



**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.



Some of our  
“home again  
...gone again”  
families



## **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***

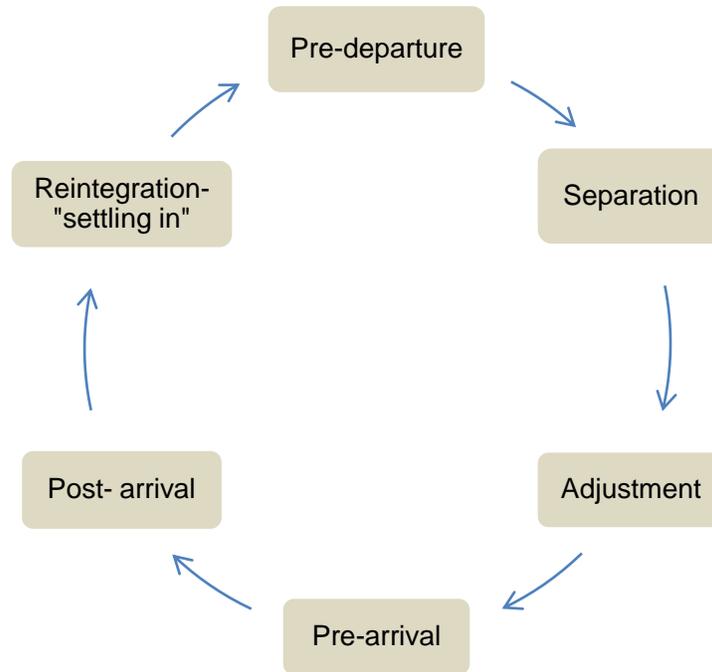
Due to time zone differences and Dad's work schedule, families are challenged to find the best time and means, to stay connected.

*“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 4:20 am 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.”*

## ***The Emotional Cycle of Separation***



There are many emotions a family may experience as they go through the cycle of separation. Even though these emotions can be unique to each member of the family, there are generally some common feelings that all families experience.

### **Pre-departure**

As Dad prepares to leave, he may be quiet and withdrawn (especially if separation is lengthy and there are tasks to complete before he goes). He may feel affectionate, anxious, distracted, grumpy or sad. Mom may experience similar emotions. There is a greater likelihood that couples will argue during this time and although these arguments may be insignificant, they provide a way for the couple to put some emotional distance between themselves in preparation for living apart. For children, once they are old enough to be aware that Dad is leaving, they may experience sadness and/or anger.

## **Separation**

An initial sense of relief that the pain of saying good-bye is over may be followed by anxiety. Routines may have been interrupted and need to be re-established. The stay-at-home parent may often feel sad, guilty, restless, and irritable. For younger children, (depending on their development and relationship with Dad), the first couple of days after separation, they may experience a sense of loss which can result in sadness or anger, tantrums or behaviour issues.

## **Adjustment**

At some point, wives may realize “hey, I’m doing O.K.!” They have re-established family patterns and settled into a routine. They have begun to feel more comfortable with the additional responsibilities expected of the stay-at-home parent. Generally speaking, children are very resilient, and often rebound quickly from feelings of sadness and/or anger.

## **Pre-arrival**

In this part of the cycle, both the parent away and the parent and child/ren at home, feel an anxious excitement about being together again. Mom is looking forward to “just being Mom again” and Dad is longing to be reconnected with his family.

## **Post-arrival**

For the most part there is a sense of happiness and relief. Even though both parents may be happy and relieved, this period may also be characterised by an increased opportunity of argument. After separation, expectations of the other partner can be higher. For example, when Dad arrives home, Mom may be looking for more attention and help with the children while Dad may be tired and moody and need time to recuperate due to the work schedule and travel. They both need to be aware of each other’s needs and allow time to refocus on their relationship.

## **Reintegration “Settling In”**

If Dad’s rotation allows him to stay at home for a week or more, routines are established and there is a sense of unity as the couple and family reconnect.

## ***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..."*



## Activities for Families

### Mailbox with Movable Flag

#### Materials:

An empty Premium cracker box or a 10 pk. - tetra juice box or premium cracker box (or any box the size of a mailbox), scissors, cardstock, foam sheets, construction paper, glue, paper fastener, Velcro stick-on fastener.

Cut **top** flaps off the opened end of the box. Using glue, cover the box with construction paper.

If making the rounded mailbox, glue a piece of cardstock (cut to fit) to the top of both sides of the mailbox. (Construction paper may not be firm enough)

Lay the mailbox (on end) on a foam sheet, trace the outline and cut to fit. Repeat for the front, remembering to cut the front, a little longer (for the square box) or leave a tab on the rounded part, to attach a fastener. Glue one to the back and the remaining piece to the flaps on the front, for the door of the mailbox.

Make the arm of the flag by gluing foam to cardstock or thin cardboard. Make the flag from construction paper and glue to the arm. Attach with a paper fastener. For a latch, use a Velcro stick-on fastener.

### Countdown 'Til Daddy Comes Home

Recycle a container (peanut butter jar, etc.) and decorate (label can say, "Kisses from Daddy"). Fill the container with treats of your child's choice (Kisses, etc.). Your child can then countdown by removing one treat each day until Dad comes home. Enjoy!

### Mail for Dad



### Countdown 'Til Daddy Comes Home



## ***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 Centre's 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.***

*“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.”*



**The Tree House  
Family Resource Centre**

*Where families learn and play together*

*The information contained in this booklet  
was compiled by Myrna Moss,  
for the Tree House Family Resource Centre,  
Deer Lake, NL.*

*For more information you may contact the  
Parent Program Coordinator at;  
[treehouse\\_ppc@nf.aibn.com](mailto:treehouse_ppc@nf.aibn.com)  
1(866)635-5808 (toll free)*



*Scan with your smart phone to visit our website*

*[www.treehouserresourcecentre.com](http://www.treehouserresourcecentre.com)*