



Guide for Returned Volunteers

Welcome home!

During your stay, no matter how long, you have probably learned a lot, gained new opinions, met countless amazing people, and experienced numerous personal changes. You must understand that upon your return, the once familiar will now seem different. Do not expect to view people or situations as you did before your departure. Your window to the world has grown to accommodate this self-transformation.

And now you are home. The transition home can present a new set of challenges for volunteers returning from abroad. While the length of your stay overseas is a key factor in the degree of your symptoms, keep in mind that transitions may be difficult even if you only volunteered a short time.

Re-Entry Shock (Reverse Culture Shock)

Many times, after overseas program experiences, participants encounter some degree of re-entry shock upon returning to their home countries. Re-entry shock can be particularly alarming because it can be unexpected. While planning an overseas trip, people expect to feel some anxiety upon arrival in a new setting. Usually, people will not do much to prepare for the return home. Awareness that you may be impacted by re-entry shock may aid your transition back to your home culture.

The pattern of re-entry shock is described as a U-shape. At first, you are filled with euphoria and excitement to be home. This initial period of elation may be followed by a difficult period of disorientation or depression. Some common symptoms of re-entry shock may include:

- Restlessness, uncertainty, confusion, or boredom
- Sense of loss, apathy, insecurity, or loneliness
- Feelings of frustration or anger
- Feeling misunderstood
- Desire to be alone

- Homesickness for host country/people
- Negative feelings/feeling of rejection towards home culture
- Need for excessive sleep
- Loss of friendships
- Feeling resistant to family or friends

Coping with Re-Entry Shock

Although each strategy for coping with re-entry shock is as unique as the individual experiencing it, there are some helpful tools to assist the transition process. It is important to try to integrate personal changes into one's life within the home culture.

Some ways to do this include:

- Stay in contact with the culture of the host country, as well as the friends you made there.
- Keep a journal to help facilitate this reflection. Many times, hidden feelings may surface during your writing.
- Be mindful of your physical well-being – exercise, eat well, and manage your stress.
- Be appreciative of what you have accomplished and learned abroad.
- Share your experience with others.
- Continue to support the villages you worked in. All donations raised will be sent to the villages in your name.
- Reach out to us if you need support! We can also help to facilitate ongoing relationships with the people you grew close to during your volunteer experience.