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# Educare



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

## Security in an Insecure World

We live in an insecure world. At the time of writing the latest outrages being widely reported are the attack on the shopping mall in Nairobi, suicide bombings against Catholic worshippers in Peshawar and Boko Haram strikes against an agricultural school in Northern Nigeria. This is all added to the constant backdrop of violence and civil war in the Middle East. Travelling and working overseas can substantially increase that danger to ourselves and our families, even travel outside of these obviously troubled areas.

Over 10 years ago we shared in Educare our own experiences of living with insecurity in Senegal. During the 1990s when we worked there, many West African countries suffered from civil wars, armed rebellions and constant instability. Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Guinea and eventually Cote d'Ivoire all saw upheaval, evacuation of foreigners and refugee crises. Senegal has enjoyed relative stability except for a low-level guerrilla war in the Casamance region - it was this that we were caught up in. We were forced in 1997 to evacuate our home and the international school site in the Casamance to live as exiles on a temporary site near Dakar for the remainder of our service there until 2001. We saw and experienced first-hand the struggles many of the children faced in coming to terms with the evacuation. We also saw others coming into Dakar from neighbouring countries after harrowing journeys to escape civil war and violence.



The reasons for insecurity faced by our workers vary with the country of service. In some countries it may be political instability or civil unrest, whereas in others with relatively stable democracies the crime rates in certain places can be dangerously high. The political unrest may lead to anti-foreigner sentiments, with some factions aiming to gain an advantage by stirring up xenophobia and hatred through propaganda and other means. Even if foreigners are not viewed as 'the enemy', they can very easily be caught up in conflict - to the point of being caught literally in

crossfire. Foreigners may be viewed as kidnap targets along with wealthier nationals for financial gain from ransoms. Terrorism is a worldwide risk, but obviously a much greater threat in some countries than in others.

Less overt pressure may come from the possibility of visa refusals or a visa being terminated on a manufactured pretext, when the real reason is to keep out unwanted foreign nationals. Living in a country knowing that the visa could be withdrawn or not renewed creates real instability for families and those offering support services for them.

Some authorities know that putting obstacles in place for international schools and other support services makes life difficult for families. The imposition of arbitrary rules on international schools and colleges leads to a struggle to recruit, be financially viable or even function. Such indirect pressure can cause families to leave the country concerned, or at least seek education for the children elsewhere through boarding.

What effects does insecurity have on children? More importantly, what can we do about them - firstly to reduce the negative effects and secondly to reduce actual levels of danger in risk management?

Where children are living in high-risk areas the insecurity there can affect many areas of their lives as follows:

- Security precautions have to be learned and applied, such as awareness of places to avoid, and varying routes taken on regular journeys.
- Evacuation plans are necessary when there is a risk of being forced to leave because of civil unrest or even war. Living with this knowledge can be extremely unsettling for children.
- Freedom of movement is restricted. Children always need to be escorted even as they come into teen years, whereas they would experience more independence in most of their passport countries.
- Caution must be taken in making information available in public settings such as websites, blogs and Facebook, and in how much information can be given in reply to questions.

Apart from these limitations on what can and cannot be done and said, there are also effects on children's behaviour and well-being. These include among others:

- A sense of feeling threatened, leading to underlying tension and underlying alienation from nationals, or at least some groups of nationals.
- Underlying tension may lead to fear, or even panic attacks in the worst cases if faced with security personnel - especially those who are armed, or in uniforms and other clothing associated with intimidation.
- Fear of unknown national residents and of known residents who are or seem to be threatening.
- Fear of places associated with violence or other intimidating incidents.
- These fears may lead to reluctance or even refusal to go to certain places or to meet certain people or groups of people.
- Withdrawal and mood swings
- Children may become aggressive towards others or engage in self-destructive behaviour as they act out their fears.
- Tension and fear may well be acted out through defiance and other forms of misbehaviour.
- Psychosomatic illnesses such as stomach pains, headaches and other aches and pains around the body.

## Daily life and the 'danger and stress' backdrop

Many of us have to manage a balance between living with potential danger and getting on with life. The challenges in doing so are increased for those who live and work in more insecure regions of the world. On the one hand we do not want fear and a sense of intimidation to paralyse our efforts to work in less secure countries and locations - many of the most difficult to reach people live in places like these. On the other hand, we do not want to take unnecessary risks especially when children are involved.



We cannot assess security for families in the same ways as we do for adults without dependent children. It is generally easier for adults who are not responsible for children to move around to avoid trouble spots. It is also one thing for adults to make decisions that involve risk and potential

danger to themselves, but quite another for parents and organisations to make them on behalf of children. Those children have little or no say in what happens to them. *Agencies that permit unwise actions resulting in children being placed in danger risk the serious implications of neglect of parental duty and neglect of our organisational duty of care.* In the very worst cases, neglect could be fatal because of inadequate security precautions, or because the children were wrongly taken to high risk areas. When teams are drawing up security and emergency plans, there is a need to bear this in mind and include significantly lower thresholds for families.

Parents can do whatever possible to manage stress levels and the information they give to children. It is important to beware of graphic or sensationalised discussion about security risks either in front of the children or in a setting where alarming information can be easily overheard. The children still need to know enough information for them to be able to maintain safety and security, make sense of what is happening around them, and to have the truth without added extras that may come from other sources.

It is important to keep routines and try to retain a sense of normality when under pressure, whether this is from the ongoing background tension of daily living, or from a sudden unforeseen crisis. The backdrop can become very tense in some situations, racking up pressure on both adults and children. The increase in gradually, which frequently the location do not notice it level.

Breaks should be taken in These can range from an to a longer break in serves not only to help better on return, but also think about whether security situation improves.



tension often develops means that those living in until it reaches a critical

more relaxed locations. afternoon in a sports club another country. Time out families to relax and cope gives an opportunity to returning is wise until the

In some less secure places parents may send their children to stay in a safer and more open country either in a boarding school, or with friends or relatives. With relatives this is usually in the passport country. This can provide healthier peer contact as well as allowing more personal safety and freedom. However, in such situations children can become very fearful for their parents' safety.

**Where children become very disturbed leading to trauma and post-traumatic stress, psychosomatic illness and/or self-destructive behaviour, or other serious behavioural disturbances such as depression, aggression or ongoing panic attacks, it is important to seek professional help.**

Problems should not be denied or minimised, but faced honestly and dealt with appropriately. One fear is that the professional workers may recommend temporary or permanent withdrawal from the insecure location and thus threaten the sense of vocational duty for the parents or of loyalty to the organisation they represent. However, where children are suffering, or are likely to suffer, from trauma and its consequences, parents and organisations need to be honest about what is the ethically correct thing to do - stay and endanger the children or withdraw at least until the situation is calmer.

Mass migration on a global scale has been taking place in recent years, as people leave insecure and dangerous parts of the world to resettle in safer ones. This means that ethnic groups which were previously found mainly in their country of origin are now living in many major world cities.



Work with these people groups can continue amongst with the refugees and diasporas, often in situations where they are more open to changes.

## Reducing the Risks

*The following basic security precautions are advisable if crime or the risk of civil unrest is high*

**Avoid dangerous out of city locations where law enforcement is weak and avoid places where many foreigners and the local élite gather.** This may include parts of the city such as the centre and shopping malls.

**Keep up with the news about security and crime.** Find this out from the local police, trusted national friends, or any other reliable sources. The news media may be useful, but it is useful to bear in mind that they often sensationalise and/or have only second or third-hand information. Also find out places to avoid, like alleys, bad neighbourhoods, and red light districts.

**Get the addresses and phone numbers of your country's embassy.** Contact your country's embassy (or closest embassy) upon arriving or register ahead with them if possible. Advise them of your location and your name, especially if you are in a less secure country.

**Know emergency numbers,** and at least some of the local language.

**Make copies of all important documents.** Copy the back of everything, as well. This makes it easier if any documents are stolen. Scanning documents and e-mailing them as attachments to be printed if needed is another good idea. It may be possible to store important documents in an online "safe" for more security.

**Avoid showy and obviously expensive new clothing.** Expensive-looking shoes or clothes identify a possible tourist and hence a target for thieves in many countries. When carrying electronics put them in an older bag. If national residents dress in a conservative way, do the same. Avoid drawing unwanted attention to the family with immodest clothing.

**Where snatch theft is an issue walk facing the traffic.** This crime is more dangerous than just the loss of a bag or backpack. If it goes wrong it can cause serious injury or even death to the victim. Facing the traffic helps avoid the danger from cars or scooters sneaking up from behind. Also keep bags on the side of the body away from traffic.

**Be alert when using public transport.** Avoid unlicensed taxis: always use properly licensed ones or public transport - preferably at busy times.

**Teach children not to reveal personal information to strangers.** No matter how trustworthy a person seems, they do not need to know the family's personal information. If a child is asked where a family lives, or is staying if travelling, teach them a true, but non-specific response or to tell the enquirer to ask the parents.

**Be calm and respectful.** This is less likely to draw attention.



## For schools and children's centres

The leadership should assess the risks and realities of the institution in order to develop a security plan, seeking professional guidance as necessary. Ensure that security is part of an institution's culture. Input on security should be sought from all staff. A culture of security consciousness allows staff and visitors to understand that minor inconveniences translate into security benefits. Staff ownership of a security policy is essential for it to work, and it is also vital that everyone is alert to recognise anything out of the ordinary such as suspicious packages or people trying to gain unauthorised access.

Where possible choose buildings that blend in and do not attract unwanted attention. Avoid being too near high-risk neighbours such as controversial NGOs, security forces or political offices and centres. Entrances to the building should be monitored with no one allowed in unscreened. The installation of closed-circuit TV cameras, intercoms and door release systems can assist in this process. The number of open entrances to the school should be kept to a minimum to be safe under fire regulations.

Have all emergency phone numbers readily available. Have mobile/cell phones available to call emergency services from outside your facility (ensure that all local emergency numbers are pre-programmed into that phone).

In any emergency, firm lines of command, control and communications are essential. It is vital that a decision maker be identified, that this person have the authority to act and that the decisions can be effectively communicated to those who need to know them. It is also important to recognise that a designated decision maker may be unavailable during an emergency due to factors such as sickness, holiday, conference attendance, so it is important to be able to quickly ascertain who is in charge at any given time. There should be a succession list in the event of the absence of the designated crisis manager.



## Transition from Home Education to school



It is clear that making the move from home education to the school classroom is a major transition for many children. Share your experiences about how this went for your children - the good points, the challenges, any preparation or support that helped, any ideas about how the age or developmental maturity of the child affects this experience, or any other thoughts including personal family stories. E-mail them to us on [mk\\_tck@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:mk_tck@yahoo.co.uk)

## Round the World Word Fun

On a lighter note - most TCKs and their families like to learn new words, play with the languages they know and often mix languages when they speak together. Often the words in the learned host language are neater or express an idea that hardly exists than those in the child's first language. Knowing the languages of course is part of the enriching experience of knowing another culture and appreciating what the people in it value.

Here are twelve words, some of which have been posted up on various websites. Send us your favourites for future Educare editions to [mk\\_tck@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:mk_tck@yahoo.co.uk)

1. Téng (疼) is a special term for love in Chinese. It's the same character as "to hurt" (as in "my stomach hurts"), and so it is love mixed with an ache or pain. It is really only used from a parent to a child.
2. The stretch after waking in the morning? Ungdayee in the Hindi word for it.
3. Concolòn is Spanish from parts of Latin America for the crispy, almost-burnt rice that remains at the bottom of the pan after cooking.
4. The experience when something is so cute it creates the urge to squeeze it. Gigil is the Tagalog word for that.
5. Firgun is the Hebrew concept for taking pleasure in someone else's success, with a good heart and without jealousy. The opposite is the German Schadenfreude, which means taking joy in someone else's misfortune. The rare English word epicaricacy means the same thing as Schadenfreude.
6. T'aarof is the Farsi word for a standard of etiquette that runs deep in Iranian culture. A host must offer a guest anything they desire, even if the offer is not genuine, but then the guest must also refuse. This exchange repeats itself many times until the host and guest are able to work out whether both the offer and refusal are genuine or just polite.
7. Dor in Romanian is similar to the Portuguese saudade – the longing of missing someone or something.
8. Niama niama (or nyama nyama) a word used in a number of Francophone West African countries. It variously means a collection of small objects for sale (a bit like bric à brac in English which has come from French anyway), general "stuff" on a shelf or in a cupboard, or a mix of starter dishes in a meal. It can even be used to describe the fat and gristle on the meat sold in the market. It's a lot neater and more onomatopoeic than English equivalents, and one that we use having lived in Senegal.
9. There's a word in Swedish: gökotta – to go outside early in the morning to hear the birds or appreciate nature.
10. Tamil has a word for the smell of wet earth when the first rain of the season hits the ground. mannvaasanai,
11. Nesh - a dialect word in parts of England with no parallel in standard English, refers to someone feeling the cold easily.
12. Sihhatler olsun (sometimes saatler olsun) - a Turkish blessing to wish someone good health, most often used after a bath or a haircut. Turkish is rich in such expressions compared to some languages - one bilingual described English as socially challenged in comparison.

**Educare** is produced for cross-cultural families, their supporters and sending agencies without charge as an e-magazine.

**Educare** may be freely distributed and forwarded to anyone who would benefit from it.