

Moving Children Abroad

Challenge and Opportunity...

Moving abroad with children is both a challenge and a wonderful opportunity. It is a chance for families to spend more time together and experience new things – it is also hard emotionally to leave friends and the familiar behind. Young children go through a sense of loss when they leave "home" – even if home was another assignment abroad; teenagers may be very resistant to moving at all.

Here are a few tips to help you make the transition easier for the whole family. Remember that children are often your best link to the new community – it is through their activities and friends that your circle will expand.

● Before you go

- Discuss the move with the children – let them express their fears, concerns, excitement, and maybe even anger...
- Find information and pictures of their new school, house, city – and share it with them. If they are older, they can research on-line. Look for fun activities to do in their new country.
- Buy some children's language CD's if they need to learn the local language.
- Try to assure them that they can keep in touch with friends – and help make it happen. The internet is a wonderful tool!
- Let them pack a special box/bag with all their favourite things that they will open first upon arrival. Take a carry-on with their things in it.
- Have a farewell party for them and their friends.
- Take pictures and video of their friends, house, school, park... it helps when they are feeling homesick. They can show them to their new friends as well.
- Try not to arrive at the beginning of the summer holidays – it is hard to make new friends without school. Try to arrive closer to when school starts; even if this means the spouse and children follow later than the employee.
- Try not to accept moves mid-school year. This is way too hard on the children.
- Don't assume there are any accommodations for Special Education needs at post – check first.

● On-Arrival


- Try to spend some time as a family when you first arrive – plan a few fun activities.
- Remember your children pick up their cues from you – try not to complain in front of them. Try to find the positives.
- Avoid moving into your residence right away if you can. Stay at a hotel, with a pool, when you arrive – it will let you all get over jet-lag and meals will be cooked for you for the first few days.
- Before you arrive find out if colleagues have children the same age – arrange for them to meet and play together.
- If your children are of school age, arrange to visit the school before school starts.

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- ⦿ If your children are pre-school age, find out if there is a playgroup you can join – a great way to meet people!
 - ⦿ Find out if there is a sports club you can join that has activities and sports for the whole family. This can be a place to meet friends.
 - ⦿ Ask someone to show you and your family around.
 - ⦿ Plan a family holiday in-country to get to know your host country better.
 - ⦿ Encourage family and friends to visit.
 - ⦿ Try to go home once a year to maintain relationships.
 - ⦿ Ask for referrals to doctors and dentists before you need them – an emergency is not the time to be looking for one in a new place.
 - ⦿ Pack special holiday decorations – it makes home wherever you are. Buy special gifts from home for holidays and birthdays.
 - ⦿ Patience, patience, patience – it can take a year to settle in.

● — Coming Home

- ⦿ Now you get to do it all again, in reverse.
- ⦿ Try to plan a family vacation en-route home – something low stress, like an all-inclusive with a kids club. Often kids are free during the summer months.
- ⦿ Don't be surprised if your children now do not want to leave for home. Your country of assignment is where their friends are.
- ⦿ Help them re-enter – they may feel they don't fit in at home. Warn them that others may not want to hear about their lives abroad.
- ⦿ Make your children your priority. The boxes will eventually get unpacked.
- ⦿ Check out schools and programs before you come back. If your children are in need of any special programs, start at least 6 months in advance before you come home. Visit the school with your children and meet the teacher/principal when you arrive home.
- ⦿ Encourage them to keep up with friends from abroad – even encourage visits to Canada. You want them to learn how to maintain relationships. Be a role-model for them.
- ⦿ Try to arrange for them to talk to children of other families who have been back for a year or two from a foreign assignment – they can relate.

● — Bibliography

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 - ⦿ *Moving Your Family Overseas.* Rosalind Kalb and Penelope Welch
 - ⦿ *The Global Staircase: A Handbook for People Relocating Internationally.* Mary MacKinnon.
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