

TIME

MIND

TO

eurodesk

**A GUIDE TO HANDLING
YOUR **MENTAL HEALTH**
WHEN GOING ABROAD**

Are you planning to go abroad anytime soon? Living abroad can be a great experience, but it's important to look after your well-being and be aware that you may experience "culture shock".

Going abroad to study, work or volunteer is about more than just discovering new places. It's an opportunity for personal development and self-discovery as you explore new environments and cultures and meet new people.

This journey can expand your horizons, challenge your assumptions, and help you become more open-minded, flexible and resilient. This journey can also come with some challenges related to adapting to changes, and going through "culture shock."

Don't worry! It's all part of the adventure. Stepping out of your comfort zone is not easy but it will help you discover the world around you... and yourself. Being prepared will help you a lot.



WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

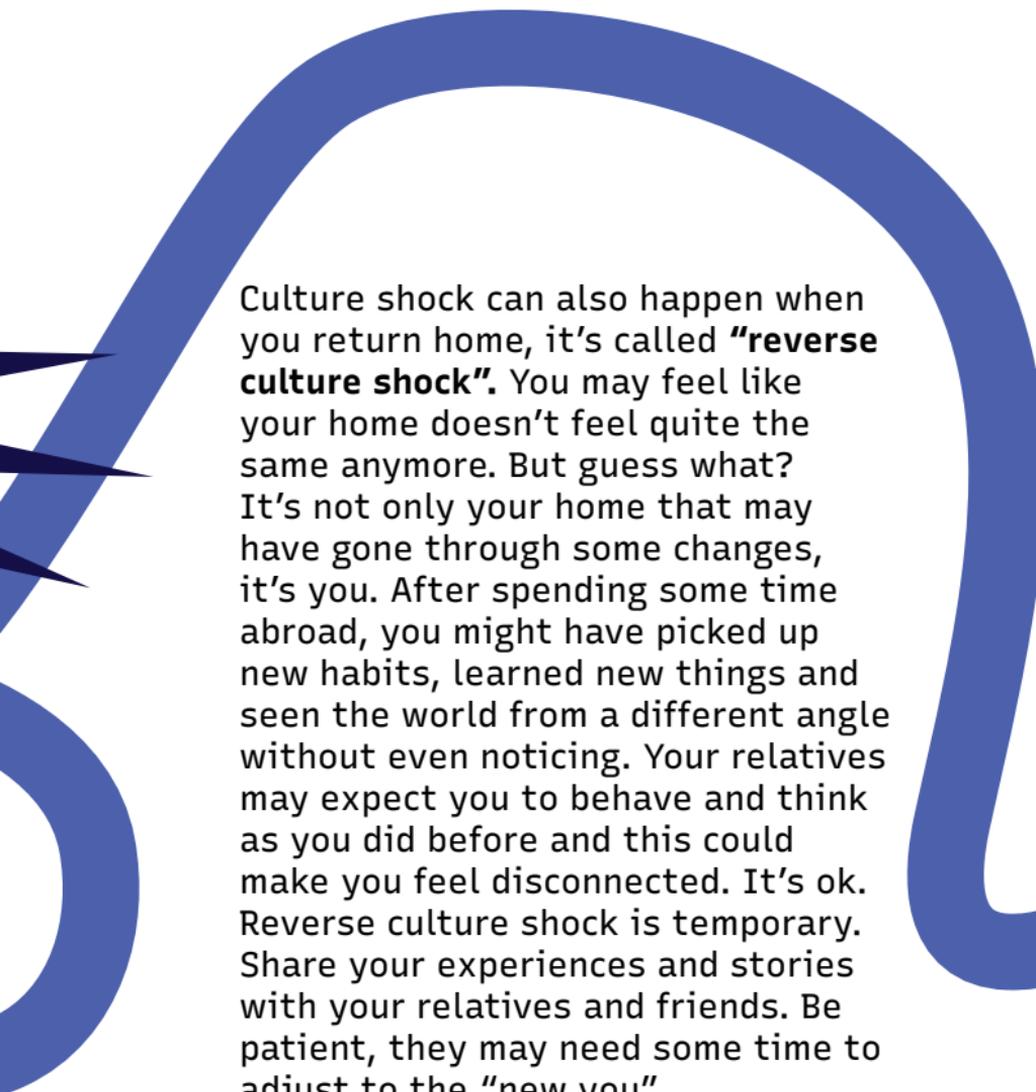


Mental health refers to your emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It involves how you think, feel, and act in various situations. Just like physical health, mental health is crucial for your overall well-being. It affects how you handle stress, relate to others, make choices, and enjoy life.

When going abroad, taking care of your mental health is important because new environments, cultures, and experiences can lead to stress, anxiety, or homesickness. Prioritising your mental health helps you manage these challenges and enjoy your journey to the fullest.

WHAT IS CULTURE SHOCK?

Sounds scary, right? Well, it's something natural that may happen when you go abroad. Imagine you're in a new environment in which people talk and act differently, even their daily habits might be strange to you. That feeling of surprise and confusion is called "culture shock." It's like being in a big surprise party where you don't know the rules, and it can take some time to feel comfortable and understand how things work. No need to be afraid! Culture shock is a normal reaction when you're in a new place. You're stepping into a new adventure!



Culture shock can also happen when you return home, it's called **"reverse culture shock"**. You may feel like your home doesn't feel quite the same anymore. But guess what? It's not only your home that may have gone through some changes, it's you. After spending some time abroad, you might have picked up new habits, learned new things and seen the world from a different angle without even noticing. Your relatives may expect you to behave and think as you did before and this could make you feel disconnected. It's ok. Reverse culture shock is temporary. Share your experiences and stories with your relatives and friends. Be patient, they may need some time to adjust to the "new you".



HONEYMOON

1/

Everything is new,
exciting and different.

Enjoy this phase as much as you can!

2/

CULTURE SHOCK

You face practical and emotional
difficulties in your everyday
life. You may feel homesickness
and loneliness.

Cope by observing and learning.

ADJUSTMENT 3/

You gain language skills and make friends. You start to understand and enjoy the new culture. Routine sets in.

Learn to appreciate and thrive.

6 STAGES OF CULTURE SHOCK

ADAPTATION

You feel at home! You've now gained a strong sense of belonging and finally feel at home in your new environment.

4/

Make the most of it!

REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK

Your home may seem foreign to you. You miss your new friends. Your family and friends may not understand the new you.

5/

Be patient! Adjustment takes time.

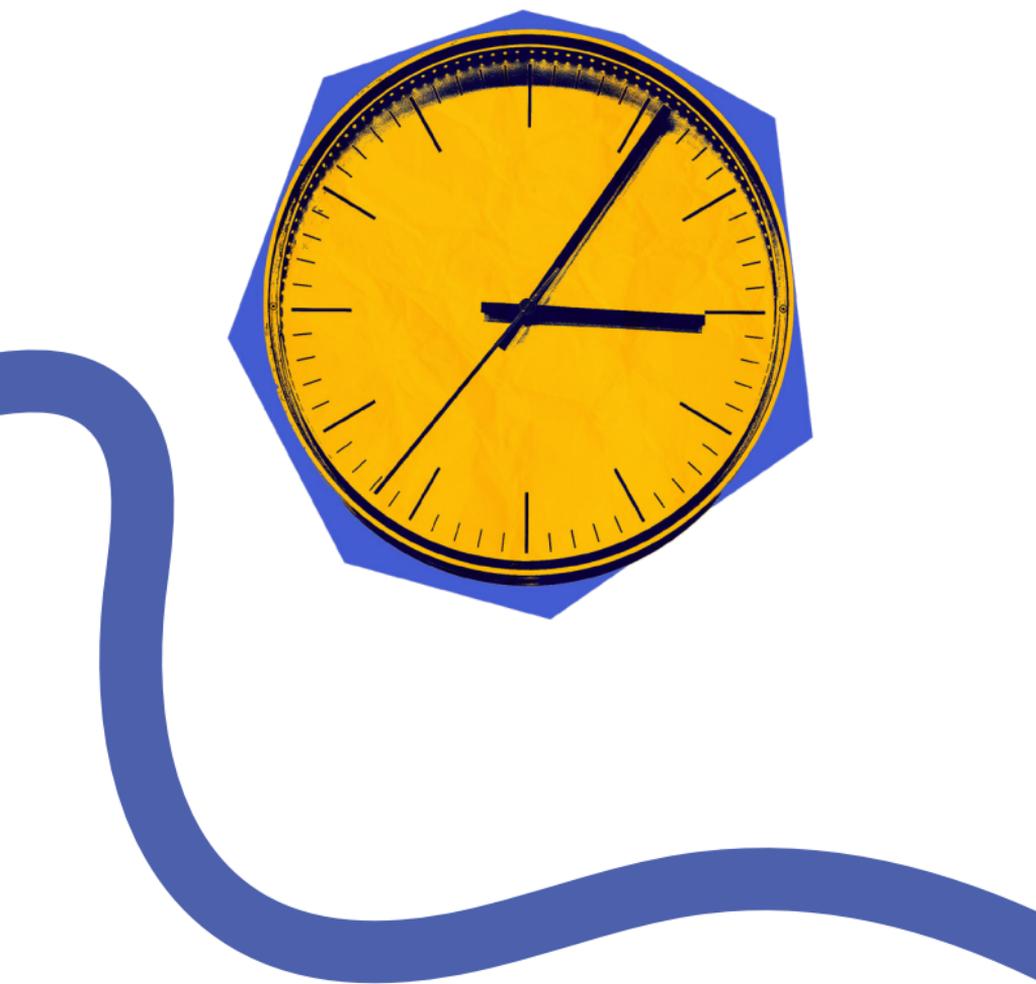
RE-ADJUSTING

You gradually feel like home again, although not exactly the same. You incorporate what you've experienced abroad into your life.

6/

Reflect & share your experience.





10 TIPS FOR COPING WITH CHANGE

Adapting to change is like learning to dance to a new song. Here are some tips to make your experience as rich as possible

1/ Be Open-Minded

Try to be curious and open to new experiences. Embrace the differences around you with an open heart and mind. This can make the whole experience more enjoyable. Of course, always take calculated risks :)

2/ Stay Connected

Keep in touch with your friends and family back home. Their support can provide comfort when you're feeling homesick. However, it's important to also disconnect in order to fully immerse yourself in your new surroundings.

3/ Build a Support System

Make an effort to connect with locals or other people in your situation. Join clubs such as ESN or AEGEE, classes, or social groups to meet new friends who can provide a sense of community.

4/ Learn about the other culture

Research and learn about the culture of the country you are going to before you go. This can help you understand the local customs and avoid misunderstandings. Once you are there, talk to local young people and ask them questions about things you might not understand or know.

5/ Stay Active

Regular exercise can have a positive impact on your mood and mental well-being. Find ways to stay active, whether it's through sports, walking, or other activities.

6/ Practice Self-Care

Pay attention to your needs. Engage in activities that relax and refresh you, whether it's reading, meditating, or listening to music.

7/ Keep a Routine

Having a daily routine can provide a sense of stability and control in a new environment.

8/ Seek Help if Needed

If you're feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or struggling with your mental health, don't hesitate to reach out for help. Many places offer counselling services or support groups for foreigners.

9/ celebrate small wins

Every step you take in adapting to your new environment is a victory. Celebrate the small accomplishments and progress you make along the way.

10/ Record

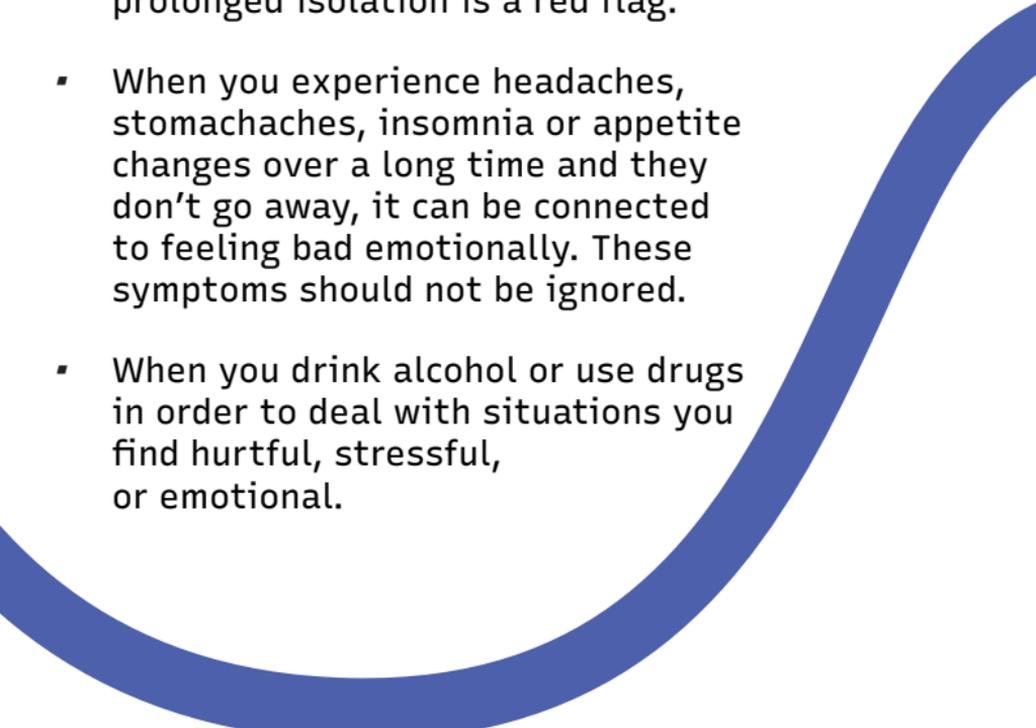
When your exchange programme comes to an end, you'll look back and realise how much you've accomplished. You'll have great memories, new friendships, and a broader perspective on the world. Something to talk about when you are old ;)

WHEN IS IT NOT OK?



Remember that culture shock is a natural process when experiencing a new culture, and it tends to lessen as you become more familiar with your surroundings.

However, some signs should alert you that something is not quite right:

- When you feel constantly overwhelmed by sadness, anxiety or frustration to the point where it significantly impacts your daily life.
 - When you isolate yourself from people. It's natural to have moments of homesickness or shyness, but prolonged isolation is a red flag.
 - When you experience headaches, stomachaches, insomnia or appetite changes over a long time and they don't go away, it can be connected to feeling bad emotionally. These symptoms should not be ignored.
 - When you drink alcohol or use drugs in order to deal with situations you find hurtful, stressful, or emotional.
- 



If you experience some of these, take a moment to reflect on how you're feeling. Talk to your friends and family or to a professional if you're struggling. Don't isolate yourself.



Remember, it's okay, especially in a new and unfamiliar environment. However, if these feelings become overwhelming or start affecting your ability to enjoy your experience, it's important to seek support.

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