

## Returning Home



Returning home after having lived overseas typically carries with it a period of adjustment, known as re-entry shock, or reverse culture shock. It results from the changes that have occurred during your time overseas, not just back in your home country, but more significantly, the personal changes you have experienced while living abroad. If you have been at Yale for an extended period of time, you likely experienced culture shock symptoms when you first arrived, but now you are at home here in New Haven; what was once quite unfamiliar and new has become comfortable and familiar. You have well established routines and a circle of friends, and all of the places where you work, study, do your shopping, seek out recreation or other aspects of daily living are well known and comprise what you now consider home. You have changed and adapted to your life in the U.S., which may understandably affect your return to your home country.

While making preparations to depart, you may feel a mixture of excitement and fear, similar to what you felt when you first planned to come to Yale. You are probably looking forward to being together again with family and friends, and there may be some aspects of life in your home country that you missed, and you can't wait to enjoy again. However, you may also worry about the uncertainty that lies ahead, and leaving behind your life here. It is also not uncommon to have the feeling that you have finally gotten adjusted at Yale and now it's time to pack up and go back.

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## Re-Entry Shock Symptoms

Like culture shock, the symptoms of re-entry shock can vary both in type and severity. Some individuals feel virtually no effects, while others may take months or even years to re-adjust and feel better. The important thing to remember is that the shock will fade with time, and everyone eventually adjusts and feels at home again.

The first days or weeks, often referred to as the honeymoon period, will be filled with reunions and excitement. You may feel like a guest in your home country. After the parties subside and you settle into your life back home, is when the real symptoms appear. Here are some of the common feelings and symptoms to anticipate:

- Harshly judging the home culture and focusing on everything that you don't like.
- Feeling that the home culture will never be as good as the previous host culture.
- Feeling that you have changed and will never fit in.
- Feeling overwhelmed by having to start your life over, and/or thinking that it was a mistake to return.
- Experiencing symptoms of depression, such as excessive tiredness, trouble eating or sleeping, lack of interest in things you might enjoy, irritability and mood swings.
- Feeling upset with those around you who don't seem to understand what you are going through.

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## Coping with Re-Entry shock

As already mentioned, over time your symptoms will subside. However, the experience of readjustment can be

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quite uncomfortable. You will want to keep in mind your initial adjustment when you experienced culture shock, and employ the coping strategies you already know. The suggestions below serve as a brief guide to coping with reverse culture shock. If you wish to have a more in-depth description of the process, you may refer to *The Art of Coming Home* by Craig Storti. Here are some strategies for coping that may help you:

- Familiarize yourself with the symptoms and be prepared for the possibility of an adjustment period.
- Talk to others who have been through it. What was it like? What did they do to help themselves feel better?
- Find a way to work with and assist international visitors. Start by inquiring at churches or civic organizations that may serve as hosts.

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### Source

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