Family Education Plan

We believe when God calls into ministry parents with dependent children, He calls the whole family. The model of healthy family relationships can communicate biblical principles even when language barriers prevent verbal communication. Children can enhance your ministry—and God wants to use your ministry situation to enhance the development and growth of your children.

The schooling options you choose for your children play a major role in who they become, "educating" them in areas far beyond the academics. Each option has unique strengths and benefits, and the choices you make require as much prayer and wisdom from the Lord as any other ministry-related decision.

At different times in a family's ministry responsibilities and at different ages or transition periods, different schooling options may be more helpful in a child's development. Remaining open to reevaluating options and never saying "Never!" can result in more comprehensive preparation for life.

Home teaching is strong in opportunity to impart family values and in flexibility to meet individual learning and family needs. Using *national schools* helps children quickly learn the local language and build relationships in the community. *Small, multigrade mission schools* provide homey atmospheres for developing strong friendships and learning to be productive members of groups.

Larger school settings often provide instruction or mentorship in special ability areas as well as "halfway steps" to cultural adjustment in the passport country. Attending a *secular school* can develop strength for standing firm and can be a training ground for becoming "salt and light" in the world. *Any* school setting helps children learn to relate to authority figures other than their parents—a key skill in the world of work.

Every schooling option provides richness in ways others cannot. No *one* schooling option is broad enough to encourage development of all the skills, abilities, and attitudes you will want your children to acquire to be ready to live independently when that time comes. This is especially true if your children spend most of their growing up years in an isolated setting overseas and you want them to be prepared to live successfully one day in your home country. Above all, look for comprehensiveness and balance over your children's *total* school career.

Many families facing schooling choices have been challenged and encouraged by developing a "family educational plan." This helps them focus on the long-term values and goals they have for their children. It helps them to be aware of and take advantage of the different schooling options that will support them in fostering this broad range of skills, attitudes, and values.

Getting caught up in day-to-day "survival" and just getting through the current year can make it easy to lose sight of long-term goals, to miss out on addressing some of the most important areas in which children need to develop. The family educational plan can help you keep broad, long-term goals in view.

In our workshops with parents we used to go through a procedure similar to the following. You may find it helpful to work through a similar process for your family. *First,* we ask them to list goals they have for their children. Which skills, attitudes, and abilities do they want their children to develop, both to live richly in the overseas setting *and* to take with them when they graduate and move out on their own, probably in their passport country?* These are some of the values/goals parents have listed:

- make good academic progress, to extent of abilities
- develop independent study skills, lifelong learning skills
- develop competence and ethics in use of technology
- be exposed to a variety of career options
- develop in areas of giftedness
- be prepared for higher education institutions of choice
- be able to work under authorities who don't share the same values
- be able to work in groups (i.e., leadership skills and team work)
- develop good work habits
- develop independent living skills for passport country
- be emotionally mature and stable; be resilient
- take advantage of unique host-country learning opportunities
- make national friends
- learn host-country language
- develop culture adaptation skills
- value host culture
- value passport country
- have strong ties to people and places in passport country
- have a positive sense of identity (as a TCK, as a citizen of passport country, as a Christian, etc.)
- hold strong Christian values
- learn to be "salt and light" in host country
- learn to be "salt and light" in passport country
- develop strong-- family relationships (including extended family)
- have good relationships with other members of the Body
- use personal gifts in service/ministry to the Body
- trust God in personal hardship; display perseverance

Second, we discuss with parents how different schooling options might be particularly strong or weak in encouraging growth toward the goals they've listed. *Third,* parents use a chart like the one on pages 4 and 5 to plot what they anticipate the circumstances of their lives might be during their children's schooling years.

Directions for completing the chart:

1) Write your children's names in the boxes on the left side of the chart.
2) Across the top, list the school years (e.g., '12-'13, '13-'14) from now through the time your youngest will graduate from secondary school.
3) In the "Task" row, jot down what you anticipate your ministry situation to be during each of those years (e.g., raising support, language school, first year in assignment, furlough, etc.).
4) In the row beside each child's name, note the grade or level he or she will be in each year (or age of preschoolers).
5) Now examine the columns under each year on the chart. What might your life look like that year in light of ministry, living, and schooling responsibilities? What schooling options do you think you can handle, and which might best meet the needs of each child and your goals for him or her that year? Keeping the answers to these questions in mind, write the options you think you might choose each year in the row beside each child's name.
6) Discuss the chart as a couple. Be open to reevaluate and make adjustments as circumstances and needs change.

Family Education Plan Sample

Year	`10-`11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18
Task	Raise Support	Lang. School	Field Training	1st year village	2nd year village	Furlough	Village	Village
Sarah	grade 1 public school	grade 2 local school	grade 3 home teaching	grade 4 home teaching	grade 5 mission school	grade 6 public school	grade 7 mission school	grade 8 mission school
Jacob	age 3 none	age 4 local preK	Kinder. home teaching	grade 1 home teaching	grade 2 home teaching	grade 3 public school	grade 4 home teaching	grade 5 mission school

A form you can fill out is included in the zipped file and is entitled "Family Education Plan Form."

Issues to consider:

Early years in a ministry setting are the best time for children to learn the national language and build relationships in the culture. Also, if they will be living away from their parents later on, it helps them feel more connected with their parents and involved in the family's ministry if they know the people their parents are ministering to and understand what their lives are like.

Research on hundreds of adult TCKs from many ministry organizations showed that those who felt they were involved in their parents' ministries had better life satisfaction as adults. Further, the research showed that living at boarding schools was not a significant factor in relation to later life satisfaction. Of far more significance was the quality of a child's relationship with his parents.

The teen years are key in the process of identity development. Many families find that national schools or isolation from home-country peers becomes inappropriate at this time if they want their children to identify themselves as citizens of their passport country as adults. Building close relationships with a variety of Christian adults helps teens grow toward adulthood and encourages them to claim Christian beliefs and values as their own as they see them modeled in other adults they admire.

Take careful note of furlough years—especially the small number of them during a child's schooling career and the age/grade levels at which they fall. What goals need to be and can be best addressed during furloughs (what goals cannot be addressed nearly as well in the overseas setting)? Many TCKs find the middle school/junior high years the most difficult for adjustment in passport-country school settings. What can be done to improve those difficulties? (e.g., help children build strong friendships in that setting and a history of successful adjustments during earlier furloughs; select the school setting or option with special care; time the furlough differently for more vulnerable children, etc.).

Pay special attention to the last year of secondary school and first year of college. Most TCKs want to spend their last year where their friends are and graduate with them. They also seem to need easy access to strong parental-type support during the first year of college. It may not be possible for families to time furloughs to meet these needs/desires for each of their children. What can be done to prepare them to make this transition without your physical presence? (Here are some ideas: during earlier furloughs build relationships with families whose values you share and who could "adopt" your children if you're not there; allow your child to spend the summer before the final year living with a family in your home country where he or she could hold a job, open a bank account, live on a budget, get a driver's license—i.e., practice many of the independent living skills which will be needed for that transition).

Every situation is different and every child is different. What one family chooses may not be the best for another family. Praise God we have His Spirit to guide us in the challenging task of raising our children to honor Him! What a comfort to know He promises wisdom but doesn't expect of us perfection. He is able to take both decisions that turn out well and those that result in unforseen difficulties and use them to help us grow so we may also more effectively serve Him as a family.

—Sharon Haag, Wycliffe USA Family Services

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