

# Missionary Stressors

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Brian Boecker Presentation - January 24, 2021.

To watch the full presentation: [https://www.missionhills.org/outreach/outreach-resources/Major Stressors for the Missionary](https://www.missionhills.org/outreach/outreach-resources/Major-Stressors-for-the-Missionary)

## 1. Dealing with Uncertainty

- o Most of these stressors can, in some ways, be planned for if they are an expected part of the experience. It is often the unexpected changes in these categories that can bring about more stress.

## 2. Language and Culture:

- o Ability to learn language later in life can be challenging
- o Comparison with others – especially kids who get it fast
- o Constant feeling of failing or falling short
- o Strain in marriage when one is getting it and the other is not

## 3. Hypervigilance with threats around you:

- o Living with the constant buzz of needing to be aware
- o Theft risk (pickpockets, locking doors & windows to home and vehicle, needing a guard, volatile political situations, etc.

## 4. Infrastructure – any sudden changes to these can be quite stressful:

- o Medical Care; availability and quality of care
- o Infrastructure challenges (maintaining a supply of groceries, cell phone credit, fuel for vehicles, water supply)
- o Ability to get repairs and/or confidence of ability to repair

## 5. Family – Extended family needs:

- o Needs of children – education, friendship, opportunities, self-care and wellbeing
- o Needs of aging parents
- o Constant transition of supportive relationships

## 6. Teams and Team relationships:

- o Different personalities, different visions and agendas as well as different values
- o Ability of the team to communicate, work through and resolve conflict
- o Emotional and relational health of team
- o Burden for those leading the team plus having additional work to accomplish
- o Multicultural teams – how to navigate the diversity of values, ideas and directions

## 7. Financial struggles and needs – current needs as well as future:

- o Constant support fluctuation and need to raise new support; includes loss of monthly support and new needs that arise and need funding
- o Pressure to keep support goals low yet be able to function in ministry and with family



- o How to plan and prepare for future: for kids' education, retirement, return to home country
- o Pressure of changing exchange rates or skyrocketing inflation

## 8. Pressure to perform (both internal and external)

- o Real or perceived pressure from supporters to "perform" or "produce" even in a country that is Gospel resistant
- o Feeling that one must justify the support dollars that are being given
- o They really need a support system where they can be honest about their own weaknesses, disappointments with God, or themselves, empty places in their marriages. They often do not feel safe to share these things with supporting churches. It's not good to be isolated.

## 9. Is it worth it – loss of hope, inability to grieve losses when they come

- o Suffering – Meaning = Despair
- o Is there regular practice of grieving losses, making transitions, and saying goodbyes?
- o Is there place to be messy and undone by loss, hurt and pain?

Not mentioned during the presentation but worth noting as additional information.

- Not having the ability to exercise or do restorative hobbies to deal with stress
- Loss of connection with friends, family, and relationships – constant transition
- Transition back to home country can be one of the most stressful situations:
  - o The skills learned and gifts used on the field can often be discounted or not even acknowledged when coming back home.
  - o Relationships can be challenging to build, and the deep community experienced on the field can feel lost in a busy culture.
  - o This transition can often be times of other transitions:
    - Vocationally and/or where do they plug-in?
    - Kids heading off to college has a plethora of challenges
    - Parents declining health or dealing with family loss.
  - o Often people think missionaries are returning home and therefore it will be less stressful.  
How to help

1. Creating a safe and regular place for missionaries to process their lives, and especially their losses, is a huge gift. This can easily be overlooked especially as we want to give solutions. Be aware of your own heart stance toward grief, loss and messiness – do I have little tolerance for that?

*“Being open to whatever arises can sometimes create a state of wonder when no words easily come but we remain open to others and to ourselves. In this way, too, presence requires a tolerance for both uncertainty and vulnerability. It is these very features that enable us to offer help to others who struggle with their own guardedness and drives for certainty.”* The Mindful Therapist, by: Dan Siegel page 23

2. Help them identify ways of self-care. What can they do to respond to and process the emotions that are going on. Do they have healthy outlets? Are there ways they can mitigate or reduce exposure to external stressors?

3. Do they need someone to come alongside them to help? Time with a counselor, mentor, spiritual director, a retreat, or time away as an individual, couple or family?
  
4. “Note that the Psalms propose to speak about human experience in an honest freeing way. This is in contrast to much human speech and conduct which is, in fact, a cover-up. In most arenas where people live, we are expected and required to speak the language of safe orientation and equilibrium, either to find it or to pretend we find it so. For the normal conventional functioning of public life, the raw edges of disorientation and reorientation must be denied or suppressed for purposes of public equilibrium. As a result, our speech is dulled and mundane. Our passion has been stilled and is without imagination. And mostly the Holy One is not addressed - not because we dare not, but because God is far away and hardly seems important. This means the agenda and intention of the Psalms is at odds with the normal speech of most people - the normal speech of a stable functioning, self-deceptive culture in which everything must be kept running young and smooth.”

Praying the Psalms by: Walter Brueggemann Page 7