

What are symptoms of culture shock?

Be alert for signs of culture shock in your students. Symptoms can include flashes of anger over minor frustrations, excessive sleepiness, unexplained crying, changes in appetite, withdrawal, aches and pains, and even depression. Helping students manage culture shock can be crucial to maintaining individual and classroom morale. The key to overcoming culture shock is to give students the tools to adapt to their new life and to help them retain their appreciation of their native culture and family traditions.

How to help your ESOL students--

*Teach students about culture shock. Knowing what to expect can give students a sense of recognition and control.

*Encourage students to continue learning their native language. Make a dual language book library in the classroom and encourage students to borrow materials to share at home. Because knowledge transfers from one language to another, the more students read in any language, the faster they will connect to new content and skills. Also, as young students often excel at language learning, reading together with parents can help ease the detachment some immigrant children feel at home because their parents may lag behind in acquiring English. This disconnect can add to a student's level of stress. Making an excuse to cuddle up with a book can re-energize sagging spirits.

*Establish and carefully explain classroom routines to newcomers. By doing this, you create a classroom culture that students can settle into quickly, thus reinforcing their sense of safety.

*Plan for projects where students can teach you and their classmates about their culture. This will foster a feeling of mutual respect in the classroom. Each member will feel she has something valuable to contribute to your promotion of global understanding.

*Help students connect to activities that might interest them outside of school. Art classes, sports teams, and hobby programs can help students feel part of a new community network.

*Encourage students to find or form support groups with other students who may be at the same point in the U-curve of culture shock.

*Allow time for reflection. Teach students vocabulary for feelings. Using pictures of children showing different emotions can be helpful in teaching expression. If students are old enough, let them journal. You might encourage them to compare and contrast their old life and their new life. Also, have students explore how to handle frustrating situations and to examine moments of success.

*Teach and model conflict resolution skills. Have students role play scenarios, so when difficult real-life situations occur, they will have the tools to react in a healthy way.

*Periodically remind students how to get help at your school if feelings of homesickness become overwhelming.

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