
THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF PARENTING TCK'S

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THIRD CULTURE KIDS: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A PARENT

Parent of two TCK's

Married to a
diplomat

Lived in 7 different
countries, children 4.

Decide based on
safety, education,
healthcare but it is
our choice to move
not our children's.

Focus on the
positives

Pitfalls

THE POSITIVES

- Learn to be adaptable
- See and experience different cultures and geographical regions
- Can relate to a diverse group of people
- Open-minded
- Bilingual
- Empathic
- As Lauren Wells puts it in her book *Raising up a generation of healthy third culture kids* (2020, p. 5), life as a TCK is both wonderful & difficult, brings joy & grief

DEVELOPMENT

Depends on the age at moving

Needing to rely on family unit when they would normally be independent.

Fears are most likely to be displayed as behaviours, for example, your child may become clingy, display bad behaviours, school grades may dip.

EDUCATION

English speaking

Bridging gaps

Boarding or to keep at post

Different education systems

Don't only befriend expats as they are also transient, not to mention missing out on so much culture.

IDENTITY AND BELONGING

- Rootlessness – where is home?
 - Importance of a strong family identity, rules and traditions can be grounding and offer some stability
 - Need to be accepted and understood
 - Fitting in to a new culture and even back home in the passport country can take a lot of energy and time to re-adjust (may not understand the societal expectations/cultural norms)
 - Often more attached to people with similar experiences than to people from home country
 - Less patriotic
 - As adults, likely to live and work elsewhere. Restlessness: it can be harder to put down roots as an adult and they can become bored if in one place too long
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RELATIONSHIPS

- Family and friends. At home and at post
 - Maintaining connections – exhausting - at least initially keep strong virtual relationships
 - Strong relationships are key: provide as much stability and support at home as possible and do not take on too many commitments early on to ensure you are there for your child, as the spouse/partner is often busy with a new job.
 - Reticence to build new connections, intimacy, distancing from friends (self-protective mechanism), can move on easily when a person is out of sight. Or your child might begin to distance themselves from others in advance of the next move.
 - In adulthood relationships they can fear becoming too attached and/or may lack the skills for developing deeper long-lasting friendships and intimate relationships.
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MENTAL HEALTH

Sense that no-one really understands what you are going through. Do not minimise or dismiss your child's feelings or what they are going through.

Try and see it through their eyes.

Loss of extended family, friends, home, education system, language, familiar customs, control, belongings, pets... All at once!

Loss of any support networks

Being different, for example, learning difficulties, LGBT , mental health itself and how that is viewed in your host country.

'MOCK
FUNERAL'
ALEX GRAHAM
JAMES

- There was no funeral. No flowers.
- No ceremony
- No one had died
- No weeping or wailing. Just in my heart.
- *I can't...*
- But I did anyway,
- And nobody knew I couldn't.
- *I don't want to...*
- But nobody else said they didn't. So, I put down my panic
- And picked up my luggage
- And got on the plane.
- There was no funeral.

(Pollock, David C. and Van Reken, Ruth E. (2009), p. 159)

GRIEF AND LOSS



- Unresolved grief – can come to the surface later in unexpected ways – for example as anxiety
 - Anticipatory grief (grieving in advance of a loss)
 - Rarely time to look back and moving can be with little notice
 - Constant goodbyes – is it worth it when goodbyes can be so painful – lack of attachment to others – keeping people at an emotional distance
 - Often leave a place/friends/things we may never return to.
 - Make sure they have the opportunity to say goodbye and allow time to process the grief rather than diffuse/distract, for example trying to cheer them up. (art, journaling, talk, reflecting on how they feel)
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INVISIBLE LOSSES

(THIRD CULTURE KIDS
GROWING UP AMONG
WORLDS 3RD EDITION
BY DAVID POLLOCK,
RUTH VAN REKEN AND
MICHAEL POLLOCK
(2017, PP. 87-91)

Loss of their world

Loss of status

Loss of lifestyle

Loss of possessions

Loss of relationships

Loss of a past that wasn't

Loss of a past that was

WHAT CAN WE DO AS PARENTS TO HELP?

- Look for both verbal and non-verbal signs that they are struggling with the transition. This can be doubly challenging as you may be struggling yourself but remember your losses may be different to your child's
 - Look out for any other maladaptive/unhealthy behaviours that may be used as coping mechanisms. Seek professional help where necessary
 - Encourage them to keep up with family and friends on visits home
 - Be a good role model. Discuss and acknowledge the challenges of moving with your children to allow them to reflect on their own feelings and experiences, Name the losses, it doesn't take away the loss or grief but can help them to process it and to find a solution/way forward.
 - Where possible involve them in decisions and learn about the next transition together
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