

Bangkok's own expatriate counselor Ann White answers your questions about culture shock, expat life, and relationships.

## ask Ann



**Q** My husband spends a lot of time with his drinking pals. I think he is an alcoholic from what I have read on the Internet. I have a nagging feeling that I am somehow at fault. Is it something I did or did not do? That I am not good enough, not attractive enough or nor clever enough? I spend a lot of time worrying if he will come home at night or if he will be okay to go to work in the morning. Please advise me what to do. I am so lonely and unhappy.

**A** Often expatriate wives have a “nagging fear” that they are at fault when something goes wrong in their marriage. Marriages that have been going smoothly for some time often get a wake-up call when they arrive in Bangkok. It can bring out the best and the worst in relationships. Some husbands are caught up in their work and may want to chill out and decompress with their drinking buddies after a long day. Moderation is the key. Has there been a recent change in his behavior; is this a new pattern? Does he come home to the family most

evenings? Has his drinking interfered with his performance at work? When he is out with his buddies, are they only drinking or are they watching sports or playing poker? Or, are they involved in the more serious night-life of girly bars and massage parlors? How frequently does he drink?

If he drinks heavily every day or goes on drinking binges, he may have a problem. Binge drinkers do not need to drink everyday, but when they do drink they get to a tipping point and are unable to stop until they are drunk. Drinking can also be a form of self-medication for depression. Many women tell me their husbands have “changed here,” and are doing things they never thought they were capable of doing. That can be a red flag. Trust your instincts.

You might want to look at your self-esteem issues if you question your appearance, intelligence, and capabilities. Ask yourself: Because of someone else's drinking: Am I afraid? Am I worried or losing sleep? Do I feel sorry for myself, inadequate, or guilty? Am I ashamed of my situation? Do I ever feel embarrassed by the drinker's behavior? Do I make excuses for the drinker or take on his/her responsibilities? Am I tired, nervous, or depressed? Am I angry or frustrated at times? Do I feel desperate and alone? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then you might want to seek help

for yourself through attending meetings of Al-Anon—a confidential, self-help support group. Alcoholism is a family disease because it affects everyone in the family, not just the person who is drinking. Al-Anon puts the focus back on you. There are two English-language Al-Anon meetings in Bangkok each week, at the Rectory Building of Holy Redeemer Church on Ruam Rudee Soi 5. They meet at 5p.m. on Tuesdays and at 4:30p.m. on Saturdays for one hour. See the website for details and a map.

<http://alanonthailand.org/>

<http://alanonthailand.org/meetings>

There is also a weekly meeting held online using Skype, Fridays at 3p.m. For more information contact: [thereisawayafg@gmail.com](mailto:thereisawayafg@gmail.com) or [www.ola-is.org/groups/will](http://www.ola-is.org/groups/will).

If your husband is an alcoholic he can find help in AA when he is ready. To find AA meetings and locations, see: [www.aathailand.org](http://www.aathailand.org). Channah Thailand is a Drug and Alcohol Treatment Program in Kanchanburi. Visit their website for further details: [www.channahthailand.com](http://www.channahthailand.com).

**Q** There seem to be a lot of great opportunities here. But, if we're only going to be here temporarily, how do I commit to anything?



When you travel for pleasure, you are only passing through, but you probably take advantage of the opportunity to see the sights, visit museums or areas of cultural interest, and dine on the local cuisine. Even if you are only going to be living in Thailand for a matter of months or weeks, you still have the chance to expand your interests! Make it a goal to find activities that you can accomplish in the specified time, or explore an area of interest you can continue to enjoy wherever you go next, such as short cooking courses; intensive SCUBA classes; gyms that offer membership by the month; yoga, golf, or Pilates lessons; lectures and tours with the National Museum Volunteers or the Siam Society. The many women's organizations are always hosting interesting activities. Even short-term involvement will enhance your stay. Volunteer work is another venue that can be short in duration: volunteers have the luxury of doing what they can, while they can. Look in ANZWG's *Bangkok Guide* under "Welfare" for suggestions and contacts. The important thing is that you find something to do and use whatever time you have wisely. You can leave your footprint here and take away a growth experience.



Ever since we moved overseas, my friends and family back home seem to treat me differently. They don't include me in family discussions or decisions, and they almost never call, even though they know they could Skype me for free. What's going on?



It's important to remember that your family and friends' lives are probably as busy and full as when you were living at home. Harsh but true, since you were the one who left, you might just have to make more of an effort than they do. I suggest scheduling a "phone date"—a specific time to talk to your family and friends. It might be challenging due to the time difference, but it is worth the effort. You need to be proactive and keep the lines of communication open. You might want to give your family and friends a small webcam. Perhaps your family can



Do you have a question for Ann?  
Email us at: [ask@acclimatemagazine.com](mailto:ask@acclimatemagazine.com), and you might find your answer in an upcoming issue.

arrange a regular video conference call that everyone can participate in and look forward to. That alone could help you stay involved and bring you closer together. Use the time when you are talking to them to inquire about their lives, their stresses, and what is important to them. When you are living the exotic and exciting life of an expatriate it might seem like their lives are dull in comparison. It is not a competition, so show your interest in them and give what you want to receive in return.



We typically get reassigned every two to three years, and I'm worried that we're not providing a "normal" childhood for our kids. Is it good for kids to move around so much?



What is "normal?" There is a myth that all children are resilient and that they can adapt to any situation, but the truth of the matter is that some children adapt more easily than others. As their parent you know your children better than anyone. Are your children happy and are they thriving? There are some tremendous advantages of the expatriate life and there are some serious challenges. My favorite book on the subject is David C. Pollock and Ruth Van Reken's *Third Culture Kids*.

David Pollock spoke to parents in Bangkok several times and helped them discover ways to enhance transitions as

families moved from one place to the next. I agree with Mr. Pollock that having good closure when you leave makes space for something new when you arrive. My husband and I told our children if they stayed in touch with their friends (who were also moving around to different places) that when we traveled we would try and visit them.

Joan Fedoruk, a school psychologist at the International School Eastern Seaboard (ISE) and long-term resident of Thailand, says: "Often in troubled economic times, there is no option regarding accepting the assignment. If parents are happy and stable and like the expat life, children are often happy, too. Nowadays everyone sees the value in being a global citizen, so there may not be as much resistance from the extended family when one moves to another country or continent. I believe it is difficult for pre-teens and teens to move. When peers become so precious, leaving them can be traumatic." That's not to say you shouldn't move if you have older children, it just means you might have to work a bit harder to help ease their transition.

As a parent you need to be aware of any changes in behavior of your children. Signs of depression in children may include any of the following symptoms: irritability or anger; continuous feelings of sadness; hopelessness; social withdrawal; increased sensitivity to rejection; changes in appetite and/or sleep; vocal outbursts or crying; difficulty concentrating; fatigue and low energy; physical complaints (such as stomachaches, headaches) that do not

respond to treatment; reduced ability to function during events and activities at home or with friends; feelings of worthlessness or guilt; impaired thinking or concentration; thoughts of death or suicide. Check with your child's teachers and talk to the school counselor if you think there is a problem. He/she can recommend a therapist or a child psychiatrist to assess the situation. Many children thrive in multicultural environments but for those who do not, extra care and attention must be paid to their needs, and decisions should be based on the availability of resources to support success for that child. Fortunately, there are many special needs programs available (see ANZWG's *Bangkok Guide*).

**Q** As we travel around the region, my kids are seeing some very "adult" things: poverty and prostitution to name just two. I feel like I should talk to them about these things, but I'm not sure how to approach it or what to say. Do you have any advice?

**A** Again, I asked Joan Fedoruk for her wisdom on this question and she says: "In every country there is poverty and prostitution. I feel we have to be realistic with children and let them know that these are universal conditions. They are here, and the problems are apparent. According to the age of the child, it can be dealt with in a straightforward way."

How anyone deals with poverty is personal and individual based on one's own life experience. Father Joe Maier, a Catholic priest at the Human Development Center who lives and works in the Klong Toey slums, noted that if you give money to the beggars on the street, do it with a smile and a greeting to acknowledge that you see them—they are not invisible. When you get to know the ones in your neighborhood they will become friendly faces and always glad to see you coming.

As for prostitution, I recommend a frank discussion about how the girls are often trying to earn money to send home for their families. Many of these girls believe it is their duty to provide

for their parents. If they do not have educational opportunities to pursue other careers, then they have limited options. Thailand offers great opportunities to sponsor educational scholarships for needy students or contribute in myriad other small ways (See the Welfare section of ANZWG's *Bangkok Guide* for sponsorship and donation opportunities). This could be a family discussion where everyone participates.

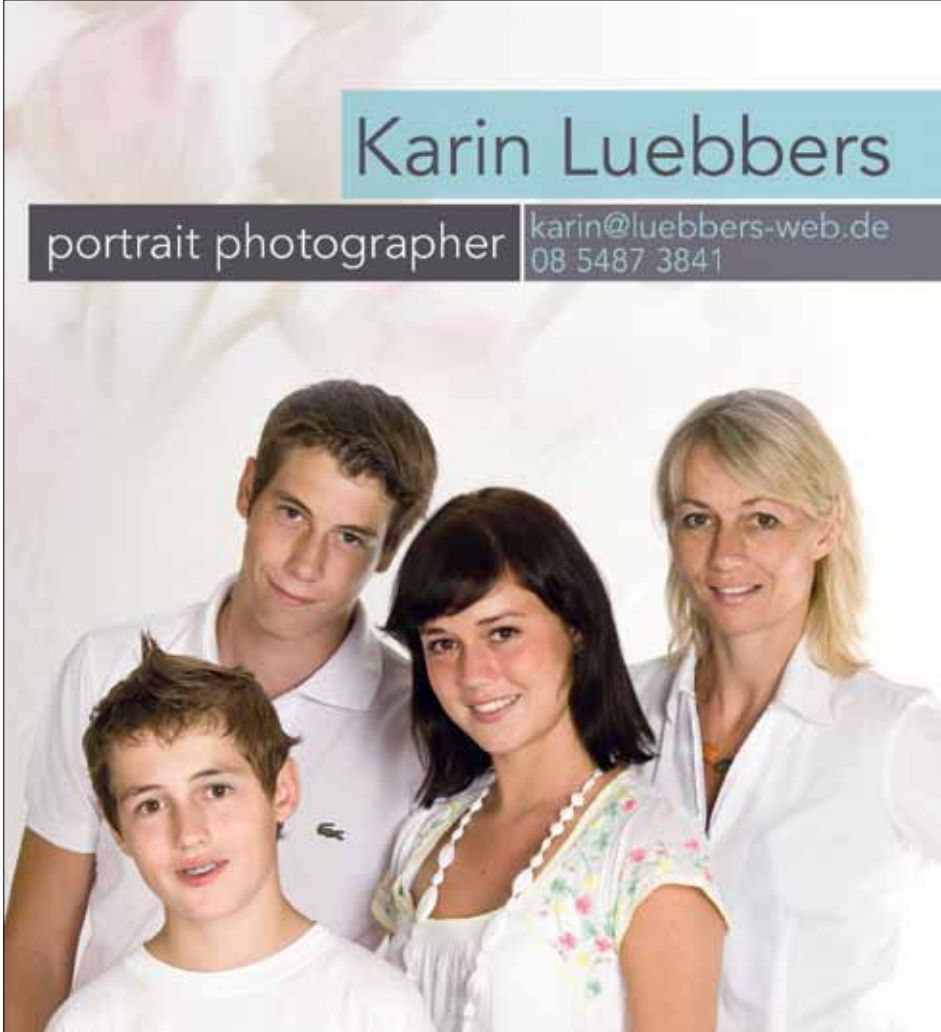
As global citizens, learning to let go

of prejudice and judgment of others might be one of the best lessons we can teach our children. It is most important to remember that as parents we model the behavior that our children will eventually follow. Parents modeling kindness, outreach, and commitment to making a difference will benefit our children.

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For the past 30 years, the Samaritans of Bangkok has been providing confidential crisis intervention services over the phone. The Samaritans is a non-profit, non-sectarian registered charity. English-speaking staff, trained in crisis intervention, will be available to answer calls and also provide referrals within the expatriate community. They have been trained to provide unconditional, emotional support and, more importantly, to listen in your time of need. All calls are handled on an anonymous basis and are free of charge. Anyone who feels depressed, lonely, or just needs to talk can call. We are there to help you...

English Services: T: 02 713 6791, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week |  
Thai Services: T: 02 713 6793, Daily 12 noon-10p.m.



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A portrait of Karin Luebbers, a woman with blonde hair, smiling. She is standing next to a young boy and a young girl, both also smiling. They are all wearing white shirts. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.