

10 Questions Missionary Kids Dread

Ever talked to an MK before? Did you wonder why we looked a little lost? Why we tend to give people confused looks all of the time? Yeah. As an MK myself, I can say with confidence: we're an odd bunch. Guilty as charged! But there's more to the story than you might think.

You see, MKs are usually asked many questions about our lives overseas. Although these well-intended questions are asked out of genuine friendliness, curiosity, and a desire to connect, a few can be extremely difficult to answer. Here are the top 10 questions MKs dread:

Question #1 "Aren't you glad to be home?"

On the bright side, MKs have many homes we love dearly. On the not-so-bright side, MKs never know where home actually is. It's complicated. Hence our blank expressions mixed with terror when confronted with this daunting question. Are we supposed to pick one? Do our homes across the ocean not count?

We are typically struck with this realization when 'home' assignment isn't turning out how we envisioned. Permanently wrinkled clothes. Too many road trips in a ridiculously-short amount of time. A diet consisting mainly of the huge boxes of Wendy's chicken nuggets purchased by sleep-deprived, currency-confused, mega-sized missionary families. Life is crazy. We recognize once again that our home country doesn't feel like home anymore.

Question #2 "Do you remember me? I held you when you were 6 months old!"

MKs desperately want to avoid sounding rude, but our diaper-clad years are pretty vague. Especially when being held by 300 different people at eight different churches in five different states was our reality. Faces tend to blur after a while. Especially at six months old and/or long gaps between home-country visits.

Once, a dear older couple invited my family to their home for dinner. I none-too-geniously doubted I had ever met them. Then I saw our prayer card faithfully stuck on their fridge and blushed bright red. Oops.

Question #3 "Where do you buy your clothes?"

Missionaries aren't usually applauded for their awesome fashion sense. But on occasion, we find ourselves accidentally wearing something not three years behind the current trend. I have these crazy-patterned bohemian pants I purchased in Chiang Mai at a night market. They're faded and stretched, but they tend to attract attention. Once, a girl enthusiastically asked me where I purchased them.

"Thailand..." I answered. She stared at me, alarmed by the fact that she would have to fly thirteen hours to purchase them. MKs' wardrobes are usually furnished in more than one country (or even continent!) It happens.

Question #4 "How's insert host country?"

Politically? Economically? Agriculturally? Socially? Spiritually? Personally? MKs have been asked all of the above! This is why I always try to avoid the professor-looking gentlemen with big glasses and grey sweaters at church visits. They are unfailingly interested in the population of Japan (my host country). I looked it up in preparation for my family's last home assignment. But then I forgot.

Question #5 "Have you made a million friends?"

Well. Do my siblings count?

In truth, siblings are usually the only steady source of friendship MKs have. Chances are, we haven't made a million friends in our host country. It's painful to admit, especially when that is what's expected of us. Language barriers and cultural differences make friendships difficult to bridge. Friendships with teammates are can end abruptly as families change location or ministry. Coupled with the realization that many of our former friends in our home country have moved on—most MKs are actually seeking friendships.

Question #6 “Can you say something in Chinese?”

Yup. Chinese. Totally not dependent on what country we actually live in.

Question #7 “Don't you love listening to your parent's presentations?”

The first sixty times? Yes! Now? We hear them in our dreams. Seriously, no joke.

A few years ago, my family and I visited a friend's small group to present about our ministry in Japan. My sister and I wanted to play outside. All the other kids wanted to listen to our parent's presentation. We stared at them like they were crazy. Really?

Question #8 “Do you eat bugs?”

This question wins the “most-frequently asked” award. Actually, I don't eat bugs on a regular basis! But, yes, a lot of MKs do. I eat raw fish, squid, and octopus weekly, though. (That tends to still illicit the same response.)

Once, my friend went to a store in her host country to purchase a kitten. She picked the smallest, cutest, furriest one and handed it to the shop owner with her summer savings. He smiled, picked up the kitten, broke its neck, and gave it back to her in a paper bag for dinner. She ran home crying, “Mommy! Mommy! I didn't want to eat Fluffy!”

Question #9 “Have you had fun over there?”

I love living overseas. But it is not a vacation! It's life. Normal, mundane, regular life. Math tests, grocery-shopping, and room-cleaning still apply to MKs too. Just under different circumstances. Possibly without air-conditioning. Possibly without beds. Probably without a dryer.

But that's okay. The only time I wished for a dryer was when I put on a freshly-washed shirt straight from the clothes rack and found a beetle crawling up my sleeve. I probably wouldn't have categorized that experience as fun.

Question #10 “Are you going to be a missionary when you grow up?”

What if someone asked you, “What's your dad's job? A doctor? Oh. Then you're going to be a doctor too, right?”

“I don't know!” you might reply.

I don't know either. But I do know that I want to follow God's call for my life, wherever that may be.

The next time you talk to an MK? Recognize they might feel lonely and insecure despite their nonchalant façade. Ask “how are you?” instead of “where are you from?” Give them a smile and a hug.

And to MKs, the next time you are asked one of these 10 questions? Smile. Recognize that they are asked out of a desire to understand and connect. Love back by engaging ... even through these ever-dreaded questions.

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