

9 re-entry tips for churches supporting returning mission workers

Re-entry refers to the return to the passport country/culture of origin of someone who has lived in another culture. As a spacecraft returning to Earth suffers intense stress, a person re-entering their passport country can suffer stress in many ways.

These tips are really just the 'tip of the iceberg', covering a few of the most common stresses.

'Home?' The passport country does not necessarily feel like home.

'Please listen' Listen, listen more and listen deeply. People in transition need the freedom to share their stories as they process the changes in their lives.

'How long?' The re-entry process affects each person uniquely. While good support may lessen the intensity and the length, there are no certainties in how long or how difficult the transition may be.

'Not spiritual giants' While people who live in another culture for a significant period of time certainly may have learned some important spiritual truths and practices, they are not spiritual giants and would typically prefer to blend for a while rather than have their 'differentness' focused on.

'View from the other side' Many people who work in cross-cultural contexts do so in developing countries. Making the transition between poverty and wealth produces complex feelings, and requires overwhelming choices in simple things like selecting shampoo.

'Who am I now?' People in different places change differently. We need to allow each other the freedom to simply discover who we are now.

'Practical challenges' There are plenty of practical challenges in a 'new' country. If you have recent experience with Centrelink, public transport, purchasing insurance, internet or phone services, consider offering to help the person re-entering Australia with those arrangements.

'Fresh ideas' Having experienced church differently in their host country, people re-entering their passport country can contribute fresh ideas of church community and how local mission might work.

'Laugh together' In the many facets of transition, just one 'silly little thing' may be the last straw. One way to support the returning person is to ask what 'little things' might have bothered them this week, and laugh together about them (if they're not too distressed!)