

Tips for Parents



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Supporting your child if one parent works or lives away

You may not be together as parents all the time because one parent lives or works away for extended periods of time but you are both still parents to your child. Whatever the situation, it's important you work together to decide how you will parent your child.



Parents staying at home have concerns about:

- **Making decisions** – Being the only one to decide on routines and managing behaviour.
- **Feeling alone** – It can be very isolating being a lone parent and raising children and making decisions without support.
- **Anxiety about partner returning** – Feeling concerned that the returning partner will not fit into the current routine and will cause conflict and confusion.
- **Negative feelings** – Feeling unhappy they are left behind to manage the family alone may lead to resentment towards the other partner.
- **Emergency situations** – Worrying about the partner being able to get home in the event of a family emergency.

Parents who live away have concerns about:

- **Missing key events** – Being upset they miss out on key events in their children's lives e.g., birthdays, school plays or sports days.
- **Not fitting in** – Feeling concerned they won't fit in with the family routine when they return.
- **No longer feeling 'needed'** – Feeling that they are no longer needed by their family as they are growing up without them around.
- **Being tired** – Feeling exhausted after being away and yet wanting to be enthusiastic about being home.
- **Negative feelings** – Feeling resentment towards the partner able to stay at home.
- **Emergency situations** – Worrying that they will not be able to get home in the event of a family emergency.

You can work together for the benefit of your child by following a few simple ideas:

- **Stick to routines** – It will be difficult enough for your child to be away from a parent so try to keep things at home as they have always been e.g., the same bedtime routine, same people taking them and dropping them to nursery/school, same tasks and activities.
- **Plan 'keep in touch' times** – If one parent is away you will all feel better if you have a regular day and time each week for your child to catch up with the absent parent either on the phone or via video chat. Both parents can help your child to plan what they would like to talk about.
- **Keep each other updated** – Make a note of information about your child or family members and arrange a time each week to update your partner. Try to stick to this routine.
- **Calendar** – Have a visual aid such as a calendar so your child can see when the other parent is coming home. Your child can struggle with the concept of time. Let them mark off the days each morning and count remaining days.
- **Share tasks, activities and events** – Make sure both parents remain aware of all dates in your child's calendar from parties and concerts to doctor and dentist appointments. You may not both be able to make events but you are both part of the family. You can both talk to your child about important events in your child's life.
- **Make a keepsake box** – Help your child to keep a box with important items that they might want to show their mum/dad when they return e.g., drawings, photos, school reports, certificates.
- **Picture board** – If the parent is away with work for long periods of time for example, in the armed forces, create a visual board of pictures or a map to help your child understand where the other parent is. Let your child create this with you.
- **Leave reminders** – If a parent is going to be away for an extended period of time, they could record themselves reading a bedtime story or make a photo frame or album just for your child so they have a constant reminder of their parent.
- **Keep the nursery/school informed** – Make the school aware that your partner will be away and that they may notice a change in your child's behaviour.
- **Don't criticise each other and be patient** – When a parent returns from being away it may take a little time to learn about the routines and adapt to how things are being done. It can be tempting to criticise, but remembering that things do change and pointing out the positives is much better for everyone.

Where to get advice and support

Universal parenting support and advice is provided by midwives, health visitors, GPs and your local authority. Early help programmes such as Flying Start and Families First are also available.

Look after yourself. Meeting up with other parents can be great for your wellbeing. Your local **Family Information Service** (www.fis.wales) will be able to tell you what's on in your area.

For positive parenting tips and expert advice, visit: gov.wales/giveittime

