

Helping Expatriates Settle In and Settle Down

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For new assignees to the host location – particularly those unfamiliar with the local culture, language, and societal nuances – settling in to the new assignment location and finding a daily routine may be at times overwhelming. In many cases, human resource and expatriate administrators may need to point assignees and their families in the right direction. The most practical way to reach this goal is typically through an in-depth orientation session about the new location and/or through the services of an on-site destination services provider.

Sending the expatriate and spouse/partner on a pre-assignment trip is a common vehicle for transitioning the family to the host location. These trips, which should not be treated as vacation time, have specific objectives for the assignee to achieve. Among the most common tasks are the following:

- Locate appropriate housing
- Determine a suitable move-in date
- Consider what items to ship or store, along with what items are needed in the new home (e.g., major appliances)
- Learn about school opportunities and requirements
- Gain a better understanding of what expatriate living will entail through exploration of neighborhoods and discussions with other expatriates on site, where possible
- Meet local managers and become familiar with the new worksite and operation

While guidance before an assignment is important, what about the initial few weeks? In this period, the assignee is typically busy getting acclimated to the new job responsibilities, managerial style, and colleagues. Meanwhile, the family is busy dealing with the remaining logistics of the move, meeting new teachers and classmates, introducing themselves to other expatriates and local neighbors, and other activities. To help the family navigate through the initial weeks, providing them with a list of key tasks (illustrated in Chart 1, “Checklist of Settling-In Tasks”) is a step in the right direction.

When the assignment has been completed, whether an employee returns home or accepts another foreign transfer, it is standard practice to offer the same relocation services that were available on the initial move. Some employers schedule house hunting trips (similar to the initial pre-assignment trip), particularly if the employee is returning to a new domestic location.

Remember, an organization’s effort to help the assignee and family relocate should ease the disruptions that arise, not complicate them. Check in with the family from time to time and ask how they’re doing

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Chart 1 Checklist of Settling-in Tasks

The process of moving then settling into the host location involves numerous tasks that need to be addressed. The following items represent typical items that should be addressed or explored either pre-assignment or when the family is officially on-site:

Residence

- Home search and lease negotiations
- Furniture and appliance purchase or rental

School interviews and selection

Registration with appropriate local authorities

Transportation

- Car purchase, rental, lease
- Local driving rules
- Driver's license
- Public transportation

Community orientation

Shopping

- Local shops, open markets, and international stores
- Supermarkets and individual food shops
- Specialty shops
- Clothes and shoe stores

Services

- Dry cleaner/laundry
- Hairdresser/barber
- Dressmaker/tailor
- Post office

Finances

- Banking
- Financial services
- Bill payment

Household help (maids, gardeners, baby-sitters, drivers, security guards, repair people)

Medical

- Physicians and dentists
- Hospitals
- Emergency procedures
- Pharmacies

Recreation

- Social events
- Sports
- Entertainment
- Expatriate and local clubs and organizations

Places of worship

Spouse career networking and job search research

Spouse's activities

Children's activities

