

Relocating Young Expats

by *Clements Worldwide*

You have packed your family's belongings, said your good byes, learned "hello," "thank you," and "where is the restroom?" in your new country's language, and now your new job and life are just a 12-hour plane ride away. Your family has stepped up to the new challenge of an overseas move. Or at least you have.

When you are offered an exciting chance to move to a new country, it is easy to jump at the opportunity. However, other members of your family may not be quite as excited. Under all the other stresses of moving, it's easy to overlook the amount of anxiety your children may be experiencing now that they are faced with the idea of starting an entirely new life. Just like adults, children face numerous tribulations when moving abroad, from emotionally draining circumstances such as having to give up the family dog or saying good bye to friends, to challenges that are mentally draining like learning an entirely new language and cultural mindset. Many times, the activities they are used to such as cheerleading and little league baseball might not be available.

Expatica.com, an online resource for expatriates, estimates 45% of expatriates have children aged 5-12. These children are considered "Third Culture Kids," a term commonly used for kids who have grown up in a country other than their passport country. The idea is that children abroad are exposed to two cultures, that of their home country as well as their host country, to form a third culture that is a blend of both. This term was coined in the 1960's by sociologist Ruth Hill Useem, who spent several years as an expatriate parent.

You can help your children prepare for the move, and it can be as simple as being receptive to their concerns and keeping communication lines open. The more you talk about what to expect when you move, the more they will be able to mentally and emotionally prepare for their new surroundings. Here are a few ways to help your kids acclimate and begin to enjoy their new country.



Introduce Your Destination

Try to familiarize your children with the country by reading books related to expatriate life or the country in which you will be living. Pick up a few guidebooks, and plan day trips to area museums or other attractions. If your children have something to look forward to, like a visit to a zoo when you get settled in your new country, it will help to get them through the anxiety of moving.

If your children will be required to speak another language, look into getting a tutor to teach them basic phrases. You can also try online or video courses to aide in learning the language.

While you're on the internet, visit the website of the school your children will be attending. Many schools' sites offer pictures and virtual tours of their location. Seeing pictures ahead of time can help your children prepare for what to expect when they arrive.

Keep in Touch

Make sure your child has an address book to record their friends' contact information, and even a camera to get pictures. Create scrapbooks and photo albums to preserve memories. When they start to feel homesick, your kids will be happy they have connections to their old friends through photo albums, and the ability to share new experiences with them through emails and letters.

The world of online social networking makes keeping in touch even easier than conventional postcards and telephone calls. Sites like Facebook and Myspace allow you to keep in touch with friends through messages, status and profile updates. There is a good possibility your kid has already discovered these sites, but if not, take a moment to check them out.

Another good site for staying in touch is Skype. If your kid is running up your phone bill with overseas calls, Skype is for you. This software allows you to call anyone anywhere in the world for free, as long as they have also downloaded the software. If you want to call people who don't have the program, Skype offers pay-as-you-go and monthly subscription plans.

Express through Art

Encourage your kids to explore their new surroundings through photography, video, or creative writing. Creative outlets are a great way for them to express their feelings, and see the beauty in a new situation. Site such as Flickr allow you to upload a few pictures and video for free, or purchase a year of unlimited uploads for \$25. This site is particularly unique because it also has community aspect, where you can add friends and family as contacts. Then these individuals can view your pictures every time you upload new ones.

While your kids have on their creative thinking caps, they can scout out contests designed just for expat youths. Many organizations have contests for writing and artwork. For children of Foreign Service members, there are organizations such as the Foreign Service Youth Foundation that holds regular contests, in addition to workshops on topics including college preparation. For more information, visit www.fsyf.org.

There are also a number of scholarships dedicated to expatriate students. Expatyouthscholarship.com details one scholarship which is open to students of two age ranges, 12 – 15,

and 16 – 18. Students complete a short essay and a creative media, such as a video, photo journal, or original artwork.

Deadlines and additional information will be announced soon, so visit www.expatyouthscholarship.com for updates.

Moving to a new country presents new challenges for the entire family, but can put unique pressure on expat children. While it will be impossible to make their transition seamless, this can serve as incredible learning experience and a worthwhile opportunity to see a new culture. Just take it one day at a time. This process will never be completely stress-free... well, unless someone invents a "flying house."

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