



Ministering to Missionary Children

Posted June 2006

Below you will find 27 great ideas that have been used by churches to show love and care to missionary kids, often called MKs. They have been collected from a wide variety of churches and caring church missions personnel.

For MKs Growing Up Overseas

1. **Enlist prayer partners for each MK.**

Finding one or more people who will commit to pray for an MK regularly is spiritually beneficial, encouraging to the missionary parents and sometimes to the MK. It also helps the intercessors develop a genuine love for the MK they have chosen. This has the potential to create a lasting relationship when the MK returns home.

2. **Maintain the MK's membership in a Sunday School class.**

Once a missionary kid has been a part of your Sunday School class during a home assignment, maintain his or her membership in that class. Advance the child's name on the class roll from year to year. Post the MK's address, a current photo (keep it updated, at least once a year), hobbies, and a world map showing the location of your MK in the classroom. Stay in touch with the child by having the class members write letters and remember the child on holidays and birthdays. Exchange letters and tapes. Send Sunday School papers. Ask the child to send something unique from the field (such as the front panel of a corn flakes box in the national language). Use Instant Messaging to stay in touch, or call the child on Skype to talk with friends. Send care packages. Keep the connection alive so the child will feel a part of the class during the next home assignment, and classmates will welcome the child as one of them.

3. **Correspond regularly with the MK.**

Write to the MK on a regular basis, and always add little age-appropriate gifts in the envelopes: a page to color, stickers, Kool-Aid packets, key chain, some seeds to plant, calendar, pictures, jokes, word puzzles, stencils, note pad, balloon, craft supplies, bookmarks, unique shoelaces, iron-on patches, a fold-out Christmas decoration, an interesting clipping or update on their favorite sports team.

4. **Send magazines or catalogs.**

Send fashion magazines or catalogs to teens before they come home so they can see the styles that are popular in the USA. They might be able to have things sewn very inexpensively in their country, with only a picture as a guide. Or they may want to order from a catalog so some new clothes will be waiting for them when they return.

5. **Provide housing for MK teens during the summer.**

Some missionaries like to send their MKs back to the US for summers towards the end of high school so they can adjust to the USA, get work experience and obtain a driver's license. Provide homes willing to host the high school MKs for summers.

6. Send Videos or DVDs.

When a good age-appropriate movie comes out, send it to your MKs so they will be familiar with the things that kids their age discuss when they get home. To the MKs, it's more than just a gift; it helps them stay in touch with American culture and the interests of kids their own age back home.

Have the youth group make and send a video on What's Hot and What's Not .

Send a VeggieTales video to show at the MK's birthday party.

(Special note: Be sure that DVDs are the right format for the country.)

7. Subscribe to a magazine for MKs.

Age-appropriate magazines help them to stay in the touch with the US. Examples are *Ranger Rick*, *Highlights*, *Clubhouse*, *National Geographic World*, and *Campus Life*. Focus on the Family has publications for all age groups. For MKs who you know better, send magazines that relate to an area of interest: *Sports Illustrated Kids*, *National Geographic Kids*, *Sports Spectrum*. For college or adult MKs, *Among Worlds* is a great publication, published by Interaction International. See <http://www.tckinteract.net/amongworlds/overview.htm>

8. Send short-term teams that include teens.

For missionary families with teenagers, having teens from their home country can be a real encouragement. Not only do their kids get to work alongside other teens, they also develop friendships that can help when they re-enter their home country. If the MKs and visiting teens click , the MKs will have peers at home who actually understand a little bit about their life and who will reflect back on fun times overseas.

9. Birthday in a Box.

Before the MK's birthday, send a package that includes everything that the child needs to have a birthday party. The package can include: paper plates and cups, napkins, streamers, balloons, tablecloth, party favors, cake mix, frosting, candles, party hats, confetti, candy, goody bags and even wrapping paper and thank-you cards! Also include a gift for the child. These can be developed around a theme. Allow families in the church to sign up for these so every child gets one in time for his or her special day. Foothills Bible Church of Littleton, CO does this annually for every child up until age 12. (See Synergy Newsletter for another creative idea from this church. [Click here](#)) Grace Church in Mesa, AZ did this for one year, so every child received a *Birthday in a Box* as a one-time surprise.

For MKs on Home Assignment**10. Furnish a bedroom for an MK.**

Before the missionary family returns for home assignment, find out the interests of the children. Offer to decorate or furnish their bedrooms with themes based on their interests in the place where they will live during home assignment. (A younger child might like a VeggieTales theme. For an older child, you might paint the room in the colors of his or her favorite sports team and put up posters of that team.) Be sure they understand they can take these things back to the field with them when they return. Or offer to ship the bedspread and decorations back for them when they go back to their overseas home.

11. Help them obtain new clothing.

When MKs first arrive home from overseas, their clothing may be outdated. If they have come from a warm climate, they probably have no winter clothes at all—the ones from last home assignment won't fit any more! Provide mall gift certificates or financial assistance to help them get new clothing. Or take them on a shopping spree for clothes

- that are suitable for going to school in the USA. This is especially appropriate for teens or pre-teens who struggle to fit in , but be sure that all children within a family are treated equally.
- 12. Help them get acquainted with new friends before church.**
 When missionaries with children come to speak in your church, let them stay with a family that has friendly kids who are their age or with the youth leader or Sunday School teacher. Let them get acquainted with these new friends before church so they can go with their new friends to Sunday School, youth group, etc. and not feel so alone . Or invite some kids their age to have supper with them Saturday night before they visit the church on Sunday.
 - 13. Do some research and prepare for the M K 's arrival.**
 Before hosting a missionary family, do some research on the country where they are working. Involve your children in this research and learn about the place where this family lives. Build anticipation so the host children will be eager to learn from the MKs when they arrive. This could also be done by the Sunday School class of the MK child's age group, so the MK will be a celebrity who is everyone's friend when he or she arrives... rather than feeling like the missionary's kid that no one understands or knows how to talk to.
 - 14. Post current pictures of the family.**
 Be sure to post an updated picture of the family in the host home and in the church. Having an updated picture shows care to the MKs, who hate to come home to pictures of themselves from eight years ago posted on the refrigerators or on the bulletin board in the church.
 - 15. Help them learn skills needed for life in the USA.**
 Provide financial aid for the child to attend camp or a re-entry seminar, such as Interaction International's Transition Seminar. (See <http://www.tckinteract.net/seminars/TCKtransition.htm>)
 Play a North American sport together (football, baseball, tennis, golf) noting rules, scoring, star players, etc.
 Provide an ESL tutor for MKs who have studied in another language and whose skills in written English are not well developed.
 Provide a teen MK with a driver's education course. Enlist people who are willing to take the MK driving to practice for taking the driver's test and getting a license. MKs often have difficulty finding someone who will let them practice driving enough to actually get a license.
 Volunteer to take an MK on a tour of a local college campus.
 Give the gift of a book on American idioms. Even adult MKs often struggle with understanding common idioms they hear in the USA. A good one is *Cambridge Dictionary of American Idioms* (http://www.cambridge.org/elt/elt_projectpage.asp?id=2500256), but many others are available.
 - 16. Host the children when their parents travel.**
 Offer to keep the children while their missionary parents travel for conferences or support team building. Make their stay at your house a memorable time by doing special things they may not get to do overseas... or things they miss from their country.

17. Sponsor a “fun day” for the family.

Provide free tickets to the area amusement park or water park.

18. What not to say to MKs.

Isn't it great to be home? (This might not feel like home to them.)

You've grown so tall. (They already know it, they've heard it before, and of course they have—they're four years older! Your kids have also grown in four years.)

I knew you when you were “this big”.

Remember me? (Don't put them on the spot and embarrass them.)

When are you going back? (That may not make them feel very welcome!)

What's it like to live in _____? (The question is too general and hard to answer. It's like saying, Tell me about your life. What's it like? Ask a more specific question like Where do you go to school? MKs do like to share about their lives.)

Say something in Chinese. (Again, it is too general. Ask How do you say hello in Chinese?)

I met someone from India. Do you know him? (India is a big place! It's a little like someone asking you, I met an American. Do you know him?)

For College-Age and Beyond

19. Help them with basic skills for living in the USA.

When students first return from overseas, help them become familiar with procedures for obtaining a driver's license, bank account, IRS forms, and/or a job. Take the student to a library to use microfiche or other contemporary resources.

20. Provide “going-to-college kits”.

Prepare going-to-college kits for college-bound MKs or take them on an off-to-college shopping spree to get supplies for dorm or apartment life. Purchase the things that most students take to college – desk lamp, extra-long sheets (for dorm beds), comforter, towels, hot pot, laundry detergent and supplies, plate/silverware/cup, etc.

21. Develop a resource list of people willing to assist.

Develop a resource list of people from the church who are willing to offer their services to the MKs from the church or in the area. Examples:

Accountants (or anyone who would be willing to help with taxes – MKs usually have simple taxes but the concept of filing them is very new to them)

Mechanics (to fix vehicles or give advice on maintenance or whether fixing a car is worthwhile)

Car dealers (who are willing to offer advice on buying a used car)

Doctors/nurses (who may be available to answer questions, who take the mission insurance so they could treat the MKs, or who could provide referrals if the MK needs special care; the process of finding someone through the insurance network is often overwhelming and scary to MKs)

Lawyers

Driver's Education teachers

For other ideas, think about the things that college kids call home to have their parents help with and consider who might be able to assist if Mom and Dad were far away and not able to directly assist.

22. Provide host homes.

Offer host homes for holidays or school breaks (or even just to do laundry on weekends). It is ideal if each MK has a host who he/she knows well and feels comfortable with, but if that's not possible, having certain homes designated as open for the holidays may be helpful. Hosts should have overseas experience OR very open hearts and minds that will allow them to be understanding and flexible when cultural differences arise.

Invite a group of MKs to come for a holiday. Inviting all the students from a certain overseas school or college or mission organization allows the MKs to have a true holiday reunion as well. It also makes them part of a group rather than the lone outsider in a family.

Provide host homes where people are willing to house MKs for free or at a minimal cost over the summers. For those whose parents are overseas, it's often hard to earn enough during the summers to pay for room and board AND save for the following school year.

MKs love to have Sunday dinner in a real home. Be sure they have a regular ride to church, then take them home for dinner. They love to have adopted grandparents or families of their own in the church. If students like to cook, take them shopping, buy the ingredients and let them cook in your kitchen. Or teach them to bake pies or bread, or cook American foods that they may not know how to make. Find out what foods the MK misses from the country where he grew up. If he misses mangoes or papaya or plantains, buy some from the local international market for him. If the food needs to be cooked, let him teach you how to cook it—or eat it! Find a recipe online and cook a favorite food for him.

23. Provide financial help.

Provide scholarship assistance for MKs in college. Offer \$500 per year per child, and ask the college or university to match that amount. Or pay for one college class—or a trip home to visit parents overseas.

24. Send care packages.

Care packages are welcome anytime, but in the fall and around final exam times (Christmas and summer) they are particularly appreciated. Send a care package to a college MK for Valentine's Day (homemade cookies, stationery, stamps, aerogrammes, etc.)

25. Encourage them and offer practical help after college graduation.

Don't stop caring for MKs when they graduate from college. The first year out of college is especially tough for many MKs. They are out in the real world but don't have their parents to fall back on for guidance or practical support. People who have been involved with the MKs during their college years should keep in touch with them after graduation and offer practical help (a place to stay, help with resumes/job hunting, etc.) and encouragement. They may need it more than ever!

MISCELLANEOUS**26. Great websites**

Interaction International: <http://www.tckinteract.net/seminars/TCKtransition.htm>

MisLinks: <http://www.mislinks.org/practical/mk.htm>

27. Great Books

Bowers, J. M. *Raising Resilient MKs: Resources for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers*. Colorado Springs, CO: Association of Christian Schools International, 1998.

Gordon, Alma Daugherty. *Don't Pig Out on Junk Food: The MK's Guide to Survival in the U.S.* Wheaton, IL: Evangelical Missions Information Service, 1993.

Pollock, David, and Van Reken, Ruth. *Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds*, Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, Inc. 2001.

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