

A. FOREIGN SERVICE LIFE

The Ripple Effect

One person is posted overseas; dozens of people are affected. Family, friends, colleagues and professional contacts will experience some degree of upheaval. All the friends and relations of every member of the family are affected as well, your parents, your children's playmates, your teenager's boyfriends and girlfriends. It will affect plans for schooling, real estate purchases, spousal career management and financial planning.

Sorting, packing and compiling inventories are tiring and confusing. It is the mental stress and anxiety, however, that create the most difficult problems. Careful planning, realistic expectations, patience and a sense of humour are the most valuable tools to handle these situations.

A positive attitude creates an atmosphere in which new experiences can enrich one's life rather than merely provide situations which have to be endured. Relax. Hundreds of foreign service families have done this before and lived to enjoy the experience, if only in retrospect, so can you.

Leaving Friends and Family

An individual becomes more independent. A family become more interdependent. A single person, without the reassuring presence of familiar colleagues, close friends and relatives with whom to share and consult, must draw upon personal resources to cope with the turmoil of an international move. Members of a family depend upon each other almost exclusively for friendship and nurture, for the sharing of memories and experiences. The nuclear family becomes even more tightly knit in the absence of relatives and familiar neighbours. This closeness often lasts beyond the posting. The flip side of this, of course, is that this very closeness, both physically and psychologically, may build family tension to the breaking point. This is especially true early in a posting, before you make friends at the mission.

Any change is stressful. The complexity of the many changes involved in a move to a foreign country increases the potential for stress: a new house, a new school, new neighbours (no neighbours), a new language, a new job, no new job (for the spouse), a new cuisine, new products, a new culture, and a new lifestyle.

Posting and Re-entry Assistance

Once the assignment has been confirmed, and you know where and when you are going, the resources of the Department are available to you: the Posting Centre provides post reports, education reports and counselling, spousal employment counselling and pre-posting workshops. Most important of all, you have access to people who have been there before. The Foreign