



## Contents

### 1. Mentoring for success Pg 2

How leaders can support third culture families

### 2. Stress in Children Pg 5

By Steve Bryant

**"A third culture kid is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside their parents' culture."**

## Mentoring for success; how leaders can support third culture families

Back in 2003 we ran an Educare article on mentoring and the responsibility of agencies to care for their children. The emphasis there was on the need for mentoring support and how families can benefit from it. We also wrote that it only works effectively if the family are willing to listen to advice, is based on a relationship rather than just hierarchy and structure, and if the mentor is competent to advise. That competence should ideally be from both experience and knowledge. These observations still apply nearly 9 years later, but in this article the aim is to provide a basic tool to help leaders work as mentors. The idea behind it is to encourage the mentor and the parents to ask the right questions in the first place, and then talk in more detail about maintaining the things that are going well and changing those that are not.

The list of questions is neither exhaustive, nor is it a formula. Not all of these questions are relevant every time the local leader meets with the family. If the leader does not feel qualified to discuss some detailed issues, it may be best to focus on the more general questions and refer to outside help. This could come from someone else in the host country, from the agency's own TCK Consultants, or from specialist agencies like SHARE and AERC.

The discussions are not meant to be just a box-ticking and duty-performing exercise. As already mentioned, talking with parents about their children is something that is built on relationship and trust. The clear purpose of this is to provide support, NOT surveillance or some way for leaders to control fellow workers. We have a duty of care as an organisation, and all good agencies and entities have a family and family-friendly ethos. These factors mean that we must care as best possible for our children, but we don't interfere with the parents and normal family life. We can guide and advise, but we cannot and should not prevent parents from making their own decisions for their children, whether we agree with them or not at times. The only exception would be if we sense real danger to the children from careless or abusive actions or negligence.

Some of the questions are more relevant when making a decision about a new option, either at the start of a child's formal education or when a major transition is considered. However, it is good to realistically and regularly review progress even when the children are well established in the school or home-based option they are using.

### For all Children - general welfare questions

1. What are the impressions of the children's general well-being?
2. If they have recently arrived how well are they adjusting?
3. Do the children have the friends they need? Are the main friends local children, local adults, other TCKs or agency staff? If the children are isolated, then how can this be reviewed and changed?
4. If home leave is coming up, how well prepared are they? How advanced are the practical arrangements for education and other needs?
5. If definitive re-entry is coming up, discuss the same issues as for q4 with the proviso that sorting out the necessary details now is even more important.
6. If definitive re-entry is coming up, do the parents plan to move directly to one place and stay there? (If not then they should be encouraged to change plans, or find a more permanent location as soon as possible after arrival and temporary accommodation.)
7. How is the children's health – both physical and emotional/psychological?
8. What about physical fitness and exercise, especially if living in big cities? If the children are lacking exercise and play opportunities, and this is having a negative impact what can realistically be done to improve that?



### Educational review

#### For all children

1. How well are they doing compared to norms for their age group?

2. If the answer to question 1 is unknown, what can be done to check up – teachers in home country, education consultants in the sending office, or with specialists such as AERC, SHARE, Anchor, or testing in an international school....?
3. Are the parents & children happy with the current option? If no, what are the alternatives? If there are no realistic alternatives, what can be done to make the option work better?
4. Are the children being issued with adequate educational records?
5. How does the education they are receiving compare with that of the passport country for re-entry?

### **For Local Schools**

1. Are you happy with the ethos of the school? Both the formal stated school policy and the informal classroom and playground sub-culture.
2. Do you have a good relationship with the teachers and school management?
3. Are the children integrated at all?
4. If the answer to number 3 is no, then how do the children cope with this?
5. Is there any evidence of bullying, including name-calling?
6. Are the academic standards good enough?
7. Are the discipline standards good enough and discipline methods fairly used?
8. If the school is in a shame-based culture, are children and/or parents blamed and shamed for poor academic performance?
9. If shaming is being used, even if not directly on the TCK or other foreign children, what impact is this having on the child?
10. Are safety standards good enough?
11. As children progress up the school are they being taught enough critical thinking skills or is there a heavy emphasis on rote-learning?



12. Does the school have enough resources and equipment to properly teach at the higher levels?
13. What active measures are you taking to keep up with what the children learn in class and from school peers? If they are learning unacceptable standards and behaviour how do you process this with the child?
14. If the school is struggling is there any way you could help out?
15. What positive things are the children drawing from their school experience – local friends, appreciation of the country and culture, language skills....

### **For Schooling at Home**

1. Are the children making enough progress at a relatively normal rate?
2. How is the progress on pure home schooling being assessed? Encourage real objective assessment if not currently being assessed.
3. If using a correspondence school are you happy with the materials, the delivery service and the feedback from tutors?
4. If using an internet based programme, are you happy with the curriculum, speed of marking and feedback from tutors? Is the technology working and reliable?
5. If the answer to 3 or 4 is no, is there anything you can do about this, anything others can do on the family's behalf to help? E.g. the sending office TCK Consultant to phone, even visit the school if possible.
6. Are costs an issue with the correspondence or internet school?
7. Are the materials portraying a balanced view of life? Are they excessively secular and politically correct or do they give a distorted view of our beliefs and values (even from "trusted" sources)? Are the parents open to change if the materials are not adequate or appropriate?
8. Do the resources used meet the re-entry needs (short-term and long-term) of the child?
9. Do the resources overemphasise one style of learning – e.g. all on CDs or DVDs, fill in the blanks exercises, rote learning, all reading and no activity.....etc
10. If yes for question 9, what measures could be put in place to improve this?
11. Are the parents under pressure from other strong voices in the host country (including from other agencies) to choose a certain set of resources?
12. What about socialisation: does the child meet enough other children for their well-being?

13. Are the children enjoying learning at home?
14. Are you enjoying teaching at home?
15. How well can the children stay on task – any distractions? If yes, is there anything that could be done to reduce distractions?
16. What positive things are the children drawing from education at home? E.g. less time wasted in classroom crowd control, one to one attention meaning more work can be done faster, strong family bonds...

### **For International Schools**

1. How well is the school matching up to the long-term academic re-entry needs?
2. How well is the child performing academically?
3. How is academic performance measured? Are the report cards, forms or transcripts easy to interpret?
4. Is the school struggling for staff? If yes, what effect does this have on teaching?
5. Are the teachers adequately trained? Are there any who overemphasise certain learning methods? If yes, are these detrimental to the child and are there any issues that require a visit to discuss things?
6. Do the children have enough time for sport and aesthetic subjects?
7. If the mother tongue is not English, is there any provision for mother tongue teaching in the timetable? If no, what can be done for them to learn the academic mother tongue?
8. If the school is struggling is there any way you could help out?
9. Are the costs an issue?
10. Are you aware of any tensions towards certain groups of TCKs or parents?
11. What are the positive things they are gaining from their school? E.g. Friends, good relationship with teachers, happy at school.....



### **If Boarding**

1. How are the children coping with separation?
2. How are you coping with it?
3. Do you get enough contact from the school to let you know how the children are?
4. How do the children relate to the house parents?
5. How do they relate to the teachers?
6. Do they have friends there and how long are those friends likely to stay?
7. Are you able to see the children regularly in term time (if living near enough)?
8. Do you see any benefits in the children from the boarding experience?

### **If Mixing Options**

Examples include attending a local school with home-based academic mother tongue learning, English language school and Korean Saturday school, or correspondence mixed with home education.

1. Is the child coping with the workload?
2. Are you coping with the required supervision?
3. Do the children have adequate time to socialise?
4. If using one main school option with supplementary lessons, is the school aware of the extra learning the children do?
5. Does the school make any allowances for supplementary learning? If not, would they be open to discussion if the children are under time pressure?
6. If there are 2 payments to be made, is cost an issue?
7. If the children are struggling to do all of the required work, are there any measures that you could take to relieve this?

## Stress in Children

Children can and do suffer from stress with all its related problems. There is plenty of literature available on stress, but for every book about managing it in children there are four others aimed at adults. That bias in understanding can come through into international organisations where all too often adult counsel and support is offered in difficult times, but nothing or very little is given to the children. This has been clearly shown in cases of evacuation, although one exception already noted in a previous edition of Educare was when children were evacuated from a war-torn Central Asian country, but continued with their school in a neighbouring country. While in the relocated school the staff gave the children plenty of time and space to express themselves and work through the stress of evacuation in that supportive environment. This type of support for children should be a role model to the rest of us.

Stress comes from many sources, but transition stress for TCKs is a universal experience. If they are not in transition themselves then friends around them always are. Transition brings the double factors of loss - of familiar places, friends, possessions and sometimes pets - and of the need to readjust to the new situation. This seems to be a never-ending cycle for TCKs therefore a constant background of stress is a natural result. Another standard stress factor is living as a foreigner in the host culture. However well accepted a child is, even fully integrated into school, there are almost always differences that are very hard to overcome - different ethnicity that immediately identifies us as foreigners, different cultural practices at home and different understanding of key life values and much more. In some cases children just learn to live with this, even enjoying their inside knowledge of two or more cultures, but for many others they would love to be that bit less different in order to fit in better. On top of this are the usual school and academic pressures that can be heavier in some cultures than others - especially those where academic achievement gives honour to the whole family and failure brings shame.

Reactions to stress can be grouped together and likened to the following animals



Defiant donkey - characterised by defiance, hostility and aggression sometimes directed internally as self-destructive behaviour. The donkey fights and lashes out against his situation.



Weary sloth - passive behaviour, tiredness and the inability to concentrate, a lack of energy faced with the many changes needed, therefore the child doesn't even try at times



Confused chimpanzee - uncertainty as to what to do, relying on others to take a lead, not able to make even simple decisions because they think they don't know how.



Blend-in chameleon - copying the behaviour of others, passive and eager to please, always saying yes just to fit in and be accepted.



Regressive puppy - behaviour goes backwards to match that of much younger children. This includes babyish toys coming back out, familiar objects giving some sense of security, hiding behind the parents, a reversion to bed wetting and soiling, and tantrum reactions to relatively minor problems.



Hiding hedgehog - this child retreats from life to hide behind books, screens, games, jigsaws, schoolwork....anything that avoids stressful human contact. In cases where abuse or some other very negative experience causes the stress any places that remind the child of where it took place will be avoided, as will people who remind them of the offender/s.

The first step to helping children through stress is to recognise that there is a problem. All too easily parents can ignore warning signs in the hope that the problem will go away by itself. In other cases there may be an element of denial and disbelief that their own children could be suffering from stress. Once a problem is recognised then the source or sources can be found and possible solutions worked out. There will be cases where the problems don't just go away, even if the parents give supportive understanding; there is no shame in knowing that outside help is needed and going to get it.

It may be that help is needed to identify whether the problems are a storm that your children can ride with your support, or if long-term changes are needed. These changes could be made to the children's situation such as switching from an unsuitable home education programme to a better one, changing schools in the same city or finding a suitable option for socialisation by taking them to an out of school club. In the most difficult cases it could be a change for the whole family by moving away from the high-stress living situation. Examples here would include moving from socially isolated small town settings to study in an international school, or moving teenagers out of highly restrictive societies to more open ones. Working these things through with team and field leaders is part of the process in making major decisions like these, but it is also very valuable to consult with outside professional support.

Even if professional or other outside help is required there are plenty of things that we can do to support our children. This applies primarily to parents, but can also apply to other concerned adults in the agency, or school or youth group that the children attend. Whatever else we do or don't do our children need to know our unconditional love that doesn't change despite all difficulties.

It's a great idea to have fun together. This doesn't necessarily mean spending a lot of money on sophisticated activities, it may be something as simple as reading a favourite story but taking that bit longer to read more of it, or it could be making cakes or other food preparation for fun as well as to eat. Physical activity releases natural endorphins and makes us feel better, so make time for sport, dance or some other exercise routine. Many children now, not just TCKs, grow up in huge cities and get far too little physical activity for their general health. We need to be ready to counter that with deliberately planned exercise when needed. Simple things too like stress balls can be useful. Listening to familiar music that they enjoy and eating good food that they like all help.

Related to this is finding something that the children can succeed at and encouraging them to go for it. Are they good academically, in sport, music or making craft items? Are they usually very helpful around the home? Make a deliberate effort to give them plenty of praise when they do well at these things.

It's normal that children pick up on parental attitudes. If the parents are stressed by the situation they live in then the children become stressed, if the parents are negative - especially in transition situations with the associated chaos and culture shock then it's no surprise when the children act in the same way. Because of this it is vital that parents should be as positive as possible, where there are frustrations and stress they should not be loaded on to the children. Alternative routes of expression such as having one or two trusted friends and mentors who will listen and help would be much better. On the other hand parents need to be ready to hear the children vent stress and frustrations, even saying outrageous things sometimes. There are limits should it come to insults towards individuals or host country nationals generally, but normally expressing feelings like this to parents helps relieve the tension.

Through changes and stressful times it is good to keep a routine and maintain stability. In transition times stick to normal times for meals, stories, devotionals and for going to bed. Keep up special familiar activities such as a family games night, pancakes for weekend breakfast, skype calls to grandparents on Wednesdays - or whatever normal family rituals you have. In the difficult evacuation year at our school in Senegal one thing that helped all of us (adults as well as the children) was the maintenance of normal school academic and social activities. It is also important to maintain standards of what is and is not acceptable. It can be all too easy to accept bad behaviour because of misplaced sympathy and tolerance.



All of us need friends. For children in constant transition that is one of the biggest difficulties they face. Is there any way you as parents can help? How about school staff reading this - do you have buddy systems for children arriving to the school? If a lot of children leave at once, particularly from small, close-knit school communities, is there anything done to help bond the ones who stay?

This article is very much an introduction to the theme with only a few general pointers to help. If you would like to contact us on this issue, either privately or for the more open forum of a future Educare we would welcome that. Likewise we welcome contributions and comments on any of the issues we raise in Educare.

**Educare** is a free e-magazine produced for all TCKs, parents of TCKs, international school staff and any others supporting third culture families.

It can be forwarded on to anyone who would benefit from it - just check that it is wanted before forwarding it. Direct subscriptions from [mk\\_tck@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:mk_tck@yahoo.co.uk)