

SOS Détresse

Who can help to overcome the difficulties?

Whether we are an immigrant, a worker posted abroad, or a student on an exchange programme, a huge range of emotions can engulf us during a situation of exile: disorientation, fascination, curiosity, anxiety, discouragement, frustration, irritability, disappointment, loneliness... We can feel happy about the challenges we have overcome, but also feel disenchanting because of the difficulties, feel nostalgia for our former lives, feel depressed and a desire to withdraw from daily activities. The changes seem too big to us, and the time to adapt too long.

Trying to understand what is happening can be a real challenge. However, it is normal and common to feel these emotions that are part of adapting to new surroundings. Taking time to listen to yourself is important. Already the fact of being able to recognise your emotions and **talk about them** to someone may be relieving.

With time we will naturally learn to find a personal balance between the values of our country of origin and those of the host country. It is important to simply allow the time necessary to learn and to feel at home in the new country. And you should not be shocked to know that adapting to a country can take years.

Luckily, we are not powerless and we can **adopt strategies** or attitudes which will help us to better overcome this experience.

- **Try to lower your expectations** of yourself and of the host country. We have to agree on realistic objectives to achieve by putting overly high and perfectionist ideas behind us. For example, we have to keep in mind that learning a new language is a process which can be very long, and not get discouraged if we cannot speak it perfectly.
- **Knowledge is power.** By informing ourselves and deepening knowledge of the language and customs of the host country, we can slowly start to feel less powerless. By interacting more in the new environment it will allow us to increase our circle of acquaintances and it will open more doors.
- **Adopt a spirit of openness** towards everything different that we come across and accept a life of new experiences, despite the challenges. Try also not to think that our cultural habits are “good” and those of the host country are “bad”. By avoiding such rapid judgements, by understanding and learning to appreciate cultural differences, we avoid more misunderstanding, interact better with others, and we feel more at ease.
- **Find a balance between the two cultures.** We feel better integrated when we

have found a way to preserve our own identity whilst integrating different elements of the host culture. Whilst making an effort to be open to new ways of doing, seeing and thinking things, it is important to keep the link and feeling of belonging towards our own culture. Our adaptation will be better if we are proud of our origins.

- **Invest in activities that provide satisfaction.** Many people realise shortly after arriving, that their expectations and their dreams will not be realised, or not as quickly as they hoped. This disappointment can be balanced out by other aspects of our lives where we have gained a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. This could be maintaining good relations with the family and friends, physical exercise, arts, music, religion, community involvement, volunteering...everything that makes us happy and satisfied.
- **Don't isolate yourself and resist the temptation to turn in on yourself.** Family links, contact with the extended family, also with new technologies, make it possible for us to feel less isolated. It is often a great help for maintaining a link with other members of our culture of origin or with people who live or have lived a similar experience. Also being in contact with native people, to participate in the most narrow way in the community and the life of the host country, contributes to developing a feeling of finding your place and being integrated. Sometimes getting involved with an association can also help us to find our confidence, to be in contact with people who share the same values, and to find a role that is rewarding in our eyes.
- **Going to specialised institutions.** It can perhaps be useful to contact associations to benefit from their experience and assistance.

Every uprooted tree that is re-planted in foreign soil has to find nutrients in this ground so that its roots can find a new support and give the tree its strength again. We too have to look for and find whatever contributes to our well-being in the host country.