

Families

The successful integration of a family into the host country, and its reintegration back into Canada depends upon the successful adaptation of every member of that unit. A family is not a static unit. Experiences change individuals within the family and shared experiences change the family. A posting is such an experience. So, in addition to the normal progression of changes, the foreign service family must learn to manage geographic and career mobility as other families manage measles.

i. Children

Infants and young children (parents can decide when their children are no longer young children) are self-centred and very attuned to how their surroundings affect them directly. They will usually adjust smoothly if they are kept well rested and comfortable. Everything is new and exciting to young children so they will not regard a new cultural environment as strange at all, just more new things to be learned.

Two factors seem most important in the adjustment of children to a new home locale; the number of friends they make in the new environment; and, parental attitudes, especially the mother's.

As soon as residence is established, or while in the hotel if the stay is more than a few days, you should make an effort to find appropriate playmates for your children. Playing and having fun make happy children, and happy children like it wherever they live.

Between the ages of 3 and 5 children are very susceptible to emotional stress and fearful of separation from loved ones. Their vocabulary is still small, their concept of distance and time not well developed and their potential for anxiety is great. It takes no small measure of skill and love to help them through the transition period.

Help them say good-bye to favourite people. Let them help make arrangements for keeping in touch by mail, tape or pictures. Reassure them again and again of your love and continued presence. When you must leave a beloved nanny behind after a posting, make sure you take the time to prepare them to accept you as an adequate alternative. If you have not been in the habit of giving them baths, reading to them, playing with them, fixing their cuts and consoling tears, they may not find you much of a comfort.

Needless to say, it helps a great deal if the parents remain as constant as possible. After all, parents are the centre of their universe. A favourite cuddle toy, a special book or blanket or sweater, and more hugging, love, patience and strength than you knew you had are needed. This is not the time for new clothes, new books, and the breaking of old habits.