

Children in Crises

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Synopsis

Raising children cross –culturally in challenging environments such as political unrest, disadvantaged living conditions and spiritual oppressive climates is a task that everyone involved must be aware of.

Parents, supporting churches and sending agencies need to work together to support and protect their children.

Other challenges such as unhealthy work-life balance and stresses on the marriage and family can also impact the wellbeing of children.

Through teaching and group work we will be looking at these red flags and their potential long-term effects, and discussing possible ways of prevention and intervention.

“Children are travellers
who ask
for the way”

Indian Proverb

Opportunities

- In general: Sensitizes TCKs to other cultures, makes them world citizens!
- Limitations of restrictive settings makes them appreciate their own inheritance and freedom
- Sensitizes them to other spiritual realities
- Gives them the opportunity to learn more about life challenges such as poverty and injustice
- Enables them to sympathize with those who are marginalized
- Deepened awareness of family values (family of origin and family values of host country)
- Growing appreciation of relationships and friendships in contrast to time and task orientation
- Deeper understanding of risk and appreciation of peace

Considerations

- Children are taken into possibly unstable situations due to the parents' ministry and work assignment
- There is a choice and a decision due to a calling, ideally well thought through and prayed over > calls for parental responsibility
- The choice is to minister in a politically and spiritually challenging/hostile environment that calls for extra care and circumspection

Considerations

- The ministry is a response to a calling that can have profound impact on children's relationship to the Lord and on their personal and professional development – (faith, personality/identity and career)
 - was it positive - parents being a good model, caring and protecting, loving the host culture vs. just doing the job; good local friends and bonding
 - Was it abusive - traumatic experiences, witnessing injustice , inside and outside
 - unresolved issues – that were taken to the field or after leaving, e.g. no permission to grieve the loss and change, etc.

Types of Crises

- **Crises through environment:** war, terror, climate, culture, loss through movement and departure, and more subtle: religious and sexual harassment, spiritual oppression, isolation
- **Crises from within:** family, ministry, mission > parental and marital stress, lack of quality time, separation, neglect, emotional and spiritual insensitivity, undue/unhealthy expectations (own or from outside), over-responsibility

Impact on kids and young adults, - short- and long-term

- Impact of war, terror: e.g. fear or minimization, etc.
- Impact of culture/faith system: growing up at a forming time in a different world view
- Impact through family/ministry challenges: e.g. through unhealthy values, unbalanced priorities, personal and organizational decisions, etc.

Group task: Share examples/experiences in your small group as you reflect on one of these 3 aspects!

Common Crisis Reactions by Age Groupings

- **Pre-School:** Fears and worries; somatic problems; play which has themes of the trauma, compulsions, regression, separation anxiety, nightmares and sleep disturbances.
- **School Age:** Fears and worries, somatic problems; play which has themes of the trauma, compulsions, regression, separation anxiety, nightmares and sleep disturbances, fantasies, anger, hostility, interpersonal problems, school phobias and other school problems, apathy and withdrawal, guilt, personality change, chronic sadness and depression, self-rejection
- **Adolescent:** Fears and worries, nightmares and sleep disturbances, fantasies, anger, hostility, interpersonal problems, school phobias and other school problems, apathy and withdrawal, guilt, personality change, chronic sadness and depression, self-deprecation, intellectualization, rationalization, anxiety, acting out.

Resource: http://www.mmct.org/helping_children.php

Prevention and Intervention

- reassess foundations
- encourage transparency
- child-focused ways of communication

Reassess Foundations

- Revisit the calling as a family
- Is there an agreement (spiritually, location, unity) in the family?
- Is the marriage on good terms? > friendship, respect, affirmation
- Question of bonding, friendships and identification with the placement > good support base in times of crisis
- For each partner: faith, marriage and personal commitment to the people and place will be the safety net for the kids

Encourage Transparency

- Unity among the parents, team and sending agency > good and open communication, clear lines of authority
- On-going risk assessment
- Carrying the “weak” > the strongest shouldn’t be the guideline
- Depending on the age level of the kids: honest talks and involvement in decisions

Child-focused ways of communication - particularly in times of crises

- Encourage children to ask questions.
- Talk on their level.
- Be honest. Tell them what has happened on their level of understanding and only as much as they need to know
- Find out what frightens them. Encourage your children to talk about fears they may have.
- Focus on the positive.
- Pay attention. Your children's play and drawings may give you a glimpse into their questions or concerns

How to support/train/prepare internal balance and stability of families?

- As part of the pre-field training: focus on family, marriage, testimonies of TCKs
- More spiritual awareness of ministry challenges and effects on family life
- Regular family assessments on quality times, balance, stress factors > important for possible intervention

Group task: discuss in small groups and gather ideas!

Preventive support of families for crisis times

- Train parents, teachers, co-workers about their role model > their reactions to trauma can have a stronger impact on kids than the event itself
- Parents, teachers, friends can “read” what is normal or what has changed in the child’s behaviour as they know the kids well.
- Educate parents about traumatic reactions
- Give child a sense of control to boost resilience

Preventive support of families for crisis times

- Support and trust in competence and responsibility of parents and workers in making personal decisions
- staying in contact (phone, Email, skype)
- raising more prayer support
- protocol of on-going risk assessment > good contacts to local authorities and friends as well as embassies
- encourage CMT Crisis management team

Support of families after traumatic events

- Place of safety, > relocation to safe place
- Keeping kids with their parents!!
- Help parents to cope and reassure their kids > kids' coping ability depends strongly on parents' reaction to trauma
- medical check, if necessary
- Stability, routine
- debriefing
- on-going care (and assessment if needed) with good support system

Words of Wisdom

„So much has been said about the pressures of ministry overseas and the cost to the family. And often we still don't 'get it'. We still act as though we believe deep down inside that 'If I burn myself out for the Lord, He'll do His part and take care of my family'.

Wrong. That is not how it works. Rather, my ministry is in and through my family, just as God's ministry is in and through His family, the Trinity, and the church. What greater statement can be made about our God and His loving purposes, than that which is written on the faces of our children as they interact with joy and dignity in a difficult place?“

From: „Raising Radiant Daughters in Dark Places“ by Emily van Dalen

Words of Wisdom

Wess Stafford says:

“When all is said and done and I stand before my Lord, I am sure he will value more what I have done in faithfulness to my two children than the ministry to millions of children in poverty. I don’t know what you are doing in the workplace or what impact on the world you are making, but if you have children entrusted to you, I am dead certain the same is true of you. They are precious, deserving of our time, attention and serious commitment – not someday, but today.”

Dr. Wess Stafford in “Too small to ignore – why the least of these matters most”, p.34