

## Children's Resiliency in the Foreign Service

Many parents in the Foreign Service are concerned with how the lifestyle will affect their children. One often hears that Foreign Service children come to depend on their siblings and family units for their social stability, because these families are the only consistency in their lives. Though I have acknowledged this statement over the years, it did not mean a lot to me until recently, when I read an essay written by my 12-year-old son about his 14-year-old brother for a school English assignment:

"Imagine a young man, 14 years of age with red hair and lots of freckles. That's my brother in a nutshell. He was a good friend when I needed him, even if he beat me up sometimes. He has wild hair, big feet, and he's pretty smart. He has blue eyes, a light complexion. He's fairly tall, long fingers, and used to have slight overbite.

"When my family and I were moving around he was often my only friend because we frequently had to move to new places where we didn't know anyone. We often used to play games and such together. When we had been in a country for a while, we might seem a bit farther apart, but that would change when we had to move again.

"We fight pretty often. Usually it's when we are bored in a new house. Often it ends up like us wrestling. We both love computers and he often tries to get me to play a game with him on our network or on one computer with some games. We both annoy each other a lot, often to the point of insanity, especially when we want each other to do something we don't want to do. He used to be a lot

worse to me than he is now. He used to beat me up all the time just for fun. Now he's a lot better. He often tries to help me through tough assignments and tries to get me ready for high school. All in all he is a very good brother and a great friend (most of the time)."

Sometimes, when one is in the thrall of moving and settling into a new culture and home, it is easy to forget that our youngsters are also going through massive changes with each move. New homes, new school cultures, differing city

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amenities and other changes can be disorienting for any child.

It is easy to say that children are resilient and will adapt, but everyone has differing ways of coping with change. In the case of my sons, clearly it

benefited them to have the consistency of one another while adapting to new homes, new schools and new peer groups.

My children and I have now settled back in the States, and I hear from them a great deal of comfort in knowing that they will live in the same house and community for more than two to three years. Yet, as they invest their hearts in our new home, I see that they continue to rely on the skills they developed in the years they spent moving and the strengths of their relationship with one another. It is a joy to see already that their relationship is a keeper that will allow them to turn to one another in times of need and joy. □

*Victoria Hess is the former spouse of a Foreign Service officer and now lives with her children in Jackson Hole, Wyo. Andrew was born in Bonn, Germany, and has lived with his family in Bombay, Bethesda, Peshawar, Harare and Bethesda.*