# Two Cultures Together
Students only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Orientation</strong></th>
<th>Post-Arrival</th>
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| **Session Objectives** | Students will be able to:  
  ✓ Use YFU tools and strategies that foster successful adjustment to a new culture and family  
  ✓ Describe their experiences and reflect on their adjustment to their exchange experience  
  ✓ Identify symptoms of culture shock and use coping mechanisms |
| **Session Overview** | The purpose of this session is to define culture, look at some common cultural behaviors, and discuss the adjustment required by both the host family and the student to make the family living experience successful. This session includes information about the iceberg model of culture, adjustment curve, and culture shock.  
Note the following lesson icons throughout the session:  
  ✓ - this indicates a take away point that should not be missed during the lesson  
  • - this indicates a question or idea that can be used to facilitate a conversation |
| **Participants** |  
  □ Students  
  □ Natural Parents  
  □ Host Parents  
  □ Host Siblings |
| **Format** |  
  □ Highly Active / Interactive  
  □ Some Activity / Interactivity  
  ✓ Discussion  
  □ Independent |
| **Duration** | 50 Minutes |
| **Group Size** | Any |
| **Minimum Staffing** | 1 Facilitator  (more would be ideal) |
| **Materials Needed** | Flipchart or whiteboard; “Strategies for Groups to Discuss” sheet at the end of this session; Visual of Iceberg; Visual of Adjustment Curve |
| **Preparation** | - Prepare visual of the Iceberg  
  - Prepare visual of the Adjustment Curve  
  - Prepare the following Flipcharts:  
    o “What is Culture?”  
    o Stage 1: Honeymoon—“Isn’t this interesting?”  
    o Stage 2: The Thrill Is Gone |
- Stage 3: Culture Shock—“How can they live like that?”
- Stage 4: Adjusting—“I get it”
- Stage 5: Acceptance—“I feel comfortable”
  - Prepare the following flipcharts and hang them around the room; leave space on the sheet for student responses:
    - THE STRANGEST THING I HAVE SEEN...
    - THE STRANGEST THING I HAVE HEARD...
    - THE STRANGEST THING I HAVE TASTED...
    - THE STRANGEST THING I HAVE TRIED...
  - Cut and fold up “Strategies for Groups to Discuss” for Activity 2
  - Become more familiar with the challenges of culture shock; check out the links below
    - [https://www.yfuusa.org/s/10_CultureShock.pdf](https://www.yfuusa.org/s/10_CultureShock.pdf)

**Handouts for Participants**

*NEW* Strategies for Dealing with Culture Shock

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**Energizer: The Strangest Thing...** (5 MINUTES)

Ask students to grab a marker and respond to some of the prompts hanging around the room. Use these during the discussion about culture and behavior.

- THE STRANGEST THING I HAVE SEEN...
- THE STRANGEST THINGS I HAVE HEARD...
- THE STRANGEST THING I HAVE TASTED...
- THE STRANGEST THING I HAVE TRIED...

**Facilitator Note:** Students should have had the definition of culture in their Pre-Departure orientation. Not all partner countries may use the iceberg model described below, but most do. Briefly review the iceberg analogy if this is unfamiliar to you:

Culture is like an iceberg, where most of what creates a culture is hidden below the surface. The obvious parts of culture—language, food, clothing, holidays—are above the water line, but values, beliefs, and ideals are below the surface. It is important to note that values, beliefs and attitudes are represented by a larger, more significant portion of the iceberg, and that when we think about culture, these critical components of culture cannot always be seen. Understanding culture requires looking beyond “the tip of the iceberg.”

**Introduction & Iceberg Discussion** (5 MINUTES)

1. Take a look at some of the strangest things (energizer above) and ask for volunteers to share some of their “strangest things.”

2. Ask participants to define culture. Write their responses on the flipchart labeled, “**What is Culture?**” *(Definition of Culture: Culture is the values, attitudes, beliefs, and ideas that a group of people have in common.)*

3. Present a picture of an iceberg for all to see. Ask students about the image and how it represents culture.
• What does the top of the iceberg represent? (Behavior)
• What about the bottom of the iceberg, the part that cannot be seen? (Values and beliefs)
• What does the idiom “Tip of the iceberg” mean? (Only a hint or suggestion of a much larger or more complex issue).
• Why is this relevant to us to talk about?

4. Explain to the students that since they are in a new culture, they will likely need to learn new behaviors. Use the conversation starters below so students can engage on this topic:

• What are some examples of behaviors that are different here in the US that you need to learn? (Possible answers: table manners, how to dress for different events, household routines, social interactions).

• How is this process going? How does this process affect your feelings about the US? (Again, reference some of the strangest things; ask students what made them uncomfortable with some of these items and why. Possible replies: produces anxiety, confusion, and frustration)

• What behaviors or ways of life in the US are exciting and do you enjoy learning?

• What behaviors or ways of life in the US are frustrating and have been difficult to understand?

5. Close the discussion and move on to the next activity. Be sure to take note of any students who are having a significantly difficult time adjusting and let the Field Director know so that the SSM can get involved.

Activity 1: Adjustment Curve (15 MINUTES)

1. Introduce the topic by explaining that the adjustment cycle is predictable, normal and healthy, but not everyone experiences all of the stages nor do they occur in any set order. Explain that their host family will likely go through a similar adjustment cycle as well.

2. Use the visual to explain the 5 basic stages of adjustment. Ask questions such as:

• What does the vertical axis mean? (level of happiness or comfort)
• What does the horizontal axis show? (time)
• What is this visual showing us?

3. Divide students into five groups. At each station, provide a flipchart titled with one of the Cultural Adjustments stages:
Stage 1: Honeymoon—“isn’t this interesting?”
Stage 2: The Thrill Is Gone
Stage 3: Culture Shock—“How can they live like that?”
Stage 4: Adjusting—“I get it”
Stage 5: Acceptance—“I feel comfortable”

4. Display the Adjustment Curve visual for the students to see during this activity. Explain that they have 5 minutes to work together and come up with 3 or 4 different examples of the stage. If they prefer, the groups may instead act out a skit that illustrates the adjustment stage they have been given. Some questions that may help get the discussion started are:

- What is happening in this stage?
- If you have already experienced this stage, how did you react?
- What stage are you in currently? How do you know this?
- What kinds of things happen during this stage?

5. After 5 minutes, going in order from Stage 1 to Stage 5, the groups will then share their examples or their skit with the large group as they explain the meaning/significance of their stage.

6. Close the discussion by reminding the group that:
   ✓ Every exchange experience is unique and equally valuable
   ✓ Highs and lows are a normal part of life and are experienced by everyone; this is especially true for exchange students who are living in a new place and experiencing so many new things—both good and bad.
   ✓ At the midyear orientation, we will plot our own adjustment curves and see how different everyone’s experiences have been up to that time. Then, we will do it again at the Re-Entry Orientation and compare once again.

Activity 2: Coping Mechanisms (20 MINUTES)

Facilitator Note: Read the culture shock handouts linked in the preparation notes above so that you are prepared to talk about this topic with students.

Culture Shock: Your mind and body's reaction to being disoriented and feeling overwhelmed by a culture that is not familiar to you. It can cause both psychological and physical discomfort.
1. Using ideas from the “Stage 3: Culture Shock — ‘How can they live like that?’” slide from the previous activity as a guide, lead the students in a brief discussion about culture shock. Ask them what it is and what the symptoms of it are. Be sure to touch on the following points:

✓ Most people go through some sort of culture shock; it is different for everyone.
✓ Culture shock is your mind and body’s reaction to being disoriented and feeling overwhelmed by a culture that is not familiar to you.
✓ Culture shock can cause both psychological and physical discomfort.
✓ Some people may be sad, others angry. Some people become quiet and close themselves off. This is all OK and normal, as long as it doesn’t last too long. If you are upset for a long period of time, you should get help from your host family or Area Rep.

2. Ask students to return to their Adjustment Curve Stages groups (5 groups). Ask a member from each group to choose two folded pieces of paper (“Strategies”).

### Strategies for Groups to Discuss

- Find the courage to take new risks
- Focus on the positive
- Be flexible and accepting of new things
- Become more open minded and less judgmental of oneself, other people and situations
- Seek help from others
- Get involved with your community
- Do small things to make yourself feel better
- Realize that there is more to learn and experience
- Challenges make you resilient; it feels tough right now, but you will grow and learn from it
- Laugh at your own mistakes. Find the humor when learning new things.

3. Explain that they have 5 minutes to work together to read the strategies and talk about how it can be applied to their adjustment.

4. Ask two people from each group to read their strategies and present their examples on behalf of the group. Encourage discussion about the strategies and examples from others.

5. Provide the students with additional strategies as needed:

✓ Remember that culture shock is normal.
✓ Analyze the cultural differences to help explain the issue.
✓ Set some goals.
✓ Talk to someone—your host family, your Area Rep, a friend.
✓ Remember why you became a YFU student.

**Wrap Up (0-2 MINUTES)**

1. Distribute the *Strategies for Dealing with Culture Shock* handout for students to reference during the tougher times of their exchange journeys.

2. Close the session with these ideas:
   ✓ Understanding culture and culture shock, how they affect you and how you react (choices) are key points to consider during your year.
   ✓ By overcoming the down times of culture shock through the choices you make, you will gain confidence in your own abilities to overcome very real and difficult obstacles in life.
   ✓ When you realize you are experiencing culture shock symptoms, pay attention to how you act through your choices and note the type of exchange experience you are making for yourself.
Iceberg Visual

VALUES & BELIEFS

BEHAVIOR
Stage 1: Honeymoon—“Isn’t this interesting?”

Stage 2: The Thrill Is Gone

Stage 3: Culture Shock—“How can they live like that?”

Stage 4: Adjusting—“I get it”

Stage 5: Acceptance—“I feel comfortable”
STRATEGIES FOR GROUPS TO DISCUSS

Cut into strips, and fold into tiny pieces. Each group needs to take two strategies to discuss and share examples of how to use these.

Find the courage to take new risks

Focus on the positive

Be flexible and accepting of new things

Become more open minded and less judgmental of oneself, other people and situations

Seek help from others

Get involved with your community

Do small things to make yourself feel better

Realize that there is more to learn and experience

Challenges make you resilient; it feels tough right now, but you will grow and learn from challenges.

Laugh at your own mistakes. Find the humor when learning new things.