

Tip Sheets for Parents of Missionaries

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Top Ten Tips for Parents of Missionaries

1. **Connect with others.** Find other POMs who understand. Also keep looking until you find the person or group who won't ever totally understand but wants to.
2. **Don't be afraid to grieve.** With another trusted person or in a group, explore all of your feelings about being a POM, including your sadness or anger. Grief is a process, a new beginning, a transition period through which we are changed. God can use our grief.
3. **Learn to speak the truth in love.** Learn to communicate honestly with others. Tell them how you feel, what you need, and what you would find helpful.
4. **Commit to learning practical skills that will help you stay in touch** with your missionary children and grandchildren. Learn to text and send digital photos, to Skype or use a calling card or web-based phone service, and the best ways to ship packages.
5. **Ask for information.** Ask your missionary children about their hopes, fears, joys, plans. Ask their sending church or organization about the training, preparation, and care they are receiving. Ask about contingency plans for emergencies. Ask for updates in all areas so that you can pray effectively.
6. **Say good-bye well.** Spend time together in the weeks and months before a departure. Have fun. Also work to resolve unfinished conflicts.
7. **Tell your missionary that you want to stay connected** while they are on the field, and plan together how to accomplish that.
8. **Commit to personal growth** so that you can have a healthy adult-to-adult relationship with your missionary.
9. **If you are married, keep your marriage strong and healthy.** If the marriage needs work, utilize this stage of life to rebuild your relationship.
10. **Travel!** If at all possible, go to the mission field and visit your missionary. See where and how they live. Meet their friends and team members. Let their mission come alive for you too.

Ten Steps to Starting a Local POM Group

1. **Ask God to bless and guide your effort** as you set out to build a local group. **Talk personally to the POMs you know, even if it's only a few**, about your idea for a new group. Invite them to help you get a group going.
2. **Set a specific direction for your group.** It's fine to talk about your missionaries, but the purpose of the group is to provide fellowship, support, and education for POMS themselves.
3. **Find a professional Christian counselor** who understands both family dynamics and the necessity of acknowledging grief as a key component of adjusting to new situations. If the counselor has any missions background or interest, so much the better. Ask the counselor to read *Parents of Missionaries* and volunteer to help you begin the group and moderate group meetings, especially in the beginning.
4. **Introduce your idea to the local church and missions leaders you know** to enlist their support and learn of other POMs in your area who might benefit from joining the group.
5. **Contact other churches in your area.** Mail or e-mail a letter that introduces your idea to church and missions leaders you don't know and state that you will make follow-up contact in a week. Make follow-up phone calls to letter recipients, asking if they know of POMs who might benefit from joining the group. Ask for help in making contact with those parents.
6. **Choose a date, place, and time for the first meeting** six weeks in advance and arrange for a meal (either potluck or catered for an affordable fee per person).
7. **Contact all the POMs on your list** to introduce yourself and the group idea. Invite them to attend the first meeting and bring either a covered dish or the fee for the meal, depending on your plan.
8. **Facilitate the meeting** by providing name tags and cheerfully set tables. Plan short opening remarks and serve dinner. Allow approximately 45 minutes to an hour for dinner, dessert, and conversation.
9. After dinner, ask POMs to arrange their chairs in a circle without tables or other barriers in the middle. **Let POMs introduce themselves** and tell in just a few sentences about their missionary children and grandchildren.
10. **Lead a discussion on a topic of interest to POMs.** Use chapters in *Parents of Missionaries* as a guide. We especially suggest discussing these topics (one per meeting): dealing with grief, learning to use technology, coping with the holidays, staying connected with grandchildren, building strong relationships with young adult children.

Good POM Relationships with Adult Children

Intergenerational connectedness and positive relations contribute to the psychological well being of both generations, parents and adult children. Conflict distresses both generations. A positive, strong, connected relationship with parents contributes to a missionary's adjustment and success and provides strength and comfort to POMs.

1. **Set your children free.** Learn to see your adult children as individuals with separate identities.
2. **Express affection for your adult children.** They want to hear you say "I love you." They desire your blessing.
3. **Communicate with your adult children in respectful, nonjudgmental ways.**
4. **Address and resolve conflicts** with your adult children, whether they occurred in the present or the past, to the greatest extent possible. Your relationship is what matters most. You may need to agree to disagree.
5. **Do not view the successes or failures of your adult children as a reflection on you.** At the same time, take responsibility for your own faults as a parent and, if necessary, apologize and do what you can to make things right now.
6. **Take care of your physical health and, if you are married, take care of your marriage.** Both good health and a good marriage are characteristics associated with positive parent-adult child relationships.
7. **Take comfort: Parent-child relationships tend to improve around age 30 as children mature.** Relationships with adult children are complex and are not static. Parents tend to give more to young adults and to receive more later in life.
8. **Build a support network apart from your children.** How satisfied are you with the quality and the extent of your other relationships (marriage, friendships, relatives) besides those with your adult children?
9. **More distance can actually increase emotional closeness, a plus for POMs!** Geographic proximity creates opportunity for psychological closeness but does not guarantee it.
10. **Make plans to incorporate some shared activities into furlough visits.** Fathers, especially, gain a sense of intimacy with their adult children when they share activities with them.

POMs Can Grandparent Great Across the Miles!

1. Although living a long distance from grandchildren will always be second best to living close, keep in mind that **you don't have to live close to be close!** Loving, thoughtful, imaginative grandparents live in the hearts of their grandchildren no matter what the physical distance between them.

2. **Know the risks.** It is true that geographic distance creates a risk of emotional distance. You may be tempted to believe, "They're too far away... I don't count...They're not listening..."

3. **Catch the vision to counter the risks.** Grandparenting is a ministry. The unconditional love and affirmation of grandparents is important to your grandchildren's development. Realize that you are needed in your extended family as a leader, a resource, a role model, a conduit for transmitting family history, values, and faith.

4. **Face the pain.** Recognize that the longing to be geographically close will not go away as long as the separation continues. It's important to face the pain of living far from your grandchildren so that you can work through the sadness, accept your reality, and move on to create a great relationship with your grandchildren across the miles. (Healthy grieving always takes place in a connected relationship with others, not alone.)

5. **Become intentional.** The responsibility for establishing a close long-distance relationship with your grandchildren rests with you. (This is also true even if your grandchildren live nearby.) Make your grandchildren a priority. Invest time, effort, and money into building a bond between you.

6. **Be the initiator.** Resolve to be active, not passive. Your children can help to facilitate a relationship between you and your grandchildren, but even without their involvement, you can demonstrate to your grandchildren your desire to know and understand them and to be emotionally close.

7. **Master the principles** of being a good grandparent. There are many good books on the subject. Two we recommend are *The Long Distance Grandmother* by Selma Wassermann and *Long Distance Grandma* by Janet Tietsort. Also learn from other grandparents you know and admire.

8. **Learn the best ways to communicate** with *your* grandchildren--phoning, instant messaging, e-mail, cards and letters, Skype? Start when grandchildren are young and adjust the methods as they grow older.

9. **Give your grandchildren a place** to keep some of their things in your home, providing a connection point for them on furloughs and visits.

Ten Tips for Getting Through the Holidays as a POM

1. **Plan ahead to avoid exhaustion**, which accentuates all other feelings of sadness or loss. How could you simplify Christmas this year?
2. Giving up the common expectation that throughout life we would be able to enjoy our adult children and our grandchildren is a loss, and losses must be grieved. **Try to identify where you are in the grieving process.**
3. **Let go of the “oughts” of the season**, including how you “ought” to feel. Just be yourself. It is normal to experience distress in the face of loss.
4. **Brainstorm ways you can insure adequate personal and emotional support for yourself throughout the holidays.** Some examples: Schedule personal “down time” throughout the season. Find a close friend who is willing to listen without judging. Have some extra “God time.” Plan a new kind of holiday activity and invite others to join you.
5. **Identify interpersonal issues within your family that need to be addressed before the holidays** in order to prevent unwanted tensions.
6. **Clarify your personal expectations about the holidays and communicate those to family members in advance** to avoid misunderstanding, surprises, and disappointments. Learn the expectations of others. Find mutually agreeable solutions.
7. **List all the good new things God has provided** even as you have had to endure the absence of loved ones on the mission field.
8. **List all the good things you can think of about having an adult child in missions.**
9. **Locate other POMs in your area.** Work out a plan to stay in contact, even once a week, during the holidays. If possible, plan to attend together one event that everyone would enjoy.
10. **Find news ways to include your missionary children and grandchildren in your celebration or to be a part of theirs.** Make your own “books on tape” for grandchildren, write and send an email “journal” about holiday preparations and activities, open gifts together while on Skype, learn to text or send digital photos, invite your children’s friends to join your celebration. Think creatively and plan ahead.

How to Pray for Parents of Missionaries

Is it easier to go to a foreign field yourself or to see your children go? asked a missionary parent. She answered her own question: It is much more difficult to see your children leave.

Family members left behind parents, grandparents, siblings feel a sense of loss when their loved ones go to a foreign field. Some liken it to a death in the family. Often there are feelings of gratitude for children obedient to God mixed with the real sense of loss when they leave. Yes, even those who have prayed for missionaries all their lives and ask God to send workers into the harvest still feel the hurt of separation when their own go.

Here's how you can pray for parents of missionaries, and how POMs can pray for themselves and other POMs too.

Pray that POMs will:

1. Experience the comfort the Holy Spirit promises to those who need it.
2. Accept and support the missionary calling of their son or daughter.
3. Realize that their acceptance and support will strongly affect their son or daughter's happiness and effectiveness as a missionary.
4. Resolve any issues with their adult child and say good-bye well.
5. Know joy that God has chosen their son or daughter for a particular task, and that their child has been obedient to God's call.
6. Establish and maintain frequent communication with their missionary son or daughter and his or her family.
7. Find a loving support group or network that understands and appreciates them.
8. Be able to speak honestly with their friends about their feelings and to deal with their grief in healthy ways.
9. Take initiative and find ways to develop and maintain connection with their grandchildren even across the miles.
10. Consider seeking out other young people at home who need love, mentoring, and encouragement.

(Adapted from an article by Gerald and June McNeely in *Parents as Partners*, a publication of the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.)

How to Understand and Help Your Parent (especially for recruits)

1. **Show your parents** that you are willing to listen to them and that you care about how they feel and your relationship with them.
2. **Include your parents in your decision making.** Try not to surprise them with the news. Give them time to adjust.
3. **Provide your parents lots of information**--about the country you are going to, your preparation activities, your sending church or organization. Also help them with answers to the things parents worry about, like how you will get medical care, how you will get off the field in a medical or political emergency, and how you will be financially supported.
4. **See that your parents are involved in your training and preparation.** If you have a shepherding group, invite your parents to a meeting or dinner to talk about their concerns.
5. **Give your parents' concerns and reactions serious consideration.** God sometimes works through your parents to shape or delay your plans. Get good counsel from other mature Christians as you evaluate how to proceed.
6. **Your parents' lives are not going to be what they have expected.** They won't see you often and their grandchildren will grow up away from them. Your parents have some grieving to do, no matter how supportive they are of what you are doing. You need to understand this.
7. **Do not try to argue your parents into supporting your plans.** Instead, let them know that you are sorry that they have fears and sadness because of your plans. Learn to talk to your parents adult to adult.).
8. You may feel disappointed by your parents' lack of support or you may feel that their reactions or objections are unspiritual. **You may need to grieve** this disappointment and accept it in order to have a positive relationship with your parents and still be able to go on with your life and plans.
9. Some parents are very supportive of their child's missions plans but do not know how to deal with their own grief. **Encourage your parents to have good connections with others, especially other POMs.**
10. **Help your parents learn to use technology** to be able to stay in touch with you when you are overseas.
11. **Say good-bye well.** Spend time with your parents while you are preparing to go overseas. Build memories and connections.

How Churches and Agencies Can Do POM Care

- 1. Acknowledge parents of missionaries.** Include POMs in your missionaries' preparation and sendoff. Provide information for parents about a recruit's area of service, training, and preparation. Help POMs connect with one another. If the recruit has a shepherding group, invite the parents to a group dinner or meeting.
- 2. Encourage and train missionaries to say good-bye well.** This includes spending time with family members as well as working to resolve any conflicts prior to departure. Provide time for this in the missionary's preparation **and** home service schedules.
- 3. Be aware that POMs—even veteran POMs—grieve.** Just acknowledging this can be healing. Express care and your desire to understand. Encourage churches to pray for POMs when they pray for missionaries.
- 4. Encourage missionaries on the field to stay in contact with family members.** Provide leadership and direction for ways to do this.
- 5. Be aware that POMs may have concerns.** Ask what they are and how you can pray. Try to determine if the POM is getting needed emotional support.
- 6. Involve church members in ministering to POMs who may have physical needs** that the missionary would care for if he or she were home, such as leaf raking, grass cutting, or transportation to and from doctor's appointments.
- 7. Churches can determine if help is needed when missionaries are visiting POMs,** such as money for extra groceries or activities for grandchildren (movie or amusement park tickets, for example)
- 8. Encourage POMs to travel to the field in areas where it is safe to do so.** Churches could provide help with funds for travel if POMs have a financial need.
- 9. If parents travel to a commissioning service, recognize them.** Better yet, ask ahead of time if they would like to participate in the commissioning. Include prayer for parents as part of the service.