



**HOME
AGAIN...**

**...GONE
AGAIN**



Support for families when a parent works away



From our big cities to our small communities, many of our families deal with the challenges of work-related separation.

Some families quickly adapt to this lifestyle, while others find it difficult to manage.

We are pleased to put together this practical guide that provides useful information for families who often have one parent working away.

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

For this booklet we have referred to the “away” parent as Dad and the “stay at home” parent as Mom. We do realize this may not always be the case but for the majority of families engaged in this lifestyle, this is the norm.

Many families today are learning to cope with the many challenges of the home and away lifestyle and are making it work for them.

It is important to remember that this lifestyle is a choice and not all families deal well with the pressures. The decision needs to be a family one. Have a plan or “understanding” about how long you will continue the arrangement and reassess your goals from time to time.

When everyone works together, supports one another and stays connected, the home away experience can be positive and beneficial.



Challenges **When a Parent Works Away**

Some common challenges for:

Mom – Parenting Alone

One of the greatest challenges for Mom is parenting alone. The extra support that another presence in the home gives is really missed.

Dad – Missing the Milestones

Being away and missing birthdays, hockey games and the everyday significant happenings of the family, is difficult for Dads.

Children – Separation

No matter what the age, if Dad has a good relationship with the child, his presence is missed.

Couples – The Emotional Cycle

The range of emotions caused by the home and away cycle add to the challenge of maintaining a good relationship.

Families – Staying Connected

Due to time zone differences and Dad's work schedule, families are challenged to find the best time and means, to stay connected.

“The biggest challenge for me is that I’m a single mom for 8 months of the year.”

“If something happens, she wants her Dad. They’re really close when he’s home.”

“He gets up at 4:20am to call the children on Skype while they eat breakfast. That’s their time. We do a Skype call later at night. That’s our time.”

Additional Stress Factors

Sometimes there are factors that add to the level of stress a family may experience:

- Health issues (physical or emotional) for the stay at home parent or the children
- Lack of extended family support
- Pregnancy
- The parent at home works full time or attends school

The Positives

Even though there are challenges, the work away experience can be both positive and beneficial for families.

- ✓ The parent away is able to spend quality time with the family when home
- ✓ Financial stability
- ✓ Job security
- ✓ Increases the quality of relationships
- ✓ Strengthens independence for both partners
- ✓ Work enjoyment and experience for the partner away

“I find it emotionally draining to look after my child with no help while pregnant... keeping up with play time, housework, groceries, shovelling, etc.”

“I find we are more mature in our relationship because he works away ... we don't argue over the little things.”

Tips from Families

- 1. Maintain a regular family routine* whether Dad is at home or away. Routines give children a sense of security and help them manage change more easily.
- 2. Be consistent in guiding children's behaviour* and keep to family rules so children are not confused about what the limits are.
- 3. Develop a good support system* especially if family members are not near. Don't feel guilty about asking for help.
- 4. Find ways to stay connected.* Take advantage of the latest technology; Skype, texting, etc. Good communication is important to all relationships especially if one parent is away.
- 5. Secure the best rotation schedule possible.* Be prepared to negotiate with your employer so your work arrangements and schedule are the best possible for you and your family.

"I find the routine becomes non-existent when Dad is home because he tries to make-up for lost time. He has a harder time saying "no" after being away."

"I used to feel guilty if I had to depend on others and thought it was a sign of weakness but I don't feel that way anymore. Now I'm thankful for any support."

Advice for Moms

1. *Take care of yourself.* Eating well, exercise and rest are essential to a healthy body and mind. Remember what's good for you is good for your child.
2. *Take time for yourself.* Parenting alone can be overwhelming and mothers often find themselves on the bottom of their priority list. Taking time out for yourself, is as important for you, as it is your child.
3. *Take advantage of support services.* Your community may have organizations, such as a family resource centre, that offer support. It is also a great place to connect with other moms, especially if you are new to the area.
4. *Stay positive.* There are always pros and cons to every situation. When you're feeling down, try and focus on the positives.
"You cannot direct the wind but you can adjust your sails". - Unknown

"I try and take at least an hour a day for myself. I need that social time with my friends."

"Our local Family Resource Centre is doing a wonderful job. Sometimes just a listener makes all the difference in the world."

Suggestions for Dads

- 1. Let your children know what you do.* Find toys that represent your workplace, such as trucks, loaders or ships, etc. Take pictures of where you work or some of the things you see and do while away.
- 2. Stay connected while away.* Leave notes for Mom to read to your child at bedtime or share a favourite song or story by recording it. If you miss a birthday, leave a special note or gift at home.
- 3. Support mom in keeping to routines when you are at home **and** away.* It's important when managing your child's behavior that Dad and Mom are consistent and back each other up. Work together as much as possible.
- 4. Have an emergency plan.* Develop a plan for an unexpected family crisis or emergency. You will be more at ease while working away, knowing you have support in place.

"Whenever he'd hear 'our' song, on the radio, "I'm Already There" by Lonestar, he would call on his cell phone, and put it next to the radio. If we weren't home, he would record it on the answering machine."

"Because of the time difference, the children were often gone to bed when he got off work, so he would leave a message for them on the phone and they would play it the next morning."

Caring for Children

- 1. Acknowledge your child's feelings.*
Encourage them to talk openly. Instead of saying, "Don't feel sad," say, "You seem sad. I feel that way, too."
- 2. Have a visual countdown.* Give your child a method of measuring time until Dad comes home. Some ideas: crossing days off a calendar, paper chains, jelly beans in a jar, etc.
- 3. Plan something for the day Dad leaves.*
To ease the stress of separation, spend some time with your child doing a fun activity.
- 4. Take pictures while Dad is gone.*
Capture everyday events and the special ones on camera or video. When Dad comes home, celebrate with a family night and watch it together.
- 5. Plan things to do when Dad gets home.*
Whatever you plan, try and remember to follow through. Broken promises are especially hard for children to deal with.

"Don't put too much on the shoulders of older children...talk to them and let them know its okay to miss Dad and feel sad. Try not to say, "Be strong for Dad"."

"When he first gets home they're inseparable... everything is Dad, Dad..."



For Couples

1. *Keep your relationship alive.* When Dad comes home, plan to spend time together as a couple. Get a sitter and do something you both enjoy.
2. *Communicate openly and honestly with each other.* Good relationships thrive on openness and honesty.
3. *Give affirmation of your love.* Loneliness can add stress to relationships. Be consistent in reassuring each other of your love and commitment.
4. *Be patient with each other.* Try to understand things from your partner's point of view. Take the time to discuss frustrations and work out solutions.

"We always make a point to never hang up mad."

"When he first comes home he's tired, overwhelmed and happy all at the same time. I find I need to step back and give him space. He doesn't need to be bombarded right away with everything that went on while he was gone."

"When he comes home, I want to go out but he wants to stay home."

Your community may have services in place to support your family as you parent your children. Local Family Resource Centres offer a wide range of quality programming that would be beneficial to all family members.

The quotes in the sidebar are all comments from moms who are experiencing the challenges of work separation.

A special thank-you to all the moms who so openly shared their heart on the many issues surrounding this topic.

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“The work away experience is not for everyone. We both made the decision for him to work away and when he signed up, I signed up. I look at being there for the children, keeping the house, booking his flights, and all that, as my job.”

“We love the extra time we can spend together as a family. It’s like a vacation every two weeks. We’ll continue as long as it works for us.”