



# Department for Communities

Support for Families



When a Parent Works Away



Government of **Western Australia**  
Department for **Communities**

# Minister's Message



I am pleased to promote this practical guide that provides useful information for families who often have one parent working away.

More Western Australian families are finding themselves in this situation where either parent works away for extended periods of time.

Some families find this change easy to adapt to, while others find managing this lifestyle somewhat difficult.

I lived this lifestyle with four children aged five years and under for over 20 years and understand the issues families face in similar circumstances.

The ideas and suggestions outlined in this booklet are just some of the many strategies that have worked for families experiencing and living this unique lifestyle.

*Robyn McSweeney*

**Hon Robyn McSweeney MLC**

MINISTER FOR CHILD PROTECTION;  
COMMUNITY SERVICES; SENIORS AND  
VOLUNTEERING; WOMEN'S INTEREST; YOUTH



# Top Tips for Families

The 'home and away' cycle may bring out a range of emotions and can affect each family differently. Families can work together to overcome these challenges and deal with the range of emotions that may arise.

## Tips for families:



- Take the time to look after each other's emotional and physical well-being.
- Develop a good support network of friends and professional support services, especially if you are isolated from family and existing friends.
- Stick to a consistent family routine when Dad or Mum is home and away to give children a sense of security.
- Keep involved in parenting and the household by participating in everyday tasks.
- Create a family plan together by talking about how to deal with challenges. It's great to include the children in this if possible.



Exercise by taking a walk with baby in the pram, or join a walking group



Relax through yoga, golf, meditation or swimming



# Who Cares for the 'At Home' Parent when their Partner is Away?

A cycle of emotions ranging from happiness to helplessness and depression can occur during those times when one parent is working away from home. At times the family may feel particularly vulnerable especially when friends and family are scattered.

## You can:

- 1 Take care of yourself while your partner is away by doing activities you enjoy, spending quality time with your friends and making time to look after your health.
- 2 Keep up your energy levels by eating well and having quality sleep when you get the chance—remember it's okay to take a break.
- 3 Take some time for yourself each day. Sometimes the stress and tension of parenting on your own can feel overwhelming and it's easy to forget or run out of time to look after yourself.
- 4 Remind yourself why your family chose this lifestyle. Take advantage of the good times and focus on the benefits when you are feeling down.
- 5 Allow yourself to be supported by accepting help when offered and asking for help when needed.

"Personal support, practical help and good information can all make your parenting job easier."

6 Consider using a trusted babysitter or other child care arrangements (either permanent or casual) for your children each week. Your children will benefit from the different experiences, while giving you a break or the opportunity to do household chores, personal care or engage in your favourite activity.

7 Draw on the knowledge and personal support offered by family and friends. Friendships formed through parent groups and playgroups can provide an opportunity to share ideas.

8 Access internet-based forums, support groups and websites to communicate and share information.

9 Support services such as telephone helplines and parenting forums/workshops may be helpful at different times.

10 Take advantage of Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and other support offered by your partner's employer in dealing with the home and away cycle. They may be able to connect you with others in a similar situation.

11 If you feel overwhelmed and unable to cope, contact your GP, child health nurse or a counselling service.

Contact details for some of these services are listed at the back of this booklet.

1 Quotes are taken from the Ngala and Meerlinga report, "Aeroplanes always come back" *Fly-in Fly-out employment: managing the parenting transitions* (2006) by Dr Danielle Gallegos at the Centre for Social & Community Research, Murdoch University. Many thanks to Ngala and Meerlinga for permission to use these quotes.

"I ask for more help now than I did in the beginning, because I thought it was a sign of failure... I thought I was a power woman... and to ask people to help me, it was just a sign of failure but I've definitely gotten better now." <sup>(1)</sup>

Trish



3



Take time out once a month with friends



4



Go online for support and join a parenting forum





# Practical Advice for the 'At Home' Parent

Life is different when one parent works away from home. The adjustment may be easy for some families and not so easy for others.



Here are some of the ways parents can support children during these changes:

- 1 Maintain a regular family routine. Decide together what routines work best for your family and encourage everyone to stick to them.
- 2 Encourage your children to have regular contact with Dad or Mum when they are away. Use technology such as Skype, Facebook, messaging, video calls and telephone as appropriate. Sitting down together as a family to write a letter is another great way to maintain contact.
- 3 Explain your reasons for choosing this lifestyle to your children and allow them to express their feelings about what this is like for them.



"We'd start the countdown from five days and that's really exciting you know, every day it's like Daddy's coming home in four days and three sleeps and two sleeps. We chose five days because it's what she can count and it's easy with one hand." Cheryl

4 Counting down until Dad or Mum's return home can create an element of excitement and expectation in your children's lives. Through their excitement children demonstrate that Dad or Mum is part of their everyday life. You may choose to use a whiteboard or a calendar to mark off the days.

5 Create an environment that allows Dad or Mum to unwind from work and feel their sense of family. This may mean that there is no long list of 'to do's' that may cause conflict. Allow everyone the space to reconnect, so you can all enjoy spending time together as a family. Decide together how long is acceptable before jobs are started.

6 Schedule enjoyable activities you can do as a family which can be continued when Dad or Mum returns to work.

7 Think about ways everyone in the family can meet their needs for an enriching social life through sport, hobbies or other recreational activities.

8 Create a box of items that the children can look through to remind them of Dad or Mum (this box may contain photos, notes, toys or games).

9 Include the parent working away from home in everyday conversation—"I wonder what Dad would think about..." "I wonder if Mum would ....."

10 Encourage your children to develop positive friendships by having friends over and arranging play dates.



5



Keep a journal about how you are feeling



6



Enjoy spending time in the garden



### Share Your Tips with Us

We would love to hear what strategies work for your family when Dad, or Mum, works away. Send us an email at [parentingwaine@communities.wa.gov.au](mailto:parentingwaine@communities.wa.gov.au) and we will post the most creative ideas on our website! (We reserve the right to edit responses)

"He'd come home, we'd have real stress for two and a half days and then everything would settle down ... if we had a bit of a rest ... then we'd have a really happy four days." **Hillary**

# Mum and Dad:

## Caring for Your Children and Each Other

The way parents negotiate and problem solve when managing daily challenges can provide great learning for children. Working together as a family to develop solutions can have a positive influence on everyone in the family.

**1** If you are still deciding on whether you want to take on this lifestyle, picture what it will look like. You may want to come up with a family plan which might include the family goals you hope to achieve while working away from home. Consider how each parent is feeling and offer support to meet their practical and emotional needs. Set aside time to discuss frustrations and work out solutions.

**2** Be aware that a period of re-adjustment is normal at the time of leaving or returning home. Everyone will cope in their own way and it is important to remain patient and understanding. Communicate how you are both feeling and part with each other on good terms.

**3** It is important for both parents to recognise that they have both been working hard while apart and that each may need some 'time out' separately, as well as reconnecting as a couple and family.

"Don't think of mining as a job, you've got to think of mining as a lifestyle that's going to affect everything you do. If you're happy with it that's good, but you shouldn't be trapped in a lifestyle. It's a matter of balancing up what you get out of it." Jonathon





4 When managing children's behaviour be consistent and support each other. Discuss and set family rules together. When these rules are broken apply logical consequences. Check with your partner if things have changed for your child.

5 Remember, children may react when their Mum or Dad leaves for work and they may not know how to express their feelings verbally. Provide a space in which feelings can be openly discussed.

6 It is important to ensure you have adequate home security so that you all feel safe while your partner is away and have a well-planned emergency procedure should the need arise.

7 Make sure your children understand when Dad or Mum is leaving and that they have the opportunity to say goodbye. If this happens early in the morning, it may be easier to say goodbye the night before. For very young children, preparation for Dad or Mum's departure could involve spending some individual time with each other and ensuring that the daily routines such as bathing and feeding are incorporated into these times.

8 Be prepared to negotiate with your employer so that your working arrangements and roster work for you and your family.



7



Jump on a trampoline



8



Make a list of 6-10 things to do each day and be content if you achieve two of them



# Resources

## Telephone Support Services

### Parenting WA Line

A free 24/7 telephone information and support service for parents with children up to 18 years.

**t: 1800 654 432 (free call)**

**e: [parentingwaline@communities.wa.gov.au](mailto:parentingwaline@communities.wa.gov.au)**

### Ngala Helpline

Provides parenting information, strategies and referral for parents with children up to six years.

**t: (08) 9368 9368 (Helpline)**

**t: 1800 111 546 (Country callers)**

### healthdirect

Offers a health telephone helpline.

**t: 1800 022 222**

**e: [info@nhccn.com.au](mailto:info@nhccn.com.au)**

**w: [www.healthdirect.org.au](http://www.healthdirect.org.au)**

### Lifeline

Provides crisis counselling, information and referral to other services.

**t: 13 1114 – Telephone counselling**

**e: [lifeline@lifeline.org.au](mailto:lifeline@lifeline.org.au)**

**w: [www.lifelinewa.org.au](http://www.lifelinewa.org.au)**

### Pregnancy, Birth and Baby Helpline

A telephone and internet support service providing general information about pregnancy, birthing, post-natal care and parenting in the first 12 months.

**t: 1800 882 436**

**w: [www.healthdirect.org.au/pbb](http://www.healthdirect.org.au/pbb)**

## Support and Counselling

### Relationships Australia

Offers a range of family and support courses, including courses that explore the challenges facing families where a parent works away. **t: 1300 364 277**

**w: [www.relationships.com.au](http://www.relationships.com.au)**

### Centrecare

Counselling, support, mediation and training services. **t: (08) 9325 6644**

**w: [www.centrecare.com.au](http://www.centrecare.com.au)**

### Anglicare

Provides a range of services and counselling to individuals and families.

**t: (08) 9325 7033**

**w: [www.anglicarewa.org.au](http://www.anglicarewa.org.au)**

### Kinway

Provides counselling and relationship education programs and a telephone counselling service.

**t: 1800 812 511**

(Telephone Counselling Service)

**t: (08) 9263 2050 w: [www.kinway.org.au](http://www.kinway.org.au)**

### beyondblue:

#### the national depression initiative

Provides information and support to people living with depression.

**t: 1300 224 636**

**w: [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)**

### National Perinatal Depression Helpline

**t: 1300 726 306**

**w: [www.panda.org.au](http://www.panda.org.au)**

### Red Cross

Provides practical support for women who suffer from post natal depression.

**t: (08) 9225 8808**

**w: [www.redcross.org.au/wa](http://www.redcross.org.au/wa)**

### Wanslea

Provides child care and parenting support services. **t: (08) 9361 8277**

**w: [www.wanslea.asn.au](http://www.wanslea.asn.au)**



## Parenting Support

### Department for Communities

**Parenting WA** - the Parenting WA Line is a free 24/7 telephone service for information. Parenting WA staff support parents of children from pre-birth to 18 years of age by helping them gain knowledge, skills and confidence in their parenting. Support may be provided by telephone, information resources, individual sessions, home visiting (not available all areas), presentations, workshops, groups or community activities. Services are located throughout the State.

**t: 1800 654 432 (free call)**

**Parenting WA Library** - a free resource library for parents and carers with children up to 18 years.

**t: (08) 6279 1223 or 1800 686 155**

**w: [www.parenting.wa.gov.au](http://www.parenting.wa.gov.au)**

### Meerilinga

Supports the development and well-being of young children through the support of their families and community.

**t: (08) 9489 4022**

**w: [www.meerilinga.org.au](http://www.meerilinga.org.au)**

### The Raising Children Network

Helps parents with the day-to-day decisions of raising children, and looking after their own needs.

**w: [www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)**

### Mum Zone

Online parenting forum for Mums.

**w: [www.mumzone.com.au](http://www.mumzone.com.au)**

### The Bub Hub Website

An online parenting resource including support forums for connecting with other families.

**w: [www.bubhub.com.au](http://www.bubhub.com.au)**

### Playgroup WA

To find your nearest playgroup.

**t: 1800 171 882**

**w: [www.playgroupwa.com.au](http://www.playgroupwa.com.au)**

### Ngala

Supports parents in the early stages of parenting (0-6 years).

**t: (08) 9368 9368 (Metro)**

**t: 1800 111 546 (Country)**

**w: [www.ngala.com.au](http://www.ngala.com.au)**

### CLAN WA

Offers a range of services, including home visiting services to support families with children up to the age of 12 years.

**t: (08) 9228 9006**

**w: [www.clanwa.com.au](http://www.clanwa.com.au)**

### Community Child

#### Health Nurses

Community Child Health Nurses can assess children's health and development and provide information about many aspects of parenting, maternal and family health and healthy lifestyles.

**w: [www.health.wa.gov.au/services/](http://www.health.wa.gov.au/services/)**

## Children's Sport and Recreation

### The Department of Sport and Recreation

Go online to find a sport or recreation club and download the Active Kids Holiday Calendar.

**w: [www.dsr.wa.gov.au](http://www.dsr.wa.gov.au)**

### Local Council

Your local council's website will provide information around a wide variety of activities and services.

**w: [www.dlg.wa.gov.au/Content/Directory/](http://www.dlg.wa.gov.au/Content/Directory/)**

## 10 Tips for self care

9

Listen to your favourite music



10

Go dancing





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# Maintaining the Balance



More and more families are developing their own strategies to deal with the challenges of the home and away lifestyle and are making it work for them.

Your family can all work together to stay connected while enjoying the positive benefits of this phase in your family's life.

## **Department for Communities**

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140 William Street  
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**t:** (08) 6551 8700

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## **Parenting WA Line**

Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

**t: 1800 654 432**

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This publication is available on request in other formats to assist people with special needs.