

Embracing change is what expat families do well – you've got this!

Families already accustomed to dealing with change are a step ahead



“Taking the leap of faith that is required when asked to step into the unknown takes great strength of character and tenacity.”

It has been a very strange six months since the beginning of the global pandemic in March. As we tentatively emerge into a changed world, the beginning of a new school year is upon us. The majority of our youth have not been in formal schooling for six months. The impact of this will only fully reveal itself in time, however returning to school for our children will probably present as many challenges for them as the need to stay at home from March did.

There are as many experiences of coronavirus as there are families. But the two things we all have shared over the past six months have been uncertainty and change. Even now we are not sure what the next six months will bring. And so, we edge forward to create a new type of normal.

Challenge and change

We have all faced challenge and uncertainty. Our kids experienced an abrupt, premature end to their school year way back in March. For many of us, this has created the need to turn our homes into classrooms for home schooling. Add to this family unease around safety of loved ones in our home countries, concerns for friends around the world and immediate personal health risks and there have been plenty of challenges. And now, as we all head into a new school year, there remains the undercurrent of uncertainty and more change.

- How soon will education get back to 'normal'?
- What will the new normal be?
- How will our kids fit in with the collective 'catch up' on missed education?

Expat families are accustomed to change

Choosing to be an expat family and embrace a life of change takes courage. Taking the leap of faith that is required when asked to step into the unknown takes great strength of character and tenacity, alongside a strong accompanying partner and a good relationship between expat parents or a strong support system. As expats undertaking relocation, we encounter ongoing small and often outwardly imperceptible adjustments as we adjust to change. There is always discomfort and often pain. Alongside the pain, however, there builds a deep understanding that life does not stay the same. Unlike someone who may live their whole life within the same community, people who have moved communities often build a resilience that can see them through tough times

We get used to the pain of saying goodbye repeatedly to family and friends as we visit our home country for a short holiday; the struggle as an accompanying partner to find a purpose or job in a new community when moving for your partner's work; the discomfort of being the new employee in a company you have just joined and needing to discover how it all works around here; the pain of helping your children say goodbye to their hard-won friends as they move from their fourth school...

We get on with it. This modelling of resilient behaviour can go a long way towards creating resilient kids.

Understanding change

As expat families we know and understand that:

- Change is normal, natural, necessary, challenging and helps us grow.
- The urge to resist change is normal and can be overcome.

- Humans are programmed to feel comfortable with the familiar and therefore to fear change. This response exists to keep us safe.
- Going through the process of change will feel scary and uncomfortable at times (like travelling through a train tunnel) but we need to feel this to move forward to something new.
- Change can make us question our basic beliefs and values.
- Each time we embrace change we are building our capacity to deal with future change.
- The magnitude of a change event can be different for each person in the family.
- When we overcome the challenges of change we grow and become more resilient and more able to cope with change.
- Great opportunities can come from embracing change.
- In increasing our own ability to accept and embrace change as adults we are modelling this for our children

Moving forward

Although formal education has been patchy for many of our kids with home schooling or in some cases no schooling, many expats understand that education is about more than schoolwork, and our experiences of resilience in the face of change can help prepare them with great life skills.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has identified 10 top life skills that are the core set of skills at the heart of promoting the health and well-being of children and adolescents. Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour, which enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.

As we move out of lockdown, and the new normal comes into being, it's worth taking stock of how much the experience of expat life has given our kids a head-start in developing these life skills. Even as we put away the school books we have been using to help our kids learn at home, it's worth considering what 'home schooling' can we go on doing to continue support our kids' learning in these valuable life skills?

The 10 core life skills as laid down by WHO are:

- 1 Self-awareness
- 2 Empathy
- 3 Critical thinking
- 4 Creative thinking
- 5 Decision making
- 6 Problem solving
- 7 Effective communication
- 8 Interpersonal relationship
- 9 Coping with stress
- 10 Coping with emotion

“People who have moved communities often build a resilience that can see them through tough times.”



Tina Smith is a coach, mum to two teenage boys, accompanying partner and co-founder of Enhanced Relocation Ltd with Linda Spencer. Enhanced Relocation offers bespoke workshops for employees and families, as well as individual coaching packages for one-to-one clients. As professionally certified International Coach Foundation coaches, they specialise in holistic, personal support for relocating families. Online one-to-one employee, youth and accompanying partner coaching sessions and family workshops are now available.

A 10% discount is offered to FOCUS members when booking.

thrive@enhancedrelocation.com
www.EnhancedRelocation.com

