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**THE MINISTRY OF PURPOSEFUL MISSIONARY KID
RE-ENTRY CARE**

by

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A Thesis Reflection to Accompany Ministry Project (Handbook)

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I. Introduction

From the very beginning of my career emphasis in international and cross-cultural ministry, the place of missionary kids (MKs) has taken a prominent place. I immediately sensed a unique difference in the interests, attitudes, goals, and spiritual or social development shared by them in comparison with the ‘typical’ national. Having consistently come into contact with MKs in the past 12-13 years, their gifts and struggles have drawn me in to learn more from their particular cultural insights and to reach out to them in loving concern.

My aim in creating a re-entry handbook was to provide awareness and support for MKs in their initial transition to the U.S., but the other primary goal was to provide encouragement for MKs throughout their life beyond the initial transition. This includes both tips and insights for them to consider personally, as well as suggestions for their families and mission agencies as they encourage them in their life-long journeys as multi-cultural and spiritual people. If nurture for MKs improves and provides them with the skills and support they need for healthy adjustments and transitions, my further hope is that their enriching gifts as multi-cultural and spiritually-grounded people will make a positive impact on the world (and the church) around them.

The handbook was created with missionary kids from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) particularly in mind. It is to this church body I am most closely related, and in which I saw the clearest needs for such a practical and useful project. However, I believe many other churches, as well as individual MKs and their families, will find it useful as a basic way of better understanding themselves and the transitional process within their ‘home’ culture.

Definition

Missionary Kids make up a subset of a larger culture called ‘Third Culture Kids’ (TCK). The definition of a TCK, according to Ruth Van Reken and David Pollock (1999, 19) in their pioneering manual in this area of research, is:

“...a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCK’s life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background.”

As you can see from the definition, a group of individuals with analogous cross-cultural histories make up their own particular cultural identity. It is often very helpful for TCKs to discover a place of belonging within this unique culture. Those TCKs who’s overseas upbringing is grounded in a religious purpose, usually guided and supported by a ministry agency, are called more specifically ‘missionary kids’. There are even more specific aspects of the MK identity that can be held in common among this subset. The particular attributes and experiences held among most MKs will be outlined later in this paper.

The Need for Re-Entry Care

Living with and serving in ministry with adult MKs has enriched my work and cultural perspective. I have often been surprised to discover the wonderful insights that MKs bring to a conversation, simply because of their upbringing in another context. In leading younger MKs in sessions and workshops, it was immediately evident that they are not like other kids, so understanding their developmental process became increasingly

important in order to better connect with them. Hearing the pain and the joys of the life histories of my close MK friends has developed a greater tenderness and compassion in me for them. And as I have watched missionary parents or international students face the enormous changes they are to encounter as they return to their 'homeland' with their children, it was apparent that support was needed for them. Not only is this a population of people which has inspired, intrigued and fascinated me in my own life and work, but it has become clear that there is an expressed need from MKs and their families for understanding, encouragement, and support as they encounter the return to the U.S.

In general, adequate time and attention is rarely given to those who travel or live abroad when it comes to their re-entry. While ministry agencies (as well as secular sending institutions) often have extensive orientation sessions for their outgoing overseas travelers and sometimes for the families as well, the return process after service is not addressed with the same degree of consideration. The returnees often do not realize that re-entry is often the most difficult aspect of living cross-culturally. Setting realistic expectations for what is to come is very important (Storti 1997). Sometimes the attitude is that since it is HOME, they believe that it should be an easier adjustment to that which is already familiar. Re-entry is difficult for almost everyone in the family, but for children, the challenges, expectations and changes are far more dramatic (Seaman 1996).

First of all, missionary kids are rarely returning to a place they would call 'home'. They are far more likely to name their home as the international site(s) where they lived. Although the influence of their parents' home culture has likely been evident in some way, the U.S. is an entirely new place for them. Secondly, high expectations for MKs to adjust quickly, fit in easily, and identify with national and family ties at home come from

both the community around them as well as being imbedded in their own personally psyche (Storti 1997). And thirdly, depending on the age of the MK, they are going through enormous changes developmentally at the same time that they are adjusting culturally (Eakin 1996). It is difficult to sort out the typical transitions of growing up from the particular cultural changes they are experiencing. It is at this time in their lives as well as in this specific transition that nurture is most necessary.

Mission sending agencies play a vital role in the transition process for missionary families. They also facilitate the role of missionaries as they serve as a bridge between the churches abroad and within the U.S. These agencies have a responsibility to care for the needs of their missionary families, as well as to help the families continue to enrich the broader church as a part of their ministry. David Pollock outlines the three primary reasons that agencies are responsible for the care of MKs. The first is out of general Christian love for them as children of God and in their special circumstances. The second is to ensure that the ministry of their called leaders can continue in a productive, strong, and healthy manner. If children are doing well, their parents and the work being done is more likely to have quality and continuance. And thirdly, Pollock encourages agencies to acknowledge the ‘potential’ that MKs hold as ministers and global citizen. (Pollock, 1997). The present North American mainline churches (in particular the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, to which I am a member) are extremely mono-cultural. In an increasingly globalized world, the church lags behind in addressing the changing communities around them (Ward, 1998). Missionary kids have needs not only in adjusting to the North American church ways of life, but many also wish to identify their own sense of God’s calling within that church and in the world to which it relates.

It is not only the church which faces great changes these days as they adapt to the multi-cultural environment around them. In many aspects of our secular environment (workplaces and educational institutions), great attention and emphasis is being placed on international relationships and interactions. Research is continuously being done and resources are constantly being developed to address the increasing connections we have with the global community. Consideration for the skills present in many TCKs due to their overseas upbringing is given added recognition and is being uplifted in these contexts. The needs of the community for the skills and insights of MKs are becoming increasingly obvious and necessary. It should not be difficult for MKs to find their place in this environment.

II. Process of Study

General Research Methods

It was exciting to begin mapping the fascinating culture of TCKs through the many resources available in the field of intercultural communication and interaction. Not only did the research include wonderful outlines of benefits and challenges for this population (see attached list), but a genuine care for TCKs was evident throughout all that I read and from all those with whom I spoke. Academic researchers were open to sharing their discoveries without hesitation, knowing that bringing awareness to as many people as possible could only enhance the process of transition and the development of multi-cultural persons in every way.

It was evident that many others have seen the necessity of further research, care, and attention to the developmental and transitional processes of TCKs. Although there

has been a felt need for this type of attention for many years (beginning in the 1960s with Dr. Ruth Hill Useem's first use of the term TCK), the formulation of the TCK identity was not recognized or talked about among most internationally-based families until the late 1980s. Even then, it was primarily researchers and educators, rather than the TCKs and their families who had access to information about this culture. This was true in Christian circles as well, as in 1984, when the first of three International Conferences on Missionary Kids (ICMK) took place. The participants at the Conference were largely mission agency leaders and educators from international schools (Bowers 1998).

Most of the work done in this area of study has been done by former TCKs themselves, but there are also those non-TCKs like me, who have acknowledged the wonderful attributes and needs of those who grew up amidst various cultural perspectives. *The Third Culture Kid Experience: Growing Up among Worlds*, was perhaps the primary and monumental contribution, in that it has served as a practical manual for families living abroad as well as opening the eyes of the general public to recognize this unique population. Seminars for TCKs, led by David Pollock through the organization Interaction International, provided the most substantial and direct support and encouragement for the TCKs themselves in this journey. These workshops got the word out, so to speak, so that most TCKs now have at least heard of this special culture they belong to, and they know the general meaning of the term 'TCK'. In recent years, many new organizations and research materials have been established to better understand, support, and enrich both TCKs and the communities in which they live. I attempted, in this manual to include some of the most up-to-date as well as the 'classical' work done for MK and TCK care.

Even more research is being developed these days for TCKs in order to utilize and draw upon the strengths they have attained through an overseas upbringing. The needs of the increasing multi-cultural communities we encounter everyday ensure that TCKs have a significant role to play in this ever-changing environment. Ted Ward states, “The TCK of today is the prototype of the citizen of the 21st century.” (Kittredge 1988). Some companies, governmental agencies, schools, and many other organizations actually seek out TCKs because they are known to have some very natural and specific skills (intercultural communication, linguistic ability, mediation, diplomacy, observational skills, and an understanding of issues of diversity are just a few skills mentioned by professionals) which can enable them to serve in much-needed ways (McCaig 1996).

In the field of education, recognition of the gifts of TCKs has been affirmed as well. Teachers are encouraged to challenge TCKs by developing their academic understanding of multiculturalism in order to match the daily reality of their lives as multicultural people (Useem 1976). Ruth Hill Useem, together with others, has done research on TCKs to show the “positive contributions which they have made, are making, and could make to their families and local communities, to their workplace and larger society, and to the interdependent and conflictive world scene.” (Useem 1999:1). This research indicates that: “TCKs tend to gain higher degrees of education than their non-TCK counterparts... Two thirds of the TCK sample in the study felt that it was important to have an international dimension to their lives... Two thirds also felt that they have more transnational knowledge and skills than they have opportunity to use in their lives.” Useem found TCKs to be “a rich resource as they serve as bridges between Americans and the outside world.” (Useem 1999:2 and 5). I would be interested to know if the

same research were to be done on MKs in particular, would the results differ? I am willing to bet that MKs would rank even higher on academic achievement and international involvement than the general TCK community.

Missionary Kid Sub-Culture

Many of the pioneers in the work among TCKs have been children of missionaries. These experienced persons, as well as parents and leaders at missionary schools, have uplifted the concern for MK care and been primary sources of information. Identifying the particularities of MKs as a subset of TCKs added an important focus to my research. In this case, the book, *Raising Resilient MKs* was the most helpful. The Christian identity plays a vital role in the development of any child, but certainly to a greater extent for those who are the children of pastors or other workers within church structures. Let's take a look at some of the particular characteristics of an MK as compared to other TCKs or to other Christians.

MK families tend to be immersed in the local culture abroad more than other overseas workers. They are more apt to (and often expected to) interact with the local population in most aspects of their lives. This often orients the identity of an MK towards the culture of their host country to a greater degree than to that of their passport country (www.tckworld.com/tckdefine). Also, missionaries' economic status, depending on the circumstances, is often lower than other international businesspeople or those serving in the military, but higher than the nationals living around them. This places them in a unique kind of middle class culture of their own as well (Storti 1997). Christian schooling also has an impact on MKs in many cases, although because of the

diversity of schooling options available and accessed today, I did not attempt to research the differences in this regard.

For MKs, the mission agency and/or the missionary community are often primary influences in their lives. The context in which they live, their attitudes toward the new culture around them, and their sense of calling or purpose is shaped and sometimes determined by the mission community. For some, the mission community serves as an extended family. It is a place of core identity (Ward 1998). The impact of the mission community on an MK's spiritual and ethical formulation is an added dimension that other TCKs don't often have. Within religious communities, there are more stated convictions and claims about what is both culturally and religiously appropriate, right or wrong (Pollock and Van Reken 1999, and Barnes, Cline, and Witaker, 1989). The rules that are developed depend on faith (Van Reken 1996), and decisions made in the family are also based in faith (Van Reken 1989). MKs can acquire a lot of guilt when they face the fact that what is OK in one culture may not be appropriate in another (Bakker 1989). This likely occurs when the rules taught by families and the church become synonymous with the faith supporting them. When the rules suddenly change culturally (as they are prone to do when shifting from one part of the world to another), faith, then, is also shaken. The ability to determine what is faith and what is culture is an extremely valuable concept to develop in MKs (Van Reken 1996).

Van Reken (1995) also points out that recognizing the painful losses and other hurts that come from such a transitory upbringing can easily be over-spiritualized or seen as a weakness by the Christian community. MKs may often try to deny their pain because they do not believe it is acceptable within their faith system. They believe that

‘to question the pain is to question God,’ but they also may realize that if they are to “deny the pain, they deny the entire system of belief.” (7) For this reason, Van Reken stresses the importance of holding up the paradox that faith and pain often go together in our Christian lives, as is supported by Jesus’ example in the Garden of Gethsemane and other scripture.

While religious communities can be wonderfully open places for young people to identify the richness and diversity of God’s creation, witness God’s power, and be taught to place greater value on people over things (Hill 1998), they are also often subject to higher standards of academics, conduct, values, and expectations than their TCK counterparts by those around them each day as well as their sponsors and families back ‘home’ (Bakker 1989). Depending on the denominational beliefs, host culture perceptions of Christianity and family convictions, an MK typically has to juggle his/her own mixture of ethical rules and morals as well as opportunities to openly address and experience a more pluralistic religious environment. Ideally, an MK will be free to critically evaluate the variety of beliefs and values s/he encounters, including Christian claims (Hill 1998).

As a part of any young person’s development, they are apt to test boundaries and seek to make their own decisions independently from their parents. When faced with a new culture, this developmental stage can be very scary for an MK. They may feel that they already have lost so many aspects of their identity that if they question or doubt their parents or God, it means that they have no firm ground to stand on at all. For this reason, this natural developmental stage can often be delayed for MKs (and other TCKs as well), and if not delayed, there are generally feelings of guilt or rootlessness. There is a need

for parents and others around MKs going through these changes to let them know that their questioning and doubting is normal and acceptable, while giving them the support they need to do the hard work of making their own decisions and identifying their own belief (Pollock and Van Reken 1999).

While the Christian influence may be an unsettling or confusing piece of an MK's life in some areas, it also has a dramatically positive impact on MKs over TCKs. In one of the articles I read, some of the characteristics attributed to TCKs are: "confusion of loyalties", "lack of conviction", and a belief that 'truth is relative' (Schaetti and Ramsey 1999). Given the religious foundations that are often present in MKs because of their upbringing in the church, these complicated characteristics may be counteracted by the fact that they are likely to also have an identity rooted in something greater than cultural practices, a strong foundation in ethical and moral concerns, and "loyalty to Christian values above social pragmatics." (Ward 1998, 68). In fact, one of the main foundations for ensuring a healthy transition is the presence of a "positive spiritual core," - a steady and strong set of values and personal faith that remains unchanged despite the various cultures encountered (Pollock and Van Reken, 1999, 197)

Research on MK Nurture

I began my research in a more traditional way, through books and articles written about my particular interest. While there was a decent amount of information in this area, I quickly found that internet resources and personal connections were much more fruitful in developing the manual. Mainline churches, such as the ELCA and Presbyterian Church in America, do not have resources or curriculum of their own to

contribute, while non-denominational groups seem to have more well-developed resources in providing retreats, spiritual support, and general adjustment care. Thus, I depended on interviews and discussions with ELCA staff persons, related mission agencies, pastors, families, and MKs themselves to assist me in identifying appropriate theological and church-related perspectives. It was easy to see the significance and need for this project as I noticed the lack of resources that have been developed in mainline churches for missionary re-entry, and heard from all those with whom I spoke of the desire and need to have more done in this area, especially from a theological perspective that comes from one's own tradition.

On the missionary sponsoring agency level, my two most important discussions were with Global Mission staff at the ELCA and at the World Mission Prayer League (WMPL), a pan-Lutheran based mission agency. I was fortunate to attend the ELCA's Summer Missionary Conference (SMC) with returning missionaries and those on furlough. The ELCA provides academic testing, counseling and financial support, but outside of that, little structured attention is given to MKs to assist in their transitions or to nurture them spiritually in their life decisions and choices. Child care is provided by knowledgeable and caring friends at the SMC and other retreat times, but activities are not related to the particular needs of the MKs as they face the challenges of, and grow in their multi-cultural identities. However, individuals in the mission sending agency who are associated with MKs and their families periodically offer additional support, especially in times where particular needs have been identified or requested. Some older MKs have taken leadership roles in international or youth programs of the ELCA on occasion as well. (Campbell, Halloway, and Rosland 2006)

The WMPL, being a much smaller and more closely-knit community, seems to have more personal knowledge of the missionary families and their adjustment process. They acknowledged the kids in more tangible ways, not trying to push kids into being ‘little missionaries’, but helping them find their place or their role in the ministry. Although they have put together some resources pertinent to the MK culture from time to time for their summer camp gathering of missionaries, nothing more formal has been done. They tend to rely on other professional organizations or the non-denominational resources available. The most meaningful words I heard regarding the need for empowering MKs for future service in the world came from Rev. Santiago Gomez, a leader in Peace of God Church of Cuenca, Ecuador, where WMPL missionaries have served for a number of years. He told WMPL that they didn’t need missionaries sent to their region anymore, but rather requested that MKs return to serve as a bridge... as friends rather than missionaries who can authentically help strengthen the young leadership of the church. He recognized that MKs had a language and cultural understanding which was unique and valuable for the church in his area! (Koski and Lindquist 2006)

Getting the most accurate and personal input from MKs and their families added so much applicable information, making the work I was doing real, and affirming the necessity of it. Not only did I learn more about the commonalities among MKs, but I was able to recognize the vast differences in each MK’s experience – even among siblings of roughly the same age! Through 15 intensive interviews with adult MKs of all ages and parents of MKs of varying ages (see Resource List), I heard stories which were exactly in line with what all the research had said and which affirmed the need for re-entry support.

While I continuously heard and read MKs sing the praises of their international upbringing and how it has impacted their lives in positive and significant ways, the process of adjustment, particularly back to North America, was often very painful and difficult for them. Those who were given no resources reported more anxiety and struggles than those who said that they heard so much about the ‘third culture’ attributes that they got tired of it. Even in each of my informal discussions with adult MKs or other related persons, I received confirmation that this project was indeed necessary and would be useful. After the SMC, program leaders said that in evaluations, the missionaries had requested greater attention to be given to MK nurture in the future more than they had asked for in previous years (Campbell, Halloway, and Rosland 2006).

While the present missionary families were mostly concerned with practical re-entry resources and support, the older adult MKs, their families, and those who have worked with or researched MKs for a number of years were the most excited about the emphasis I have placed on recognizing the strengths and gifts that MKs can bring to the world and in the church today. Too often, MKs are shuffled to the side because they don’t follow the mainstream, or their struggles are accentuated and sensationalized so much that they start to feel as though they are abnormal. This adds to their inferiority complex, and they are maybe even seen by others as problems that need to be fixed within society because they don’t properly fit in. However, as I will discuss in more detail later in the theology part of this paper, not only are MKs a kind of ‘prototype’ for the 21st century citizen, but they also can be a ‘prototype’ Christian as well (Ward 1989, 59). I believe Joyce Bowers (1998, 8) said it best in *Raising Resilient MKs*: “To minimize multi-cultural background makes an asset seem like a deficiency.”

The most significant experience I had during my research was meeting two recent MK returnees at the SMC. These two college-aged women were hungry for someone to listen and understand what they were going through at that particular time in their lives. All of the potential and the pain of their experiences were expressed in our time together throughout the conference and in brief connections afterward. I remember thinking that even if this manual was never utilized by anyone in the future, the many things I learned through my research and interviews was well worth it, just so that I could be there as an understanding listener for these two young ladies at a time when they needed it the most.

Throughout my research, I was gathering resources from anyone who had any little suggestion of what might be helpful for MKs, their families, and mission sending agencies. At conferences and in classes, on the internet and in the library, in churches and at social gatherings, through new acquaintances in the U.S. as well as in India, I collected thoughts, suggestions, resources, and stories which added to the enjoyment as well as widening my knowledge base regarding MK reentry.

Theology

In addition to the many theological directions and understandings that directly relate to an MK re-entry experience outlined in the manual, I would like to look at a couple of the topics a bit more closely. These are issues which I believe should be addressed by professionals who have a solid understanding of the scriptural and mission perspectives of the denomination with whom they work.

As I researched various theological viewpoints on MK support, I found a few to add further complications for an MK, and some even seemed slightly manipulative or

easily misconstrued. This could so easily cause additional pressures, expectations, grief, shame, guilt, or confusion for an MK who is sorting through his/her lived experience and that which is taught by religious leaders around them. I do not wish to pass judgments on differing theological perspectives, but I do want to stress the need to develop resources and provide guidance for those within one's own tradition or denomination. It also would be worth mentioning that present missionaries, and even some mature MKs themselves should have a hand in developing curriculum and theological resources for all young people, but in particular for MKs.

As I mentioned earlier in the paper, those in the education field are actually gearing their study programs toward more multi-cultural perspectives, into which MKs fit nicely. A comment was made that educators actually encourage their students to commit 'cultural suicide' simply by learning new things and expanding their horizons. The result of such a life-changing kind of education that pushes students beyond their cultural boundaries is that students are transformed into persons that will no longer fit in the cultures they call "home," but they must rather live in the margins... along with MKs and other TCKs (Bennett 1995/96, 5). I see this idea directly in relation to the way we talk as Christians about not being of the world, but in the world. We live in the now and the not yet, as people who are both/and, rather than either/or. The church, too, is in the process of creating marginal people. This area of theology so clearly relates to the lives of MKs, and MKs could have so much to offer as resource persons in relating their experiences between worldly cultures as well as how they might relate that to their spiritual lives.

At the same time that we deny the world, the incarnational example of Jesus encourages us to validate the individual and various cultures to which we identify or

belong. We find ourselves in a paradox of paradoxes! In some ways, we commit cultural suicide and no longer fit in the world around us. However, as we relate to the world, we are called to invest deeply in the lived experience of those around us, celebrating the goodness of God's unique creation and the affirmation of that goodness in Jesus' life on earth. It is here that aspects of Liberation Theology emerge for me. For example, preferential option for the poor speaks to our lives as Christians, living on the edges or fringes of society, but the richness of a grassroots, primarily experiential reflection on God's activity and liberation in the world roots us deeply into the communities around us.

It is exciting to think about where a discussion on the above theological ideas might go in a room full of adult MKs. While Anthony Gittins (1989) touches on some of these matters in identifying the stranger (marginal person) as a type of ideal Christian identity, I believe that much more can be said and developed in this area of theology. I will hope that not only will the church see a need to discuss such matters in our increasingly diverse communities, but also that MKs will be invited to give input wherever appropriate.

Creating the Handbook

One of the most difficult aspects of the project was the process of actually determining what to include in the handbook and how to express the many issues I had learned about. It needed to be very accessible and easy to read, especially for the MKs. In the midst of an intensive transition, it is unlikely that most people will have time or energy to sit down with a long theoretical essay with academic jargon on the re-entry process, no matter how much it applies to their present life situation. The goals were

quite different for each segment of the handbook: MKs, their parents, and mission agencies.

Since my primary goal was to encourage young people, I knew that it had to approach things in a down-to-earth manner. While I sought to address many key issues, I chose some of the more basic topics to emphasize, and I tried to use some of the words of their peers whenever possible. Introducing the TCK culture and helping them identify themselves in the outline was a starting point, but providing practical advice and suggestions was also necessary. Although the handbook is meant to be read just prior to departure for the U.S., I also wished to provide resources far beyond that initial move. It was important to cover a broad spectrum of situations and experiences, hoping that every MK who reads it would take at least a few helpful pieces of information with them.

For parents, I wished to mostly address concerns of their younger children, since those kids may not be able to read or understand the handbook or other resources to which I direct them. Parents must create awareness for themselves and teach it to their younger children in ways that they feel it is most appropriate. However, older children also have a great need to be listened to and understood, so in addition to encouraging parents to read the MK part of the manual, I chose to address some particular issues in the lives of older MKs.

The Mission Agency section includes mostly suggestions and topics that could be emphasized in various ways in their support of MKs. I hoped to keep this part of the handbook brief and to the point, knowing the limited time and resources available to many people serving in these agencies. At the same time, I hoped to give an encouraging and motivating push to leaders to move forward in the improvement of MK re-entry care.

Much of the information and insights I found important are shared in the manual itself. I chose to address the remaining, and some of the deeper topics here within the paper. The handbook emphasizes personal adjustment more than future calling or society's needs, but this paper attempts to address the balance of transition needs of MKs as well as the needs of the communities around them to utilize their gifts.

Additional comments

As I expected, the interviews that I had with missionary kids were, for the most part with those who had had positive adjustments. All of the MKs I spoke with shared struggles, but overall, they were more likely to point to a sibling who had a more difficult time of it. I was not successful in enticing some of those named siblings to also be interviewed, but was at least able to hear some of the differing stories from their family members. It also was very enlightening to interview parents and their adult children separately in order to compare the experiences and perspectives from each. In this case, between parents and children, the facts were the same, but the viewpoints were often quite different. One of the additional surprises I had in the interviews was hearing the word 'pride' so often from the MKs when I asked how they felt about being an MK. While I did expect to have a more positive response to the question, being proud was not one of the words I would have thought would be so common.

I would have liked to explore Janet Bennett's (1995/96) perspective on encapsulated vs. constructive marginality further than I did. After all, her viewpoint matched my goals in the manual, which were to help release the encapsulated captive MKs from their web of conflicting loyalties and identities, as well as guide MKs to a

place where they were able to make positive boundaries and decisions for themselves. However, from what I understood from her concepts, they turned out to be technical terms for what I already was describing in many other more simplified ways.

I learned a great deal about the developmental process of MKs versus the average U.S. kid. It would be wonderful to do a more intensive study on how differently they move from an ethno-centric perspective to an ethno-relative one. There is a tendency among MKs to view their host culture in a more positive light than their home culture and a more tolerant approach to people from other cultures. Perhaps someday I will be able to explore these issues further.

III. Conclusion

It was a complete joy to do this project. I felt that there were positive reinforcing moments all along the way. Of course, the more I learned and listened, the more I saw greater needs and inadequate opportunities to accomplish all that I'd like to see happen. However, I was able to meet so many dedicated, wise, and caring people in the missionary community who long to do more to nurture MKs.

The most important aspects of the project were: First and foremost, providing the manual itself to create awareness and assistance for the various people involved in the MK reentry process; then, in raising consciousness among missionaries and mission agencies for the care of their young people; stressing a balance in providing for MK needs as well as recognizing the community's needs for MKs; providing a positive approach to MK nurture by acknowledging, recognizing, addressing in a way that leads

to growth and development; and being available to listen to and encourage so many in their on-going re-entry journey.

I pray that this project will further inspire MKs and the people around them to draw us all closer to the global community that God wishes us to be, recognizing both our commonalities as well as our unique gifts in the journey. I will conclude with a quote by Norma McCaig (1996), which sums up my hopes quite well: “Provided with an environment that not only acknowledges, but also values their experience and encourages them to use their skills, they can – and many will – change the world they live in.”

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General profile of MK/TCKs

This list comes from David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken's book, *The Third Culture Kid Experience: Growing Up Among Worlds*. It in no way is meant to put TCKs in a box, but rather to identify some basic commonalities, and even some of the paradoxes of the traits and experiences TCKs might share. In most cases, there are both positives and negatives to each descriptive attribute.

Having a broader picture of the world around them.

Unsure about which ideologies and values they identify with most.

Personally connect with various lifestyles in the world.

Have a realistically painful view of reality, empathizing to an extreme.

Interested and appreciative of various cultural environments and expression.

Struggle to know about and identify in home culture.

Can adapt quickly and easily in many situations.

Overly cautious about what is culturally appropriate in different situations.

Act like a chameleon, easily blending into their environment.

Extremely aware of cultural differences and able to identify them quickly.

Multicultural diversity is viewed as a norm, a place where they feel comfortable.

Can feel elite or privileged among those around them.

Live in the present and wish to take action immediately.

Exhibit impulsive behavior, indecisiveness, or lack of trust in making plans.

Have a core network of caring and wise adults accessible to them for support.

Lack of trust in adults who have made significant decisions in their lives.

Feel a sense of superiority among those around them because of vast experiences.

Merely *appear* judgmental or arrogant simply in sharing a personal story.

Find stability and identity in relationships rather than place.

Always moving from one thing to the next, seemingly unable to settle down.

Build various and deep relationships quickly.

Hesitant to invest in others because of multiple losses in past.

Early maturity seen in knowledge base, relationship with adults, and communication.

Delayed adolescence in identity formation, decision making, and independence.

Highly and naturally skilled in cross-cultural understanding, observation, social interaction, linguistics, etc.

Working through multiple losses, unresolved grief, and feeling 'terminally unique'.

Have a rather privileged lifestyle in their host culture.

Find a large part of their identity within a system (sending agency).

Missionary Kids Reentry Handbook:

A Resource for MKs, their parents, and
sponsoring agencies.



- Submitted by Sara Trumm
M.A. Thesis Project
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Introduction:

In my work and social interaction (largely centered in international relations), I have met many fabulous people whose important developmental years took place in countries other than that of their passports. These 'Third Culture Kids' (TCKs) have enriched my life and my understanding of what it means to relate and serve as a bridge between different cultures. Even as many of them have shared struggles of their unique upbringings, none have had regrets about growing up overseas – and most see their experience as a great asset in their life.

While the field of Intercultural Communication and Adaptation has become wonderfully rich in serving those who shift their entire frame of reference through moving to and from another culture, I have noticed that Missionary Kids (MKs) in mainline denominations largely have not seen the benefits of resources available to them, particularly when it comes to 'returning' to the U.S. I chose this manual as my thesis project because I feel that Christian communities (sending agencies, churches, families, etc.) can better care for MKs in this difficult transition, and because the particular skills that MKs possess should be encouraged as vital assets to global awareness, education, and future interaction in an increasingly globalized world.

The manual will be submitted to mission agencies and the contents can be used as the organization wishes. I suggest that the first two sections be sent to missionary families 4–6 months prior to any child's reentry experience. However, if parts of the manual are helpful in another situation, it may be adapted accordingly.

The journey of an MK's reentry to the U.S. is typically a life-long process. This manual is just a start, as it outlines some of the key traits and issues common among MKs. Some of the topics here might not pertain at this particular moment in an MK's life but could become important later. Please make use of the resource pages at the end of the document for on-going help and encouragement.

Dedication:

This project was inspired and guided every step of the way, by my mentor, 'boss-lady', overall phenomenal woman, and most of all, my dear friend, Robin M. Bragge. It is merely a drop in the bucket compared to the impact and influence she had on so many lives. As the person who first introduced me to 'third culture kids' as well as a host of other intercultural concepts, I hope to continue Robin's legacy in some way.

– Sara Trumm

Being an MK — Benefits and Challenges

It is time to once again begin a new phase of your life, this time in a place your parents call 'home'. For you, the U.S. may have some wonderfully familiar aspects that help it to feel like home for you too, but in other ways, it is an entirely foreign culture. Are you ready to face this new place with the same openness and curiosity that you had as you arrived in the place(s) you recently lived?

The expectations for you to fit into U.S. culture are likely to be greater than when you went to another country. After all, your heritage and extended family is in the U.S., the language is your mother tongue, and you look like any other North American kid! You may expect for it to be easy (or easier) to adjust to the U.S. than it has been with other transitions you have made abroad. Your parents may expect you to fit into what they know as a comfortable and familiar culture and others might believe that now you have returned, you'll finally be the American that your passport says you are. **But it isn't as easy as that, is it?**

Maybe this is news to you and maybe it is all too clear already, but *you are different from other kids!!* Do you see this as a good or bad thing? Do you feel like you never fit, or do you seem to adjust and fit in better than other kids in new situations? In what ways do you feel ahead of your peers and which ways do you feel behind?

Actually, you share more in common with kids in the U.S. than you or others around you might think. Each person is unique in their personal make up, and each faces various contradictions in their personality. However, there are some things that you share with a particular group of kids (i.e. children of foreign diplomats and business people, military personnel, or missionaries) that stand out because of your particular upbringing in a bi- or multi-cultural context. Those who grow up between cultures (from one culture but relating to another) learn, create, and share a particular lifestyle that becomes its own culture – a third culture in itself. Thus, MKs are a part of a group of people called Third Culture Kids (TCKs). Let's take a list at what 'the experts' say about some of the benefits and challenges particular to TCKs and MKs.

BENEFITS

Make friends quickly
Adaptable and flexible
Feel at home anywhere
Broadened worldview and exposure
Academically advanced
Strong faith in God to provide
Bi-lingual or Multi-lingual
Serve as a 'bridge' between people
Trust in God—sense of purpose

CHALLENGES

Cautious about getting close to others
Restless/unsure about decision-making
Feel at home nowhere
Appear arrogant or intimidating to others
Inexperienced in many social settings
Guilt or Anger with God for losses
Look like an American, but don't feel it
Don't know where to find belonging
Feel powerless and without choices

There are actually many more attributes that seem common among TCKs but I hope you can identify with at least some of these traits.

You know you're an MK when...

- You speak two languages, but can't spell either.
- You have a passport, but no driver's license.
- You have a world time zone map next to your telephone.

- Andy and Deborah Kerr

WHO AM I? WHERE DO I BELONG?

As you re-establish yourself in the U.S., it is natural to look around yourself and do a lot of comparing to others. As you do this, the differences between you and other kids and other families will stand out. You will maybe wonder if you'll ever fit in. You knew your place in your host culture, and you now know that you also belong to a particular 'third' culture group that exists outside of a particular location, but what about your identity as you start living in the U.S.?

Christian

No matter what, you can rest in your identity as a child of God. This is the place where you can be 100% sure you belong, no matter what you feel or experience from day-to-day. God's promises and purpose do not change as you move from place to place and you can have confidence in God's unconditional love for you. As a Christian, you are also part of a story...and you have an important place within that story of faith.

"For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope."
Jeremiah 29:11

Being transcultural is actually a very Christian-like trait. There are several examples in the Bible of people who experienced growing up or living a significant part of their lives in another culture. You might relate to Moses, Joseph, Ruth or Samuel in a way that others do not understand. Paul had to adjust culturally throughout his journeys, always attempting to be 'all things to all people' (1 Cor. 9:22) He even found a cultural guide for himself in Barnabas as he made his way in a new place.

Jesus could be seen as a third culture kid! His example has more richness than your typical TCK. Jesus not only welcomed misfits and strangers, but he was one of them. His example shows us how to live as a part of both heaven and earth, identifying within each, and doing so with humility and care for everyone. Jesus was willing to be put into difficult situations because he trusted that there was a purpose and a plan which would bring healing and growth, wholeness and forgiveness in the end. As a follower of Jesus, you can embrace your unique identity and see it as an opportunity to relate with people in your own special way.

Missionary

The faith community which has surrounded you in your life so far has influenced you greatly. Your sponsoring agency, or community of other missionary families has probably been a place of belonging. They have created a specific missionary culture for you, with values that are particular and lifted up in a clear way. Whether you are returning with your family at the end of missionary service, returning on your own before your parent(s) have completed their service, or any other number of scenarios; the missionary agency/

community will probably play a much smaller role in your life now. However, these folks remain available to you and loyal, even if the connections are not as obvious at this time.

Many MKs return to the U.S. to find a much less cohesive Christian community than they had in their international site. There are exceptions to this, of course, but it is definitely going to be different. You no longer have the same role as you did when you were visiting on furlough, and the attention you receive will not be like it was before (for better or for worse!) Despite the differences, the church in the U.S. needs your insights and experiences, your passion and your involvement! Take time to find your place in a congregation where you feel nurtured and where you also can share your gifts as you feel called.

Family

Missionary families are often closer than other families who have not undergone cultural shifts together. Not only do missionary families have to depend on one another to help understand and interpret the world around them, but they often create strong ties based on their religious beliefs (especially if Christianity is a minority religion in their area). This can even be true in cases where kids go to boarding school far away from their parents. As you return to the U.S., you may notice that other families do not share the same kind of closeness. While this might be a welcome change for you if you are seeking more independence, your family is also the greatest link you have to your past experience. They help you to keep the memories and cultural ties alive inside of you, as well as relating best to the new situation in which you find yourself.

Your extended family is eager to have you 'home' and can be a welcome place of stability in your life. It will take some time to get to know one another, but these relationships are more likely to be lasting and move quickly to a place of understanding and comfort. However, not all families relate to one another in this way. In cases where extended family ties do not provide this kind of support, your family probably has close friends who serve as a type of 'second family' to which you connect quickly and in the long-term.

Youth

This is a time of great development and growth in your life. You are forming your own opinions, making some of your own decisions, and beginning to have more responsibilities and independence within your family and community. Your U.S. peers are experiencing these same kinds of changes. It is a turbulent stage of life for anyone. Friends are greatly influential and usually their input becomes more important than your family's.

Fitting into the youth cultural norms feels like a high priority. While some young people strive to be 'different' and express their own uniqueness, it rarely strays from a kind of 'pop' culture that imitates others. Finding out what's 'in' and what's 'out' will be a challenge, but watching and listening to those around you (reading magazines or watching movies may also be helpful) will quickly acclimate you. Remember that although there is a lot

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Romans 12:2

of pressure to fit in to the norms of youth culture – your own interests, values, and even sense of style needs to be respected. The temptation to compromise your beliefs and values in order to fit in might be great, so stay strong in what you know is right!



Nationality

You hold a U.S. passport. You are probably very aware (at least more aware than your peers in the States) of the politics of this country, its history, and its present role in the world. Your opinions of U.S. policies vary greatly depending on your experiences, but they are based largely on an outsider’s perspective.

Your loyalty to your country is not based on it being your home, and you may in fact feel more loyalty to the country in which you lived previously. You could even consider yourself a world citizen—not defined by any nationality in particular, but open to all. On the other side, please know that if you adjust well and identify easily within the U.S., this in no way means that you are betraying your connection and care for your previous host culture!

National identity goes far beyond remembering the Pledge of Allegiance, singing the National Anthem, or lighting fireworks on the 4th of July. What you should be aware of is that for other young people who are growing up in the U.S., their nationality is largely taken for granted and not examined in relation to other countries. Finding your identity within this context is likely to be rather confusing, and facing the ignorance of your peers about other parts of the world can be frustrating.

“Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it solely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men (sic) and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one corner of the earth all one’s lifetime.” - Mark Twain

I DON’T UNDERSTAND THESE PEOPLE!

It is not easy to sort out what your relationship is to your ‘home’ culture. You probably look the same as those around you, but feel very different from them inside. You could be called a ‘hidden immigrant’. If you look at the graph below, you might understand why as a hidden immigrant, there are many times that others’ expectations of you are confusing and contradictory. While you just came from being in the foreigner category and you’d like to be seen as a mirror, you know inside that you are not. Sometimes you are expected to know about something that is completely new for you and at other times the most obvious information is told to you as though you are a 2 year old.

FOREIGNER Look different Think different	HIDDEN IMMIGRANT Look alike Think different
ADOPTED Look different Think alike	MIRROR Look alike Think alike

One of the most helpful resources for you in your adjustment to the U.S. is a 'cultural informant.' This person could be a former MK/TCK, a teacher or family friend, or someone from your congregation who has sensitivity to, and possibly experience in the challenges of returning to the U.S. He or she might take you shopping, teach you to drive, introduce you to important people and places in your area, or just be available to answer questions without causing you to feel strange for not knowing how things work.

Although communities are becoming more and more diverse in the US, most middle-class white citizens do not interact much with others who are from different backgrounds. They probably will not recognize the difficulties that those from non-dominant cultures face. New immigrants, international persons, and people of color will appreciate your awareness and identification with these struggles. You might be drawn to these non-dominant cultural groups because you also feel like a bit of an outsider. This is a wonderful place for you to get involved and make an impact in your school or community. Whether you invest (even volunteer or work) in a place which gives attention to multi-cultural diversity, by simply attending to the concerns around you, you'll discover that you are well-suited to be a cultural bridge.

It is easy to be highly critical of your home culture. The materialism and ignorance about the rest of the world that you encounter are just two examples of areas where you might be tempted to pass judgment. You also might fight against an internal sense of superiority because of the seemingly superficial, hypocritical, or inhospitable attitudes of those in the States as compared to your host culture. You could even struggle with the lack of attention or status that you previously had abroad. Maintaining a humble and servant-like attitude is important so that you avoid appearing (or being) arrogant to others.

BUT DIFFERENCE FEELS BAD!

While most teens wrestle with loneliness and mood swings, you are experiencing a great deal of additional loss and change right now to add to an already emotional rollercoaster ride. It is very natural to feel many emotions at this time, especially confusion and uncertainty.

You probably just said goodbye to not only places and friends, but also to most everything familiar and comfortable. Home is a place where you find acceptance, understanding, safety, belonging, and where you feel 'in your element'. Although everyone is saying that you are coming 'home' to the States, this place is not likely to feel at all like home in these ways. You need to allow yourself time to mourn the losses and give yourself the time and space to re-establish yourself. The grieving process happens in its own time and in its own way. While grieving, you might be tempted to protect yourself from the pain of separation by being cautious about making new emotional attachments, withdrawing or keeping your distance, trying to be overly self-sufficient, or avoiding commitments.

Although you should give yourself permission to take time and space for grieving, you also

need to make attempts to invest in the new place as well. Try to find a balance in a very new environment. The best advice in this situation is to **BE PATIENT** with yourself!! It does get better and there are wonderful things ahead for you. Know that you are not going crazy if you just don't feel 'yourself' for awhile. You are not alone. Lean on others for support when you need it.

DOES GOD REALLY CARE ABOUT ME?

Amidst the mourning and hurt of losses, it is not uncommon for MKs to wonder how God could allow such pain and separation in their lives. Perhaps the church, mission agency, or God has let you down in some way. Having some of these negative feelings in no way means that you are not a faithful Christian. Jesus experienced pain and loss while remaining faithful. He even felt forsaken by God, yet stayed true to his calling. Faith and pain can go together. It is a difficult part of our life journey, but when we are able to look back, we see that the struggles also bring positive maturing and growth... even redemption! God is with us throughout the pain and brings us to wholeness again.

“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.” Hebrews 5:7

As mentioned earlier, you can find comfort and rest in your identity as a child of God. However, this also might be a time where you begin to question the beliefs and practices that have been taught to you all your life. Not only is it normal to question or doubt as you begin shaping a faith that is your own, but you also may begin to encounter what seem to be contradictions between Christian teachings and your environment, especially in a changing cultural setting. You might feel that if you doubt your Christian upbringing, then life begins to unravel and you will lose everything. Seek out trusted friends, family members or pastors to help you work through your questions and the contradictions you encounter.

FINDING YOUR WAY HOME

For MKs, HOME is a multiplicity of relationships rather than a place. Like a turtle, you carry your sense of 'home' around with you. While this makes it very difficult to answer others' questions about 'Where are you from?' you also are not restricted, but rather free to find places where you can fully be yourself, be known, trusted, accepted, loved, respected and forgiven no matter where you are. More and more people in this world find themselves living in-between places and cultures that are familiar to them. Is it possible to embrace this new globalized sense of home?



“Living in the liminal without a home is different from living in the liminal as a home” - Lee Knefelkamp

Please bring strange things. Please come bringing new things. Let very old things come into your hands.

Let what you do not know come into your eyes. Let desert sand harden your feet.

Let the arch of your feet be the mountains. Let the paths of your fingertips be your maps,

And the ways you go be the lines on your palms. Let there be deep snow in your breathing,

And your out breath be the shining of ice. May your mouth contain the shapes of strange words.

May you smell food cooking you have not eaten. May the spring of a foreign river be your navel.

May your soul be at home where there are no houses.

Walk carefully, well-loved one, walk mindfully, well-loved one,

Walk fearlessly, well-loved one. Return with us, return to us, Be always coming home.

-Ursula K. Leguín

Advice from MKs who have gone before you!

It's OK to pretend you understand the jokes or comments of your peers sometimes, even when you have no clue what they are talking about.

Be careful when making friends at first. Sometimes the people who initiate a relationship first are in desperate need of a friend. While they may end up being people you trust and identify with the most, get a sense of the entire community before you invest too deeply.

Stay in touch with your friends in your previous home. Email and phone calls make this easy!

Find someone whom you trust to answer your questions without causing you to feel stupid.

Be careful to not be too judgmental about others' lack of knowledge about the world outside the U.S. See it rather as an opportunity to share an alternate view and open others' perspective.

You might identify with international students or new immigrants more than U.S. peers. That's OK—and actually a good thing!

Get involved in an activity (sports, music, clubs, etc.) where you are a part of a group/team that shares like interests.

Find opportunities to use the foreign language skills you may have. It might be talking with your family in that language once in awhile or even doing some translation work!

Be patient with yourself!!!

Ask for help.

Don't think you are an expert.

Look for the good in U.S. culture too.

Go ahead and struggle with God—God can handle it.

Find like-minded people and get involved in multi-cultural communities.

Stay connected with roots—those who provide continuity in your life.

“And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.’” Matt 8:20

Parents —

Encouraging Your MKs

It is probably overwhelming for you to think about all the changes coming in your return to the U.S. It will be a challenging adjustment for you personally, but if you are like most parents I've met, your children are one of your primary concerns as you make this move. In this section, we'll look at some of the basic topics of concern for MKs returning home as well as a few practical suggestions.

Please read the previous section of the manual before this parental segment. It gives some important groundwork, especially for your older kids, while this part helps you to nurture your children's transition at particular stages of development. Each child experiences and reacts to the return differently. Since you know and influence your children the most, you can adapt the following topics and suggestions accordingly.

OVERALL EMPHASES

COMMUNICATION:

Open communication within the family is extremely important. Family meetings, devotions, and general check-ins will help everyone feel better about the many changes occurring. Including your children in discussions and decisions regarding the family's move provides a sense of ownership in the ministry as well as a sense of validation and value - that his/her thoughts and wishes matter.

Listening to your children is probably one of the best things you can do to ensure good communication. Help them to know that it is natural to feel sad, angry or a whole range of emotions as they make this drastic transition. Healthy expression of any of these emotions should be encouraged. It is tempting for parents to offer only reassurances to kids about the changes they are experiencing. However, sometimes your child simply needs comfort.

Share your own adjustment process in a realistic and positive way, not trying to show that you know exactly how your children feel (you don't!) but to share together in the struggles and lessons along the way.

STABILITY:

Try to provide places of continuity in the U.S. (i.e. a home base) so that your child can have a consistent address and familiar people (family, friends or congregation) with whom they can connect upon return. These may be places/people with whom you may have kept your kids in touch through pictures, video, tapes, and visits during furlough.

In general, if you are returning as a family, try to limit your outside commitments for the first year, simply to emphasize a sense of stability for the kids as they adjust.

Rites of passage and family rituals give kids a sense of value and accomplishment. Because rituals and rites of passage often vary greatly from culture to culture, it is wonderful if you can create your own personal and culturally-tied activities which will be special and unique to your family members.

CLOSURE:

Before departure, encourage your kids to say the goodbyes they need to, and ensure that there are not several loose ends or unresolved issues that are being left behind.

Upon reentry itself, one suggestion has been to go to a hotel/resort where just your family can be alone before jumping right into the hustle and bustle of family and friends in States. This provides a buffer time for just your immediate family to grieve the losses of what was just left behind as well as prepare for what is ahead.

If at all possible, provide an opportunity for your children to return to the host culture of their upbringing for a visit at some point in the upcoming few years.

GUIDE AND ENCOURAGE:

Treat the transition to the U.S. similarly to the way you approached going to a new country in the first place. Encourage the exploration of new places, customs, and daily life experiences of the world around you as though it were a foreign country (after all, it is foreign to your kids!). Encourage an attitude of curiosity, flexibility and openness, just as you probably did overseas.

Help your children visualize the future in a realistic and positive way. If they are old enough to look ahead and plan, help them see the wealth of possibilities open to them (careers, involvement in community, activities, etc.) and if they are younger, help provide a picture of what the future might be like. The more realistic the child's expectations are, the better the adjustment is likely to feel. Identifying one's expectations is a difficult task, especially for a young person, so you can help guide the process.

Help kids identify their gifts and skills. These things may not be obvious to them. The openness and adaptability they have developed overseas is likely to go unnoticed as an asset. Also, help to provide opportunities for them to use these gifts whenever possible.

Encourage them to reflect on what they are going through, who they are becoming, what is happening to their values, how cultural rules conflict, etc. Affirm a valued and positive attitude towards difference. This not only is an opportunity to guide them in their faith lives, but also helps to shape their multi-cultural identity in positive ways.

OUTSIDE RESOURCES:

For a start, just look at the resources available at the end of this manual. The books, websites, and organizations listed will go much further in detail on the various topics addressed here. Know that you are not alone in this process! Look for re-entry activities and events at area

colleges or community centers. There might be some even overseas before you leave. Other family, friends, church connections, teachers, and professionals might provide an outside perspective which your kid could appreciate as well.

Seek out a cultural guide or mentor (perhaps a sensitive peer or older person) to help your children understand the environment around them and patiently answer their questions. You can take the initiative to talk with teachers, pastors, or other leaders in your children's life to help them understand the unique nature of their upbringing.

YOUNGER KIDS (approximately ages 3-11)

Children at this age tend to be quite dualistic in their thinking. Actions are either right or wrong and authority figures play a very important role in their lives. It is also common for them to feel responsible for that which is happening around them, as though they are the cause. Developmentally, kids first need to figure out who they can trust and what they can rely on before they begin to identify themselves as their own persons. Then, they will wish to actively be involved in controlling and manipulating the world around them (this can include wishing to help in various tasks). Practical skill building and the alleviation of guilt are important things to emphasize for younger kids. Building slowly, step by step rather than all at once, will also prove beneficial at a younger age.

While in the first few years of life, fulfilling basic needs is what a child needs most. A preschooler needs consistency and sameness. This is not easy to provide when everything around them is changing. Creating your own routines and patterns and then sticking to them will be of most benefit. Make sure that the child is able to keep treasured items (toys, clothes, pictures, etc.) with him/her during the move. Simply your physical presence will also be of great comfort.

Social interaction is important for school-aged children. Help to find playmates for them. Academic adjustments are also primary at this time in their lives. The new school environment, expectations and rules will perhaps require most of your attention.

Younger kids live much more in the present, which means that the immediate losses or adventures are central to them. They will likely be unable to understand "Why?" or to imagine the future. Linking them to the past (including successes they've had) helps in adjustment. In general, talk about what is happening, what might be the next step(s), and guide them in thinking ahead. Letting the child plan his/her own room is one practical way of doing this.

Verbal expression is not well developed in younger children. They are more likely to act out their feelings. Help them verbalize by asking questions and even talking out what they seem to be going through by something as simple as a custom made bedtime story! Helping children name their feelings and identifying what is really happening around them will aid in their adjustment and developmental process.

Children often pick up on the stress of the parents. While it is helpful to be honest with them, maintaining a positive attitude toward the move will be helpful to a younger child in facing the change themselves.

OLDER KIDS (approximately ages 12-18)

Some say that the ages of 12-14 are the most difficult, especially for a returning MK. While academics may be the biggest adjustment for earlier school children, adjusting socially is much more a concern for the teen. Fitting in and acceptance are greatly important to them. It is often difficult for them to balance the pressures to conform to what is 'in' culturally with maintaining their own values and style. Decision-making becomes an important skill for them, which you can help to develop. It is a time of overall identity formation. Their U.S. peers are going through this same process, but your child simply has an added piece in identifying themselves culturally.

Determining the proper balance of freedom and responsibility will be a challenge for both you and your children at this age. You are probably coming from a more protective or isolated environment and might need to loosen the reins a bit in order to let them exert and identify their independence. However, providing guidelines for teens to know boundaries and appropriate behavior is important, especially as they face a different structure of what is safe, expected, and allowed. If your kid feels pressured, they might even appreciate being able to use your rules as explanation or excuse with their friends. Stay involved in their activities and make sure to meet their friends, teachers, coaches, etc.

Your older children probably already have an advantage in realizing that truth is contextual and it is important to accept or understand different value systems. At the same time, this can also add to their confusion as they attempt to develop their own value systems and determine truth. As your children shape their worldview and begin problem-solving on their own, be a resource for them and remind them of the roots of their faith which remain constant in their lives.

Choosing a college from overseas is challenging, although with the help of the internet, this task is a bit easier now. Plan ahead to visit schools on furlough before your (or your child's) actual return. Several MKs and their parents have commented that large schools are a bit overwhelming and they have been more drawn to small colleges near family or friends. Others appreciate the diversity in a large school. For kids returning for college, it is often helpful for parents or another trusted adult to be nearby for the first year. College life is a big enough adjustment, but together with culture change, it is good to have a stable person around. Also, consider if staying in the host culture could be the best option for your child.

Sending Agencies— MK Reentry Care

As the sending agency, you have a responsibility for the nurture of the MK, for the sake of the individual, the ongoing ministry, and the needs of local North American churches. It is your agency that initiates, suggests and provides resources, opportunities and a network of support.

Typically, MKs are given minimal attention amidst the many details of missionary reentry. Unless there are specific issues which need to be addressed, more often it is left to the parents to help their kids adjust best to the U.S. Some of the suggestions listed below are already being done very well, but there are also some important reminders or new suggestions as well. In this section, special attention is made not only to empower kids for reentry itself, but also for life beyond the initial reentry - in their development and future decisions as well! The first step is to ensure that MKs know the many valuable resources available to them. The first two parts of this manual (and the resource list) will provide the basics and point MKs and their parents in the right direction. You can add your own resource persons to the list and try to stay familiar with new resources becoming available.

Utilize the resources within your church body itself. Contact a local pastor or lay leader in the area where MKs are returning. Ask him/her to watch out for the MK(s). If possible, choose someone who either is also an MK or is in tune with the unique nature of their experience. Involve the congregation in the life of the missionary family (or the life of an MK returning on their own). Have them help with introducing the kids to U.S. culture (clothes, popular activities, people and places, etc.) or provide rides or a place to stay over holidays for the college kids.

Staying in touch with the mission community can be of great value for the MK upon return. It is a place of identity and belonging. Perhaps a volunteer would send out a newsletter periodically to keep MKs up to date on what is happening in the ever changing missionary community. Now, with online blogs and chat rooms, there are many opportunities available to keep this 'family' connected.

Don't forget to make use of the gifts of mature MKs who have an interest in being a resource for younger MKs. With their lived experience, their social, linguistic, and CC awareness skills, as well as knowledge about int'l education and cultural diversity - they offer valuable input. Invite them to participate and lead at events in which they would be well-suited. Some of them would make fabulous missionaries themselves!

Acknowledge the kids as a part of missionary service. Include them in debriefing and re-entry sessions as well as celebrations and recognition of their time of service. MKs can

benefit greatly and bear much fruit when they are given the same kind of attention given to adults. At missionary gatherings or retreats, provide meaningful sessions for kids which educate and encourage them in their lives. Perhaps a former MK or other knowledgeable individual could write curriculum in order to address pertinent topics such as:

- belonging/identity
- dealing with grief and loss (mourning) – unresolved grief
- reconciliation and healing
- materialism and entitlement
- theological themes of diversity and philosophy of mission
- trust – in others and in God
- stereotypes and racial discrimination

Emphasize life skills (how to get good grades—how to make friends) and provide returning/reentry culture sessions. The workshops could be highly specific and practical, or related to broader issues.

- creating realistic expectations
- building healthy relationships
- boundaries/independence
- introduction to the U.S. church and culture
- U.S. money, geography, history, cultural events, calendar, spelling differences, library skills, and use of non-metric system
- introduction to various careers/occupations
- U.S. youth cultural experiences (movies and music, for example)

Don't wait until there is a crisis to provide professional psychological care from someone familiar with TCK life. Provide on-going support from trusted and familiar individuals within your organization.

Academic testing is very helpful when a child is ready to reenter the U.S. school system. It would be beneficial to also orient the kids to American school systems and academic expectations.

Follow up on MKs a year, two years, and five years after return. How are they doing (psychologically and spiritually)? How did their international upbringing impact their faith journey, career goals, social involvement, etc. Are they involved in the church? Why or why not?

***Information in this manual came from multiple sources, including:**

Written Resources:

Bennett, Janet. 1995/1996. On being Different: A New Perspective on Cultural Marginality. *TESOL Matters*. Part 1 (Dec. 1995/Jan 1996): 5-6. Part 2 (Feb/Mar 1996).

Bowers, Joyce M. ed. 1998. *Raising Resilient MKs: Resources for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers*. Colorado Springs, CO: Association of Christian Schools International.

Echerd, Pam and Alice Arathoon. eds. 1989. *Understanding and Nurturing the Missionary Family*. Compendium of the International Conference on Missionary Kids, Quito, Ecuador. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.

Gittins, Anthony J. 1989. *Gifts and Strangers*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.

Pollock, David C., and Ruth E. Van Reken. 1999. *The Third Culture Kid Experience: Growing Up Among Worlds*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

Schaetti, B. F. and S. J. Ramsey. 1999. The Global Nomad Experience: Living in Liminality. *Mobility* (September): 40-5.

Smith, Carolyn D. ed. 1996. *Strangers at Home: Essays on the Effects of Living Overseas and Coming 'Home' to a Strange Land*. Bayside, NY: Aletheia

Storti, Craig. 1997. *The Art of Coming Home*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

Britten, Samuel L. 1999. TCK World. <http://www.tckworld.com> (accessed September 2, 2006).

Individual Resources: (through formal interviews and informal conversation)

Sharon Bangsund, Joyce Bowers, Mary Campbell, Michelle Collins, Doug and Monica Cox, Bronwen Dietrich, Mackenzie Glander, Sandra Halloway, Dale Howard, Franklin Ishida, Phil and Rene Johnson, David Kehler, Gail Koski, Bruce LaBrack, Jean Larson, Cindy Lindquist, Jo Quanbeck, Tanya Rosland, Heather Roth-Johnson, Bethany Sack, Joel Setterholm, Dan and Cathy Smith, Mark and Roseanne Swanson, Paul Tidemann, Pete Tidemann, Ruth Van Reken, and many many more pilgrims on the journey!

Other Recommended Resources:

Websites:

www.missionarycare.com – missions and mental health resources

www.ismk.org - Int'l Society of Missionary Kids - resources and gatherings

www.mk2mk.org - Campus Crusade for Christ website for MKs

Organizations:

Global Nomads International: chapters at many colleges and universities

Interaction International: www.tckinteract.net or www.interactionintl.org
“Among Worlds” and “Interact” magazines
Training seminars for MK Caregivers
Transition seminars and world-wide events for TCKs

Interchange Institute

Intercultural Press: www.interculturalpress.com/tck.htm
Publishes multiple books and materials for intercultural relations

Families in Global Transition, www.figt.org
Collaborative events, conferences, articles and suggested readings

Barnabas International, www.barnabas.org
Reentry Seminars
Mukappa chapters on Christian College Campuses, mukappa@barnabus.org
“MK Connection” Newsletters, retreats and gatherings

Books:

Don't Pig Out on Junk Food: The MK's Guide to Survival in the U.S. by Alma Daugherty Gordon - MKs offer insights for successful cross-cultural entry to the States.

Letters Never Sent, by Ruth Van Reken

Missionary Children: Caught Between Cultures, by Dr. Doris L. Walters

Adult TCK Survey Results: Writings by Adult TCKs, by Ruth Van Reken

Uprooted Childhoods, by Eidse and Sichel

Understanding Global Nomads, by Norma McCaig

Notes from a Traveling Childhood: Readings from Internationally Mobile Parents and Children. 1994. Foreign Service Youth Foundation.

Let's Make a Move! (activities meant for young children) and *Footsteps Around the World* (for teens) - both these found at www.branchor.com

The Reentry Team, by Neal Pirolo - caring for your returning missionaries

...and much, much more! This is just a start!

General profile of MK/TCKs

This list comes from David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken's book, *The Third Culture Kid Experience: Growing Up Among Worlds*. It in no way is meant to put TCKs in a box, but rather to identify some basic commonalities, and even some of the paradoxes of the traits and experiences TCKs might share. In most cases, there are both positives and negatives to each descriptive attribute.

Having a broader picture of the world around them.

Unsure about which ideologies and values they identify with most.

Personally connect with various lifestyles in the world.

Have a realistically painful view of reality, empathizing to an extreme.

Interested and appreciative of various cultural environments and expression.

Struggle to know about and identify in home culture.

Can adapt quickly and easily in many situations.

Overly cautious about what is culturally appropriate in different situations.

Act like a chameleon, easily blending into their environment.

Extremely aware of cultural differences and able to identify them quickly.

Multicultural diversity is viewed as a norm, a place where they feel comfortable.

Can feel elite or privileged among those around them.

Live in the present and wish to take action immediately.

Exhibit impulsive behavior, indecisiveness, or lack of trust in making plans.

Have a core network of caring and wise adults accessible to them for support.

Lack of trust in adults who have made significant decisions in their lives.

Feel a sense of superiority among those around them because of vast experiences.

Merely *appear* judgmental or arrogant simply in sharing a personal story.

Find stability and identity in relationships rather than place.

Always moving from one thing to the next, seemingly unable to settle down.

Build various and deep relationships quickly.

Hesitant to invest in others because of multiple losses in past.

Early maturity seen in knowledge base, relationship with adults, and communication.

Delayed adolescence in identity formation, decision making, and independence.

Highly and naturally skilled in cross-cultural understanding, observation, social interaction, linguistics, etc.

Working through multiple losses, unresolved grief, and feeling 'terminally unique'.

Have a rather privileged lifestyle in their host culture.

Find a large part of their identity within a system (sending agency).