

RELOCATING TOGETHER WITH CHILDREN

The stresses of relocation, it's uncertainty, language problems, isolation, change in work status, more dependency of the accompanying spouse, which are again more complicated when you have children. Children may experience abrupt discontinuities at the time of transition. Try to prepare them in before hand, as well as possible. The child also may lose their grandparents, and other extended family, friends and school-mates. Children of all ages have an easier time with learning the language, making friends and they may acquire a new extended family if one of the spouses is German. Children are much more adaptable than adults. This of course varies between children, but is mostly impacted by the age of the children when relocating and the personal stories and resources of the parents.

The family life cycle is usually divided into phases: the young adult, marriage, the birth of the first child, and parents with preschoolers and children in puberty and teenagers.

Relocating with Toddlers and Preschool Children

This is probably one of the easiest time to change countries. In the first place, children are very adaptable and parents are younger and mothers of young children tend to seek each other out in search of playmates for their children and adult conversation for themselves. There are various play groups organized in Freiburg-one in English and another in Spanish that I am familiar with. If your child is Kindergarten age, in addition to an English speaking Kindergarten?, there are regular neighborhood kindergartens-half and full day. Full day here, often means they come home for lunch and then can return for a few hours in the afternoon. As an American women, who lived years in Brazil I found this notion of kindergarten hours very odd-actually I find the whole school system set up to make life difficult for working or professional mothers with no grandmothers around to fill in.

If your child is already in grade school when arriving, there is a German preparatory class at the Karlsschule, Karlstr., Freiburg. Children normally spend a year with other foreign children and then are moved into a regular grade school. There is also an English speaking school in the Scwartzwald-LINDA HELP NAME-LOCATION- two hours from here. It is a protestant "originally missionary" school and there is no regular transportation service. There are no English-German schools or European or International English speaking schools in the area-UNFORTUNATELY!!

Relocating with older children

This is definitely more complicated. Older children are often coaxed migrators-in that they do not choose the change and are often not so happy about leaving their school and friends back home. They have a somewhat more difficult time learning German and have more adaptation problems at school. The Karlschule only accepts children up to the age of 14-so if your children are older there is no adequate school option here. A problem, which may mean putting your child in a boarding school. Children during the age of puberty are especially sensitive about being different. My daughter came at the age of ten from Brazil and did not find the first year here very easy. She lost a school year because of the language and was rather embarrassed about looking different. I am Italo-American and she has darker skin -she did not like being different from her school-mates. She spent one semester at the Karlschule, then moved into a regular grade school where she had then to repeat the third grade ..At the time she was annoyed with us-today she is happy about being tri-lingual and recognizes it as a big advantage in her life. The Germans are generally less tolerant of diversity than the Americans and finicky (sp) about spelling their language. They are not prepared and largely do not have a real sensitivity for multi-lingual children. You can have your child declared Dyslexic and then their spelling notes will not count in the fifth and sixth grade. Nothing like resorting to being pathological because you are bi-lingual. The other option is a "sonder schule" where they place about 30% of their foreigners children- as less than an ideal choice. Try to get a Gymnasium recommendation from the "sonder schule" . That is another detail here, contrary to any rational understanding of child development children are tracked in the fifth grade into three types of schools. Haupt schule-for working class professions, Real schule for technical-type jobs and Gymnasium -for those who want to eventually have the chance to go to college.The inadequacy to train and provide teachers who can work with bilingual children and a general lack of respect for bilingualism is a major problem which will have to be dealt with. Although the Germans are looking for green card holders, and immigration trends are on the increase due to the European Union, they are slow to prepare themselves and reluctant to see themselves as a diverse land . A contradiction to the reality and the fact that more than 20% of the population is foreign-17% in Freiburg.

The change in country affects the whole family, adjusting to the dominant culture, dealing with more insecurity, problems of learning the language and understanding the cultural differences, more dependent on the working or German spouse, more isolation. This stresses the children too and because they learn the language more quickly, often inverts the family

hierarchy and the children end up doing a lot of translating for their parents. Try to maintain your cultural integrity, speak only your mother language to your children –at home and do the best you can to learn the language, make friends and adapt-that takes the burden off of them. Help them acquire a bi-national identity-if you expect to be here longer. And see the experience for yourself and your children- in the medium and long run as an incredible advantage in language learning, cultural experience and living with differences, and , of course there are the perks of travel and the richness of international living for many of us.