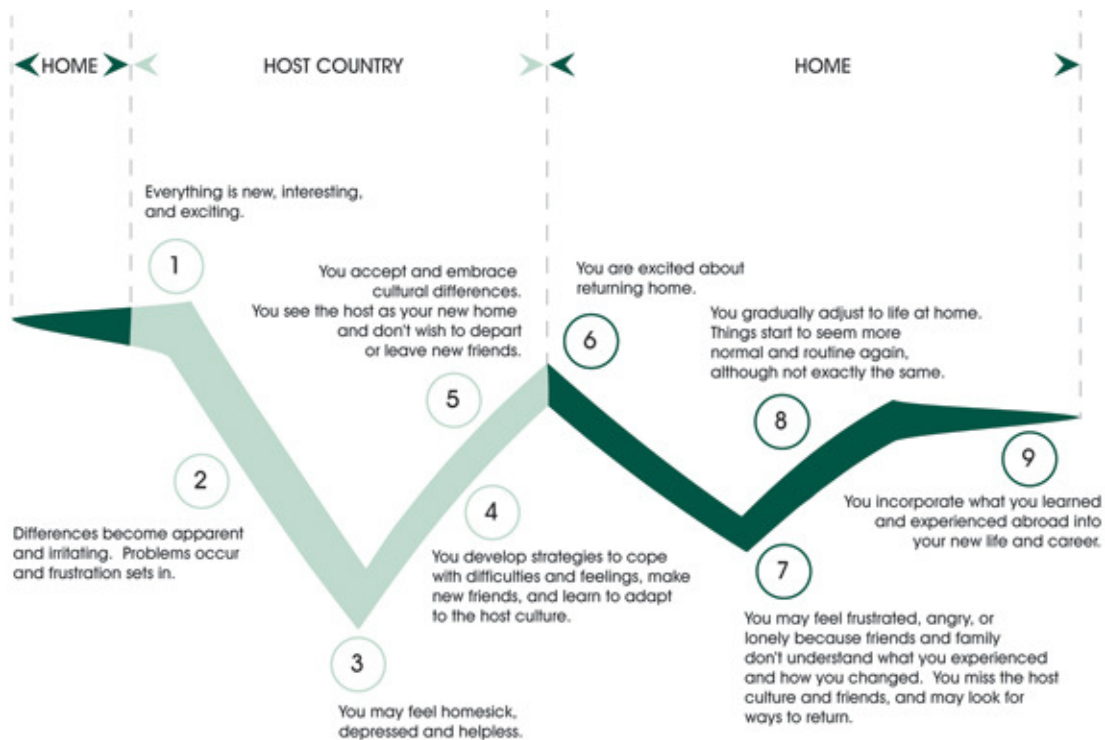


Re-Entry

Connie Champeon

Re-entry: Reverse culture shock, feeling like an alien in your own country.” Re-entry stress can take the form of feeling disorientated and out of place; feeling disillusioned; feeling irritated with others and with certain aspects of your culture; or feeling lonely, isolated, depressed, and misunderstood.” (Jordan p 53)



<http://my.ilstu.edu/~jrbaldw/372/Adaptation.htm>

Culture shock may set in immediately but often it is 10-12 months before it really hits. Reverse culture shock (RCS) or Re-entry shock is almost immediate, always within the first month. If you've been longing to get home, there will be a short honeymoon period first before RCS hits. If you've been dreading leaving the foreign field, then RCS can hit almost the minute you get off the plane.

- The better or more life changing your overseas experience, the more difficult your re-entry will be.
- It tends to be more traumatic for younger people than older people. Older people have generally had more traumatic, life changing kinds of events. Their thinking may be more, "Oh, this is another one of those life changing kinds of things."

QUESTION: **Why did you go on a mission trip?**

One of the reasons should have been to change the world and yourself. This desire to change the world and yourself shouldn't end when you return "home". How you handle re-entry will to a great extent determine if you are going to continue to be affected and have an effect. because of this experience.

Key Verse: Heb 11:8-10 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. (9) By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. (10) For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. . . (13) These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Your overseas experience may lead to you being a stranger in your own homeland – which is exactly what the Bible says we are to be. Too often we are comfortable here. Opening your eyes to the reality of your "homeland" can be a huge step to helping you to conform to the image of Christ instead of to the image of those around you, making yourself uncomfortable in your own skin. Your identity should be in the city which is to come.

How to prepare yourself (and your family) for a more positive re-entry experience:

- **Prepare yourself for leaving from the moment you arrive**
 - If it's 3-4 years it can wait for your last year, but be careful not to put it off too long. If you are going on a short term trip, however, this is especially true if it a short-term trip. From the time you arrive keep a list of what you want to see, what you want to buy, to whom you want to say good bye. Begin checking it off throughout your trip or the last week you'll be trying to buy everything, see everything, say good bye to everyone. If you're trying to do all this while you're packing it just won't happen.
 - The better your goodbyes, the better your foundation for re-entry. When you feel you've left things unfinished or unsaid, it is hard to look forward to returning home
- **Prepare to continue the impact of your trip:**
journal, letter to yourself, etc.
- **Prepare for how things will be when you arrive home:**
have realistic expectations
 - You've changed and they've changed, many things have happened while you have been gone – Narnia affect
 - They haven't been where you've been so they can't understand or be as interested – Uncle Charlie syndrome
 - People may respond negatively because they are resentful or ashamed (less than 10% of people who are called actually go)
 - No, how the Red Sox are doing is not comparable to people dying without Christ in Haiti. Your priorities have changed because of your experience. Now, people dying in Haiti is one of the most significant events in your life, but for your friends and family back home, the most significant thing that has happened is how the Red Sox are doing.

When you share the most important things that have happened to you, they will respond with the most important things they have happened to them. You need to understand this and listen, not belittle them for their misplaced priorities or they will stop wanting to listen to you.

- The pressure that time overseas places on relationships between parents and young people is one of the major stresses exchange students experience upon coming home. This will be different for college students but it can still be a big issue. 1) Your relationship may already be strained because of your growing independence and your time overseas will exacerbate that stress. 2) You're parents may be excited that you were able to go, but they still cannot relate to what you went through so it will be upsetting to all of you that no matter how hard they may try, "They just don't understand."
- This pressure on relationships between parents and children is also true for adult children. Parents often feel the children that have been gone need to "make it up to them" for their absence. They want to make up for all the time away from the grandchildren in particular. There are a lot of problems if the missionary tries to fall in line with these expectations but not doing so can create hurt and bitterness. It is best to talk things over with the parents ahead of time if possible. Let them know what your plans are and when they can expect to have the grandchildren. Plan some special times into your calendar that they can anticipate sharing together.
- **Prepare yourself to minister at home**
 - Be careful not to be critical of your family, friends or church – you were the same way until God gave you this opportunity to see the world differently.
 - Have a support system in place, ideally others that went on a trip, to talk to.
 - Ask for opportunities or set up opportunities to present what you did, involve your pastor, maybe have him interview you, but work together to prepare the kinds of questions he'll ask and the answers you'll give (this would work for a youth leader as well).
 - May be best NOT to plan meetings right away (example of my parents & the first church they went into)
 - SUPPORT YOUR PASTOR AND YOUR CHURCH

What Family and Friends Can Do (Storti pp. 34-35)

- Show interest.
- Don't be offended when they criticize their home country (which is also yours) and compare it unfavorably with their overseas post.
- Don't make them feel defensive.
- Don't pressure them to visit all the time.
- Don't spring family problems and responsibilities on them too soon.
- Above all, be patient.

Additional or more Specific help for Student Short-Termers

- Give them time to talk (or they might explode). The pace of college life makes this hard so it will probably take effort to set aside time for them to tell you about their trip and for you to tell them about what happened on campus while they were gone
- Try to email them about major happenings on campus/at school so they don't feel so much like aliens when they return (deaths, engagements, faculty changes, moments of spiritual significance on the campus, etc.)
- Plan times before and after trips for new and experienced students to talk with one another about what happened, what to expect, the high points of their time, etc.
- Make room for them when they get back – literally and figuratively. You're used to them being gone, be sure to plan to include them in the last few weeks of extensions, prayer times, getting together with friends, etc. Make sure there's a hole in the closet for them to hang clothes, a spot for their shoes, etc.
- They come back expecting it to be like they've never been gone, give them opportunities to catch up on what's been happening. Be patient when they seem one step out of sync.

Recommended Resources:

Jordan, Peter. *Re-Entry: Making the Transition from Missions to Life at Home*. Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 1992.

Pascoe, Robin. *Raising Global Nomads: Parenting Abroad in an On-Demand World*. Vancouver, BC: Expatriate Press Limited, 2006.

Storti, Craig. *The Art of Coming Home*. Boston: Intercultural Press, 1996.

<http://www.international.umd.edu/studyabroad/991>

http://www.larissa-becker.de/reverse_culture_shock.html

<http://www.studentsabroad.com/reentrycultureshock.html>

<http://my.ilstu.edu/~jrbaldw/372/Adaptation.htm>

<https://gustavus.edu/cice/reentry/ReverseCultureShock.php>

http://www.munich-business-school.de/intercultural/index.php/Culture_shock,_Re-Integration_and_Re-Entry_culture_shock_-_Managing_Cultural_Differences

<http://www.livingabroadbook.com/abroad10.htm>

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Personal Debriefing

Set aside a time for reflection on Philippians 4:8-9: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” Using this verse as a springboard, spend two or three hours alone, reflecting on your missions experience.

As you reflect on your time on the mission field, make a list of the things for which you are grateful to God. List them under the headings of true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable.

In your notebook, record the following:

- what you have learned through your experience on the mission field
- what you have received from God through it
- what you have seen in the lives of your fellow workers that you would like to incorporate into your life
- what you have seen God do in the lives of the people to whom you ministered

Pray and ask God to show you how you can work these new insights and values into your life once you are back home. Record the specific insights He shows you.

List the obstacles that might prevent you from incorporating these new values and insights into your life. Pray about strategies to overcome them.

Finally, write yourself a letter. Pretend you are writing the letter to a friend, and include in it the most important points you have covered in your personal debriefing. Put the letter in an envelope, seal it and address it to your permanent home address. Give the letter to someone who will mail the letter to you in five or six months time. When it arrives, it will be a surprise, and should be a great encouragement to you. You will also be able to measure just how well you are doing in applying to your life at home, all the things you learned on the mission field. Covenant with yourself that when you receive the letter, you will correct any deviation that may have crept in from the course you set for your life.

(Taken from Jordan pp. 37-39)

Stages of Reverse Culture Shock

<http://www.studentsabroad.com/reentrycultureshock.html>

Reverse culture shock is usually described in four stages:

1. Disengagement
2. Initial euphoria
3. Irritability and hostility
4. Readjustment and adaptation

Stage 1 begins before you leave your host country. You begin thinking about re-entry and making your preparations for your return home. You also begin to realize that it's time to say good-bye to your friends abroad and to the place you've come to call home. The hustle and bustle of finals, good-bye parties, and packing can intensify your feelings of sadness and frustration. You already miss the friends you've made, and you are reluctant to leave. Or, you may make your last few days fly by so fast that you don't have time to reflect on your emotions and experiences.

Stage 2 usually begins shortly before departure, and it is characterized by excitement and anticipation - even euphoria - about returning home. This is the initial feelings of fascination and excitement you may have when you your host country. You may be very happy to see your family and friends are also happy to see you. The length of this stage varies, and often ends realization that most people are not as interested in your experiences had hoped. They will politely listen to your stories for a while, but you may find that soon they are ready to move on to the next topic of conversation.



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This is often one of the transitions to **Stage 3**. You may experience feelings of frustration, anger, alienation, loneliness, disorientation, and helplessness and not understand exactly why. You might quickly become irritated or critical of others and of U.S. culture. Depression, feeling like a stranger at home, and the longing to go back abroad are also not uncommon reactions. You may also feel less independent than you were while abroad.

Most people are then able to move onto **Stage 4**, which is a gradual readjustment to life at home. Things will start to seem a little more normal again, and you will probably fall back into some old routines, but things won't be exactly the same as you left them. You have likely developed new attitudes, beliefs, habits, as well as personal and professional goals, and you will see things differently now. The important thing is to try to incorporate the positive aspects of your international experience while abroad with the positive aspects of your life at home in the United States.