



Episode 045: Caring for Missionary Families as they Engage in Transition - Becky Matchullis

Becky Matchullis works for [Outreach Canada](#) as a missionary family resilience coach. She has been coaching mission worker (singles, couples and families) for the last 15 years, helping them to successfully navigate transitions, loss, crisis and repatriation.

Becky grew up as a missionary kid in 3 different countries and has lived and ministered in missions as an adult in Cambodia, Indonesia, Kuwait and Canada. She and her husband have raised four third-culture kids and so her experience in helping families transition well is not only professional but something she has done personally as well.

Tell us a little bit about yourself and how you came to be passionate about helping mission workers work through transition.

- I grew up as a missionary kid in Asia and so transition was a normal part of my life.
- In my late teens, when I repatriated to Canada, I remember really wanting to say, “I’m done with this. I want to get married, settle down and spend the rest of my life in Canada.”
- It didn’t take long for that to change. I realized that I didn’t necessarily belong fully and I enjoyed being overseas – there was a sense of restlessness and a desire to bring the Gospel to people who didn’t know.
- My husband and I went with a mission organization to Indonesia and we thought we’d be career missionaries but God had other plans. We ended up having difficulties with our visas and so after four years in Indonesia, we ended up being redeployed to Cambodia and we’ve served in Kuwait but that was cut short as well because of a family crisis.

Let’s define some terms. What does MK stand for? What does TCK stand for?

- MK stands for Missionary Kid.
- TCK stands for Third culture kid – someone who has in their developmental years grown up in a different culture than their parents’ home culture. MKs are a subgroup of TCKs.

What’s the difference between change and transition?

- Change is a move from one situation to another. It’s external.



- Transition is our emotional or psychological reaction or the process we go through inwardly to deal with the change.
- Transition happens in both positive and challenging changes.

You serve as a life coach and you help people transition through the many changes they face. Can you walk us through what transitions a missionary family might face?

- *Calling* – initially, God calls missionary families and it's a sense of euphoria in this calling. There's a sense that nothing is impossible with God and it compels the family to move into a place of chaos.
- *Chaos* – this is about getting ready and going overseas – there's the change of routine, of support systems, the change of new environment and culture. All this change is initially quite fun and exciting! You're exploring and settling in and it's a honeymoon stage. This stage can vary significantly in length.
- *Crisis* – This stage is around when culture shock starts to hit – this is where the negative emotions come in – frustration, irritation, hostility, anger, fear, etc. Even little things can be such an irritation. Missionaries might begin to question God and ask why they are there.
- *Contentment* – it's acceptance and finding a new normal. It's a great place to be because God is working in us and is building our character. There are new relationships and new support systems that have developed.

Is it necessary that every missionary family go through the crisis stage?

- Everyone goes through it but how they cope and react within it is different. Each family is unique. Most families, when given time and support, have absolutely no problem going through a transition. God does amazing things in us through transition.
- Sometimes it's not even the family as a whole. Everyone except for one person in the family might do very well in the transition and while one really struggles.

Are there particular points of transitions that affect parents?

- As a parent, you're often focused on your children and so knowing that their children could be having a hard time or wondering how they are going to get through transition, can be a big concern for the parent.
- The parent is also facing the transition themselves and so they're trying to cope through their own transition while leading their children through it at the same time.



Are there particular points of transition that affect the kids?

- MKs never quite feel like they belong – when they are in the host culture, they know the language, they probably feel like they fit best there because they are very integrated and yet they know they’re a foreigner. When they come back to North America for home assignment, they don’t fit in here even though they look like they should belong.
- As MKs get older, they then struggle with their identity – who they are as a person.

Are there particularly stressful aspects that you observe that churches might not know about?

- *Coming home for home assignment* – there’s excitement and joy about seeing family and friends again, enjoying four seasons, etc. but the transition can be challenging. North America doesn’t feel like home – they have the transition to a new home, new school, new environment.
- *Redeployment* – Missionary families may be asked to relocate to a new mission field and you must make that transition all over again.
- *Unrecognizable losses* – Working with missionary families who are working with least reached people, mission fields are becoming harder and more difficult. Many of these families are losing their security and there’s a greater sense of sacrifice – this can be a real stress on the family.

How do missionary families change while they are overseas and how does this impact their transition back to their home country when they return?

- When you are put in a place where you are challenged to the core, your very fabric of being is challenged to the core. Your faith is grown. You grow closer as a family – it’s their one constant. They see God’s miracles.
- There’s travel – you see the poverty in a land as well as a culture that is rich – you have positives and challenges of where you’re serving.
- Coming back, it can be a real time of “Who am I now?” The church and people back here assume they’ll be the same as when they left but they have changed and they might not even be able to pin point how they’ve changed.
- There can be trauma and hard things – there can be circumstances that leave them exhausted, stressed and even to the place of burnout. They can feel disillusionment toward God or their mission organizations. All these things can be difficult to process while they’re overseas and so it’s when they come back to North America that they can process what went on and rejuvenate and rest and recall the goodness of the Lord.

How can local churches who have mission workers overseas step forward into this caring mode? What advice do you have?

- Give time and space for the missionary family – letting them know that you know that they need time to process and grieve.
- Debrief – if the church can debrief them or offering to pay for professional debriefing



- Be there – listen and ask questions. Trust needs to be built but beyond “How’s it going?” and listening for a quick answer, ask some heart to heart questions and really listen to their answers.
- When the leaders of the church take time to do this, it really shows the missionary family that they are cared for and are important to the whole church.

What other practical advice do you have for a mission committee, pastor or caring person in a church?

- Helping them find a house, find a car, etc.
- Helping them get their kids registered for school
- Helping them get a family doctor, a dentist, etc.
- Be a mentor that is willing to help the mission family re-enter – someone who will answer questions and guide them culturally – this can be very helpful.
- We can often see when someone is struggling – we see their behaviors – and if you notice that with one of the members of the family, speak into it sooner rather than later. The sooner they can be debriefed or receive other types of help, the better it’s going to be for the individual in the family. Of course, do this in a gentle and loving way.

What resources do you recommend to churches or missions committees who want to support their workers through transition and change?

- [Mind the Gaps: Engaging the Church in Missionary Care – David J. Wilson](#)
- [Canadian MK Network website](#) - there are global and regional activities that are happening to support both MKs and the missionary families – that’s a great place to check out.
 - [ReBoot](#) – a weekly retreat for college-aged MKs returning to Canada more permanently – this happens each summer, once in Kitchener, Ontario and once in Calgary, Alberta.
- [Mission Prep](#) – a family re-entry camp in the Toronto area for mission families.

If our listeners wanted to learn more from you, how might they contact you?

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