

Book Review

Expat Parents: Don't Leave Home Without This Book

by Mary van der Boon

Most expatriate parents don't want to think too much about the impact their nomadic lifestyle is having on their children. Because most children quickly learn new languages, make new friends and seem to embrace their new surroundings far faster than their parents, it is easy to assume they are spared the adult distress of culture shock and the long, slow acculturation process.

School guidance counsellors and child psychologists agree, however, that children uprooted in an international move go through an adjustment cycle that is every bit as painful as that of their parents. Concerned parents looking for a way to help their 'third culture kids' now have a valuable new tool.

When abroad do as the local children do - Ori's guide for young expats is written by long-term expatriates and intercultural experts Hilly van Swol-Ulbrich and Bettina Kaltenhäuser. Through their own personal experience and professional observations, they became convinced that an international move impacts children in a very unique way, and set out to write this delightful, practical, entertaining and reassuring guide for the young expat.

Ori, the migrating bird, is the book's 'international moving specialist'. The colourful and friendly Ori leads his young readers through the book, guiding them through the many different phases they will encounter, from preparing for the move to looking back on their overseas experience. The child is encouraged to keep a record of his/her feelings and experiences, using the book as a combination journal, workbook, scrapbook and photo album. The book puts the young expat in the centre of the moving process, and is loaded with suggestions and fun activities to help the child make sense of this strange, exciting and often bewildering new experience.

There is even a separate chapter for parents/instructors offering tips and suggestions to aid their child in the adjustment process. By reading and completing the exercises together, parents, relatives, teachers and counsellors can gain insight into the feelings of their expatriate children. The book suggests an excellent 10-point action plan for parents:

- Involve the children at an early stage
- Be careful what you say in front of your children: stay positive
- Do not underestimate the stress your child may be feeling
- Try to limit additional changes in the child's life while you are abroad
- Be consistent!
- Encourage children to keep their friendships
- Help and support your children in finding new friends
- The adaptation process takes at least four months, longer if there is a new language involved
- Be understanding if the child's performance at school declines temporarily
- Be careful - have your security and safety precautions up and running as soon as possible

Links and e-mail addresses are given throughout the book, and Ori even has his own website and discussion forum (www.ori-and-ricki.net) which complete the truly interactive format of this book. With Ori's help, the young expat will be able to truly create a safe, friendly and happy home away from home. When abroad do as the local children do is also available in German.