

## □ ADOLESCENTS ABROAD — VIDEO REVIEW □

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teens



The adolescent years can be a difficult period for any individual. Many of us may look back on this time of our lives with mixed feelings, recalling that our moments of triumph were easily overwhelmed by our many anxieties. Growing-up as part of a foreign service family presents adolescents with additional challenges to overcome as they move through this key phase of life.

*Adolescents Abroad* is a video-program prepared by the Family Liaison Office of the United States Department of State to assist families in coping with some of the issues that may arise in raising children in a foreign service environment. It features Dr. Elmore Rigamore, State Department Psychiatrist, and five discussion participants with foreign service experience: an educator, a social worker, a mother of seven children, and two young adults.

The program provides an overview of the three stages of adolescence, and outlines the physical, emotional, and intellectual changes that a young person must go through on his or her road to becoming an adult. These

changes result in an inevitable ebb and flow of tensions within the growing individual. Mood swings, combined with the teenager's restless desire to sample the independence of adult life, often make for tempestuous years for the family as a whole.

One of the adolescent's greatest needs is to initiate the process of separating oneself from the family and to develop the self-reliance needed for adulthood. However, this is not such an easy task for young members of foreign service families. Frequent moves make them less likely to form strong friendships outside of their family and increase their reliance upon their immediate family as a source of emotional support. As part of a unique and visible community abroad, they are constrained by concerns about the impact their actions may have upon the position of their parents, and may be less free to experiment with new forms of self-expression that set themselves apart from their parents' generation and are the teenager's stock and trade.

The video directs attention to the problems associated with frequent moves and readjustments to different cultures. Dr. Rigamore, and the discussion participants, emphasize that for the adolescent a move is a traumatic experience. The young person must leave behind their familiar milieu and start afresh in a new home, a new school, a new peer group, and possibly, find a new boyfriend or girlfriend. In addition, foreign service teenagers must also come to grips with living in the midst of a new culture that might be vastly different from that to which they are accustomed. While the parents might wish their family to learn all they can about the people and cultural institutions of their new land, their children may be more interested in

keeping in touch with the latest trends in pop culture back home. Some support should be given to this desire, perhaps by subscribing to magazines that will keep teenagers abreast with North American fashion, movies, and music.

Understandably, many children long for the friendships they left behind and are reluctant to venture out to make new friends, when they know that they will just have to leave them behind when they move again. The video argues that parents can help their children overcome some of these fears by setting an example through their own efforts to maintain personal and family friendships over the years and over the miles. Parents can also work with the school or other members of the community to establish a program through which newcomers become acquainted with other youngsters who have already made the adjustment to life at the new post.

Dr. Rigamore emphasizes the importance of an open dialogue between the parents and their adolescent children about an upcoming move. Adolescents

Moving can be viewed as a process with four stages: saying goodbye to the old neighborhood and friends; disengaging oneself physically and emotionally from the old life; moving, unpacking, and initial familiarization with the new surroundings; and finally, a period of readjustment.