



ADJUSTMENT DIFFICULTIES

Why do we have adjustment difficulties?

Many people encounter adjustment difficulties when they relocate overseas. Often they experience one or all of the following:

1. **Home sickness:** This can be especially noticeable if it is your first posting overseas.
2. **Loneliness:** This can arise for some who have difficulty in meeting new people and who don't have their usual support social networks to contact or socialise with.
3. **Culture shock:** Encountering new cultures, languages, customs can cause disorientation and a loss of identity, and can be upsetting.

If you are experiencing homesickness, stress and depression, it may be helpful to talk to friends (many expatriates also living in Singapore would have experienced the same adjustment difficulties), your family doctor or a counsellor.

Children also experience homesickness as they are away from their extended family, grandparents, and friends, are starting at new schools and adjusting to new routines and the new climate. Children need support and reassurance from their parents, friends and teachers as they adjust to their new environment.

Phases of Adjustment

There are usually four phases of adjustment that you may experience:

1. **Romance:** The initial excitement upon arrival in a new overseas posting may cause everything to appear great, nothing is wrong; and you are having a wonderful time. You are an enthusiastic spectator absorbing the sights and forming impressions.
2. **Reaction:** Soon you begin to notice so many differences in this country that you didn't know how to deal with them. Daily activities that you used to take for granted in your home country now seem like insurmountable problems. You soon realise it's not going to be like home.
3. **Recognition:** The first sign of recovery is a return of your sense of humour. You become more familiar with the languages, foods, and non-verbal behaviours and you feel less lonely, uncertain and lonely
4. **Resolution:** You are able to integrate and live well in the new environment with its different customs, attitudes and values. You may even enjoy and appreciate them from the standpoint of an insider. For some you might be called being "bi-cultural".

Not everyone passes through these phases and not everyone is in the new culture long enough to pass through all four of them.

Signs and Symptoms to look out for

Common symptoms of adjustment and culture shock include feeling angry over minor inconveniences, irritability, extreme homesickness, withdrawal from people who are different from you, boredom, headaches, overeating, loss of appetite, need for excessive sleep, upset stomach, depression, unexplained crying, marital or relationship stress, loss of ability to work, study effectively and sudden intense feeling of loyalty to your own culture.

You may not experience every one of the above symptoms. It is possible only a few apply to you.

Managing culture shock and adjustment difficulties

Even though you may not be able to avoid adjustment difficulties or “culture shock”, there are ways to ease the stress whilst you settle in.

Some techniques include regular exercise, meditation, yoga, adequate sleep, a healthy diet, minimising alcohol consumption, keeping busy and becoming involved in expatriate community or even seeking spiritual activity such as prayer. These can all help you manage stress whilst you adjust to your new environment and feel more settled in your new posting or job assignment.

Getting out and about will help you see how Singaporeans and expatriates live here. Making local and expatriate friends who can assist you as you find your way around and help answer the many questions you will have upon arriving will help ease the stress.

Reading magazines targeted at the expatriate population will help inform you about local services and help you gain more knowledge about the culture you are being introduced to.

Try to be open-minded and familiarise yourself with the local customs and language.

Most importantly be patient! Many people new to Singapore will take some time to adjust and settle in and the majority realise that this is a wonderful, interesting, safe and clean environment in which to live.

Weight loss (Bariatric) Surgery

When BMI > 40, or lower in the presence of serious weight-related health problems, this can be managed by a surgeon specialising in gastric banding or intra-gastric balloon procedures.

Please discuss medical and surgical options with your doctors when behaviour modifications of diet and exercise do not work for you.