

Tips for long distance fathers.

To be separated from your family for an extended period of time can give rise to a number of sometimes confusing and conflicting emotions.

Homesickness, heartache, frustration, jealousy, isolation, guilt, or even sometimes relief!

Each of these feelings is legitimate, and completely understandable given what can be very stressful periods of separation.

Parenting from a distance is becoming increasingly common in many occupations, but this does not mean that the role of the distant parent should be in any way minimised or less significant. The impact this separation can have on both you, as the distant and sometimes isolated person, and your partner and children can be reduced by following just some of the suggestions included in this tip sheet.

Having a healthy family relationship to start with is integral in building the resilience required to minimise the impact of negotiating a long distance family relationship. Healthy relationships are those that are built on trust, open communication, respect and understanding for everyone in the family unit.

Pre departure check list:

- Ask yourself – ‘am I ready to take on this posting’. This is a decision that will have an impact on a large number of people: family, friends, and your personal networks. While only you will know if you are ready, seek advice from those around you that you trust.
- Before leaving on an extended journey openly discuss as a family your need to be away for a little while. Be open about the sadness and happiness that your trip will create for you – the good things and the bad things. Be perfectly clear about where you are going, why you are going and how long you will be away. It is important that your children are aware that you will be coming home and that you still love them very much, even if you won't be home to read them a story each night.
- All parents need a break from the kids every so often. If you know that you have a big trip or extended time away coming up, try to arrange for an opportunity for you and your partner to have some time alone together – treat yourselves to a romantic weekend away or a night in a city hotel.
- Use a diary or calendar to be sure you are aware of all the special events that are going to occur while you are away so that you don't miss any of them. Remember seemingly small events to you are often very big for your children.
For example:
 - A school play / sports day
 - A friends birthday party
 - A big match or sporting event
 - Mothers day / Fathers day
 - Other significant anniversaries

Try to make contact at the time of these events or write a letter telling them how proud you are of them. Sending something special can also add to the occasion. This can be prearranged with a delivery service of some kind (such as a florist) or with your partner.

- Before you leave create a countdown calendar with your children so they can mark off each day that you are away.

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While your away:

- When phoning home pre prepare topics to talk about with your kids, paint a picture with words of what you are doing
- Send home photos, postcards and stories about your adventures. Trivial things for you might be a fantastic show and tell topic for your child!
- Mail home simple items from your location. Newspaper articles drink coasters, stamps, food wrappers or any other items that give a feel for your location.
- Use technology to remain in contact. Send an instant message or email at unusual times to let your family know that you are thinking of them.
- Send home a photo documentary of what you do all day when you are away. Include things like what you eat, how you travel, or where you sleep. Encourage your kids to reply with the same.

Coming Home:

Short term visits -

- Try and retain some normality around family activities, children benefit from routine. Don't spend the short visits home trying to make up for your absence. 'Normal' activities provide kids with some feeling of security and help them adjust to your next departure more easily.

For good -

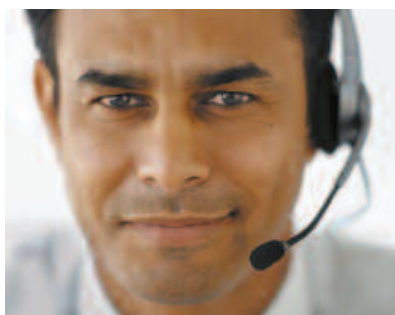
- When coming home for good, be respectful of the challenges faced by your partner in being the sole carer of your kids in your absence – honour their role with recognition.

This list is by no means exhaustive.

Sometimes the most important part of the process can be sitting down with your family and coming up with your own ideas on how to remain in touch during long absences.

It is also worth remembering and sometimes nice to know, that as much as you are missing family members at home, they too are missing you very much.

1300 78 99 78
www.menslineaus.org.au



The only service of its kind, Mensline Australia provides confidential telephone counselling, information and referral to specifically enable men to enhance their relationships and manage the challenges associated with disruptions to their family life or primary relationships.

Managed through Crisis Support Services Inc, Mensline Australia is a national service available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for the cost of a local call.

Mensline Australia was established in September 2001 as part of the Commonwealth Government's Men and Family Relationships initiative. Since then, the service has been overwhelmed by calls from men around the country wanting to talk about their relationships.

Talk it over
**Mens
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AUSTRALIA


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Mensline Australia
is managed by Crisis Support Services