

Understanding the needs and problem of internationals

A- Major problems and needs

What are the Major Problems and Needs for internationals upon arriving to US?

There is a long list of practical and basic needs and concerns that the internationals in the United States face. These needs can only be met by being aware of and sensitive to them. The basic needs of internationals are similar to those of anyone else who finds himself in a foreign country with a different culture and language. Internationals need people to trust as soon as they arrive in the U.S. and especially during the first few months. Otherwise, without a someone to trust, internationals may be lonely during their years in the USA. The normal reaction that hits internationals when they arrive in the USA are anxiety, fear, tension, misunderstanding, embarrassment, feeling out of place. There are also language difficulties, food and financial problems, maintaining cultural or religious customs, social relationships with the opposite sex, family and community oriented. learning transportation system, buying vehicle. Home sickness and Developing friendships

The needs of internationals here can be divided into six categories: Culture shock, physical, linguistic, social, emotional, financial and spiritual.



1- Culture shock and culture barriers

An academic description of culture shock might be *disorientation, the sense of confusion faced when moving into another culture*.

What causes culture shock? An inability to use the language, changes in routine, changes in relationships. Their lives are centered around relationships with family, friends etc. Loss of understanding, sense of time is different, values are different, use of money, customs differ, emotional and evaluative disorientation such as strange music, food, traffic etc.

What are some of the symptoms of culture shock? rising stress, physical illness, psychological and spiritual depression, fear, isolation.

It would be helpful for us, in discussing these needs, to recognize the different phases of culture shock that any student experiences when coming to a new country. We need to train ourselves to help them deal with this culture shock by respecting them, learning a bit about their culture, rules, even learn a few simple words and phrases of their language. You say "Amen", I say "Ameen". You say "A Potato" I say "A Patata". We should acknowledge that the perspective that the other culture isn't wrong, it's just different. Differences are visible culture (food, music, art, architecture and religion). If this person is here for a short time, he or she will be more resistant to adapting to any change in this country, than if the visitor plans to be here for a longer period of time.

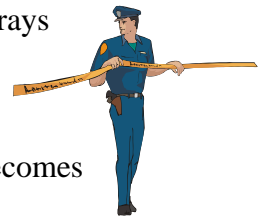
2- Physical Needs: Finding shelter is the first need the student will face if he will not be staying in a dormitory. Followed by that comes the need for food, clothing, healthcare, and expenses. They may have some food restrictions which make it hard for them to choose what to eat at a restaurant or in people's homes. Most religious people do not eat pork of any kind. In general, chicken, rice, fish, fruit, and vegetables are good choices to include in a meal. Many cultures prefer their food hotter and spicier than Americans. Rice is a staple food in many cultures. Chicken is a favorite. In many countries, it is served with rice.

Another problem could be called 'local acclimation needs'. When first arriving in America they can be very confused by little issues like opening a bank account, getting around town, and using public transportation. They don't know where to shop and the difference between a grocery store and a department store. They are unfamiliar with common names like K-mart and JC Penney. They don't know where to find a public rest room, how to tip in a restaurant, how to use the Internet, and how to find the post office and buy stamps.

3-Language Needs: Most internationals come to the United States with a limited knowledge of the English language. This creates a barrier for them in communicating with Americans. Many of these students are required to take English as a second language classes before starting their courses in college and getting involved with society. Their limited knowledge of the language makes it difficult for them to understand the idioms, accent, and vocabulary used by Americans.

4- Social Needs: Internationals come to a new environment where no one recognizes them for who they are because they don't know who they are. Many people make assumptions about them based on their appearance or their accent, sometimes showing them little and even no respect, considering them to be from a third class country. This creates a feeling of inferiority in them, and they retreat from interacting with Americans and try to find ways to cover up the problem with isolation, alcohol, or sex.

For example: The media in Middle Eastern countries to often portrays the United States as a dangerous place to live, full of crime and robberies. When they come here, internationals generate this fear and it becomes overwhelming to them especially if they are living alone. They cannot trust people the way they did in their own country.



Another social problem faced here is the time problem@ the people oriented or group-oriented are little interested in specific designations of time. This contrasts with Westerners. For example: Where a westerner will say, "I will come and visit you tomorrow at six o'clock in the evening" a people-oriented international would say, "I will come to see you tomorrow evening." The evening may mean anytime between three o'clock and eight or nine at night".

They encounter the new challenge of how to manage their time in a different way and be punctual so as not to miss appointments or be late for their classes. Be aware that internationals are more like Americans than they are different. Their problem may differ in detail but not in kind. Many of them, when they come here, have the thought of marrying an American because it helps solve so many problems for them regarding their immigration status. It helps them to obtain a green card which would permit them to

travel back and forth to United States. Some are rational in their relationships and often approach the opposite sex here in a completely different manner than they would normally do in their native country.

5- Emotional Needs: The most difficult thing for internationals in the United States is to develop genuine friendships. For example the community oriented people live in a community where everyone personally knows all the other people living in the neighborhood. They visit each other daily, and even share meals together.

Middle Easterners don't find this attitude when they come here. Neighborhoods in the United States have grown distant. People in apartments rarely know the names of their neighbors, much less have a friendship with them. People are more isolated and live individually. This issue increases the feeling of homesickness in their life. Most of the internationals bring their spouses and family members with them to the United States. Often spouses have a tremendous need for friendship. They feel the need to talk to someone especially if they have nothing to do, no language and no work. Imagine sitting all day at home. They now miss their family, friends, and neighbors more than ever. They feel that no one cares for them, and they become lonelier.

6- Spiritual Needs: Most internationals are here to learn, work and live in freedom and peace but they have more than just academic objectives to pursue. They also want to learn about American life including our religion. While most internationals think of United States as a Christian nation, many are uninformed about the Christian faith. Many of them are coming from countries where it is not permitted to witness for Christ, therefore they may have many questions about Christianity. But all these international's personalities and characters have one spiritual thing in common: In each one is an empty heart which no one can fill except Christ. Add to that

the guilty feelings, loneliness and fear of death and destiny. Many of these internationals, although not expressing it, seek freedom from the guilt feelings and bondage that they have in them due to participating in activities prohibited in their religion, such as political matters, drinking, drugs, and sexual relationships.

Muslims, the Qur=an affects their thinking in all areas of life. A Muslim has personal devotions to God, goes every day to the mosque for prayer, and prays in public. Islam in his family and community life, at work and even politics and culture. The Qur=an grants the Muslim spiritual power which on the average is more important than understanding the meaning of the text. The Qur=an, spoken and written, is used in treating illness and getting protection in all kinds of circumstances in gaining blessing and in making curses. When an international arrives in the United States, his spiritual life will be different. As internationals start living in the United States, they find out that there are too many churches, religious groups, and aggressive Christians trying to convert them to Christianity and convince them that Israel is the promised land, the nation of God, and has the right to exist in the Middle East. They start to examine and research in order to find out the truth

B- What can we do as Christians?



1- Be ready for friendship: Friendship is an in-depth relationship combining trust, support, communication, loyalty, understanding, empathy and intimacy. Friendship requires meeting the needs of both friends. It is comfortable, fun and relaxed. There are certain aspects of life that all of us crave. Being able to Atrust@ and relax with your

friend is a big part of friendship. Building friendships takes time. It is made, not born and it is ultimate. The friendship is with Jesus, and the formula for that relationship is described in warm words in *John 15:12-17*. It's a friendship based on the greatest love of all. If you haven't experienced it, and you should trust me on this my friend; you don't know what you are missing.

An important ultimate goal for Jesus was to make his disciples his friends. The friendship is with Jesus, and the formula for that relationship is described in warm words in *John 15:12-17*. Learn from scripture about friendship in *Proverbs 17:9; 18:24; 27:5; 27:17; in Jeremiah 33:2-3; and in Ecclesiastes 4:10; 1Corinthians 13:4-7; and in James 4:4*. Friendliness is being able to carry on a comfortable conversation with a social acquaintance and is a matter of practice and following certain procedures in communicating no matter how difficult it is for you to carry on a conversation with an international friend. Whether you are talking to a friend, best buddy, an international person (stranger) or a social acquaintance. These suggestions are helpful to get you started:

1- Always get the other person's name and always give your name.

2- During the conversation, use the other person's name at least once.

3- Minimize the focus on yourself and keep the focus of the conversation on the other person.

4- Ask open ended questions that cannot be answered with a Yes@ or No@ to keep the conversation rolling. Now, remember that it does get easier with practice and prayer. So do it!

Many people find it difficult to approach a stranger or someone they know very little about and begin by getting acquainted. Everyone has trouble establishing

relationships from time to time. Not even the most successful people are successful every time. However, nobody is successful unless they try especially when you know that God is on your side and He wants you to do it.

2- Guidelines for Christians who want to befriend internationals:

1- Be sensitive, not only concerning their needs but toward them personally. Deal with your friends personally, one on one. Be sensitive to them as a person first, then to their needs. Make time for them as it affects your relationship with each other. Be alert to each person around you. When you see them, move toward them. Greet them and welcome them with a handshake, be cheerful and smile.

2- Learn to remember a person's name and greet them by their name. (John 20:15-16), After the resurrection Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene. He called her by her name, "Mary". Her eyes opened as she turned toward Him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni" (which means teacher)... God names people according to their characters: For example, there is a big difference between Elie and Ali. "El" in Hebrew means "God". "Ali" in Arabic means "He" Elie means "God is my strength" while "Ali" means my strength is "He". Most people called me Ali instead of Elie!

3- Ask them appropriate questions which reflect interest and acceptance.

4- Have a sense of humor and listen carefully to what they are saying (pay attention). Remind yourself of the interest God has for them. Be hospitable, friendly, generous, and have a servant heart. These things will make others feel good.

5- Don't depends on your own wisdom. Not all people are alike. For example: people ask me where am I from. When they hear that I am from the Middle East, they automatically assume that I am a Muslim, but I am not. Don't assume.

6- Don=t judge all nations because of one you like or don=t like. Each one has a different style, culture and personality. There are many who are open or closed, poor or rich, educated or non-educated, religious or not religious, experienced or inexperienced, old or young, female or male.

7- Create an environment of acceptance among your international friends. Be aware of prejudices. Don=t talk down to them; instead, treat them as equals. Accept them, not because of someone else, but because of Jesus. If there is someone that you don=t like who is from a certain country, it does not mean that everyone you meet from that country is the same.

8- Humble yourself so they can ask you questions.

9- Look the other person in the eye. This doesn't mean stare at the other person. It means moving your eyes within a triangle formed by the width of the forehead at the apex narrowing to the mouth at the bottom of the triangle.

10- Minimize focus on yourself and keep the conversation on the other person.

11- In the end, remember that there are other aspects of conversation that are also universal. Remember to smile, smile, smile, then smile some more, to be sincere, to be genuinely complimentary, to speak clearly and to be enthusiastic and positive and don=t mumble. Being able to carry on a comfortable conversation with a social acquaintance is a matter of practice and following these procedures in communicating. No matter how difficult it is for you to carry on a conversation with a social acquaintance now, remember that it does get easier with practice. So, practice!

3- What American friends can do to help internationals with culture shock & adjustment

- § Be aware of the process of cultural adjustment and culture shock. Share this information with your international friend as a form of encouragement and reassurance. Most incoming students are not aware of this adjustment process.
- § You can become the Acultural informant@ for your international friend. Help explain how things work. Discuss American idioms B Aoff the wall@, AI smell a rat.@ Speak slowly.
- § Work at better understanding your international friend=s cultural background. It will not only provide topics for conversation, but also show you care enough to engage in true cross-cultural dialogue.
- § Know the limits of your involvement. Financial, academic or psychological problems should be directed to the school=s international student advisor or especially, to his or her pastor.
- § Don=t always come across as the expert. Work toward a relationship of equals.
- § Allow for reciprocity in the relationship. It is easy to always be the one giving. Allow your friend to invite you for tea, a meal, or a movie.
- § Write your friend=s family back home with his/her permission.
- § Let them know there is someone here looking out for the best interests of their son or daughter.
- § Be a good listener. Love & respect are the key. Trust is the bridge for cross-cultural communication.

- § Forgiveness as a life style: If we are sincere in our desire to befriend someone from another country then try to become familiar with his country, culture, and family.
- § A person of the same sex holds your hands, or kissing. Arrive 15 or 30 minutes late to lunch or any appointment. No apology offered. To help to overcome culture shock be with him and explain the differences.
- § Help them to be flexible and not to put high expectations and not criticize, be angry or withdraw from fellowship.
- § Let them express frustration in order to understand the culture and how to adjust. Serve them out of a heart of love and humility and remember that they are a guest. Strive for Christ=s likeness, not America, to shine through you..