

Culture shock is basically a state of anxiety. It is precipitated when your values — the cultural baggage you bring to the mission — come into conflict with the people's values in the host country. It is a sensation of strangeness and feeling detached from all that is familiar. Even the most taken for granted signs and symbols of social intercourse — how to shake hands, how to handle household staff, how to express courtesy — will strike you as alien from all that you have been brought up or learned to perform. No matter how poised or how full of goodwill you are, a series of emotional props has suddenly crumbled. It is not unusual for people to develop gastro-intestinal symptoms, get depressed or lose their appetite when suffering from culture shock.

The most effective way for you and your family to reduce the effects of culture shock is to be supportive of one another and resolve to learn what it takes to operate effectively in the host country. This requires good interpersonal communication, encouragement and mutual support. People quite naturally react differently to the same situation. This is fine as long as one's behaviour is not prone to extremes or consistently goes against the norms of one's peer group. Your attitude toward the people and events you encounter in your new environment is the key to successful adaptation. If your attitude is to constantly emphasize the dark side of things, you are bound to be miserable and have a negative effect on others. Any situation has its advantages. Often it is simply a case of focusing on the bright side in order to get the message. Think positively!!!

Children abroad, especially younger ones, often experience major adjustment problems because of the newness and uncertainty of their situation. Full parental support is a must. This means prompt establishment of eating and sleeping routines, adequate opportunities for exercise and playing with peers, being encouraged to help out with settling in and being allowed to express fears and anxieties. Your availability and dependability in the early days of a posting will make youngsters feel more at ease. Children need to know that they can count on their parents "being there" at key times.

Part of the adjustment for the entire family involves becoming friendly with your fellow employees and their families. This will make you feel more comfortable and start the "learning process" in motion. More than likely, you will begin to meet foreign service families from other countries, all in a similar position to your own. In countries where locals are discouraged from mixing with foreign nationals, your links with the expatriate community can be very important.

On the other hand, take full advantage of the openness of some societies and start to develop friendships with local people who share the same hobbies and interests as you do. Young children are usually less inhibited than adults and may be the "goodwill emissaries" who bring parents into contact with local people they would otherwise never have met. Church groups, volunteer work, friendship clubs, Canadian Clubs, parent-teacher groups, language classes, part-time courses and excursions into the countryside are just some of the many activities that help overcome cultural barriers, cement new friendships and make living abroad a worthwhile experience. Later on, many of you will look back with fond memories and, like many of your predecessors, claim that some of your strongest friendships were developed abroad and are still flourishing.

## Money Problems

Happiness is impossible anywhere, when you are constantly worried about whether you can make ends meet. Worries are not simply a matter of how much money you are personally worth; they are a function of your cash flow. To bring Micawber's Equation into its present perspective:

Net income \$300/week  
Net expense \$299/week  
Result: Contentedness

Net income \$300/week  
Net expense \$301/week  
Result: Misery