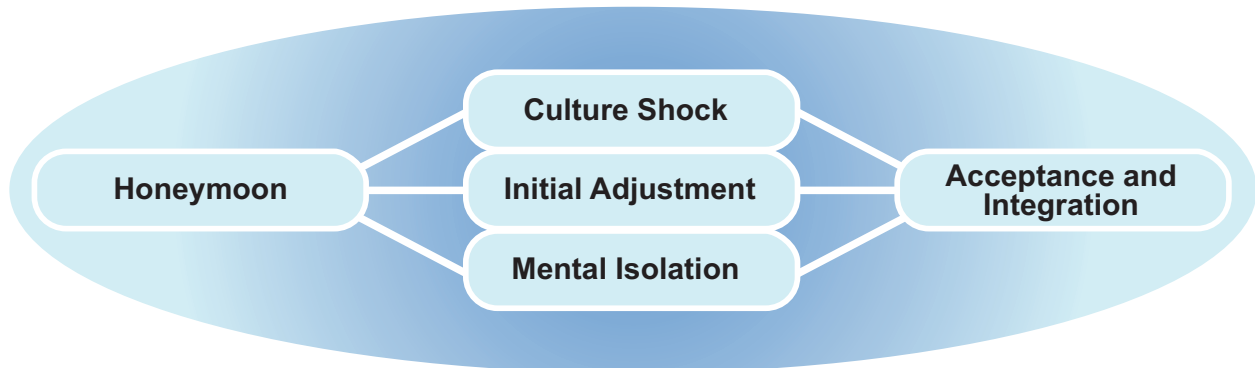


Cultural Adjustment

It's common for new immigrants to go through periods of adjustment when living in a new culture. Newcomers don't necessarily progress from one stage to the next; these phases can overlap and be influenced by such factors as personality, culture, and life situation. A newcomer who may have successfully progressed through a difficult period may be plunged back into it by events such as family breakdown or business problems.



The Honeymoon

When immigrants first arrive, they feel like visitors. Everything is new, curious, and interesting. Life is full of exciting possibility and surprises. Newcomers may get help from a settlement agency to adjust to their new community.

Culture Shock

After living in a new country for a few weeks to a few months, newcomers are immersed in survival issues such as housing, transportation, and learning a new language. There is often a loss of prestige; many newcomers are professionals and were capable providers for their families in their home country, but the only work they can find in Canada may be low paid and low skilled. This is the time when culture shock sets in. The stress of this stage may manifest feelings such as anger, apathy, and hopelessness, which can lead to depression. The stress can also cause physical symptoms such as weight loss or gain, insomnia, tiredness, and headaches.

Initial Adjustment

By this stage a normal routine has developed. Everyday activities such as housing and shopping are no longer major challenges. English skills are good enough to communicate basic ideas and feelings. Gradually, newcomers begin to accept their new home and make friendships; they discover that there are good things about their new community.

Mental Isolation

Newcomers have been away from family and friends in their home country for a long time, and may feel lonely and homesick. If they haven't gained mastery of English, they might experience continued frustration at not being able to participate fully in many aspects of society. They may also feel frustrated with unsatisfying jobs, and lack the confidence to and question whether they will ever reach the social and economic level they were at in their homeland.

Acceptance and Integration

This is the period in which learners and their families realize they are in the new community to stay. The newcomer has accepted the habits, customs, foods, and norms of Canadian culture. Learners have probably learned enough English to feel comfortable interacting with native speakers, and they are able to participate more fully in Canadian society. They may also have developed a sense of belonging through ongoing acts of welcome by their new community.

Helping Your Learner Adjust

- **Understand the reasons for culture shock, and empathize with learners' difficulties.** Imagine yourself in a different culture, and reflect on difficulties or embarrassments you might face. Now imagine facing them in a more permanent and critically important context. This is how your learners might be feeling. Have patience if your learners appear slow to learn English, or are uninterested in the lessons. Life's complications may well be interfering with learning.
- **Be empathetic as learners adjust to a new culture.** If learners have sufficient language skills, you may find an opportunity to discuss the stages of adjustment so they will understand that what they feel is normal and temporary.
- **Discuss with learners that there may be physical and emotional ramifications of these stages of adjustment.** A change in diet and weather, stress, or general anxiety can result in physical symptoms like hair loss, sleep problems, weight gain/loss, headaches, and other illnesses. Anger and depression are common emotional responses when a person is having difficulties adjusting.
- **Assist learners to set realistic goals and expectations.** This depends on factors such as a learner's background, language level, age, and previous experience, as well as what goals may be practical for the community in which she or he are living. For example, tutors can help learners find out about jobs and job training opportunities in their community, and what levels of English are required.
- **Boost learners' confidence.** Set tasks appropriate to each learner's level to ensure success, and plan activities such as field trips to local places where English language interaction can be practised in an informal and non-threatening way.
- **Highlight learners' successes.** This involves setting language tasks that learners can accomplish successfully. The tutor should provide lots of encouragement so learners recognize that even small steps can contribute to more long-term goals. Make sure that learners are aware of their own progress—remind them of their starting place, and how far they've come.
- **Present opportunities for learners to communicate about their lives.** Learners come here with a rich past. As they become more comfortable with you, they will begin to open up. Plan activities that allow their stories to be told. This may include journal writing as well as conversation. Create lesson plans that give learners the opportunity to share their life stories.
- **Encourage learners to value their own culture, as well as Canadian culture.** Design activities that promote cultural sharing. (Eating is a great way!) Share music, stories, and humour.
- **Get in touch with community and settlement agencies.** As a bridge to the community, you may be asked to help your learners with practical matters that affect their well being. For example, your learner may want to find recreational activities for his or her family, locate a family doctor, or you may need to direct the learner to settlement agencies with counsellors who can provide support.