

ANTARCTIC DAD

Families in Transition: Relevance of Edwards/ Burgemeestre

picture book 'Antarctic Dad'

by psychologist Judy Parker

As an educational psychologist, I work with many families in transition where

a parent may be away from home for extended periods, and the family has to

make special adjustments to retain regular contact.

- Third Culture Kids e.g. European families in an Asian country where the child attends an international school.
- An international household with a parent who may be flying to other Asian countries and maybe home only a couple of nights per month.
- Some Asian students in Australia live with grandparents here while their parents are in business in Asia.
- Third Culture kids preparing to shift to another culture with an additional language.
- School of the Air students often have parents working for extended periods in the outback or remote regions. They may be mustering, flying or even sailing. Plotting the parent's GPS locations can be a link.
- Oilrigs and mining camps often have two week on/off rosters, so working parents may be away for concentrated weeks and then home fulltime.
- Travelling fathers constantly on overseas trips are the norm for some transitional families.
- Families where servants cook children's meals and they eat separately, missing out on family conversations with a parent about daily 'good' and 'bad' things.
- Shift workers with changing rosters.
- Some families have to prepare to move to a new country or travel for extended periods. To reduce the alienation and dislocation, having the students research on the Internet, get pamphlets and do family projects on their destination are useful strategies. Often the parent without a work permit can be more involved.

The family issues and electronic contact portrayed in 'Antarctic Dad' are

realistic. The Dad is not a remote 'Disney' father but the immediacy of e-mail

means fast accessibility, everyday. 'Real' family issues such as homework,

readers, projects, footy games and celebrations such as birthdays are illustrated as part of the story.

The parents are modelling interest in a wider world by making Dad's work real

and accessible with digital photos. Dad is involving his family in his work in an

intimate sense, like young children going to his office each day.

Involvement

of the class in the project related to the absent parent's destination makes it

into 'virtual school'.

In some client families in transition, the Dad takes the kids to school and does

the reading THAT week he's home and then they cycle home together and

chat about daily news. Some families write notes in envelopes for the Dad's

suitcase and he opens one per day when he is away.

Nightly mobile contact or e-mails and digital photos such as in 'Antarctic Dad'

are realistic ways in which families in transition retain contact by discussing

homework or school news. Families often send a soft toy to travel with the

father or be photographed in his changing workplaces.

'Antarctic Dad' provides global modelling of compassion for people in different lands and for environmental issues on a wider scale. That is relevant

for all families