



Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



MAKING A SUCCESSFUL ADJUSTMENT WHEN POSTED

Prepared by the Staff and Family Support Office



INTRODUCTION

The posting has come through, and planning starts for you and perhaps your family to depart. There are multitude of things that are necessary before you and those who may be going with you get on that plane. It is a challenge to leave a familiar environment behind and move away to a new country, language and culture, as well as a whole new working environment.

You may not have had a lot of time to think seriously about what lies ahead. This guide will give you some ideas about what to expect as you and perhaps your family transition from Australia to a new country. Some practical tips on making a smooth transition to your new life are provided, along with some brief ideas about what to expect emotionally on your return home. Although the challenges of moving overseas are undeniable, the opportunities and rewards are invaluable. We wish you well, and hope you and any who go with you enjoy your overseas experience.



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PREPARING FOR A MOVE

This is an important phase because it affects how you experience your time at post.

Moving can be stressful!

Moving house, whether to another suburb, state, or country is invariably a high stress time. Of course, the more time you have to prepare, the less stressful it may be. But there will still be stress. As soon as you find when and where you will be moving to, it is important to start planning and one way to do this is to draw up a 'moving plan'. Include what you will need to do, and when it needs to be done by, and (if relevant) try to divide tasks among family members, so that everyone feels involved, and no one feels they are carrying the whole load.

For you and perhaps your partner, you may begin 'winding down' and delegating/handing over work to others. The worst thing you can do for your stress levels is try to finish every work and home project before you leave. Do what you can, let people see what you have been doing and where you are up to, so they can easily take over when you leave. Children can be particularly affected by the prospect of being uprooted. See the section on 'Going on Posting with Children' for some useful tips.

Tips to help with the Preparation Stage

- **Talk it out:** Sit down as a family and discuss your feelings about the move. Allow and encourage everyone to express their feelings, good and bad, positive and negative.
- **Tender Loving Care (TLC):** Stress can negatively affect both the body and mind and make you more vulnerable to illness. People need to give themselves a little extra 'TLC' at moving time. This could include being patient and tolerant with others, and looking after health by eating well, exercising, and getting enough sleep.
- **Give yourself a break:** People handle stress differently. Do not ignore signs of stress, but do not dwell on them either. Just be aware, be patient, and be willing to look for help if it is needed.
- **Keep familiar patterns:** As much as possible, try to stick to the old routine such as mealtimes and bedtimes. Familiarity provides security.
- **Research the new environment:** Study as much information about your new 'home' as possible. The best way to overcome the feeling of being uprooted is to be prepared for when you put down roots in the new location. If others are going on posting with you, get them involved.

- **Accentuate the positive:** Make a list of things you (and those who may go with you) are looking forward to about the new location, and a list of good memories from the old. Take time to have some fun while you do this as laughter can be highly beneficial!
- **Take charge of your move:** Being fully prepared for a move is the best way to reduce relocation stress. As soon as you have your notification, start planning. Assess your financial situation and make appropriate plans, determine what household and personal effects you will need, make inventories, establish a timetable, get information on the new location, and set aside some time to deal with your feelings.
- **Be optimistic but stay flexible:** Things rarely turn out just the way we imagine them so an open mind and a determination to make your move a positive experience is your best insurance that you will adjust well wherever you go. Change can mean opportunity if you reach out and take hold of it.
- **Do not go it alone:** Moving is not easy and although you will probably manage it well, there may be a time when you will need some special support and assistance. You can find this through your neighbours, friends, relatives, and your organisation's Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

What will I need to take?

Knowing what to take with you and how to take it can become stressful and confusing. If you have not already been made aware of what will be provided in your new home, or if you do not know about how much you can take with you (and what restrictions there may be), your organisation will have a contact person who can clarify this with you. However, following this guide may help you through the first few days while you find your bearings and help you make your new home feel just a little like your old one!

Carry on

- Passports and visas
- Travel documentation
- Extra passport sized photos
- Children's birth certificates, adoption papers, etc.
- Insurance forms
- Banking information
- Medications, prescriptions, and vaccination records
- School records
- Power of attorney forms
- Address book
- Baby food – check the policy of the airline you are travelling with as rules vary across airlines.
- A 'Survival kit' in case your luggage is delayed or lost (changes of clothes, personal care items and medicines).
- A favourite toy or simple activities (games, books, etc.) for the children
- Power adaptors for mobile phones, laptops, etc.
- If you are unsure if you can take a certain liquid, aerosol or gel on board you can contact the airline directly. Alternately you can click the following link: <http://travelsecure.infrastructure.gov.au/>

Checked-in luggage

Pack some items that will help make you more self-sufficient and comfortable on arrival, for example:

- Instant coffee, tea, sugar
- Milo, Vegemite, Tim Tams, and other Australian foods that may not be easy to secure overseas
- Pads of paper, pens, and pencils
- Marking pens and tape
- Plastic bags for storage or disposal
- Paper or cloth towel
- Soap, toilet paper, and other toiletries
- A few clothes hangers
- Travel iron
- Hair dryer
- Books
- Electronic devices (tablets, cameras, etc.) and batteries
- A few of the children's most treasured possessions
- Swimming costumes (if appropriate for where you are going)
- Some family photos
- Enough clothing and personal care items for two months

Other suggestions

- Do not forget anything that will turn your new house into a home. Photos, prints or maybe a favourite throw rug will make a huge difference.
- Do not forget about your sports and leisure supplies.
- High quality plastic boxes with tight fitting lids are excellent for storing toys and clothes, etc. in your new location and are a great defence against pests.
- Have colour copies of photos made to take with you so you can leave the originals at home.
- You may need special plug adapters to connect your appliances to host country outlets. These do not change the voltage in anyway, just the shape of the plug, so you may also need dual voltage appliances or combined adaptors / transformers.

Some more handy hints

- Consider leaving truly irreplaceable items and antique furniture with a trusted relative or friend for the duration of your posting. You may wish to explore long term domestic storage options, however, confirm your storage and insurance entitlements with your organisation as this could be an additional cost to you.
- You may do a lot of entertaining in your new location, so those special tableware and glassware items you may have will come in handy.
- You may want to pack Christmas decorations and gift wrapping paper.

6 weeks prior to uplift

- Group your belongings in relation to what you would like to move, store, or perhaps give away or sell.
- Prepare an inventory of all belongings going to your new location, and an inventory of all belongings going into storage.
- Update your address book.
- Complete general household repairs.
- Small gifts? Do you need to take any?
- Update your will (for more information refer to the following section 'Personal Affairs').
- Driver's Licence: Check that it is current, so it can be transferred or consider obtaining an international licence. Find out what is needed at your new location.
- Insurance Policies: Have you kept a record of them, i.e. life, accident, medical, home owners, etc.? Also, anticipate changes to your home and contents premium while you are away.
- Car Insurance: Have you received a letter from your insurer concerning current cover and no claim bonus? You may decide to sell your vehicle unless someone can continue to use it while you are away.
- Health Insurance: Have you requested a letter from your insurer outlining who is covered, the type of cover and when it is paid up to? It is strongly recommended that you retain your private health insurance coverage in Australia for the duration of your posting, as all medical costs incurred during any visit or medical evacuation to Australia are your personal responsibility. For information on medical provisions while overseas, please refer to your organisation's HR policy. DFAT staff are also reminded that now is a good time to discuss any medical issues or concerns with the DFAT doctors.
- What will happen to your home while you are away, house sitters, rental, or leave vacant?

4 weeks prior to uplift

- Finalise all outstanding accounts, such as telephone, rates, and credit cards.
- Garage Sale: Have you considered either a garage sale to dispose of unwanted household items or donating your unwanted goods to charity? You may also consider listing some of your goods for sale on your/your partner's workplace classifieds.
- Valuables: Have you taken photos of special items such as antiques, furniture and jewellery for insurance purposes?
- Hobbies / Crafts: Check what supplies you may need.
- Medical / Dental records: Have you organised copies for the entire family to take with you?
- Prescriptions: If you or a member of your family requires medication, obtain a signed and dated 'Certificate of Needs' from the prescribing physician.
- Optical: If you or your family wear glasses, do you have a spare pair of spectacles and sufficient contact lenses as well as a copy of the prescription?
- Clothing: Do you need to purchase any special clothing? Consider the climate you will be living in.

2 weeks prior to uplift

- Arrange to have your utilities (e.g. electricity, gas, water) disconnected.
- Borrowed items: Have you returned library books, etc.?
- Deliveries: Have you cancelled the milkman, newsagent, etc.?
- Keep your address book updated!
- Redirect mail.
- Confirm travel plans.
- Have you thought about a babysitter or pet-sitter for the day of the move?
- Cancel any gardeners or domestic help.
- Start using up all canned and frozen foodstuffs.

1 week prior to uplift

- If you have children, prepare a bag of goodies to help them through the move process and any long haul travel.
- Machinery: Have you drained any fuel from your lawn mower and any other machinery?
- Remove batteries from all items not in use.
- Apparatus: Have you stored away or dismantled swings, trampolines, etc.?
- Inflammables: Have you stored away or disposed of any paints, turps, etc.?
- Keys: Are all the keys to your home, car, luggage, etc. accounted for? Leave copies with someone responsible.
- Collect any laundry, dry cleaning or shoes left for repair.
- Start packing your clothing and, if you wish, your personal papers into boxes leaving the originals out for inclusion in hand luggage.
- Any last minute gifts?
- Clean oven and empty the pantry.
- Leave the vacuum out for any last minute clean ups.
- Organise a Family First Aid Kit, (consult with your travel doctor for recommendations about what it should contain).

24 hours before uplift

- Empty and defrost fridge/freezer.
- Re-check house, garage, garden, closets, windows, lights, etc. for items stuck or hidden from view.
- When packing, leave out alarm clock, passports, tickets, personal papers, wallet, etc.

Uplift day

- Lock all windows and doors as you leave, set the alarm if you have one.
- Check all items during loading and check for any missing or damaged items.
- Read the removalists documentation thoroughly before signing, and save a copy for future reference.
- Have a safe trip!!!

Note

It is important to remember that the above is a guide only. The timeframe for some of the action items will be dictated by when you have your uplift, and may not occur in the same sequence as above. Please also note that you may need to set aside one/two days for the uplift of your goods going overseas and to storage. You will need to set aside an additional day for cleaning up the house after your uplift.

Tip

It is a good idea to put anything that you do not want packed into a pile on its own. Put items in a certain room or cupboard with a large sticker telling the removalists that the goods within this area are NOT to be touched. It is not unheard of for handbags and passports to be packed by enthusiastic removalists!

'To advise' checklist

Have you advised the following?

- Accountant
- Australia Post
- Bank
- Church or other place of worship
- Centrelink
- Child Support Agency
- Clubs
- Dentist and doctor
- Educational facilities (schools / colleges / universities / childcare)
- Electoral register
- Insurance companies (property / vehicle/ health)
- Library
- Medicare
- Motor vehicle registry
- Neighbours
- Publication providers (newspapers / magazines / journals)
- Solicitor
- Telephone and internet providers
- Utilities providers (electricity / water / gas)

PERSONAL AFFAIRS

Personal administration

Financial affairs and legal matters such as making or updating a will and nominating a power of attorney need attention **before** your departure.

Finances

By taking some time to organise your finances prior to departure, you may find that financial management for your family runs smoothly during your time overseas. Family finances are important and a lack of attention to finances and budgeting can lead to major difficulties any time, but especially during an overseas posting. There are many things to consider when you begin to plan. It is suggested that you:

- Consider any changes in your income, spending and savings that will be caused by your posting.
- Set realistic spending and savings goals so as to balance your income and expenses while you are away.
- Start a special savings account to help cover any unforeseen expenses during your time away.
- If you have them, is your health and life insurance up to date?
- Establish a system for paying bills.
- Decide how credit cards will be used during your time overseas. It might be best to check with your bank about your ability to operate your account(s) whilst overseas.

Wills

Do not forget to make or update your will. Some people feel that by doing this they will jinx themselves but knowing you have taken care of formalities will leave you with peace of mind. Speak to a solicitor or obtain an 'Australian Legal Will Kit' from any newsagency or Post Office.

Power of Attorney

A power of attorney is a legal document that is used to give legal authority to someone else (such as a relative or friend) to make decisions or do certain things on your behalf. The person who signs the Power of Attorney (gives up the authority) is called the Principal, and the person who is given the authority is called the Agent or Attorney-in-Fact. There are many reasons you may decide to make a Power of Attorney, such as illness, disability, or cases where the Principal is travelling and cannot be present to sign legal forms. A Power of Attorney does not necessarily mean that the Principal can no longer make decisions – it just means that another person may act for them also.

Enduring Power of Attorney

An Enduring Power of Attorney gives you the power to choose a relative or friend to manage your lifestyle and financial affairs should you either become incapacitated or develop a decision making disability. You can appoint more than one attorney if you wish.

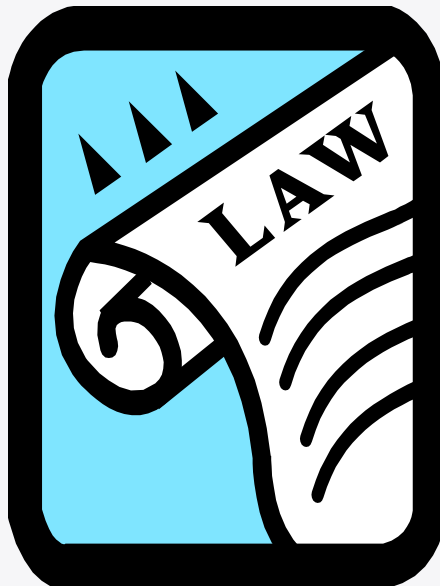
If you take this step while you are competent to do so, it will mean that you decide:

- who will make decisions on your behalf;
- what decisions they will make;
- who will manage your finances; and
- how your finances will be managed.

An Enduring Power of Attorney is not revoked by your impaired decision-making capacity – it endures throughout your incapacity. It must be executed while you have capacity and you can revoke the appointment and make another appointment at any time, providing you continue to have capacity.

Important Note

The information written in this guide on wills, powers of attorney and enduring power of attorneys is a guide only and can vary between jurisdictions, so it is very important to obtain independent legal advice before proceeding.



EMOTIONAL PREPARATION

The emotional stages of preparation: 1 – 6 weeks before posting

Anticipation

Feelings and thoughts of anticipation, excitement, and often apprehension tend to increase about four to six weeks before you depart. Of course, sometimes there is very little warning of postings - a matter of days or weeks perhaps - and there tends to be an even greater confusion of thoughts and rush of emotions as a result.

Disputes

It is a busy, intense time of trying to complete a multitude of jobs and saying farewell to friends and family. As such arguments in the family may occur when normally they do not, or they may increase. This can be upsetting, but try to stop and understand what may be causing the conflict, and then think about ways of managing it with patience and tolerance.

For some, these behaviours are part of preparing for the separation from the life the family has been leading, and they should be considered as ways of trying to cope. Try to remember that quarrels are common in families at this stage, rather than thinking that they indicate something is wrong in your relationship.

Talk Matters Over

Good communication between you and your partner and/or family is very important. Experience has shown that couples and families who communicate well appear to have fewer major problems.

Face Emotions

Discover how your partner and/or your family really feel about being away from 'home' for the length of this posting. Listen carefully to their opinions. Discuss feelings openly and in a mature, and reassuring manner, and listen to possible short and long-term effects that this move could have on your family. Express and discuss all your concerns and fears about and for each other, and try to be completely honest. Mutual understanding and reassurance can re-affirm trust and help dissolve worries.

Make Plans ‘Just in Case’

Discuss what you would do ‘If..?’ It is very important to consider how you would both handle a crisis such as a death, accidental injury, or illness in the family. You need to sit down and discuss what you and the family will do if a crisis occurs. Whilst emergency contact information is something that people should already know, we all know that in emergencies people can forget the most basic of information. Think about making an emergency information sheet before you depart and placing it somewhere safe and accessible. Also, ensure that your family’s Next of Kin contact details are lodged with the appropriate area/s in yours or your partner’s organisation.

Plan for Special Occasions

If you will be away for special occasions, e.g. birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas and the like, try to make arrangements for these prior to departure. It is not always easy to find ‘Thomas the Tank Engine’ or ‘Bob the Builder’ toys or cards overseas!

Develop a Support Network

While a network of relatives and friends can assist greatly with peace of mind and a sense of security, your organisation also provides assistance through an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). An EAP is a confidential counselling service for employees and their eligible family members, paid for by your organisation at no cost to you. All EAP counsellors are qualified professionals who have extensive training and experience in counselling, coaching and workplace consulting.

Develop Plans for Staying in Touch

Letters and emails are probably the easiest and cheapest way to keep in touch. If sending letters, number each one as they may arrive in bunches, or out of sequence. Children can be encouraged to draw pictures and write letters. Phone calls are wonderful, but remember the cost of international calls can be expensive – do your research about how you will stay connected with family and friends. Alternatively, internet based services such as Skype, Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, and FaceTime can save a considerable amount of money if you plan to call friends and family back home.

Letting Go

This stage occurs in the final days before departure, and can be a challenging time for everyone. Time often appears to fly by and this is when you may realise that many goals have not and will not be met. The recent period of hectic preparations and high emotions may now result in tiredness and perhaps a sense of numbness.

The Pre-departure Jitters

Imminent departure may produce more tension, anxiety and quarrels within the family. This is not unusual, but rather a normal symptom of a kind of preparatory grief for what is being left behind. This is a good time to try to focus instead on what lies ahead.

GOING ON POSTING WITH CHILDREN

One of the most important issues for anyone with children is their reaction to the news that they are moving, and their adjustment to a new home, country, and culture. Being informed is very important to children, and one of the worst mistakes we can make as adults is to assume that children do not care or will not understand the details. Keeping them 'in the loop,' consulting them about choices whenever possible, and including them in family planning will work wonders with respect to their adjustment.

Factors to consider depending on the child's age:

Preschool children

Children under the age of six may worry about being left behind, or being separated from their parents. It is very important for them to express their feelings and fears about the move. Give them a job to do – for example, have them be responsible for boxing up their favourite toys and labelling their boxes with crayons and stickers.

Ages 6 – 12

Primary school age children are usually most concerned with how the everyday routines of their lives are about to change. Showing them pictures, videos and magazines of their new 'home' or the country they will be living in will help a lot, especially if you can find new places in advance for the things they like to do.

If your child takes dance lessons, find and share information about the new dance studio they can go to, or similarly if they take karate or play soccer. Even if their favourite thing to do is to go to the park or the local pizza shop, find these types of places in your new 'home' and obtain brochures, pictures, books or movies and get them to have a look on the Internet.

Teens

Teenagers are most concerned with fitting in, and so may react angrily to the move, even insisting that they are not going. This is usually due to the total lack of control they have over disruption to their lives (leaving friends, school, and jobs).

Teens can also be worried about making new friends and also about what the differences will be in their new school. They may be curious about the clothing, hairstyles, and social aspects that teens in the new city will have.

Other tips for making the transition as smooth as possible

- Give young children an entertaining travel kit for the move.
- Give older children a diary for recording the trip and move.
- Give children of all ages a special address book for recording email addresses to keep in touch with friends and family.
- Show them around soon after the move, so they can explore their new home and neighbourhood.
- Give children a job or task to do, such as working on their room (younger,) supervising little siblings (middle) and painting or arranging furniture (teens).
- Set up ways for them to keep in touch with their school, friends, etc. Remember that the children will come back to Australia and will need to re-establish themselves.
- Take a break with the family as soon as possible to explore museums, local sights and recreation areas in your new city (where safe to do so).
- Where possible, arrange a visit to new schools and meet with teachers before the actual first day of attendance.
- Encourage children to bring home their new friends.
- Keep an eye on the children: Since moving can be difficult for children, staying in touch with their established friends is very important. Even though most children do adjust given time, once you have arrived and settled in, it is essential for parents to watch for possible danger signals. These can include a child spending too much time alone, loss of interest in favourite things, loss of energy or appetite, or other behaviour pattern changes.

Tip!

It may sound like early days, but it is important to start planning for your children's day care and school arrangements for when you return to Australia, even before you go on posting! Do not leave it until the last 6 months of your posting, as placements in your desired day care and/or school may have a long waiting period. Therefore, start taking actions early!



WHAT IF THE CHILDREN ARE STAYING AT HOME

Sometimes both parents and/or a single parent, will go on posting without their children. They could mean that they will be staying with family, friends (caregivers), or perhaps going to boarding school. Even if your children are quite accustomed to spending time with other family members or may already have gone to boarding school, it is still important for parents to offer as consistent an environment as possible to make transitions

Tips for a smooth transition if your children are staying with caregivers

- **Plan ahead:** Set the tone early, ensure you are talking to the children about this as far ahead as possible. Talk about it in positive ways, e.g. “you’re going to have fun staying with Nan and Pop.” It will be important that they spend quite a bit of time staying over at the home where they will be living as this will help them to feel safe and secure.
- **Communication:** Have age appropriate conversations with the children, assure them that they are loved, that you will stay in regular contact with them, via the phone, Skype, email and so on. Explain that their parents have a job to do and therefore, for a time will have to be away from them.
- **Possessions:** Ensure that you know how much ‘gear’ your children will be able to take so you can help them plan for any restrictions and avoid last minute disappointments. Be honest with them about how much they can take and help them plan what they will be taking. Having photos of their parents will be important.
- **Younger children:** Preschool aged children will not understand abstract concepts such as time. For example, saying “we’ll be home in a year” may not make much sense to them, so explain it in different ways, such as “we’ll be home before your next birthday,” or “we’ll be home before Santa comes next.”
- **School-age children:** Here the situation starts to become more complex as they have more going on in their lives at school and with friends. Ensure caregivers have access to regular communication with you, other family, and social supports for advice and support to help them in their role.
- **Adolescents:** With this age group parents must be especially sensitive to what they may going through. This can be difficult as teens are notorious for not talking to their parents about things. They also are technologically savvy and have access to worldwide information, and may worry after watching, hearing, or reading the news about incidents in your posting location.

Another defining problem for adolescents is a wish to be the same as everyone else. They have more financial and social issues, and so it could be a lack of access to a car, a lack of fashionable clothes, etc that may become an excuse to lash out at their caregivers or their parents overseas. In some cases they will get angry with the caregivers because their parents are overseas and their family is not like everybody else's. For these reasons and others, setting the tone early in terms of communication is critical to creating consistency for your teens.

Tips for a smooth transition if your children are moving to Boarding School

- Most importantly, **build and nurture strong and loving relationships within the family** long before you all face the transition to boarding school. The confidence that parents love their children regardless of circumstances, performance, achievement, and physical separation will help provide stability and security in the midst of change, including the transition to boarding school.
- **Talk about the boarding school experience well in advance.** Be realistic about what will be enjoyable and what will probably be difficult. Express your feelings honestly, and encourage your children to do so as well—without trying to tell or convince them they should not feel a certain way.
- **Be sensitive to the individual needs of your children.** Children are not all ready at the same age to face separation from parents. If one of your children seems particularly insecure and fearful of the separation, you may need to investigate other options for that child's living and education needs to allow for additional maturity. A year or two of delay may prevent many years of difficulty later.
- **Get as much information as possible about the boarding school before sending your children.** Find out about its purpose, philosophy, discipline, rules, expectations, privileges, restrictions, and visitation options for you as parents.
- **If at all possible, visit the boarding school and meet the boarding home parents with your children before you have to leave them there.** This will give you, as a family, an opportunity to talk specifically about what it might be like for your children to go there, and they will be able to go to a place that is at least somewhat familiar. You as parents will also be able to visualise your children in their setting when they are away from you. All of these things make it easier to maintain a sense of being 'connected' even when you are physically separated.
- When your children go to boarding school, **allow them to take along some reminders of 'home' that are meaningful to them** — pictures, toys or books, pictures to hang, a special pillow or blanket.
- **Provide your children with some tangible reminder of your love** to take along to the boarding school. Affirm your love to them and be sure they understand (and feel) that you are not sending them away because they are a bother or keep you from doing things that are more important than they are.
- **Openly communicate with your children that you will miss them** and that, because of your deep love for them, you too feel emotional pain in being separated from them.
- **Discuss and make provision for ways to keep 'in touch'** while you are away.
- **Involve your children in planning how to spend their school vacation time.** You may not be able to get time off at the same time as the children, so may need to plan in advance where they can go if this is the case, for example they may stay with other family and/or friends back home. If you can spend this time together, it will be very important to do some special family things.

ELDERLY PARENT CARE

As parents grow older, adult children/caregivers are faced with changes and concerns that they may not know how to deal with. If your parents are elderly, ill, or require full time care you may be extremely anxious about the posting, thinking “What if something happens while I’m away?”

You may need to consider arrangements for someone to check on, or care for, your ageing loved ones. For occasional care-giving assistance, consider supportive/community care services such as home delivered meals; home maintenance or visitor/companion services; transport to and from doctor’s appointments, shopping, clubs, etc.; emergency alert systems.

If your loved one is in a long-term care facility, inform them and the facility of your plans and make arrangement for friends, family members or professionals to check on them regularly. Leave your new contact details with the facility in case of emergencies.

Keep your adult loved one informed of family and care-giving changes and continue to reassure them. Talk openly with your parents about the posting, concerns and anxieties. It is a good idea to include your parents in your welfare arrangements and provide them with all the relevant contact numbers.

Some useful links are provided at the end of this guide.



COMMON ISSUES FOR ACCOMPANYING PARTNERS

Various issues face the partners of officers when accompanying them on a posting. You may find that the resolution of some of these issues is just a matter of time, while other issues require you to be more proactive.

Isolation

This can arise due to the physical location of the posting, or where the culture and language of the host country creates a barrier between you and the local community.

Lack of infrastructure

You may quickly realise that there are not the same amenities that you were used to in Australia, i.e. not the range of shops, transport, places of worship, recreational activities, and social activities. Once you make contact with other families of officers who are at Post they will be able to let you know what is available in your new location.

Loneliness and boredom

Whilst the officer arrives at post and tends to throw themselves straight into work, accompanying partners do not always have the distraction of work to keep them busy. This can be especially difficult if the partner has left a busy and successful career behind. You may not be used to the amount of 'free time' that comes with being an accompanying partner. It will be important to make contact with families of other officers at Post and start to develop supports/contacts there as well as finding external groups and/or activities. If you have a Community Liaison Officer (CLO) at Post make the most of the services that they will offer to you.

Temporary loss of job, career, or studies

Many partners will have put their career on hold for two or more years. Some see this as an opportunity for a break from their usual work, to study, to do something very different with their time, to parent differently, etc. Others are keen to find work and will look to activities such as volunteer work to bring the sense of personal satisfaction.

Less recognition

Some partners may feel that they have lost some of their identity as they come to be known as "the partner of...", or "John/Jenny's mum/dad" and are not recognised as individuals.

The demands of the job upon the officer

You may find that your partner travels frequently and works longer hours. There is also a significant demand on your private time in certain locations and there may be a requirement to entertain or attend functions out of business hours.

Less support available

Your natural sources of support at home, friends and family are not there to help you and you may have to go it alone with many things in the early days of your posting until you establish a support network. Men accompanying their partners on a posting may find this especially difficult as many existing expatriate networks are designed for women.

Changing roles

You may find that you suddenly bear the brunt of home duties. Upon your arrival you may find that you have to set up your new home alone. Depending on where you are going, you may also have to source accommodation upon arrival at your posting destination. Some families are able to move directly into the house of their predecessor, but others are required to search for appropriate rental accommodation on their arrival. This task generally falls to the officer's partner and can be a very stressful period.

Reduced personal space

Many posts are located in very busy and crowded cities. You may find yourself missing Australia's great open spaces.



COMMON ISSUES FOR SINGLE OFFICERS

Overview

Going on posting can be a challenge; you will be moving to a place where you are away from your usual family and friends networks and where the cultural norms may be very different from what you are used to. Taking steps prior to departure may help you to adjust better to life in your location. Post Reports, discussions with staff at post, and the Staff and Family Liaison Officer in the DFAT Staff and Family Support Office are all useful sources of information about what to expect in your new location. The following are specific areas that you may need to consider and address when going to post. It should be noted that the location of your posting may make these issues more or less salient.

Social Engagement

Moving to post is likely to result in a significant change in social connectedness. A shift away from established family and friend networks can be quite confronting and single officers at post may be living alone whereas in Australia they may have lived with friends. In addition, the activities in Australia that you may have used to meet new people may not be available in the host country. In some locations there are very limited opportunities to engage in team sport or participate in cultural events and in smaller locations there may be a very limited diplomatic community to associate with. Moreover, there may not be many single officers or those of your age group at post. Prior to departure it is suggested that you research the options available in your location to engage in social activity and the impact of gender on attendance at these activities. It is important to also maintain connections with your networks back in Australia as you will likely return home at the end of your posting. Scheduling regular contact with family and close friends and using social media to stay current with what is happening can help when reintegrating in Australia.

Intimate Relationships

The usual ways of establishing intimate relationships in Australia may not apply where you are posted. Indeed conduct that is considered appropriate in Australia may be considered inappropriate or even illegal in other countries. Be mindful of the following if considering intimate relationships when posted overseas:

- **Legal issues:** In some countries sexual relationships outside of marriage are illegal irrelevant of age and harsh punishments can apply. Same sex relationships are also illegal in a range of countries and again harsh punishments can apply. Age of consent laws vary and can be different for males and females, as well as for opposite sex and same sex partners. A number of countries set their age of consent higher than 18 years. While many countries set their age of consent lower than in Australia, for APS employees the age of consent in the Australian Capital Territory applies (16 years). It is important to understand the laws that apply in your location when considering an intimate relationship.

- **Cultural issues:** The cultural norms around intimate relationships vary widely around the world. In some locations the norm will be that relationships do not occur across cultural groups while other places are much more liberal. It is important to understand the cultural norms around intimate relationships before seeking to establish such a relationship.
- **Status / Nationality:** In some locations you may find yourself the focus of interest from host country nationals. While this interest can be genuine, there are times when it is driven by a desire to gain financial benefit, collect information, increase status, or secure Australian citizenship.
- **Workplace relationships:** Entering into an intimate relationship with a work colleague can bring with it a number of challenges. As per the APS Code of Conduct, employees are expected to ensure that their personal interests are not in conflict with their professional duties and an intimate relationship in the workplace could lead to an apparent conflict of interest. Moreover, the end of an intimate relationship may lead to workplace conflict and adversely affect an employee's ability to perform their duties. You may want to review the DFAT *Conduct of Conduct for Overseas Service* if you have any doubts about the appropriateness of entering into a relationship with a workplace colleague.
(<http://dfatintranet.titan.satin.io/human-resources/conduct-ethics/Pages/code-of-conduct-overseas-service.aspx>)

Questions from Locals

In many cultures it is considered very unusual for an adult to be unmarried and/or to not have children. You may be asked some very direct questions about your marital and parenting status so it may be good to spend some time to think about how you would like to respond to these types of questions. It is worth noting that the people asking the questions are unlikely to be trying to be rude, they will genuinely want to understand something that is outside of their normal cultural experience.

Work / Life Balance

Maintaining a functional work/life balance on post is very important. Some people may end up working excessive hours to keep themselves occupied when they do not have a lot of recreational or social activities to engage in. For a small number of posts you may be expected to source your own accommodation and this can involve a considerable investment of time. In addition arranging and being present for maintenance visits to your residence can be time consuming, especially in those locations where what is considered an appropriate standard of work is very different from in Australia. It can be very helpful to plan non-work related activities to complete while on posting to help maintain a good work/life balance. These could include keeping a journal of your time on post, writing a blog (being mindful of security considerations), creating and working through a reading list, completing online learning, participating in specific cultural activities (again being mindful of security considerations), and setting and working to achieve personal health and fitness goals.

DOMESTIC STAFF

Issues

- Personal choice - there could be many reasons why you would or would not want to employ domestic staff.
- Difficult decision to employ staff - most of us are used to not having domestic staff. The loss of privacy from having someone in the house at all times can be hard to get used to. Some common views are: “I don’t need people to clean up after me”; “I’m a perfectly good driver”; “I don’t want my kids to be spoiled by having a nanny”.
- It can be a difficult decision not to employ staff - employment with expats is a well-paid job; what other job opportunities are there for your predecessor’s staff; what impact will losing their job have on social standing, their economy, their family.
- Some reasons to have staff - livelihood for them, quality of life for you, you may have an allowance to use to pay them, they obviously possess good local understanding and language skills that you may not have.

How do you find them?

- Inherit predecessor’s staff - confirm their suitability before agreeing to take them on; you may inherit the staff, their recipes, working hours, live-in arrangements, etc.
- Ask your predecessor/other returned Australian staff for recommendations on other good staff that you could possibly engage or swap/share.
- Talk to your organisation’s senior officer at Post (or the senior officer of the organisation operating the Post) - they will know of staff becoming available.

Staff management

- Set boundaries up front.
- Give clear instructions, do not assume they understood you the first time.
- Remember, staff are your employees and not your best friend. Treat them with respect and kindness but do not overstep the line between employer and employee.

Formalise their employment

- Posts often have a draft employment contract that you can use to set up the terms of their employment. Other than providing the draft contract the Post plays no other role in managing the staff.
- Employ staff on a trial basis initially - set out the performance standards that are required for them to retain ongoing employment with you at the completion of probation.
- Agree hours, their role, live-in /out, leave and public holidays, bonuses and allowances, standards of behaviour (including discipline of children), medical provisions - frequency of medical examinations.
- Get medical checks (this may be your own expense.)

How are they paid?

- You are responsible for paying your domestic staff although your organisation may provide an allowance for this purpose.
- Determine salary package by what is provided to you through reimbursement or cashed out allowance into salary.
- Do not pay amounts over and above the norm for the Post as it causes problems for other Australians and in particular your successor.

Security

- Discuss security issues up front – who is to be allowed access to residence, etc.
- Be clear on what your staff have access to in your accommodation - e.g. is it okay for them to use the phone / is there a limit to their usage?
- Theft - do not put temptation in their way.

Loans

- Nearly every staff member will come to you for a loan. In their eyes your salary is the equivalent of the GDP of some developing nations.
- Be empathetic and use your judgement: consider their genuine needs - marriages, education, death of family members can be expensive compared to salaries.
- Do not feel pressured into providing loans. If you do - decide up front if it is a gift or a loan and if the latter, set up the terms of repayment and enforce their deductions from salary. Any unpaid loan amounts should be deducted from severance payments.
- Sometimes a loan can be a quick exit from the city - in which case you can probably say good bye to your money.

Gifts

- Once again be empathetic and use your judgement - be mindful that your gift does not create any imbalance or friction within their own communities.

CULTURE SHOCK

It is common for people posted overseas to begin to experience what is called culture shock. Habits, customs and everyday behaviours are usually very different in the country of posting. Initial reactions to the new environment are often positive and you may be tolerant of differences. However, at some stage you may find you start to become very negative and begin to question aspects of the local culture. Common statements are; “Can’t people here do things like we do at home?”; “The food is terrible and it is so disorganised”; “Who would want to live here?”; “There is nothing to do over here.” Other characteristics of culture shock include a longing to return to Australia, avoidance of the local people, laziness with language barriers, and blaming the locals for all your problems and difficulties. When in this frame of mind people often look for anything that will reinforce their negative attitude towards the new environment and its people.

Culture shock can occur for anyone living abroad, though individuals differ greatly in the extent that they are affected. It is especially common if the local culture is very different to the one at home. This reaction is also common if you are bored. Obviously culture shock can affect your work, home life and your emotions. Additionally, any hostility you may have can antagonise local people and make things more difficult. Thus, it is important to recognise the signs of culture shock in yourself and your family members and try to remedy it.

The four stages of Culture Shock

1. Initial Euphoria

Most people begin their new posting with great expectations and a positive mindset. If anything, they come with expectations that are too high and attitudes that are too positive toward the host country and toward their own prospective experiences in it. At this point, anything new is intriguing and exciting. But, for the most part, it is the similarities that stand out.

The newcomer is usually impressed with how people everywhere are really very much alike. This period of euphoria may last from a week or two to a month, but the let-down is inevitable. You have reached the end of the first stage.

2. Irritability and Hostility

Gradually, your focus turns from the similarities to the differences, and these differences, which suddenly seem to be everywhere, may be troubling to you. You blow up little, seemingly insignificant difficulties into major catastrophes. This is the stage generally identified as culture shock, and you may experience any of the following signs:

- Anxiety
- Homesickness
- Helplessness
- Boredom
- Depression
- Fatigue
- Confusion
- Self-doubt
- Feelings of inadequacy
- Unexplained fits of weeping
- Physical and psychosomatic illnesses

3. Gradual Adjustment

Stage 2 is over and you are on your way to recovery. This step may come so gradually that at first you may not be aware it is even happening. Once you begin to orient yourself, and are able to interpret some of the subtle cultural clues and cues that passed unnoticed earlier, the culture will seem more familiar. You will become more comfortable living and working in the culture, and feel less isolated from it. Gradually, too, your sense of humour will return and you will realise the situation is not hopeless after all.

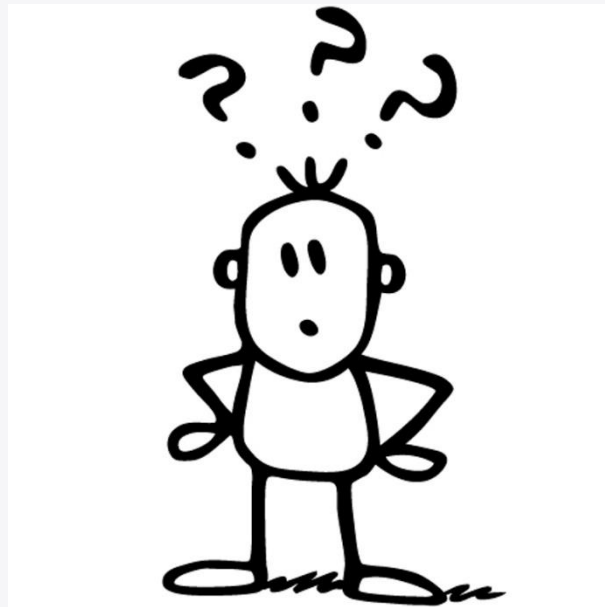
4. Adaptation and Biculturalism

Full recovery will result in an ability to function in two cultures with confidence. You will even find a great many customs, ways of doing and saying things, and personal attitudes that you enjoy and that you will definitely miss when you pack up and return home. In fact, you can expect to experience reverse culture shock when you return home. In some cases, particularly where a person had adjusted exceptionally well to the host country, reverse culture shock may cause greater distress than the original culture shock.

Enhancing your Adaptation - Tips for dealing with Culture Shock

- Appreciate cultural differences - what a boring world it would be if the whole world was the same.
- Be patient - recognise that it takes time to adapt to a new culture.
- Talk to the locals - you may find more in common than you expect.
- Gain an understanding of the history of the country.

- Be constructive in your attitude to your new environment - learn to recognise and accept what you cannot change.
- Maintain contact with your own culture through establishing relationships, or maintaining contact with other fellow expatriates in the area.
- Recognise what you miss about home and acknowledge your feelings, but focus on your transition to the new culture.
- Maintain a sense of humour and flexibility.
- View your posting as a challenge and opportunity rather than a chore.
- Above all, try to be positive, patient, and understanding.



MANAGING STRESS

At various times most postings are moderately to highly stressful for the people. Often it is not the dramatic stressors that cause stress reactions, but such things as language barriers, lack of mail, unusual living conditions (e.g. lack of privacy), and limited access to communications facilities, bureaucratic ‘red tape,’ lack of recreational opportunities, and the prolonged separation from family can cause extreme frustration and upset. This can ultimately result in various stress reactions such as headaches, poor appetite and difficulty sleeping. These reactions should not be considered abnormal or a sign of weakness.

Important note!

If you experience physical signs, make sure you get them checked out by a doctor before you ‘diagnose’ them as stress related.

Signs of Stress

Physical	Thinking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sleep disturbances (difficulty falling asleep, constant waking, waking early, feeling tired) • Cold sweats, nausea, diarrhoea or constipation • Muscle shakes, trembling • Startled reactions e.g. jumping at unexpected noises • Lower sexual interest • Frequent headaches • Constant tiredness • Breathing difficulties • Grinding teeth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusion • Lowered attention span • Poor memory • Easily distracted • Recurring thoughts • Intrusive memories • Difficulty making decisions • Frequent specific thoughts or images • Disturbing memories • Nightmares
Emotional	Behavioural
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intense grief, sadness or guilt • Sense of social isolation / feel lost or abandoned • Frequent anger • Sense of hopelessness / fear of future • Feeling emotionally numb • Loss of emotional control • Feeling anxiety / dread / panic • Drop in self-confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoiding events or places • Over-reacting to events • Withdrawing from others and wanting to be alone • Angry outbursts and/or easily irritated • Not wanting to go to work • Increase in use of alcohol, nicotine or caffeine • Loss of appetite or increased eating • Dislike being touched

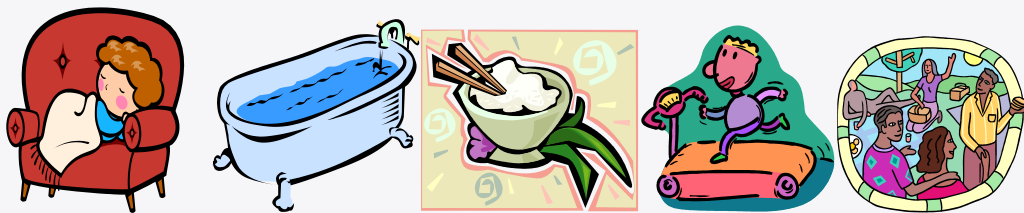
Ways to Cope with Stress

The main elements of stress management are:

- Be aware of stress symptoms and how to identify them;
- When you recognise stress symptoms in yourself, take action by initiating stress coping strategies; and
- Be aware of stress coping techniques that can be employed to reduce or prevent the effects of stress, and know which technique best suits your own needs.

How to Help Yourself

- Accept that your reactions are a normal response. Do not fight the reactions, just manage them;
- Maintain normal routines;
- Spend time with others;
- Talk with people you trust - friends, family, peers;
- Structure your time with activities and tasks that can distract you and give you a new perspective and add a positive balance to your life;
- Exercise - periods of moderate exercise will alleviate some of the physical tension;
- Relaxation techniques - will help redress your body's physical balance;
- Deep breathing exercises;
- Take relaxing baths;
- Yoga, meditation, tai chi, stretching exercises;
- Do not overuse alcohol or drugs as they actually make the reactions worse in the long term; and
- Eat well balanced meals.

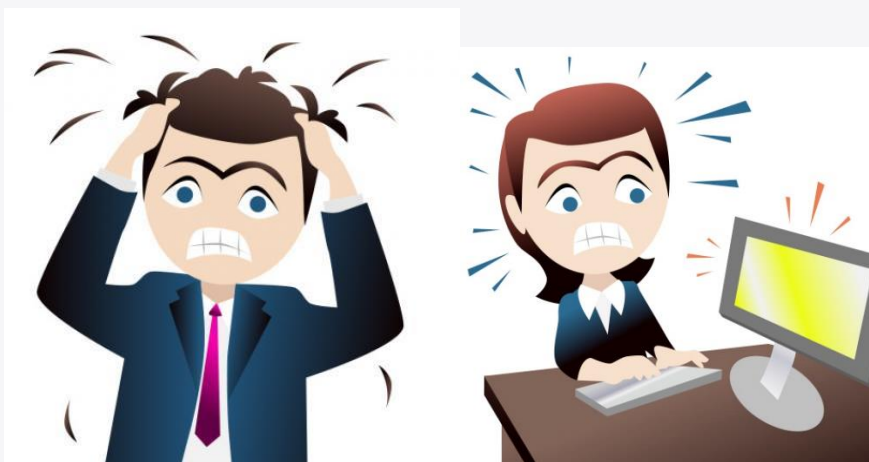


How to Help Others

- Realise that stress reactions do occur and that individuals react differently to stress and different stressors can cause different reactions;
- Accept responses in others as ‘their’ reaction;
- Be available to listen to others - be patient;
- Be reassuring and supportive;
- Be careful with advice and do not judge - try to be optimistic but avoid making any promises e.g. “everything will be alright”;
- Be sensitive to changes in people - these changes can be warning signs that a person is not coping e.g. a person may become unusually quiet or talkative, irritable or aggressive, or they may start drinking heavily;
- Know your own limits - helping others deal with their stress can be stressful on you. Do not let your own well-being suffer by taking on too many problems of others. There may be times when others need professional help (e.g. the EAP, a doctor, psychologist, or counsellor).

When to Seek Assistance with Stress

- If you cannot handle intense feelings or physical sensations. If you feel your emotions are not returning to normal.
- If you continue to have disturbed sleep and/or nightmares.
- If you continue to feel numb or empty and do not have appropriate feelings.
- If you cannot confront your thoughts and/or feelings.
- If your relationships and work seem to be suffering or changing for the worse.
- If you are having frequent accidents, or are increasing your intake of alcohol or drugs.
- If your partner or children are showing any of these signs and you wish to discuss the matter.
- If there are any other changes in emotions or behaviour that are causing you concern.



RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

Imagery in Relaxation

One common use of relaxation imagery is to imagine a scene, place or event that you remember as safe, peaceful, restful, beautiful and happy. You can bring all your senses into the image with, for example, sounds of running water and birds, the smell of cut grass, the taste of cool white wine, the warmth of the sun, and so on. Use the imagined place as a retreat from stress and pressure.

Scenes can involve complex images such as lying on a beach in a deserted cove. You may see cliffs, sea and sand around you, hear the waves crashing against rocks, smell the salt in the air, and feel the warmth of the sun and a gentle breeze on your body. Other images might include looking at a mountain view, swimming in a tropical pool, or whatever you want. You will be able to come up with the most effective images for yourself.

Other uses of imagery in relaxation involve creating mental pictures of stress flowing out of your body, or of stress, distractions and everyday concerns being folded away and locked into a padlocked chest.

Progressive Muscular Relaxation

Progressive Muscular Relaxation (PMR) is useful for relaxing your body when your muscles are tense. The idea behind PMR is that you tense up a group of muscles so that they are as tightly contracted as possible. Hold them in a state of tension for a few seconds. Then, relax the muscles to their previous state. Finally, consciously relax the muscles even further so that you are as relaxed as possible. By tensing your muscles first, you will probably find that you are able to relax your muscles more than would be the case if you tried to relax your muscles directly. Experiment with PMR by forming a fist, and clenching your hand as tight as you can for a few seconds. Then relax your hand to its previous tension, and then consciously relax it again so that it is as loose as possible. You should feel deep relaxation in your hand muscles.

The Sigh Breath

The Sigh Breath is a very simple breathing method for releasing tension in your chest, diaphragm, and neck areas. It is a moderate (rather than very deep) inhale through the nose followed by a fairly prolonged exhale through the nose or mouth.

1. Mentally think or say to yourself 'Stop!'
2. Then breathe in through nose and, pausing only briefly, let the air out quite slowly through your nose. This inhale is a moderate (rather than very deep) in-breath. The out breath is the key to the method. Be sure to prolong - to l-e-n-g-t-h-e-n - your exhale.
3. As you let the air out, let go! Relax your muscles, especially your shoulders. Let go of tension in your chest and stomach. Let your arms and legs relax. Let your jaw relax. Let your forehead relax, and....
4. ...direct your attention outside yourself to what is happening in the outside world - 'see clearly' and 'hear clearly.' Silently pay attention to what you can see and hear without listing or naming them.

Although the method involves four steps, the whole cycle of in-breath – pause – out-breath takes only a few seconds.

Easy Breathing

Maintaining an Easy Breathing pattern, where your chest and diaphragm are relaxed and moving naturally in harmony with each inhale and exhale helps re-develop and maintain a comfortable physical state with a clear and alert mind.

How to use Easy Breathing

1. Pay attention to the natural, effortless movement of your breathing cycle. Feel the movements and sensations.
2. Pay attention to the inhale, then the slight pause, followed by the natural exhale, and then another slight pause.
3. Do this for three or four minutes - paying attention to nothing else.

In the beginning it is likely that accumulated tensions and poor breathing habits may have produced an uneven breathing pattern. If this is the case you may find it helpful to first use the Sigh Breath method a few times to calm and regularise your breathing. Through practice you may discover ways of utilising Easy Breathing as a Quick Relaxer - a way of relaxing quickly for a few moments.

When to use Easy Breathing

1. Whenever you wish to pace yourself and maintain a calmer and more centred internal state - at work, in sport, socially, etc.
2. When you wish to clear your thinking in order to give your full attention to an important matter.
3. As a Quick Relaxer - especially when it is inappropriate to relax with eyes closed, or to fully stop what you are doing.
4. To develop the habit of maintaining a clear mind and calm body. Use Easy Breathing in odd spare moments: in lifts, in queues, in waiting rooms, during the TV 'adverts,' while listening to someone, waiting on the phone, or when you are being delayed. In this way you can turn what might otherwise been a frustrating or irritating event into a beneficial and centering experience.

5. To develop an on-going natural awareness of your physical state - so that any chest tightness or breathing unevenness alerts you to take action to clear your thinking and calm your body.
6. To train yourself to feel mentally and physically comfortable even when under pressure.



DEALING WITH NATURAL DISASTERS

Looking after yourself - Psychological Wellbeing

The most important thing to focus on following a natural disaster is the wellbeing of yourself and your family. This guide is designed to provide some practical tips on how to manage the reality of living through a natural disaster and some important things to consider for your wellbeing.

Psychological effects of a Natural Disaster

Following a traumatic event, most people experience a wide range of physical and emotional reactions. These are NORMAL reactions to events. These reactions may last for days, weeks, or even months after the disaster ended.

Emotional signs and symptoms following trauma

- Shock, denial, or disbelief
- Anger, irritability, mood swings
- Guilt, shame, self-blame
- Feeling sad or hopeless
- Confusion, difficulty concentrating
- Anxiety and fear
- Withdrawing from others
- Feeling disconnected or numb

Physical signs and symptoms following trauma

- Insomnia or nightmares
- Being startled easily
- Racing heartbeat
- Aches and pains
- Fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating
- Edginess and agitation
- Muscle tension

These symptoms and feelings typically last from a few days to a few months, gradually fading as you process the event. But even when you are feeling better, you may be troubled from time to time by painful memories or emotions - especially in response to triggers such as an anniversary of the event or an image, sound, or situation that reminds you of the experience.

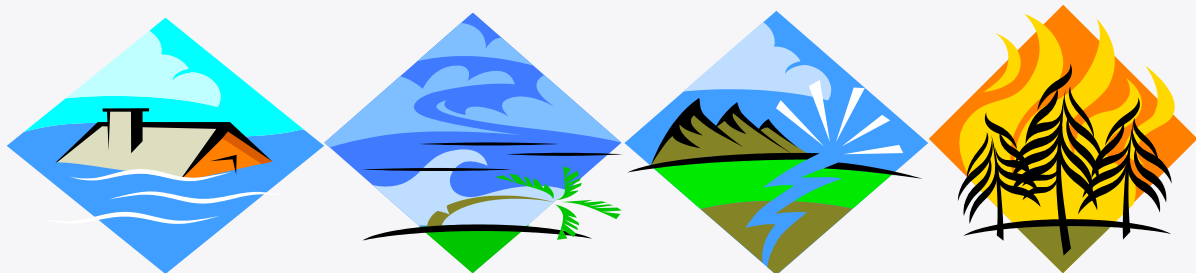
Do not be surprised if you have different reactions at different times. Having reactions in this manner allows you to avoid an emotional overload. Also, do not be surprised if you find you are overly attentive to matters relating to safety. After an event such as an earthquake it is common for people to become concerned or preoccupied with their safety or the safety of others. It is normal to want to feel that we can do something to prevent further painful things from occurring.

As a result of the above, people are often more accident-prone and if you are driving or undertaking other responsibilities, there is a greater risk of making mistakes or not doing what you would normally do.

The following suggestions are often useful ways of coping effectively and building resilience

- Remain connected with other people.
- Remind yourselves of coping strategies that have worked in the past.
- Talk about what happened and most importantly, how you feel about what happened.
- Accept the concern and care of others.
- Reach out to your family, friends, and other people in your network.
- Do something nice for yourselves.
- Do something to help someone else, remember your reactions are normal and are likely to be shared by others.
- Ensure you eat regular, well balanced meals.
- If an earthquake has occurred, expect earthquake aftershocks to bother you.
- Ensure family members are not spending too much time alone - although some private time is important too.
- Help other families and/or co-workers.
- Do not label yourself or those around you as 'crazy' or 'losing it,' remind yourself that these are normal reactions to an abnormal event.
- Do not make any major life decisions.
- Try to limit yours and your family's exposure to media reports about the disaster.

Stress relieving activities are not as difficult or time consuming as you might think. A 15 minute walk, or talking to a friend, co-worker, supervisor or mental health professional, or getting a short sleep are all things that will help the recovery of yourself and those around you, in the long term.



Helping Children after a Disaster

A catastrophe such as an earthquake, hurricane, fire, flood, or violent acts is frightening to children and adults alike. Talking about the event with children can decrease their fear. It is important to explain the event in words the child can understand, and at a level of detail that will not overwhelm them. Several factors affect a child's response to a disaster. The way children see and understand their parents' responses are very important. Children are aware of their parents' worries most of the time, but they are particularly sensitive during a crisis. Parents should admit their concerns to their children, and also stress their abilities to cope with the disaster. Falsely minimising the danger will not end a child's concerns.

A child's reaction depends on how much destruction and/or death they see during and after the disaster. If a friend or family member has been killed or seriously injured, or if the child's school or home has been severely damaged, there is a greater chance that the child will experience difficulties. A child's age also affects how the child will respond to the disaster. For example, six-year olds may show their worries by refusing to attend school, whereas adolescents may minimise their concerns, but argue more with parents and show a decline in school performance.

After a disaster, parents/significant adults should be alert to these changes in a child's behaviour:

- Refusal to return to school and 'clinging' behaviour, including shadowing the mother, father or trusted adult around the house/surrounds.
- Persistent fears related to the catastrophe (such as fears about being permanently separated from parents).
- Sleep disturbances such as nightmares, screaming during sleep, and bedwetting, persisting more than several days after the event.
- Loss of concentration, irritability, tantrums, anger and attention seeking behaviour.
- Jumpiness or being startled easily.
- Behaviour problems, for example, misbehaving in school or at home in ways that are not typical for the child.
- Physical complaints (stomach aches, headaches, dizziness) for which a physical cause cannot be found.
- Withdrawal from family and friends, sadness, listlessness, decreased activity, and preoccupation with the events of the disaster.

How to Help

Like adults, most children's reactions diminish over time. Parents and other adults can help the recovery process in the following ways:

- Keep communicating: talk about what is happening and how family members feel. This helps children from feeling alone, isolated and misunderstood.
- Reassure them about their future, that they are safe, and that they will be cared for. Be cautious of false reassurances. These do not help school age children. Do not say disasters will never affect your family again - children know this is not true. Instead reassure them by saying that "Adults are working very hard to make things safe."

- Listen and talk to them about the experience. Honest, open discussion is best, as the unknown is often more frightening than the reality. Even very young children know that something is going on and, again, the reality is easier for them to deal with than the unknown.
- Do not be afraid however to say “I don’t know” if you are faced with questions regarding the incident.
- Some children will need extra encouragement or special attention, especially at bedtime.
- Allow expression of emotions, they are part of the healing process. Support the child and allow them time to work through it.
- Allow younger children to express themselves through play and drawing. If there have been deaths they may know the children of the deceased and may want to send a drawing in acknowledgement of their sadness. This is an important ritual.
- Do things as a family and make sure time is reserved for enjoyable and rewarding experiences together. Shared pleasure carries a family through many difficulties.
- Maintain routine and familiar activities.
- Fear of water or earth tremors, and worry about another disaster will be a normal part of this process. Validate and reassure your children that you understand their fear. Remind them how life has been before and that something like this rarely happens.
- Keep family roles clear - do not allow children to take too much responsibility for too long, even if they want to care for a distressed parent. Equally, do not become too over protective of children after a trauma; try to understand if they cannot fulfil their role for a time (like going to school or helping around the house) but talk about how they will resume normal activities as soon as possible.
- Reduce change of any type to a minimum, or prepare them if changes are required.
- Keep track of the child; remember what they do and say, try not to let lasting changes in temperament and behaviour creep up.
- Make time for just being together, take time out, and re-establish recreational activities and outings as soon as you can.
- Reassure them that how they are feeling is normal.
- Take seriously all their concerns, complaints and questions. They may be trying to express something important which they do not have the words for.
- Do not make this the time to correct bad behaviour. Sometimes this is acting out and a form of expression.

Adolescents/teenagers deal with problems differently; they may rely on their peers and friends or may become more immersed in external activities. They may find avoidance a better way of dealing with parental grief, and so may appear detached or hard. Recognise these differences, allowing them the space they need, but also ensure open communication with their friend’s families, etc., so you know what is happening with your teenager. Finally, not every child will react. For some of the children this will be a sad event and they will feel sadness for other’s losses, but will not have an emotional response. This is okay. It is important to recognise that grief is personal and normal. Like adults, most children will adapt and grow through crisis with the love and support of their family and friends. However, if the child's reactions are particularly severe or prolonged, or if you have other concerns about the way that your child is reacting to a traumatic incident, do not hesitate to contact your doctor or other support services.

SOME HELPFUL LINKS WHILE LIVING OVERSEAS

General Information

<http://www.dfat.gov.au>

<http://www.traveldoctor.com.au>

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>

<http://www.tripadvisor.com/>

<http://alldownunder.com/australian-websites/help-overseas.htm>

http://www.aec.gov.au/Voting/ways_to_vote/

<http://www.defence.gov.au/dco/>

Moving and Living Overseas

<http://www.career-in-your-suitcase.com>

<http://www.expatexchange.com>

Health and Wellbeing Support

<http://www.beyondblue.org.au>

<http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au>

<http://www.counsellingonline.org.au>

<http://www.grief.org.au>

<http://www.thecompassionatefriends.org.au>

<http://www.headspace.org.au>

<http://www.lifeline.org.au>

<http://www.mentalhealth.asn.au>

<http://www.sane.org>

<http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/women>

<http://www.menscentre.org.au>

<http://www.mensline.org.au>

<http://www.mensshed.org>

<http://www.tresillian.net>

Support Services for the Elderly

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ageing-whatnew.htm>

<http://www.agedcareaustralia.gov.au/internet/agedcare/publishing.nsf/Content/Streaming+page>

<http://www.mealsonwheels.org.au/Home.aspx>

<http://www.redcross.org.au/telecross.aspx>

<http://www.seniors.gov.au>

<http://www.seniors.gov.au/internet/seniors/publishing.nsf/Content/Medical+and+personal+alarm+systems>

THE STAFF AND FAMILY SUPPORT OFFICE

The SFO provides DFAT and its employees with a range of support services designed to promote personal well-being and workplace effectiveness¹. These services include:

- **Personal counselling.** This is provided face-to-face, by telephone, and via email. Another counselling option is the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) - see overleaf. Examples of issues addressed by personal counselling are work-related difficulties and challenges, relationship and family problems, adjustment issues during or on return from posting, career and work performance matters, and personal concerns such as depression, anxiety, coping with stress, and grief.
- **Consultation with management.** Advice to DFAT managers has included a range of organisational health and effectiveness issues, such as workplace climate, group effectiveness, communication, job satisfaction, mediation, and strategies for supporting staff with performance and/or behavioural challenges.
- **Crisis support.** This occurs in response to crises both locally and overseas. Advice and support is provided to management and individuals about issues such as leadership during a crisis, reactions to trauma, managing fatigue and extended shiftwork, and preparation for consular and humanitarian support.
- **Support to families.** The Staff and Family Support Officer primarily assists and supports officers and their families before, during and after postings overseas. The Staff and Family Support Officer also engages with Post leadership and the Community Liaison Officers to foster support for families posted around the globe.
- **The development and delivery of training.** The SFO presents at many departmental courses, as well as delivering training material during Post visits. Topics include mental health first aid, mental health for managers, stress management and self-care, dealing with challenging behaviours, and working in a multicultural workplace. The SFO can develop and deliver tailored training packages on areas related to its expertise.
- **Visits to posts.** The SFO has a rolling schedule of visits to our overseas Posts, as well as to State and Territory Offices and Passports Offices. Visits are prioritised according to the general level of risk of psychological harm, availability of mental health support locally, and direct requests from a Post. Visit activities typically include briefings with senior staff and others with welfare responsibilities, individual counselling, provision of training, meetings with spouses, liaison with local health providers, and out-briefs with the Head of Mission and Senior Administrative Officer. Attached agency staff are welcome to seek counselling and attend training sessions during SFO visits.

¹ Staff from other agencies should contact their organisation in respect of what services are available to them.

- **Support to selection.** Psychological suitability assessment forms part of the selection process for some high-risk posts and roles such as the Crisis Response Team. The SFO can also provide advice about psychometric testing and selection methodologies.
- **Information hub.** The SFO constantly develops information resources in order to provide self-help guides, links to community and internet services, and referral options related to mental health and workplace effectiveness. This information is accessible on the SFO intranet page; HR tab then Staff and Family Support Office.

Access to Counselling

Counselling is available to all DFAT staff (including LES), additionally, immediate family members of staff posted overseas are also eligible. Counselling can be accessed via telephone, email or during SFO Post and State/Territory visits.

Contracted staff should seek access to counselling through their own organisations/companies. Attached agency staff at overseas Posts are welcome to seek counselling during SFO visits, but should access their own internal or contracted support services at other times.

Employee Assistance Program

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for DFAT staff provides face-to-face and telephone counselling through an external counselling provider. The current service provider is **Optum** and, in Australia, DFAT staff and their immediate family can contact **Optum (24/7 within Australia)** on **1300 361 008**.

Posted DFAT officers, their immediate family and DFAT LES can also access the EAP. Local contact details can be provided by emailing the SFO@dfat.gov.au or following the links from the SFO intranet page.

The DFAT EAP provides a limited number of counselling sessions per year. Although the SFO oversees the contract and use of EAP services, the Department is not provided with identifying information about individuals who access the service.

Confidentiality

Psychologists and social workers have strict ethical guidelines in relation to client confidentiality which will be discussed during the initial phase of counselling. The SFO manages personal information in accordance with Departmental Policies and the Privacy Act 1998. Additionally, SFO social workers and psychologists comply with professional registration requirements and uphold the ethical codes of the Australian Psychological Society and the Australian Association of Social Workers respectively.

Making Contact with the SFO

For Canberra-based personnel, consultations can be arranged either by contacting the SFO Program Officer on **6261 1239** or directly with a psychologist or social worker known to them. The SFO is located on the Ground Floor of 44 Sydney Avenue. For staff not based in Canberra, phone consultations can be arranged by contacting the Program Officer via email at SFO@dfat.gov.au.

Emergency Contact

The after-hours duty phone number is **+61 421 588 468** and should only be used for urgent concerns. Please note this is a diverted number so only voice messages (not text messages) are accepted.





Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

