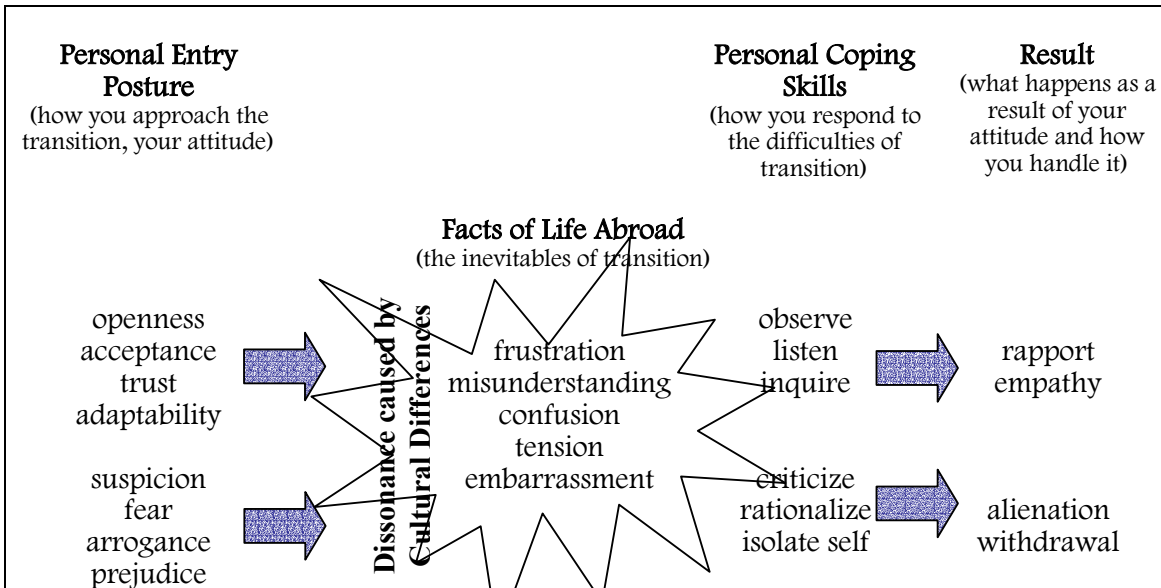
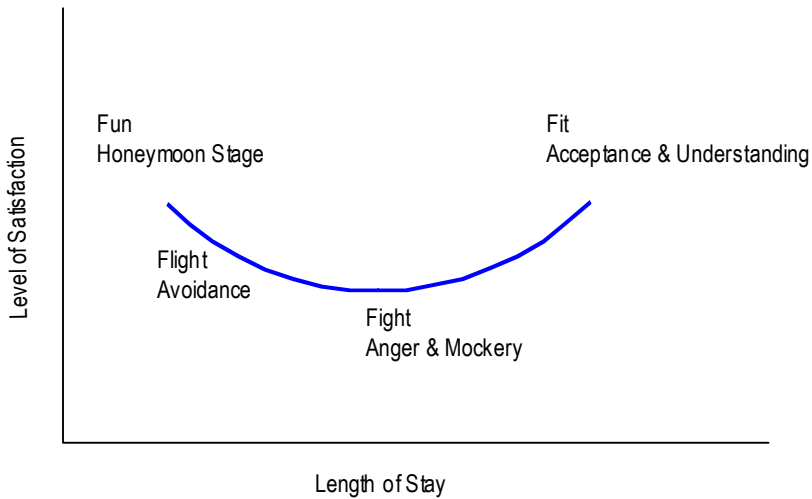


Transition and Culture Shock

How you approach re-entering your home culture has a lot to do with how successful it is and how well you feel through the transition. You have to define yourself somewhere between being a foreigner and being a native. Your posture, combined with your personal coping skills, will result in a positive or negative state of mind. Take a look at the following diagram.



David Pollock describes the process of reentry stress as follows:



This is the easiest and most dangerous stage to get stuck in. It's socially acceptable to be funny and sarcastic in criticizing another culture, but it's derisive and destructive. It can be as easy as joining in with nationals when they make fun of their own country. Don't do it. It's offensive and hurtful and will only do you more harm.

- Fun** – this is when life seems similar and/or satisfying
- Flight** – culture shock hits and you notice all the differences, it's unsettling
- Fight** – you notice the differences as bad and/or foolish
- Fit** – now the differences are okay, life seems reasonable and liveable

Culture Shock

With every transition, there comes a degree of culture shock. The greatest way to be prepared for culture shock is to be aware you're going through it. Sounds simple, but when in the middle of transition, we tend to be anxious and our minds get a little muddled. Walk yourself through the following questions.

1. **Avoidance** – at first the home culture is viewed as positive, there is euphoria as similarities are found.
What do you predict your reaction will be when you get there?
2. **Anger** – you begin to wonder why things are done so differently.
What would make you feel angry?
3. **Mockery** – you may find yourself using sarcasm and humor to make fun of the differences.
How do you think you'll deal with the differences?
4. **Appreciation** – you begin to find tolerance for the differences.
What differences do you think you'll tolerate? How? Why?
5. **Acceptance** – understand the differences and accept they're different, not better or worse.
Will you make an effort to reflect on the differences? How? Why?

Studies show that people tend to approach change to a new situation in one of four basic ways. You can choose to assimilate the new culture by totally abandoning your former culture and completely immersing in the new one. You may find yourself segregating by relating to other foreigners like yourself. Being marginal is when you become a loner, remaining on the fringe of society in both cultures, not trying to adjust to either. You can also choose to integrate. This is when you take the best of all both cultures and use them to make a healthy adjustment. You may find yourself using different approaches at different times. That's normal. However, your adjustment will be most successful if you choose to integrate. Embrace the present without forgetting the past. Enjoy Malaysia without denying what you love about your home country.

Preparing for Entering a New Culture

Here are just a few suggestions before you move:

- anticipate a positive experience
- realize that stress is normal – it's just an indication that your body, mind and emotions are attempting to readjust
- expect the effects of reentry stress to be temporary
- everyone's experience is a little different
- be honest with people and allow them to help you readjust
- reflect on your self-expectations and your expectations of others – **your adjustment will be much easier if your expectations are realistic**

To give you a more visual idea of what reentry adjustment is like, think of the children's game "what's wrong with this picture?" At first glance, the drawing looks normal. But as you look more carefully, you'll notice a number of objects drawn into the scene. That's how moving into a new culture may feel like. At first, everything will look modern and somewhat familiar. Then all of a sudden, you'll notice things that are

inconspicuously askew. There is red tape like you never imagined. Manners and customs are significantly different.

“November Syndrome” by Kathy Tulloch

Let me tell you about what my husband and I call “November Syndrome.” We first came to Dalat International School with our family in 1973. After being here for four years we went back to the States for 8 years. We came back in 1985. We expected our transition to be easy; we knew the school and a number of the people here. We didn’t expect much culture shock or transition trauma.

But in November we found that all four of us were experiencing our adjustment problems in our own ways. Eric, our first grader whined, “You mean we’re not even going home for Christmas?” Eighth grader Jon said, “Okay, the vacation’s over. Let’s go home.” And Ed and I were looking at each other saying, “What did we think we were going to accomplish here?”

Transition into Dalat International School is often tough. For secondary students we have **New Kids groups** to give the new students a chance to compare experiences and gain information about adjusting to this new school situation. The groups meet four times during the semester so the students can see their progress over time.

We find that when the students come back after the semester break, Dalat is their school. They aren’t the new kids any more. They know where their classes are, how their teachers teach and test, and who they might sit by at lunch time. Even if the students had a difficult time first semester, they will likely do better and enjoy life more when they return in January.

What can parents do to help? You will probably find that you can help your kids most by being good listeners. Listen to their annoyances and hurts without being too quick to offer solutions. Their current frustrations with lack of real friends or academic struggles will pass. There is hope.