

Missions to Mexico

Training Resources

Surviving Culture Shock and Stress

Symptoms of culture shock:

1. Unwarranted criticism of the culture and people
2. Constant complaints about the climate
3. Utopian ideas concerning one's previous culture
4. Continuous concern about the purity of water and food
5. Fear of touching local people
6. Refusal to learn the language
7. Preoccupation about being robbed or cheated
8. Pressing desire to talk with people who "really make sense."
9. Preoccupation with returning home
10. Coping strategy for culture shock: Survival techniques
11. To successfully cope with culture shock, make sure your attitudes mirror those suggested in green and red in the top half of the diagram.

Follow these tips on surviving situations with unfamiliar verbal and non-verbal codes:

1. Focus on what you can control
2. People in culture shock often feel out of control. So, don't worry about things you cannot change.
3. Don't invest major energy in minor problems
4. People make "mountains out of molehills" even more quickly in cross-cultural situations than they do in their own culture
5. Tackle major stressors head on
6. Don't avoid things
7. Ask for help
8. Write it down
9. Record your thoughts and frustrations in a journal. This will give you a healthy outlet for expressing your feelings.

Help from the Bible

Can Scripture help us with cross-cultural adjustment? Well, the book of Acts is a good place to start. Paul moves around the Mediterranean planting churches in different cultural contexts. To the Philippians he wrote: "I learned to be content whatever the circumstances." (Philippians 4:11). As Paul coped with various cultural issues, he was also dogged by Jewish Christians from Israel who tried to force Gentile converts to become Jewish.

Another possibility would be the story of Ruth. Here's a young woman who left her home country and culture and moved to Israel and wound up ultimately being in the list of Jesus' ancestors!

Other stories to look at include:

Joseph: He wound up being forced as a slave into another country and culture. He kept his faith and lived in such a wise way that he rose to a position of power. (Genesis 37-50) Daniel: Living in Babylon during the exile period, he kept his faith while also being a person of influence in the Babylonian government. Abraham: Abraham had some failures in his cross-cultural encounters. Because of fear, he introduced his wife as his sister during a visit to Egypt. (Genesis 12:10-20)