

# **MOBILITY**

## **Information for Staff who work with Service Children**

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## **Introduction**

Dobson, Henthorne & Lynas (200) reported on the causes of pupil mobility in the UK and the implications of high mobility on strategies to raise educational achievement. They considered a mobility rate of more than 20% to be high, where mobility rate is defined as:

$$\frac{\text{Number of pupils leaving and number of pupils joining}}{\text{Total school role}} \times 100$$

Their research found that schools with a high number of service children had some of the highest mobility rates and also had the least stable core population.

Mobility is an inevitable part of service life. Staff working with service children need to have some insight into the experience that frequent moving may have on development.

## **Distribution of the Service Children population**

At the time of writing there were 12,200 pupils being educated overseas in Service Childrens Education Schools located in destinations around the world in Germany, Belgium, The Netherlands, Brunei, Italy, The Falkland Islands, Denmark, Cyprus, Belize and Gibraltar. The biggest group of pupils is in Germany, the Cyprus Command has the second largest group. In addition to this, it is estimated that there are 1,000 additional service children overseas who are educated in schools outside the SCE system.

It is estimated that within the UK there are 80,000 school aged service children and of these about 10,000 will be in boarding schools. It is quite apparent that the bulk of service children are in the UK and therefore the information contained in this document is as important to teachers in the UK as it is to those working for Service Childrens Education.

## **Pattern of moving for service children**

Some service personnel will be posted to one location for long periods of time (see appendix A). Others will have shorter postings every 2 - 3 years. Some personnel will move together in block postings or regimental moves whilst other more individually in trickle postings.

Even when there is a large regimental move, there will be a number of families who join or leave at non-standard times because they have been promoted or perhaps a specialist posted to a position. Those who are members of corps such as the Adjutant General's Corps or REME or members of the RAF will move by trickle posting.

While a service family is overseas, the serving parent will often experience a number of periods of deployment from the overseas location. The frequency of deployments for one unit can be seen in Appendix A. There were regular deployments over a 9 year period while the unit was based in one location in Germany. It is important to be cognisant of the fact that children may experience separation from the serving parent quite frequently during an overseas tour. Often such deployments will be to dangerous places and therefore it is likely that the whole family will have an increased level of anxiety about the safety of their loved one.

Following a move overseas, children will experience changes in most aspects of their lives including: residence, school, teacher, friends, climate, frequency of family reunions, change in social activities, change in sleeping habits and eating habits (the later two will be particular noticeable in a destination such as Cyprus). These changes will require some emotional energy during the transition period. It is worth noting that an adult who experienced all these changes simultaneously would be more likely to exhibit stress related difficulties. Children will also experience a sense of loss when they are separated from people and things which have been important to them. It is, therefore, essential to be aware that a move can be a very emotional time for a child and that it will take a period of time to adjust to all the changes that have occurred.

## **The Transition Cycle (see Appendix B)**

A geographical move will be accompanied by a period of psychological adjustment to the associated changes:

### **Settled period**

Before the family knows about the move, they will be settled in their present location. They will have a good knowledge of the area, know how to get around, where to access facilities and activities. They will have friends and people will know them in terms of their skills and abilities and the contribution that they can make to group activities. There will usually be some sense of closeness to the others around them in the community. Each member of the family will usually have a strong sense of identity.

### **Disconnecting phase**

As soon as a family are told that they will be moving they will begin a period of disconnecting from their current situation. This will be characterised by individuals spending more time and energy thinking about where they are going to, rather than where they currently are. It is likely that energy will be expended on planning ahead rather than trying to adjust to and live in their present environment. Whilst for some family members there may be a great sense of excitement and anticipation about the future, for others there may be great feelings of sadness about leaving everything that is familiar. Some children will begin to develop negative feelings about where they currently are and will break friendships because it is easier to think about leaving something that you don't feel positive about. A child who is moving may inadvertently be excluded by peers because of the move e.g. not being asked to be part of a football team because they will leave before the end of the season. This period of disconnecting may begin 3 – 6 months prior to the planned departure date.

### **Moving**

At the time of the actual move there will often be a sense of complete and utter disruption and chaos as almost everything familiar in an individual's life changes. This period of disruption can be prolonged for a service family as they may have to leave their quarter to move in to temporary accommodation before getting their overseas passage. They may then possibly move in to temporary accommodation in their new area before finally being allocated a quarter. There will usually be a long period without personal possessions as these have been packed up and sent ahead or packed up so that the quarter can be cleaned ready for 'march out'. This means that during the transition, particularly during the actual days of the move, many familiar routines will be disrupted and this will often be unsettling for children.

During the days around the move the whole family will experience a range of emotions, both positive and negative. There will be feelings of excitement and anticipation about what lies ahead as well as sadness about what has been left behind. In an environment where everything is unfamiliar, even simple tasks can seem much harder to achieve and this may lead to a temporary loss of confidence and a sense of uncertainty.

There may be a loss of sense of identity because you don't know anyone beyond the family and your sense of belonging is "suspended". There will often be a lowering of self-esteem during this time.

### Reconnecting phase

When the family arrive in their new location, they will be busy meeting new acquaintances and colleagues and finding out about the area. There will often be a great sense of excitement and possibly a feeling of being on holiday, particularly in a location like Cyprus. However, these euphoric feelings may soon disappear with individuals feeling overwhelmed by the differences and changes that they are experiencing. Children may find it difficult to join in with their new peer groups, because their interests and hobbies have been very different in their previous location.

Everybody varies in the amount of time that it will take them to begin to feel fully involved in their new location but it will usually take at least six months for most people to feel fully settled, however for others it may take even longer than this. The length of time it takes to feel connected will depend on the number of factors that have changed and it may be that those children who move as part of a regimental change can adapt and adjust more quickly because they already have relationships with others who have moved.

It can be seen from the transition cycle that if a unit moves on a regular two year basis then the children may never begin to feel fully involved because they know there will be another move coming up in the near future. It is possible that after frequent moves, some young people will invest very little in a new location because of the feeling of a lack of permanence.

Service families will experience frequent transitions as a consequence of their own moves or as a result of others around them moving. This will lead to frequent experiences of loss and separation.

There are some specific transitions which need to be taken into account for service families.

- ❖ Young people returning to the UK after a long period overseas may find many things have changed and that aspects of life which most people take for granted such as using public transport or using telephones may be skills that they need to learn in order to fit the UK environment.
- ❖ When a service family leave the forces and return to 'civvy street' this will be a particular period of adjustment for the serving member but it may also mean significant changes for the rest of the family in terms of the environment that they are living in and their lifestyle. They may experience a huge sense of loss and longing for the service environment they have left behind.

- ❖ Many children will have moved within different education systems because of deployments to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. It is important to be attuned to the fact that children may not have been taught the national curriculum in these areas or may not have been taught in English.
- ❖ Sometimes service personnel may have married in order that their partner and children can move overseas. These children may be grappling with adjusting to being part of a stepfamily as well as all of the other factors that have already been mentioned.

### **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (see Appendix C)**

The main focus in all schools at the moment is to increase attainment and to ensure that there is demonstrable progress for all pupils. It can be seen on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs that cognitive needs come quite a long way up the scale and it is unlikely that a child will be motivated to achieve in that area if needs lower down the hierarchy are not being met.

Needs in the areas of belonging and self esteem will have been created during the transition process. It will be important to try to ensure that needs in these areas are addressed as quickly as possible after a move, as pupils who feel accepted, valued and confident will be better prepared for learning. As mentioned above some children may feel that they or their families are at risk because of dangerous deployments and they may need reassurance and support during the parent's deployment.

### **Third Culture Kids**

David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken wrote about the Third Culture Kid (TCK) Experience 1999. A TCK is defined as 'a person who has spent a significant part of his or her development years living outside the parent culture'. A TCK will develop a relationship with the parent culture (1<sup>st</sup> culture) and the culture they currently live in (2<sup>nd</sup> culture). Elements of each culture are assimilated in to the TCK's life experience but the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of a similar background (3<sup>rd</sup> culture).

Children from many different groups will fall within this definition e.g. children of diplomats, missionaries, armed forces and multinational companies. Pollock and Van Reken describe the profile of a TCK and the benefits and challenges which a mobile childhood can create. Some of these are listed below.

#### **A Cultural Chameleon**

##### *Benefit*

Able to adapt to different cultures after spending a short time observing what is going on.

### *Challenge*

Peers may feel they can't trust the TCK whose behaviour appears to change according to the group they are in. May have difficulty establishing their own value system because they become so used to changing between different systems.

### Decisiveness

#### *Benefit*

Many TCKs will have a strong sense of the importance of 'now' as a consequence of their life style.

#### *Challenge*

Some TCKs will feel there is little point in making long term plans as these are inevitably thwarted by parental moves. This can lead to difficulties in planning and making decisions which involve any sort of time commitment.

### Response to change

#### *Benefit*

TCKs will feel confident and comfortable in a changing environment.

#### *Challenge*

Adult TCKs may actively seek to change jobs, move house etc. They feel rootless and things always feel temporary.

### Relationships

#### *Benefit*

TCKs will have a wide network of friends. They will often establish deeper relationships more quickly.

#### *Challenge*

It can be difficult to maintain all the relationships. The speed of establishing relationships may feel uncomfortable to peers who are not TCKs.

### Experience of Loss

#### *Benefit*

TCKs have real experience of relationships ending which can help to prepare them for other losses they will experience in life. They learn 'closure skills'.

#### *Challenge*

May be reluctant to become too involved to avoid the pain of separation. They may end friendships to make leaving easier. They may accumulate grief as a result of successive losses of friends.

## Level of Maturity

### *Benefit*

TCKs will often appear mature compared to their peers in areas such as general knowledge of the world, relationships with adults, multilingual skills and in their confidence of travelling.

### *Challenge*

TCKs may be delayed in achieving some of the tasks of adolescence. The links with different cultures may make it harder to establish a sense of identity. It may be harder to achieve independence because of impaired decision making or the lack of autonomy that may occur due to frequent moves.

## **Ways of Helping Children**

As soon as you know that a child will be moving to a new area you should help them to find out about their new location and their new school. Establishing an e-mail link with a pupil in their new school will enable the pupil to begin to make at least one friendship prior to the move. This will also allow them to find out about the new school environment that they will move to.

You should involve pupils in preparing an 'Induction Pack' for new pupils which explains the important things they need to know about the school from a pupil point of view. Ideally this induction pack should be updated and developed by each new arrival.

Pupils should be invited to be 'mentors' for new arrivals, fulfilling certain tasks such as showing the pupil around, making sure that they follow the routine and that they have someone to talk to at break times.

New pupils should be encouraged to talk about where they have been. Pupils who are due to leave should be given opportunities to talk about where they are going to.

It will be helpful to create opportunities for pupils to talk about their experiences of moving with others so that they can learn from each others successes.

Teachers should provide information about their daily classroom routine for both pupils and parents who are new to the school. This will avoid problems such as children not having the correct kit on the scheduled day.

There should be farewell rituals for all pupils. Often the pupils themselves will have good ideas about the best way of celebrating farewells.

There should be welcome rituals for new pupils.

Records about all aspects of a pupil's progress as well as their current targets should be kept up to date so that work can be set at an appropriate level in the next school

In American literature they talk about providing a pupil with a RAFT:  
Reconcile conflicts before leaving.  
Affirm relationships and achievements.  
Plan farewell.  
Think about the future.

As mentioned above young people often create conflict to make the moving easier and it is important not only that they resolve these conflicts but that they develop conflict resolution skills as children who move frequently may avoid doing this.

It is important to help a child leave with a clear sense of who they are, who their friends are and what they have achieved. This will help them to move with a greater sense of identity and a higher level of self esteem.

It is important to help pupils think about their future. This will prevent them dwelling on what may be sad times and allow them to think constructively about what the future will hold.

It is important that all adults working with a child, including the parents, are aware of the transition process and the challenges that this may present to young people.

Pupils need to be aware of the transition process and aware that they may create conflict in order to ease the pain of separation. Hopefully with the further development of Emotional Literacy within the curriculum all pupils will be encouraged to talk about their emotions and to try and understand where these come from. An impending or recent move will be a good time to talk with groups of children about all of the feelings that it evokes.

It is important to remember that it will take several months for a pupil to feel fully settled in their new environment. In addition the child may have unresolved grief about some of the separation they have experienced. You should be aware of the indicators of stress/separation anxiety and seek advice should these persist (see Appendix D).

There is a good deal of literature, particularly in United States, about mobility and its impact on children. **It is strongly recommended that all those who work with mobile children should read “The Third Culture Kid Experience” by David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken.**

## **Useful References**

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- Schubeck D. M. Lets Move Together, Suitcase Press - 1998
- Roman B. D. Lets Move Overseas  
BR Anchor Publishing - 1999
- The League of Super Movers: My Moving Adventure  
BF Anchor Publishing - 2001

**Useful Websites:**

[www.interculturalpress.com](http://www.interculturalpress.com)  
[books@interculturalpress.com](mailto:books@interculturalpress.com)

<http://globalnomads.association.com>  
[info@gni.org](mailto:info@gni.org)

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