local Coordinator. You can reject any physical signs of affection that make you feel uncomfortable. We want you to feel comfortable and have a good experience!
	7. **Share any and all of your safety concerns with your Area Representative or RD.** If you truly feel that your safety is at risk and you cannot get in touch with your Area Representative or RD, call the PAN ATLANTIC emergency line: 1-866.227.5335
	8. **Make sure you know your school counselor** as they are there to help!

PAN ATLANTIC FOUNDATION office, during business hours/Emergency Line: 1-866.227.5335

**PAN ATLANTIC FOUNDATION DISCIPLINE PROCESS**

If you do not follow the Program Rules, your Area Representative will work with their supervisor (RD) to determine the appropriate disciplinary action, which could be the following:

1. **Warning:** This can be written. We encourage you to adjust your behavior in a timely manner after receiving a warning. If the behavior continues, or additional concerns arise, a written probation may be issued.
	* **Example:** Student is staying out late past the host family curfew and receives a warning to come home on time in the future.
2. **Probation:** This is a written notice to you, the student, with clear guidelines to improve during a specific timeframe. A copy of the probation is given by the PAN ATLANTIC head Office and to the organization in your home country. This document will also be shared with your natural parents. A student can receive probation without a warning in some cases.
	* **Example:** Student is getting a “D” in a class, and is given 1 month to improve the grade
3. **Early Termination of Program** (which means being sent home early): The PAN ATLANTIC head office and the international sending partner, determine if/when a student is sent home early from the program. The final decision is **not** made by the Area Representative or the host family.

**The BIG “NO’s”**

You could skip the Warning and Probation stages for any of these offenses:



**IN THE EVENT OF A MEDICAL EMERGENCY**

* Report the following information to your Area Representative:
1. The date of any illness or accident requiring health services.
2. The reason for the visit.
3. The names and phone numbers of the service providers, i.e., the doctor, the hospital, the radiology lab, etc.
4. When required by the insurance company, whether the 800 number was called for pre- approval.
5. In addition, hosts are asked to keep copies of all documentation or bills received before forwarding originals to the **claims** office.
6. Most insurance companies now require the student to complete, sign and submit a claim form, even if the provider files a claim directly. It is important to send this form in and to pay attention to all emailed and mailed requests for proper processing of your claims.
* Give health providers only information **directly** related to the illness or accident. Claims assessors may find reason to deny claims because of "pre-existing" conditions. If, indeed, you have a pre-existing condition, you need to be aware that the claim may be denied, even when pre-approval has been given. However, go to the doctor if you need medical treatment.
* Let your host parents make copies of:
	+ your insurance ID card, which is located in your student packet and has been emailed to them.
	+ the insurance company's 800/toll free number
	+ Your host family was emailed a list of doctors close to your home.