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[**Re-entry and Reverse Culture Stress**](http://www.thenextmile.org/ezine/re-entry-and-reverse-culture-stress.html)

Re-entry is a term commonly used to refer to the process of returning home after serving in another culture. Though someone most likely prepared you before you left for the short-term mission, it is likely that you had minimal, if any, preparation for your return.

The best way to prepare for re-entry is to do so before you leave the field.  Effective closure makes the transition home smoother. Some ways to ensure a smooth transition include making it a priority to say a proper “good-bye” and “thank you” to those with whom you worked. Be sure people know that you have appreciated them, their hospitality, and the opportunity to serve among them. Additionally, if you need to reconcile with someone, it is easier to do it before you leave than once you return home. Take the time to ask for, and grant forgiveness in a biblical manner if needed. This includes making sure everything is right among team members.  If you have returned and need to reconcile with someone, it is important to pray and do that soon so you can move ahead without any barriers.

Upon re-entry, many short-termers encounter reverse culture stress. There are several contributing factors to re-entry stress or reverse culture stress.  One is that you are being caught by surprise; you do not anticipate change, and consequently are unprepared to cope.  Another factor is value conflict.  Your values, once taken for granted and even highly cherished, now seem of lesser significance or of little importance at all.  Your way of thinking, your manner and your responses to many situations have been changing.  Often these changes are not apparent until you are back in your own culture.

**Reverse Culture Stress Self-Check**

Look at the list below. When you returned from your short-term mission did you experience any of following symptoms?

1. Feeling out of place, or not fitting in
2. Feelings of loneliness, isolation, or being lost in the crowd
3. Feeling that nobody understands your experience, or that nobody cares
4. Feeling tired, listless
5. Critical attitude toward home country – it’s waste, extravagance, wrong way of doing things
6. Inability to communicate new ideas, and concepts freely
7. Feeling of superiority – a standing aloof from others because of your overseas experience
8. Retreat, withdrawal, lack of concern
9. Confusion over conflicting attitudes and responses
10. Rejection of overseas experiences, or a desire to forget and not talk about them

If you responded affirmatively to any of the items above, then you have experienced some degree of reverse culture stress.

**Reverse Culture Stress Coping Strategies**

A variety of coping strategies are listed below that you might consider based on the degree of stress you are experiencing. In addition to maintaining an attitude and practice of spiritual dependency, it is important to connect with someone who can come alongside you during this time of transition.

For example, if you have:

* Isolated yourself, and are experiencing guilt about the affluence in your culture; focusing on memories of the short-term experience; and not seeking or engaging in ministry experiences in your home culture, you might *connect with someone who has been through re-entry stress to help in understanding the transition process and exploring options*.
* Resumed life as though nothing has happened and are unable and/or unwilling to integrate the impact of the short-term experience into you your life, it might be helpful for you to *be with compassionate, mission-minded people who can assist in sorting out the short-term experience*.
* Integrated the changes that occurred through the short-term experience and  are continuing to integrate the old and new into your lifestyle, you might *connect with like-minded people*.

Additionally, here are some things to consider if you are struggling in the following areas –

**“We are preoccupied with material things in our country.”**

* Do not be quick to condemn; realize that others have not had the same exposure to another way of life.  The preoccupation with “their world,” as they know it, is only natural.
* Be prepared for a sensory bombardment if you are accustomed to simplicity in choice and lifestyle.  An overabundance of goods, choices, etc. can overwhelm you at first.
* Expect others to not fully understand how you feel when their “materialistic ways” strike you as sinful.

**“Why do people think that our ways are the “best” ways?”**

* It’s only natural that every culture values its own ways or what they perceive to be the “best” way. (This is often referred to as ethnocentrism.)
* Be on the alert for a “holier-than-thou” attitude.  Do not be too quick to judge others for their ethnocentric stance or to think that your way is the best way.
* Share your perspectives, but at the same time avoid becoming involved in arguments.  Do not allow yourself to withdraw or refuse to discuss matters because of opposition.

**“Why don’t people recognize the contribution or sacrifice of time it takes to serve on a short-term mission?”**

* Do not expect to be in the limelight for long after your return.  Some may ask to see your slides, have you speak, etc., but soon you will be back to your “ordinary citizen” status.
* Realize that your worth and recognition comes first from God.  View your service as service to Him, not something with which to gain recognition and praise from others.
* Do not allow yourself to feel hurt or sorry for yourself when people do not notice you or your service.  God does.
* Look for ways to meet others’ needs; this will help you take the focus off yourself (Phil. 2:3-4).

When you returned from your short-term mission you may have been surprised by various challenges.  Whether it was jet lag, or people asking you how your vacation was, you had to adapt to home where life continued while you were away. The transition home will go more smoothly if you keep your mind and your heart focused on God.