

Cultural Adjustment

The Basics: Cultural Adjustment

Introduction for the Trainer

Key Content

During this session, participants will learn about cultural adjustment, some ways to cope with the stresses involved with adjustment, and the importance of self-sufficiency in the adjustment process. Participants will also learn about sources of support when they are feeling sad or overwhelmed during the adjustment process.

Main Messages

Adjusting to a new country and way of life takes time. There are four common phases of cultural adjustment that refugees may recognize as they continue through their adjustment process: honeymoon, culture shock, adjustment, and mastery.

Refugees often feel sad or overwhelmed as they adjust to their new surroundings and culture. Encourage participants to consider some coping mechanisms to deal with the stresses of adjustment. Emphasize the importance of finding a job and learning English to a smooth adjustment. Trainers should let participants know that if they or a family member ever feel unable to cope with the stress of their new life in the United States, they should seek professional help right away.



35 minutes

Objectives

Participants will be able to do the following:

- ▶ Identify and describe the four common phases of cultural adjustment
- ▶ Explain how the phases of cultural adjustment relate to their own personal adjustment process
- ▶ Discuss why seeking help when feeling sad or overwhelmed is important
- ▶ Describe how to find sources of support if feeling sad or overwhelmed

Materials

- U-Curve of Cultural Adjustment Descriptions (included)
- The U-Curve of Cultural Adjustment (included)
- Ball of yarn or string
- Balloon
- Optional: Scissors
- Optional: Flipchart paper, markers, and tape

Key English Vocabulary

- ▶ *culture*
- ▶ *culture shock*
- ▶ *support*
- ▶ *I feel _____ [excited, sad, tired] today.*

Session Preparation

The trainer should become familiar enough with The U-Curve of Cultural Adjustment Descriptions to discuss The U-Curve of Cultural Adjustment poster during this session.

Print The U-Curve of Cultural Adjustment in as large a format possible.

An empty space where participants can comfortably stand in a circle without furniture is ideal for this session.

Blow up the balloon and tie the end.

Trainer's Introduction of Session to Participants

During this session, we will talk about the common phases of cultural adjustment and how they may relate to you as you adjust to life in the United States. Cultural adjustment happens over time, and is different for each person. Being self-sufficient and able to take care of yourself during this time will help you adjust.

When you feel sad or overwhelmed, finding help or support is very important. During this session, we will consider different places to go when support is needed.

Introductory Exercise

Briefly review the key English vocabulary for this plan by saying the first word aloud in English. Participants say the word to a partner, and then all together as a group. Continue in the same way with the rest of the words and the sentence. Throughout the session, emphasize the words as they come up and use the sentence whenever there is an opportunity. If there is time (8 to 10 minutes), use the unit vocabulary found at the end of this unit to help participants better understand key English vocabulary words.

Show participants The U-Curve of Cultural Adjustment poster. Explain the chart (length of time, levels of happiness, and the emotions that the faces in the poster show). Tell participants that although everyone experiences cultural adjustment differently, this poster shows the common U-curve that most people go through when they move to a new place. Point to each phase on the poster and ask participants what the phase is called, how people might feel during this phase, and at what point in time this phase might occur. Refer to The U-Curve of Cultural Adjustment Descriptions as needed.

Participants stand, forming two lines facing each other. Each participant should be standing a few feet away from her or his partner (or partners, if there is an odd number of participants).

Stand behind one line so only half the participants can see you (with the other half standing with their backs to you). Hold up The U-Curve of Cultural Adjustment poster and point to a phase on the chart. Participants facing you must make a face that demonstrates that phase of cultural adjustment. Their partners (with their backs to you and the poster) guess what phase is being shown.

Do the same for the other half of the group, pointing to a different place on the graph so participants are demonstrating a different phase of cultural adjustment. Continue going back and forth for 3 to 5 minutes.

Ask participants to sit down.

Activity

Ask participants which cultural adjustment phase would be the hardest. *[Participants should choose the culture shock phase.]* Ask participants to think about sources of support (such as family, religion, and friends) that can help support them when life gets hard or they feel sad. Ask participants to stand in a circle. Stand in the circle with them, holding the ball of yarn and the balloon. Place the balloon on the floor next to you (or hold it between your feet if it is moving around too much).

While holding the ball of yarn, say one thing that provides you with support when you feel sad, such as talking to a friend or going for a walk. Ask participants who have thought of something to share to raise their hands. *[The trainer may need to remind participants that they already thought about sources of support.]* Hold the end piece of the yarn and gently toss the ball of yarn to a participant with a raised hand. That person shares one thing that provides support during difficult times. Again, ask participants to raise their hands if they have something to share. The participant holding the yarn makes the string of yarn between the trainer and the participant taut. The participant then gently tosses the ball of yarn to another participant with a raised hand. The group continues in this way until most participants have shared at least one thing. Encourage participants to say something different from what others have said. If participants are having trouble coming up with something new, they can say something that has already been stated.

When all participants have shared one thing, the circle may look like this:



Tell participants that the yarn web inside the circle demonstrates the support we have when we are feeling sad or overwhelmed. Ask participants if the web is strong enough. If participants say no, continue the activity until participants feel they have enough support.

When participants say that the web is strong enough, ask for the ball of yarn to be gently tossed back to the trainer. Ask a participant near you to hold the initial piece of yarn for you. Ask another participant to hold the ball of yarn. Tell participants that the group will test the support by throwing the balloon into the web of support. If participants can keep the balloon above the ground only using the web (no walls, furniture, hands, or bodies), there is enough support. If the balloon touches the ground, the group must keep tossing the yarn ball until participants are able to keep the balloon above the ground with their web of supports.

Ask participants to sit down and debrief the session using the questions below.

Debriefing Questions

- ▶ What are the common phases of cultural adjustment, in the order they usually occur? How do people feel during each phase?
- ▶ What phase would be the hardest? How will you cope when you reach this phase?
- ▶ When you are feeling sad or overwhelmed, what are some important things to remember about cultural adjustment?
- ▶ What types of support did the group identify? Which will be most helpful to you?
- ▶ Why is support important? Why is this web important?

Working With Individuals or Very Small Groups

To conduct the introductory exercise:

- ▶ When working with an individual, discuss the common phases of cultural adjustment while showing the corresponding pictures on The U-Curve of Cultural Adjustment poster.
- ▶ When working with two or three participants, conduct the exercise as it was previously described. The trainer can take part or participants can take turns making faces among themselves.

To conduct the activity, cut 15 to 20 pieces of yarn, 8 to 12 inches long. Ask participants to come up with sources of support. For each one, lay a piece of yarn on a flat surface, such as a table or floor. Lay the pieces across one another; the more pieces there are, the stronger the web will be. Discuss the strength of the web based on how much of the flat surface can be seen. Debrief the session using the questions provided.

Variations and Considerations

When the activity is complete, cut the web into pieces, giving each participant a piece to take home. When participants are feeling sad or overwhelmed, the piece of yarn can remind them of some of the supports shared during the session.

On a piece of flipchart paper, record the types of support discussed during the activity so that participants can later refer to them.

If possible, prepare a larger version of The U-Curve of Cultural Adjustment in poster format such as the version available for automatic download here: <http://goo.gl/Jvk56m>.

Consider preparing The U-Curve of Cultural Adjustment handouts for each participant.

For participants who do not know English well, use translated versions of The U-Curve of Cultural Adjustment.

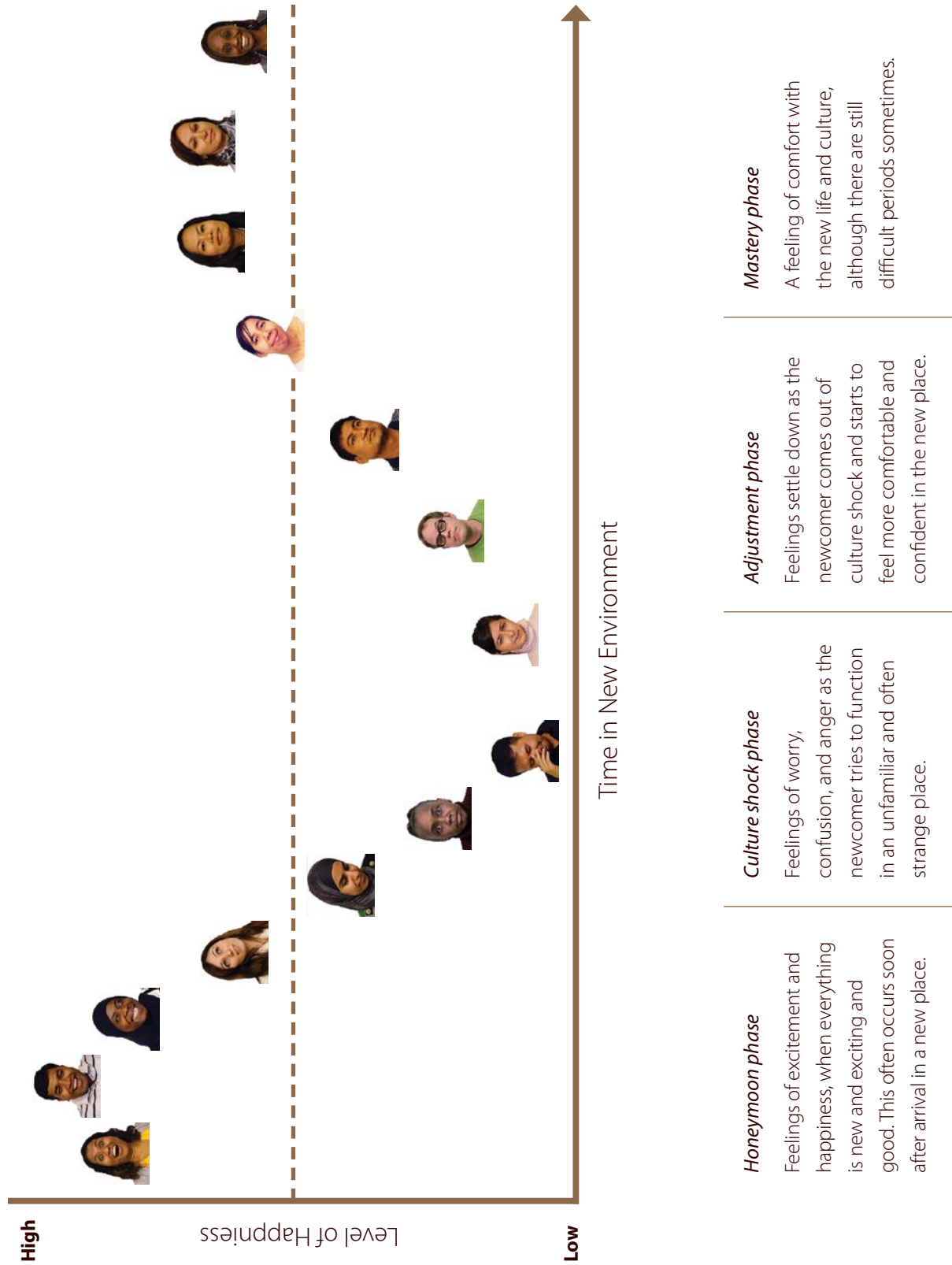
Share some of the services available in your community for participants feeling sad or overwhelmed. A Professionals Providing Adjustment Support in the Community worksheet is provided in the activity plan "Health and Hygiene: Addressing Emotional Health Challenges." Keep in mind, however, that insurance plans may require that the patient's primary doctor or nurse provide a referral for therapy or other medical services. For this reason, trainers may want to tell participants that the first step in finding counseling support is to talk to their primary doctor and get a referral from her/him.

If counseling resources are not available in your community, two national mental health hotlines with language support and a suicide prevention toolkit designed for refugees are available:

- ▶ National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (<http://goo.gl/QxbfBg>): 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
This suicide prevention hotline is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and is funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and staffed by trained crisis counselors who provide information about mental health services available in the caller's area. The website also offers free materials, such as quick reference wallet-size cards for counselors and at-risk people who may want to call the hotline, posters, pre-made audio public service announcements, and magnets. Languages include English and Spanish, and 148 others through telephone interpreters.
- ▶ LIFENET (<http://goo.gl/Cn5yAb>): 1-800-LIFENET (543-3638)
This suicide prevention hotline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It is sponsored by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and can be accessed from anywhere in the United States. It offers services to individuals experiencing a mental health or substance abuse crisis and to their family and friends. Its staff of mental health professionals refers individuals to mental health and substance abuse services. Languages include English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Japanese, Korean, Fujianese, and other languages through telephone interpreters.
- ▶ The Refugee Health Technical Assistance Center (RHTAC): <http://goo.gl/w3Fv2P>
This organization offers a Suicide Prevention Toolkit, containing, among other items, some materials in Nepali and posters in Arabic, Burmese, Karen, and Nepali. The RHTAC website also offers other related suicide-prevention resources.

The U-Curve of Cultural Adjustment

The graph below shows the common phases of cultural adjustment that most people experience when moving to or visiting a new place.



The U-Curve of Cultural Adjustment Descriptions

The graph below shows the common phases of cultural adjustment that most people experience when moving to or visiting a new place. The timeframe in which this u-curve occurs differs for everyone, so it is important that participants are aware of the phases in their own lives and consider them when their adjustment becomes a challenge.

