WORKSHEET 58 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

The shock of going back

When returning home is harder than expected

AIM

Help the person returning to their home country after a period abroad to understand and get through "reverse culture shock": being out of step with loved ones, feeling they don't fit in, losing what they lived abroad.

WHO IT IS FOR

Returning from a period abroad, end of studies abroad, returning after long assignments.

DURATION

20 min in session

HOW TO RUN IT

1. Explain that going back can be as destabilising as leaving, often unexpectedly ("I'm going home, it should be easy").
2. Explore the mismatches: with loved ones (who have changed or not), with the country, with oneself.
3. Identify what the person has lost by returning (life abroad, bonds, pace, expatriate identity): it is grief too.
4. Identify what they gained abroad and want to keep (values, habits, language, bonds).
5. Choose ways of keeping that learning alive here (worksheet 48).

POINTS TO WATCH

> Loved ones often expect a happy return: the person may feel misunderstood or guilty for not being happy. Validate that mismatch.

REFERENCES

Gaw, K. F. (2000). Reverse culture shock in students returning from overseas. International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 24(1), 83-104.

Ward, C., Bochner, S. & Furnham, A. (2001). The Psychology of Culture Shock (2nd ed.). Routledge.

PSYCHOLOGIST'S NOTES

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WORKSHEET 58 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

The shock of going back

We often imagine that going home will be simple. Yet returning can be surprising: you have changed, so have others, and you no longer feel quite in your place. It is common, and you get through it.

1. What surprises me or makes me uncomfortable since I came back.
2. What I miss about my life there.
3. What I learnt or gained abroad and want to keep.
4. A way of keeping it alive here: _____

What surprises me	What I miss about there	What I want to keep

Who could understand what I am going through on my return?

These exercises do not replace therapy. If you are in distress or having suicidal thoughts: 112 (European Union), 3114 (France) or the emergency number of the country where you live.

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