

D. RETURNING TO CANADA AS AN ADOLESCENT

Who Am I? Where Do I Belong?

As a foreign service child you have more than enough reason to ask yourself these questions. They represent the biggest problem faced by an internationally mobile family.

The dictionary defines adolescence as the period between puberty and maturity; the time of growing up; the years between childhood and adulthood. As a person in your teen years, you are lessening the dependencies and restrictions of childhood, acquiring the independence and responsibilities of adulthood, increasing your awareness of the world around you and attempting to define your place within it.

It is a time of trial and error; a time of trying new ideas, clothes, hairstyles, lifestyles and experiences; a time of searching for your own identity and establishing yourself as a person in your own right. Conducting the quest for self-identity against a changing geographic, cultural and social background is not only stimulating and exciting, it can be confusing, uncertain and frightening. At times you may feel you are the loneliest person in the world, and nobody will ever understand how you feel. As though that were not enough, your parents are making you move once again. Home to them may not seem home to you. This will be more difficult than any other posting because it is charged with expectation, anticipation and emotion.

You are the product of an internationally mobile family and the benefits may not be apparent until you finally reach adulthood. In the meantime,

- Who are you? Where do you belong?
- Are you a Canadian? A citizen of the world?
- Are you a special person of privileged position? A nobody?
- What are you going to do when you grow up?
- Will you find friends in the new place? Will your old friends forget you?
- How are you going to maintain this mobile lifestyle? Do you want to?

It is going to be difficult to sort out who you are, what you want to be and how to accomplish your goals at the same time as you are establishing yourself in a new circle of friends. It means finding a place for yourself within already existing groups, most of whom share a common background totally different from yours. You will be simultaneously more mature and more naive than most of your Canadian peers.

Sorting out all the experiences and information will not be easy but it can be done. Growing up in many cultures may lead to short term confusion over where you belong, but it gives you the opportunity to become a more interesting, tolerant, and multi-faceted person.