

**CAN I TAKE  
MY CHILDREN**



*to the*

**MISSION  
FIELD?**



The prospect of packing up the kids and schlepping them halfway around the world sometimes puts off parents who would otherwise willingly answer God's call to cross-cultural missions.

Taking children to the mission field doesn't have to be scary.

Pioneers UK has missionary kids in some pretty wild environments—from places so isolated that missionaries have to build their own houses out of local materials to megacities in North Africa, our kids are reaching the unreached right alongside their parents.

Four years ago, Alex and Hannah bundled up their two small boys and took them to the mission field in the Balkans. Parenting any child is full of challenges and joys, but how does parenting in a mission context compare to parenting in the UK? We sat down with Alex and Hannah to find out.

## **What role do your children play in the mission? How do they participate?**

*“Having the boys with us here has been great, for us and for the mission. Often they open up conversations. People will often stop and talk to us in the street or in the shops who possibly wouldn’t otherwise want to have anything to do with us. We have particularly cute children (if we say so ourselves)! Everyone wants to pinch their cheeks and quite often they stop and talk to the boys and fuss over the boys and ignore me! It just makes people take more notice, I guess. When we go to our local supermarket, the girl at the checkout counter is always fussing over the boys. But yesterday I went by myself and the girl stopped and chatted to me as well and wanted my phone number and wanted to meet up for coffee!*

*It gives a real legitimacy in our life. Especially in this cultural context, where family is so important. They’re often quite surprised we’ve come. Often if I’m out on my own, they’ll ask, “Are you here with your wife? And you’ve got children? And the children go to local schools?” The fact that they’re in the local schools, that they’re learning the language, gives us a real legitimacy because they see that we are living like them. It gives us the ability to be with people on their level.”*



*“Our youngest, when he was younger, literally opened some doors for us. He was too small to reach the front door handle, so one day he got his little step and put it by the front door and used it to open the front door and go out. We had two front doors, so then he used it on the next front door. Then he took his step down to the garden and opened the garden gate, and went out wandering the street. I was right behind him, of course. But he just went down the street with his little step seeing which other doors and gates he could open! One of our neighbours was out who we hadn’t got talking to before and she saw him and was quite taken with him. And that opened a door for me to go and have coffee with her as well! It’s a very tangible example of how they help us to create contacts.*

*Another thing that comes to mind of real door opening is when we both need to be out, having to look for someone to look after them. At the moment, our youngest son is with our neighbour, and he’ll spend three hours there. In the winter particularly when the neighbour isn’t in the garden so much and we’re not out and about so much—everyone shuts themselves in in the cold winters here—the ability to go into her house twice a week because she looks after our son really opens up communication and keeps us on good terms with our neighbours.”*



## **How do you think living abroad at a young age is shaping your children for the future, both positively and negatively?**

*“I think a big thing is that they’re growing up bilingually, and that is really helpful for a child. They’re growing up as “citizens of the world.” They’re not just seeing one corner of the world and one school and one set of white children. They’re meeting children from other backgrounds who live in a different culture. We still keep a fairly British culture in our home, so they often spot the differences between the children in their school and what the other families are doing, and we get questions. It’s just good that they can learn that people live in different ways and there are different ways of doing things. It opens them more to other people, I think.*”

*I also think they are quite on board with what we’re doing and why we’re doing it. We do a family worship time, so we’ve been learning about the Bible and they’re learning how important it is to go out with the gospel to other people and share it with them. They often join us in praying for their friends and teachers, that they might come to know Jesus. I think that’s really important for children, as well. They understand why we’re here, and I think they see it as important, in a way. “*





*“Remembering why we’re here is quite important because our oldest in particular has often said, “When are we next going home? Why aren’t we going home? When are we next going to see Granny and Grandpa? Oh, I wish I was able to play with my cousins.” And it takes a bit of careful navigating to say that those are good wishes, but God has given us a time to be here at the moment.*

*Another big challenge is the education system. In comparison to undeveloped countries I’m sure it’s probably a dream, but in comparison to what we’re used to in Britain, it’s a very weak system. So it’s a challenge to think how we can add to that, to append the things the boys do in school, keep them up to date with British standards, such that if we did have to go home and they did have to go into British schools, they would be able to cope.*

*Also, you have to decide how much you want your child to be like the children around them, and how much you’re going to say, “No that’s a line I’m just not willing to cross.” Five year olds here will walk themselves to school and cross busy roads and do everything themselves. You’ll see them playing in building sites with open wiring, and sharp reinforced steel bits littered around and you’re thinking, “No I don’t want my child to be playing there.” But how do I say that to the children so that they don’t then repeat it and say, “Oh, you’re playing in a dirty area. My mummy and daddy say that’s nasty,” which obviously we don’t want them doing. But at the same time we don’t want them playing there.”*



*“And I guess the converse is true as well. We’ve kind of been freed from British culture, and the aspects of British culture that we don’t want our children growing up with. We don’t have to teach them all the things that British schools now teach that we don’t agree with.*

*And at the same time that we worry about where and how they play, there are also some aspects of the way children play that we really admire. A five-year-old will walk a four-year-old to school and they’ll really look after each other well. Children know how to play with children very well. Yeah, they’re still children, but there are some things that we’d love our children to gain from the children here. ”*





## **What are the joys and challenges to being a parent and a missionary simultaneously?**

*“Probably the same as being a parent and not being a missionary! One of the things I’ve thought about is how much of their behaviour is due to living outside their home culture and how much of it is just normal development? And quite often I come down to it being just normal development.*

*Every child gets a temper tantrum, every child hates to share, every child gets cranky at 5 o’clock. I have to get this idea out of my head that it’s because we’re overseas and it’s different.*

*Maybe it’s more about the difference between having a full time job outside the home and full time ministry, where the line between private and professional life or work and play and family time is blurred. It’s difficult to say this is work time, this is family time, because you can’t leave work at work. And so the idea of “Dad is at work now but he’s just in the next room” is hard. They can always come in and say, “Hey Daddy can you help me with this or that,” and that’s difficult for them I think.”*





## **What is the best way to pray for children of missionaries in general and yours specifically?**

*“I guess the number one, which is the same for every parent, is that they come to know Jesus for themselves, that they develop their own strong relationship with Jesus and don’t go off the rails when they move away from home. That they don’t abandon their faith but that it stays strong throughout their lives. That’s got to be every parent’s number one. I guess more specific for our situation is that they learn the language well and make friends—friends who are good for them.*

*That they are able to discern between what is good and what is bad. To know who is good for them to hang out with and who is not good for them to hang out with. Being able to balance their position—they’re sometimes treated as special and different because they’re English—and keep grounded and humble.”*



# **Do you have anything else you'd like people to know about being a missionary parent or being a missionary kid?**



*“Well, we’ve really appreciated the support we’ve had from the UK, particularly for our boys. The school that our oldest went to before we came out was a Christian school, and they still keep up writing letters to him and sending photos which is really nice for him. When we go on home leave he’ll be joining that class again so it’s nice that they’re keeping up communications.*

*We’ve also had people at church send us little gifts for the boys, and before we left one of the families gave us a little teddy to take with us and we gave them a teddy in return. So now we’ve got a link with that family because we’ve got their teddy and have taken it on adventures around Eastern Europe. We appreciate that people have thought about them and wanted to make sure they’re ok.*

*Also, being parents of missionary kids is a privilege because it kind of opens up the Sunday school at our sending church. We went back over the summer and went to our home church, and we were able to go into the Sunday school with the boys and do a little talk about our city and what’s happening here. Because the boys are part of the non-British world, it gives a bigger link to the children there. It helps them know more about mission, and gives more of an interest because these boys are actually doing this and living it. ”*

**Thanks for sharing your insights, Alex and Hannah. We really hope your experience will help encourage parents who are sensing God’s call to the field!**





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