

Excitement and Stress – Preparing to Study Abroad

With all new adventures, there is an element of stress. Even the most positive experiences in our lives can be stressful. Stress is a normal human reaction to changes in our environment and routine. So, we would like you to take just a few minutes to think about how you might manage the stress associated with your trip so that you can make the most of your experience. Below you will find a few questions that may help you prepare.

How do you know you are stressed?

Stress impacts us in many ways: emotionally, physically, how we think, and what we do.

Think of a time you were very calm, relaxed, and content. As you continue to remember this experience, take some slow deep breaths and close your eyes for a few seconds. Notice how your body felt, what you were thinking, and how you were feeling. Now, make some notes about your experience at the bottom of the chart on the next page, next to the line marked "0".

Now – erase that image. Take another deep breath, and think about a time you were the most emotionally distressed. Let it sink in for a few moments. As you recall that experience, add descriptors to the top line on the chart marked "5". Take a few deep breaths, and connect back to your experience of being calm, relaxed, and content.

Now, fill in the rest of the lines (1, 2, 3, and 4). What are the first things you notice when you are starting to feel stress? How do you know if you are about to hit the top? Make sure to add something to each line that would let you know if your level of stress is increasing or decreasing. Consider how your body feels, what you are thinking, the emotions that are there, and what you are doing at each level of stress.

How do you manage stress?

Stress is a part of human existence – we can't eliminate it. We all have ways that we manage stress – some more healthy than others. A bit of stress can be good – it keeps us motivated and often feels like excitement. However, too much stress can really get in the way, making it hard to focus, we get irritable, and we are less than our best self.

When we get to the top of the scale (a "5"), it is often very hard to manage the emotions. But if we pay attention to our level of stress and catch it around a 3 or 4, there are many things we can do to keep from hitting the ceiling.

What can you do to calm, relax, or ground yourself?

There are things we can do to prevent stress from piling up, and there are things we can do to manage stress once it gets a hold of us. Taking care of our physical self is a key way to reduce the negative impact of stress. At the bottom of the following page, make some notes about what you find helpful in managing stress.

Now – think about your upcoming trip. You will be out of the country, away from many of your social supports. Some of the things, or people, you rely on might not be available. You will be busy, with a tight schedule. In the column marked Alternatives, write down some things you WILL be able to do abroad to manage your stress.

Putting it in Action

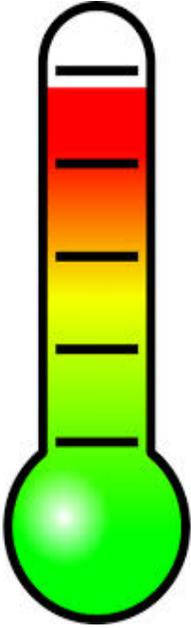
Take this sheet along with you on your trip. Every few days, take some time to check in on your level of stress. If it is a 3 or above, put some of your stress management strategies to work. Keeping your stress in a low to moderate range will allow you to make the most of your study abroad!

What are some things that typically stress you?

Take a minute to identify what typically stresses you. Knowing what usually causes you stress at home can help you anticipate potential stressors for while you are abroad. Consider discussing your stressors with your program leader and peers so they can help you manage your stress while abroad.

- _____
- _____
- _____

My Markers of Stress



| | Emotions – Thoughts – Body Sensations – Behaviors |
|-------------|---|
| 5 - Intense | |
| 4 | |
| 3 | |
| 2 | |
| 1 | |
| 0 - Calm | |

My Ways to Manage Stress

| | How I manage stress at home | Alternatives I could do abroad if my regular strategies are not available |
|--|-----------------------------|---|
| 5 Senses: What calms you? Consider sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch. | | |
| Distractions: Get your mind on other things, like reading, puzzles | | |
| Relaxation Exercises: deep breathing, meditation, muscle relaxation | | |
| Physical Activity: Moving is a huge stress reliever! | | |
| Social Support: Who can you talk to, about what? | | |
| Self-Care: What does your physical body need? Are you eating? Sleeping? Too much sugar, alcohol or caffeine? | | |