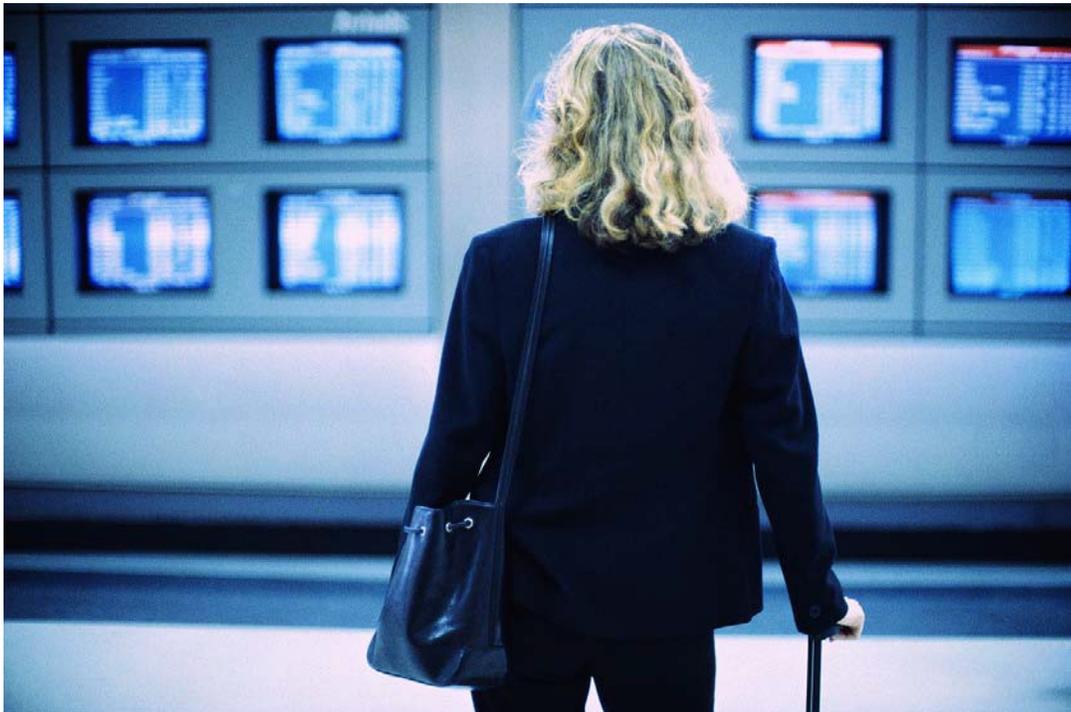




United States Department of State
Bureau of Human Resources

SEPARATED BY SERVICE



**HELPING THE FAMILY
COPE WITH UNACCOMPANIED TOURS**

**GUIDE FOR THE PARENT ASSIGNED TO AN
UNACCOMPANIED POST**



UNACCOMPANIED TOURS SUPPORT

**Published by the U.S. Department of State
Family Liaison Office 2008
Washington D.C.**

Through the generosity of the Una Chapman Cox Foundation

Original design and text by Kim S. Leong Spivak, Ph.D. 2007

Do not copy or reproduce without prior permission from FLO

SEPARATED BY SERVICE:

HELPING THE FAMILY COPE WITH UNACCOMPANIED TOURS

GUIDE FOR THE PARENT AT THE UNACCOMPANIED POST

CONTENTS

Introduction	6
Coping with Separation: The Emotional Cycle of Unaccompanied Tours	
Stages Of Separation	7
Family Separation and Readiness	8
Marital Matters	11
Chart: Developmental Implications for Children	13
What To Expect From Your Family Prior To Departure	15
Before Departure: A Pre-Posting Guide To Practical Needs	
Staying In Touch: Communication avenues	16
Family Meeting	17
Contact lists	19
Internet Safety Pledge for kids	21
Legal Matters	22
Finances: Separate Maintenance Allowance	22
Family Budget Checklist	23
Household Matters	25
School Needs	26
Pre-Departure Activities: To do for and with the Family	27
During Separation:	
Emotional Reactions during Separation.....	28
Making Family Connections Work at Post.....	29
Attitude to Distance Bonding:	30
Distance Bonding.....	31
Activities for Your Partner: Virtual Dates, Surprises, Enlisting Help	32
Chart: Psychosocial Development Guide To Interactions	34
Activities for Children.....	36
Infants.....	36
Adoption.....	37
Attachment.....	37
Chart: Separation in Infants.....	38

Toddlers.....	43
Phone Conversation Topics.....	46
Tell About Post.....	48
Tell About You.....	49
Managing Transitions : R&Rs	53

Homecoming And Readjustment:

Stages of Reunion	54
Children’s Reaction to Homecoming	57
Post-Homecoming: Readjustment keys	
1. Timing	59
2. Communication: Problem-Solving Tips; Fighting Fair	60
Family Reunion Meeting	62

Readjustment: FAQ’s

What Is Post-Traumatic Stress and is it a Problem?	64
I Get Moody and Irritable; Why Aren’t I Happy to be Back?	64
Just Suck It Up and Move on. What’s the Problem?	65
How Do I Know I Need Help?	65
We’re Having Marital Problems since I Returned, Is this Normal?	66
Sex Isn’t the Same Now; Will this Change?	66
I’m Drinking More Now, But Every FSO I Know Drinks. Is it a Problem?	67
Other Readjustment Things to Look for?	67

Appendices for Parents’ Manuals:

Appendix A: Government resources and contacts.....	i
Emergency: State Dept. Operations Center	
FLO: Unaccompanied Tours Support Officer	
Mental Health Services: Deployment Stress	
Management Program MED/ECS;	
Information: Overseas Briefing Center; Foreign Service Transition Center	
Foreign Service Youth Foundation	
Other government offices: Allowances, Office of Casualty Assistance,	
Retirement, and Payroll	
Appendix B: Useful websites for you and your family	v
Expatriate Living	
College scholarships, financial aid, and internships	

Appendix C: Regulations, Reading, DVDs, Military links	viii
FLO publications	
Readings for internationally mobile youth	
Lessons learned from the Military	
APA 2/2007 Report	
Raising Third Culture Kids	
Appendix D: Templates, check lists.....	x
Templates for checklists and forms	
Five wishes: Living Will	
Templates for activities	
Appendix E: Special considerations:	xxvi
What if I come back injured?	
What if I don't come back?	
Members of Household/EFM's	

SEPARATED BY SERVICE: HELPING YOUR FAMILY COPE WITH AN UNACCOMPANIED TOUR

The majority of families assigned to unaccompanied tours (UT) have both a resolve that they can make it through, and a dread of what the separation will do to family relationships. Planning, realistic expectations, and a commitment to consistent on-going communication are all key factors to coping with the separation. This manual incorporates these factors in providing information about how UT separation affects marriage and children and provides practical “distance bonding” activities for the Employee to try from post. The Appendices provide a listing of resources, regulations, and readings, including a number of useful websites that you can tap from overseas to send gifts home.

Corresponding age-appropriate manuals are available from FLO for the remaining parent and children. To economize on space and weight, the Employee manual is provided on CD; it contains information and exercises that are integrated with your family’s parallel manuals. The activities and charts are made so you can print off one or two pages as handy reference charts as you talk with your family. Please contact FLO (see Appendix A) should you require a hard copy or more manuals for the family.

While the bulk of the responsibilities for home and hearth inevitably falls on the remaining parent’s shoulders, he/she can only facilitate the connection between you and your children. *You* have to provide the substance of time, attention, and communication, as you would if you were not separated. In any relationship, you get out what you put in. Thus, if you expect to maintain as good a relationship as possible under UT circumstances, it is especially important that you and the family make a commitment to talking with each other regularly. The distance bonding activities provide only the fodder for such communications. You are encouraged to try the materials plus the suggested variations and to be creative in tailoring them to your family’s tastes.



About Other Caregivers: Relatives and Friends

For the purposes of the UT manuals, FLO recognizes that “family” is broadly defined and that UT Families (UTF) often rely on relatives and friends who are for all intents and purposes “family.” The contribution of the many grandparents, aunts, uncles, significant others and good friends who have stepped up to the plate to help cannot be underestimated. However, it is also acknowledged that the government’s official response does not extend this appreciation to include funding and services for persons not on the employee’s travel orders. Such issues, though important, are beyond the scope of the UT manuals. Interested parties may contact FLO with questions related to the specific circumstances of your family (also see Appendix E).

Coping with Separation: The Emotional Cycle of Unaccompanied Tours

Stages of Separation:

In general, anyone facing separation progresses through four stages, spending varying amounts of time at each phase.

1. **Protest:** About 1-2 weeks before departure spouses report feeling tense, selfish about wanting the employee to stay, unbelieving that they're actually going. In addition there is frustration over the long hours the employee is spending at work rather than with family, preparing for all the changes, and tending to work that needs to be completed before he/she leaves. Both spouses can feel mentally and physically fatigued and children often react to their parents' emotional unavailability. Disturbed sleep patterns make for shortened "fuses" and increased irritability.
2. **Despair:** Immediately before and after departure, spouses often feel overwhelmed, vulnerable, and tearful at being left alone. Thoughts of "How will I live through this?" are common. There may be difficulty sleeping alone and a need to hold the children closer than usual for comfort and company. Children often feel the same way and may find their way into the parental bed. Employees often feel a mixture of guilt about leaving the spouse to cope with so much and excitement about the adventure ahead.
3. **Detachment:** During most of the separation, there is a sense of relative calm, owing to being in survival mode in order to handle daily demands and staying positive for the post and family's sake. Although family matters are running smoothly, strong emotions, especially anxiety and sadness are not too far from the surface and may emerge when the spouse feels stressed. This "stress" may seem petty, e.g. sitting in traffic or trying to deal with business that the employee used to handle. During this time, the employee may become complacent about maintaining contact with home as energy is being drawn by post challenges.
4. **Reunion adjustment:** 1-3 weeks before homecoming there is incredible excitement and activity with a heightened awareness of things that need to be cleaned or done before the employee arrives. The employee is trying to tie up as many loose ends as possible at post as well as making plans for transfer home and the next posting. At 4-6 weeks after the initial homecoming period, the family begins to readjust awkwardly to new realities, and establishes new rules and structures. Emotional readjustment goes on for 3-6 months after return.



Family Separation and Readiness



Tips:

- Describe the U.T. to your family: Where and when you're going, what you'll be doing, R&Rs, and when you're coming back. Be prepared for hard questions your family might ask (see Common Reactions in Pre-Posting section for list of common questions and reactions).
- Talk as a family before separation: Before leaving for post, employees are preoccupied with many preparatory tasks for both the releasing and receiving jobs, often requiring extended hours and increased workload. Consequently, employees go home tired and reluctant to address painful concerns related to the upcoming separation. Avoiding these concerns and leaving them unattended before departure leaves your family vulnerable during separation. The Family Meeting sheets provided in each of the UT Family manuals are designed to help all members make plans as far ahead as possible.
- Listen to children's worries; answer questions as truthfully as possible: Do not assume you know what your child is asking or feeling. Pursue their question with follow-on open-ended questions until you reach the nugget of their concern. Using age-appropriate language, give as truthful and encouraging an answer as possible without giving false assurances as to your safety or return. When your child appears "done" or is satisfied, do not pursue the issue further.

- *Listen* to your spouse; don't "fix:" Listening to pain without fixing it is perhaps the hardest thing for most people to do. Many employees avoid the emotionally demanding talks and times with their families as a way of avoiding their own guilty feelings, thinking "there's not much I can do about it anyway." However, listening to your spouse's pain, especially pain that you have contributed to, provides more comfort than advice-giving. His/her heightened emotion is an indication that he/she is feeling vulnerable and doesn't want to lose you. The best support you can provide is listening without becoming defensive or prematurely turning to problem solving.
- Delegate rather than "dump" responsibilities on family members: Although everyone is called on to take up the slack after the employee leaves, children in particular balk at having to do "everything." Positive reframing of the re-distribution of household chores and duties will help them see the mutual benefit of helping out. That is, while acknowledging their complaints about increased work and doubts about their ability to carry it out, also point out how valuable their contributions are to the family as well as your confidence in them. The more they help the at-home parent, the more energy that parent has to spend on them.



- Commit to consistent and active contact: This involves both the at-home parent's facilitating the mechanics of distance bonding activities as well as the employee's commitment to making the activities a priority in the midst of a stressful work situation. If you want to stay connected, the extra time and work you put in to making the interactions happen will definitely be rewarded.
- Maintain family routine and discipline: A steady family structure with respect to routines and consequences provides both children and parents a sense of order and predictability in life.
 - Remaining spouses need order to stay sane as they manage multiple tasks and schedules. Support your spouse by respecting the routines put in place and affirming her/him in front of the children.
 - Expect children to test your spouse's limits as the family adjusts.
 - Eating and sleeping properly are basic requirements for health: maintain meal and bedtimes so the family stays healthy. Regular eating and sleeping routines also help to establish a sense of normalcy rather than of chaos in the midst of the changes brought on by the separation.
 - Prior to departure, use the Family Meeting format to discuss expectations related to bedtime, morning routines, cleaning up, chores, homework and consequences, with regard to both rewards and discipline.

- Opt for “Simple and Easy”: Even with the Involuntary Separate Maintenance Allowance (ISMA), your family will have to stretch to do more with less. Identify the things and procedures that simplify life and bring ease to a difficult situation and agree with your spouse to make these things a priority. This might mean getting regular babysitters or maid service so your spouse can go out with friends, or it could mean saying “no” after a certain threshold of weekly family activities has been reached. Even if your spouse could win an “*uberparent* multi-tasker” award hands down, keeping up a high level of activity over a prolonged separation will be costly. Rein in the ambitions and lower expectations. Spend money on services that free your spouse up for quality family time.



To Tandem couples

In taking a tandem UT assignment, you have decided, consciously or otherwise, to accept the difficult trade-off's with respect to career vs. family needs. Some common reactions to expect:

- Ambivalence and nagging guilt about “leaving” your children, despite the more than adequate plans you’ve likely made for their on-going care.
- Petty arguments and “sniping” at your spouse for not offering to stay behind with the children or take another non-UT assignment.
- Competitiveness and self-justification of own career needs.
- Temptation to lavish gifts on children to assuage guilt.

Put aside defensiveness, guilt, and hackneyed clichés as these suck up emotional energy better spent supporting each other and tending to distance bonding with the children. Remember, you’re on the same side.

Marital Matters

Being aware of common reactions among remaining spouses will help you to listen to and appreciate your spouse's experience of the UT and, subsequently, to offer sincere reassurance:

"I'm being left behind. He's going to have a life of adventure without me."

Some spouses privately believe that home life is boring compared to the exciting challenges and people of the employee's life. Unable to share in the adventure, many UT spouses feel they have all the drudgery of Foreign Service life without any of the benefits. They worry that they are becoming dull and unattractive to their spouses; they may worry that the employee might have an affair.

"I didn't get married to live alone." This is a frequent lament of many Foreign Service spouses who find themselves unexpectedly alone. Although they support the employee's choice, there is a great deal of pain over disappointed expectations and continued sacrifices. Many are afraid of the possibility of losing their mate.



"I have no choice." There is significant frustration that someone else has control of life changing factors and one has little say in what happens. Because the spouse wants to stay married, he/she often feels as if there is no choice but to go along with the Employee's decisions. This can lead to resentment and a "you owe me" attitude that adds to a sense of being apart rather than a team.

Worries about sexual needs: Knowing about their spouse's sexual appetites leads some to worry that their partner will turn to other methods of sexual fulfillment during the separation. Extramarital affairs may occur, as well as increased use of pornography, masturbation, and prostitutes. Frank discussion about these concerns before departure can help to clarify expectations and allay some of these fears.

"What if we grow apart?" Without the benefit of daily interaction, reunited couples often find their lives have become vastly different with little common ground.

Neglect and complacency will damage a marriage whether the couple lives together or not. For this reason, it is vitally important that both parties commit to consistent and active communication, not only around the children but each other also.

Tips for supporting your spouse

Be proactive and reassuring; stay engaged. Encourage your spouse to develop his/her self apart from his/her role as spouse, father/mother, and worker.

- Respond rather than react: This involves coming to grips with what you can and cannot control, taking action on what you can act on, and letting go of things beyond your control. It does not mean advice-giving, avoiding, or sweeping emotionally charged topics under the carpet. Your spouse cannot change the UT, but together you can make plans that will definitely affect the way the family copes with the separation. You cannot control their feelings but you can show them how you feel about them. Do your best in doing the things you know will help them, e.g., giving verbal praise, positive feedback, words, and tokens of appreciation; holding back on criticism, sarcasm, or defensive remarks.
- Communicate openly and often: make virtual dates with your partner, and take pains to keep them.
 - Use the time to build up your spouse; they are just as worn down and discouraged as you may be. Talk on all levels, not just to exchange information, but also to build intimacy. Show genuine interest by asking about what they're reading, how their minds or spiritual lives are developing, and share the same information.
 - Don't avoid potentially charged topics like child rearing practices, money, and sex in favor of "keeping peace." Write things down if you find you cannot dispense with defensive language or hurtful comments when talking.
 - Remember feelings do not define reality. Differentiate between feelings and thoughts and recognize that both are needed for effective communication and problem solving. To dismiss one or the other is to cut out important information.
 - Be respectful in your tone of voice. When you're at post, your spouse does not have the benefit of line of sight to catch nuances of body language; it is easy to misconstrue words and tones. Manners count.
 - Say what is in your heart: sometimes saying a truthful "sorry," or "you're right," or "I love you" can diffuse a tense moment and get right to the core of the matter.
- Encourage your spouse to develop him/herself. Remember that he/she is more than a spouse and parent in need of input that produces growth and life. Do not mistake the need for creative outlet, time, or space for him/herself with selfishness.
- Make it OK to get help. Prior to departure, agree that either one of you can ask for marital and/or individual counseling if needed, without fear of reprisal. If possible, agree on a counselor.

DEVELOPMENTAL Implications FOR separation

AGE	POSSIBLE FEELINGS	POSSIBLE BEHAVIORS
Birth to 1 year	<p>Reaction to parents' reactions; senses that something is different (or wrong) but doesn't know what or why</p> <p>Stranger anxiety as new caregivers/support are introduced</p>	<p>Crying and fussing; clinginess</p> <p>Irritability</p> <p>Sleep and eating disturbance</p> <p>Difficulty eliminating</p>
1-3 yrs	<p>Confusion</p> <p>Surprise and disbelief when Dad/Mom leaves</p> <p>Magical thinking: worry and guilt that they did something wrong to make Dad/Mom go away</p> <p>Distress at saying goodbye</p> <p>Worry about danger and death</p>	<p>Clinging behavior; tearfulness</p> <p>Acting up in reaction to parental conflict</p> <p>Searching behaviors after departure</p> <p>Temper tantrums</p> <p>Demand for attention and reassurance</p> <p>Regression: loss of toilet training; sleep disturbance</p> <p>Play reflects control, power and relationship themes</p>
3-6 yrs	<p>Fear of losing Dad/Mom</p> <p>Sadness, anger at abandonment, and employee's choice to leave</p> <p>Separation anxiety</p> <p>Ego-centric thinking: may blame self for making Dad/Mom leave (even if explained)</p> <p>Weepiness before departure</p> <p>When in good mood, everything seems good; reverse is true when in bad mood</p>	<p>Inability to concentrate as well on school work</p> <p>Acting up behaviors at home and/or school</p> <p>Excessive silliness, regressive behaviors</p> <p>Angry outbursts and "meltdown's" mixed with frustrated clinginess</p> <p>Experiences the world (including self) as either "all good" or "all bad," even if discussed</p>

AGE	POSSIBLE FEELINGS	POSSIBLE BEHAVIORS
7-12 yrs	<p>Sadness and anger at employee for disrupting their lives; things feel unfair</p> <p>Anxiety over Dad/Mom's safety</p> <p>Guilt over seemingly selfish feelings</p> <p>Resentment over changes and increased responsibilities</p> <p>Worry about what will happen and who will take care of them</p>	<p>Behavior problems at home or school: acting up, bullying, impulsiveness</p> <p>Regressive attention-seeking behaviors mixed with defiance</p> <p>Withdrawing from friends and activities to stay closer to home</p> <p>Drop in school grades and motivation</p> <p>Angry outbursts</p>
13-18 yrs	<p>Sadness and anxiety; fear of loss</p> <p>Worry for remaining parent and what will happen to self</p> <p>Denial of feelings</p> <p>Anger and resentment at changes that impinge on their freedoms and choices</p> <p>Feeling misunderstood; tendency to hide feelings</p> <p>Unable to admit fault or shortcoming to parents without feeling loss of self esteem</p>	<p>May show open disrespect and rebellion in speech and/or manner</p> <p>Aloofness; "I don't care" attitude</p> <p>"Closing off" or arguing as a defense against closeness</p> <p>Spending more time out of the house with friends</p> <p>Loss of interest in school and activities</p> <p>Increased concern with privacy and personal freedoms</p>



Pre-Posting Phase

Prior to departure, you and your spouse will be in “doing” mode, discussing, planning and preparing for the separation. Children, especially younger ones, will react to parental preoccupation and relative inaccessibility by getting your attention by whatever means are available to them. To minimize this mutual frustration, set aside time to listen to your family; give appropriate explanations and reassurances. Put aside preparations regularly to do fun things with the family.

Be prepared to answer difficult questions honestly and to listen to strong feelings – remember, your family wouldn’t be feeling so intensely if they didn’t care about you:

“Will you come back in one piece? What’s going to happen to us?” The many uncertainties of a UT plus the possibility of danger provokes anxiety and fear.

“Why did you choose to go?” Some families question the employee’s motives for choosing the UT. They wonder whether there’s an ulterior motive that usually pegs staying at home as an undesirable option e.g. to escape responsibilities, to avoid being with the spouse. Young children are prone to blame themselves for your going away, even if you explain the reasons otherwise.

“Why didn’t you tell me? You should have discussed it with me first.” In the rare cases where the employee made a unilateral decision to take the UT, the “left behind” spouse is understandably angry and resentful.

*“What the *@! am I supposed to do? Everything is dumped on me.”* Most spouses initially feel overwhelmed with the mechanics of having to take care of everything. There is a discouraging sense of aloneness, of not having enough support, of being left with the full weight of responsibility for kids, and “never getting a break.” Many adolescents also feel resentful of increased responsibilities that encroach on their freedom.

“Oh, you’re going?” Some employees travel so frequently that their spouses and children become used to being without one parent. Sometimes, teens secretly look forward to the simplified life during separation. The awkwardness in this situation is emotional rather than logistical, as all family members want the employee to feel like a wanted and useful part of things even though they don’t “need” him/her as much.

What To Do With It All After Listening:

- Give feedback about your caring and respect for them even in the midst of their anxiety, anger, sadness, or seeming aloofness.
- Acknowledge that your choices affect them without becoming defensive (even if you don’t agree with their perspective on the matter).
- Remember feelings do not define reality; they will pass.

A Pre-Posting Guide to Practical Needs

This section deals with practical issues related to running a household during separation, including financial arrangements, household maintenance, child care, and contingency plans in case of emergencies. Although most people do not like facing the issues because of emotional implications, these necessary, if tedious, details are better discussed before the Employee's departure. Making such arrangements is as much an exercise in anxiety management as it is in administrative planning, and will help your family cope in the long run.

Pre-Posting Preparations: Check Lists And Activities In This Section

- ./ Communication equipment and supplies
- ./ Family Discussion(s) format
- ./ Go-To list of support people
- ./ Emergency Contacts (local services)
- ./ School needs guide and list
- ./ Financial needs checklist
- ./ Legal needs checklist
- ./ Household matters
- ./ Suggestions for the Employee
- ./ Suggestions for the Family Members
- ./



In addition, FLO's article on *Planning for Family Contingencies* provides a list of documents and information to round up prior to departure. Contact FLO for a copy. The office of Casualty Assistance (OCA) also provides helpful information that can aid contingency planning. (See Appendix A for contact details.)

Staying In Touch:

Use all communication avenues open between home and post. If your family does not already own a digital camera or computer, this would be a very good time to get one (better yet, two).

- Buy greetings cards and presents ahead of departure (or subscribe to e-Cards and gift services, see Appendix B).
- If post has U.S. mail capacity, stock up on "Forever" stamps; take a few envelopes in your carry-on.
- For post: take digital camera plus accessories, web camera, speakers for computer, and a cassette recorder (if you are planning to record books for kids, buy two copies, one for post, one to send home).
- For home: make sure the phones, computer with speakers, and printer are in functioning order. A second camera will be needed for home; a web cam will be a plus.
- Set family ground rules for communications: e.g., length of calls; cheaper-rate times; sharing air-time when you are on the line with one person. Agree to not draw negative conclusions if one party misses a phone date.
- Decide together which dates are the most important not to miss: e.g. birthdays, anniversary, Valentine's, etc.
- Set up a family calendar showing schedule of calls, R&Rs, etc., on the computer. E-mail yourself a copy to post.
- Explain pouch mail restrictions and relate what kinds of things you want to receive at post, considering space and weight restrictions.

FAMILY MEETING

Task: Discuss Separation, Make a Plan Together

Questions about the Unaccompanied Tour:

- ? Where are you going? When? For how long?
- ? When will you be back?
- ? Why can't family go with you?
- ? Why did you choose to go there? Can't you tell them you don't want to go?
- ? Will you be in danger?
- ? How will your family find you?



Post address: _____

e-mail and numbers: _____

Ground rules for communications: Cheaper calling times are _____

Time differences: Post is + or - ____ hrs. from home

Best times to call home: _____

Best times to call post: _____

What if I forget to call or you aren't home when I call?

What kinds of things interest family members that we can talk about over the whole separation e.g., sports teams, favorite TV show, etc.? _____

Things that I'm interested in talking about on the phone:

? When will we see you again? Discuss:

- o Your expectations around family time, R&R, and holidays
- o Which holidays you expect family to spend at in-law's or with your side of the family:

o Note any holiday or event that your family really wants you to attend: _____

Questions about what will happen to the family:

? Will we have to move too? If so, when and to where?

? Who will take care of us?

? What do we do in case of an emergency?

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____



? Whom do we go to in non-emergency situations? If they're not available, whom else do we go to? _____

? What will happen to me if something happens to you?

? What happens when you come back?

? Will you be mad at a family member if he/she notices something is wrong when you come back and he/she tells someone about it?

Ask each family member for their list of support people with contact details (sample next page).

- Go-To people should be people whom your family member knows, trusts and can access. They should be able to help easily when in need, thus should have access to a phone and computer.
- Family members can have different Go-To people, but you and your spouse should know who they all are and how to contact them.
- Code word: It is particularly important for young children to decide on a single word that, when used, will signal their Go-To people that they need immediate attention. (The word should not be an emergency word such as "fire" or "danger.")

Picking "safe" Go-To people

When you're feeling low, you need people to turn to who can help in a way that you find useful. Some of your friends and relatives may mean well, but their brand of "help" can be more trouble than it's worth. Pick "safe" people for your Go-To lists.

A safe person is someone who

- Keeps your confidences
- Listens without judging you
- Is able to understand your point of view
- Doesn't keep score of what you "owe" them
- Can hear "no" or handle disagreement without getting their feelings hurt
- Handles anger without slinging it back or retaliating
- Doesn't "should" all over you



My Go-To Team

	NAME	NUMBER	E-MAIL	Notes
1				
2				
3				

- Code Word: _____
- Call them individually every once in a while just to check in.

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

Personal contacts: name, number

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____



Family Doctor _____

Pediatrician _____

Local hospital _____

address/tel _____

Fire: _____

Poison Center _____

Police: _____

McGruff's Internet Safety Pledge

Check each promise and sign your name at the bottom. Then put it by your computer so you'll always remember how to stay cyber-safe!

I PROMISE

- ./ Never to give out my name, address, phone number, school name, any adult's credit card number to anyone online.
- ./ Never to arrange a face-to-face meeting with anyone I meet online.
- ./ Never to go into chat rooms unless my parents say it's okay.
- ./ Never to open emails from someone I don't know and never to go to links I don't recognize.
- ./ Always to tell an adult if I see anything online that makes me feel uncomfortable.

X _____
Name

Date

Keep taking a bite out of crime online at **McGruff.org!**

National Crime Prevention Council
1000 Connecticut Ave. 13th Floor, Washington, DC 20036, www.ncpc.org

Legal Matters

No body wants to think about the possibility that you may not return. Taking care of legal and financial matters before departure will help to minimize the sense of vulnerability commonly felt by spouses in the employee's absence. So, as much as it gives you a lump in the throat, address the following with your spouse:



- ./ Update both your Wills
- ./ Make a Living Will (instructions to deny medical care if incapacitated; see Appendix D, Five Wishes)
- ./ Funeral wishes
- ./ Wishes for your children
- ./ Immigration and visa matters if your spouse or child is not a U.S. citizen
- ./ Power of Attorney: general and limited, notarized
- ./ Make sure you are both named in deeds and titles to property and assets.
- ./ Any liens or binding contracts that you have not told your spouse about

When arrangements are finalized, it is a good idea to copy the documents to CD and give a copy to key extended family members or executors.

FINANCES

Use the following Family Budget Worksheet to guide discussion about finances. Determine your expenses and budget, and make arrangements accordingly.

About ISMA: why is it so low?

ISMA stands for Involuntary Separate Maintenance Allowance, a sum of money to which an employee is entitled to offset costs of maintaining his/her family who are not permitted to come to post. ISMA does not cover rent or mortgage in most U.S. cities. Theoretically, since the employee's housing is "free" while he/she's overseas, his/her salary can still go towards paying rent or the mortgage for the family back home, as if you were living there. By design, ISMA is only meant to cover extra expenses for things that make the UT family's life a little less stressful during the employee's absence (e.g., maid, lawn service, or baby sitting). See Appendix C for reference to the regulations.



FAMILY BUDGET CHECKLIST

MANAGING HOUSEHOLD FINANCES

Make sure both spouses have access to money, i.e., that both will be able to make inquiries and transactions without the other's being present. Be familiar with passwords, procedures, and PINs needed to access accounts. Discuss how and who will file taxes.

Bank:

- ./ Joint account and remaining spouse's own checking account
- ./ Emergency funds: how much to set aside
- ./ Internet banking set up; link joint account with other account(s), if any
- ./ ATM cards in hand, PINs secured
- ./ Personal checks (for both employee and at-home spouse)
- ./ Safety deposit box: find the key

Credit cards: Make sure credit line is sufficient to cover emergencies. Many couples divide the cards so as to simplify tracking transactions, e.g., Visa to one spouse, Master Card to the other.

Insurance:

- ./ Life insurance, including amount to cover funeral or living will wishes.
- ./ Health, dental and vision
- ./ Car insurance
- ./ Property insurance

Investments and Property:

- ./ Make sure assets are also in remaining spouse's name
- ./ Consider trust funds and investments for children

BUDGET

A. Gross Income		B. Deductions	
Income: Employee	Base pay: \$ _____	Federal tax: \$ _____	
	COLA \$ _____	FICA \$ _____	
	Differential \$ _____	FEGLI \$ _____	
	Danger pay \$ _____	Other \$ _____	
		\$ _____	
Income: Spouse	\$ _____	\$ _____	
Income: Other	\$ _____		
TOTAL A	\$ _____	TOTAL B	\$ _____

C. NET income = A – B

Total Gross Income (A):	\$ _____	
Total Deductions (B):	- \$ _____	
Other deductions:	-	\$ _____
TOTAL NET income	= \$ _____	

MONTHLY LIVING EXPENSES:

1. Housing

Rent/ mortgage (including taxes, insurance) \$ _____
Utilities (gas, electricity, water, garbage) \$ _____
Home owners' association fees \$ _____
Telephone (land and cell) \$ _____
Cable TV/ internet \$ _____ TOTAL: \$ _____

2. Food:

Groceries and household supplies \$ _____
Eating out \$ _____
School lunches \$ _____ TOTAL: \$ _____

3. Car and Transportation

Gas and oil \$ _____
Car payments \$ _____
Parking \$ _____
Other (maintenance, car wash, etc.) \$ _____
Public transportation (metro, bus, train) \$ _____ TOTAL: \$ _____

4. Clothing

Family clothes and shoes \$ _____
Laundry and dry cleaning \$ _____ TOTAL: \$ _____

5. Personal

Hair (barber, beauty salon) \$ _____
Toiletries and cosmetics \$ _____
Cigarettes/ tobacco \$ _____
Medication \$ _____ TOTAL: \$ _____

6. Entertainment

Media (newspaper, magazines, books) \$ _____
Baby sitters \$ _____
Outings: Movies, bowling, games, clubs \$ _____ TOTAL: \$ _____

7. Medical, Dental and Vision

Doctors (pediatrician, ob/gyn, GP) \$ _____
Dentist and Orthodontist \$ _____
Eyeglasses, contacts, etc. \$ _____ TOTAL: \$ _____

8. Other expenses

Allowances \$ _____
Child support/ alimony \$ _____ TOTAL: \$ _____

9. Annual expenses (divide by 12 for monthly expense)

Auto insurance \$ _____
Car: License plates, taxes \$ _____
Property Taxes \$ _____
School fees \$ _____ TOTAL: \$ _____

GRAND TOTAL MONTHLY EXPENSES (Add 1 - 9) TOTAL: \$ _____

Household Matters

Whether you rent or own your residence, your spouse will need to be aware of how to attend to all household concerns, including all the aspects you usually handle.

Address the following with your spouse:

- ./ Be familiar with where household records are kept, including operating manuals, car records, bills, policies, and leases.
- ./ Monthly maintenance: know about your utility companies; when the trash goes out etc; home owners association; or landlord's requirements.
- ./ Survey large ticket items or maintenance needs; decide which projects can be done or delayed, e.g., roof repairs, fridge, heater, etc.
- ./ Preferred services and vendors: Write down emergency contact details for
 - Plumber
 - Electrician
 - Car mechanic
 - Internet service
 - Doctors (including pediatrician, dentist)
 - Environment services if applicable (snow removal, etc.)
- ./ Mail: identify items that need to be suspended during separation, e.g., magazine subscriptions.
- ./ Identify which licenses, memberships, and items will expire during the separation; make plans to request renewal papers as necessary, e.g., drivers license, professional licenses, club memberships, library cards, etc.
- ./ Other household services: the remaining spouse should be bold in asking for extra help during separation (after all, this is what ISMA is for) e.g., agree on expenditure and frequency of services such as lawn care, babysitting, maid service, au pair, tax filing service, property manager's fees, etc.
- ./ If you are in transition from another post, discuss HHE plus any storage from other government facilities, and how your family will receive it if you're not present.
- ./ Voter registration: request absentee ballot.
- ./ Get or renew passports for everyone in the family, just in case.



School Needs

One of the assets as well as the liabilities of an international lifestyle is the education that your child has received while growing up all over the world. It is not uncommon for a Foreign Service child to experience multiple school changes before graduation, often involving different international curricula and second, third, and fourth languages. When they enter U.S. schools, internationally mobile families can find the transition to local public schools rather bumpy, depending on how savvy school staff is about the needs of Foreign Service and military families.

If your children are transferring to U.S. schools while you're on UT, contact the FSI/Transition Center as well as FLO for school information. For information about schools in overseas posts, also contact the Office of Overseas Schools (see Appendix A).

You will need on hand:

- Original school records and reports
- Work samples from the last year
- Explanations of curricula, if not standard American type
- Standardized test scores, if any
- Letter from old school regarding special needs, whether gifted or learning needs, if any, even if services to meet these needs did not exist at last school
- Current immunization record
- English as a Second Language documents, if applicable.

Whether your child is “new” or not, teachers should be aware of:

- The effect of prolonged family separation: expect some initial anxiety and drop off in grades after departure; refer for help if the decline lasts more than a few months
- Signs of distress following widespread news on TV about danger in the parent's assigned country
- Close and open contact with the remaining parent; contact with school counselor at parent's discretion
- Child's experiences from different cultures and languages
- Effects of multiple international moves and sensitivity to change
- Child may be less familiar with imperial measurements
- Academic lags owing to different school calendars in southern vs. northern hemisphere may not reflect actual ability
- Maturity level may differ from U.S. peers (may be more or less mature in certain subject areas and social contexts)
- Cultural biases of standard tests used to assess a child who has not grown up in the U.S.
- Encourage “buddy” system of pairing up like-minded youth when faced with new experiences and transitions.

Pre-Departure activities

To do *for* the family:

- Ask each family member to make wish lists on their favorite websites, selecting items in various price ranges and categories. Make sure you have the necessary access passwords to the various websites and lists; you'll need these lists later for gift ideas.
- Make wish lists on your favorite websites, again, picking items with a wide price range to fit family budgets (and that will comply with post restrictions).
- Make a video or cassette recording of yourself, perhaps reading a favorite book or poem, or telling stories about your growing up years.
- Write a separate note of encouragement to each family member. Pick your words well, seal it, and give it with instructions to open it only when they're feeling really down. (In the Children's Manuals, your note becomes part of their UT survival kit.)
- Have a farewell party with closest friends, family, and Go-To support people. It is important for all to have an opportunity to express their respect for both the family's sacrifices and your service to the country before departure.
- Selecting small special "remember me" items or photos for each family member: present them just before you depart (see Appendix B for personalized photo-imprinted items).
- For children under 4: buy a set each of colorful A-B-C and 1-2-3 flash cards, or animal cards; take these in your luggage together with small envelopes (you'll be sending these home one by one later).

To do *together* as a family:

- Commit to completing the short list of fun family outings or activities before departure (generated from Family Meetings). Shopping and errands don't count.
- Make a time capsule: each member contributes one or two items to a weather-resistant container. Bury it together as a family and dig it up again at the end of the UT.
- Spend extra time together without electronic entertainment: e.g., everyone reading on Mom and Dad's bed, doing jigsaw puzzles, playing board games, going to the beach or for a hike.
- Do not make commitments for work or social events a few days before departure.

During Separation

Emotional reactions during separation

- **Detachment:** immediately before and during flight away. Emotional detachment follows on with the fatigue of preparing for both leaving the family and steeling oneself for the UT.
- **Initial wonderment:** 1-6 weeks after arrival at post. Taking in every novel and exciting thing, seeing the possibilities; eagerness to add your meaningful contributions; wishing you could share it with family.
- **Culture shock and disorientation:** Around the three and six month markers after arrival. Novelty wears off; homesickness surfaces spurred by the reality of local sights, smells, challenges, and lacks. Occasionally feeling overwhelmed and hopeless with a need to get away.
- **Stabilization:** during the bulk of the UT. Focusing on the tasks at hand; doing your best to make things work better; finding the pleasant and humorous parts of post among the ugly. Reaching equilibrium with your work load, personnel, and family matters.
- **Depression and frustration:** By definition, UT posts are difficult places to be. Expect waves of frustration and depression as things (or people) will not work well and expectations are dashed. You may feel unfairly treated or forgotten by Washington or family. Disillusionment may set in with a temptation to give up or lash out.
- **Anticipation of going home:** 6-8 weeks before departure (or finding out your next assignment), “short timer” attitude sinks in. Your mood should pick up as you think about leaving post and seeing loved ones again. You begin to see a way out of the stressful environment, focusing on tying up loose ends at post, getting home, and your onward assignment. Feeling guilty or pity for colleagues and FSNs/LES left behind; wistful for some of the weird but endearing quirks about post.

Tips:

- **Positive attitude matters:** keep your sense of humor; don't take yourself too seriously; look for what can be done instead of what can't be done with the limitations at post.
- **Manners help** when dealing with stressed co-workers.
- **Stay healthy:** sleep and eat properly. Exercise. Take regular breaks from work.
- **Stay engaged, be proactive.**
- **If you're in a frustrated period,** resist the urge to send that midnight Young Turks treatise to post management – your e-mail may come back to haunt you. Your ideas may be brilliant but wait for a better time, motive, and audience to do them justice.

Making Family Connections Work at Post

The primary reason an employee leaves post is because of family related stress. This is no less true in an unaccompanied tour. While a few UT employees rely on the “out-of-sight-is-out-of-mind” method of stress reduction, most would agree that maintaining regular family connections helps to keep everyone happier. Together with other UT employees at post, be bold in working out a flexible and equitable system with post management where staff who have family at home can have regular contact times that produce the minimum disruption to work or tapping of post resources. [If you are in senior management or in a supervisory position over other UT Americans, use your discretionary powers to help establish a flexible system that will, in turn, help employee morale and retention at post.]

Factors to consider:

- The function of staff at post who have family members at home: who can be spared for short breaks and when; stagger breaks
- Logistics: sharing of equipment and access
- Allowing reasonable personal use of government equipment for family communication, e.g., internet, IVG lines, and phones, etc.
- Flexibility with regards to “work” hours: time difference between post and home determines when UT employees want to contact home
- Flexibility with respect to changing communication break times as family schedules change
- Not everyone can pick their ideal R&R time; be aware that every UT family with school aged children will be bound by the same school break schedules
- UT employees should be reassured that there will not be negative judgments or consequences for time spent with family (this is especially needed at EER time, particularly if the supervisor is single).



Attitude Check About Distance Bonding

"I've got ten minutes, what can I do?"

For many Employees, good intentions are understandably taken over by work pressures, mechanical challenges at post, and fatigue. However, from the child's perspective, good intentions do not speak as loud as actions. The UT manuals provide activities that can be done within about ten minutes. Some projects are designed to be developed over time so that your child will have finished products at the end of the UT. Use your snatches of time to complete a piece of an activity that can be sent at your next ten minute break. All of the ten minutes will add up to time well spent.



"But it's so boring...."

To adults, children's activities may seem simplistic, tedious, and mind-numbingly boring. Many adults find it difficult to sustain attention and enthusiasm for as long as a child seems to demand it. Don't let the lack of common interesting ground become an excuse for complacency and not reaching out to your child. Pick activities that do not bring cavernous yawns and tears to your eyes; reshape them to suit you and tailor them towards your child's developmental level. Remember that your child would be relating on that same level whether you're at home on the couch or overseas in a desert trailer. The effort you put in to distance bonding exercises *will* make a large difference in helping you and your family remain connected.

Quality vs. Quantity

If you've been around children for awhile, you'll know that children can tell if a person is "present" or not. When your body is near but 'you' are not (perhaps lost in thought or the newspaper), your child will find a way to get your attention. The same will be true when you are away. At post, you will have limited 'family' time and will probably be facing technical difficulties in getting through: make the time count.

- Make dates to talk with individual family members, be consistent in keeping the times
- Talk to children at their level (see suggested Phone Conversation topics)
- Resist the temptation to discuss business issues with your partner during children's time
- Younger children do better with shorter and more frequent conversations

With very young children, *that* they talk with you is sometimes more important than what is said

- Teens and older do better with longer, more focused conversations.

Distance Bonding Activities

In this section, activities for your spouse are presented first, followed by a chart describing psychosocial stages to keep in mind as you shape your interactions with your children. Finally, Infants and Toddler bonding activities are treated separately from those for children aged four and above.

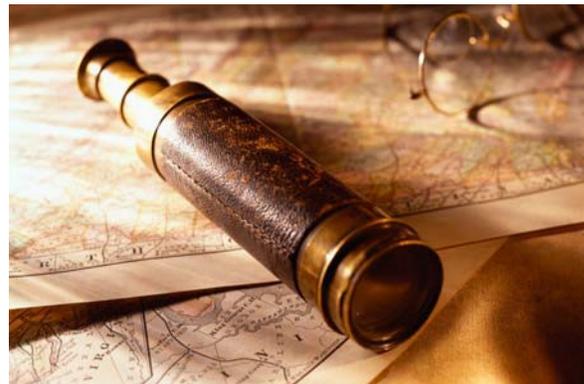
Sending things home:

Be sure to collect and bring home all the items your family sends to you. Send often:

- Photos: help to minimize the shock of physical changes when you next meet.
- Recordings: of your voice and the daily sounds at post.
- Letters and e-mail: write as much as possible
- Fun Awards or Certificates: to bring a smile and show your appreciation, e.g., UT Half-Time Survival certificate; award for most phone calls in a week; or a best e-mail joke award.

In addition, send home items of interest:

- Local paper money, coins
- A sample local newspaper article or cartoon
- Local clothing and shoes
- Odd local cooking implements
- Shells (sea and/or bullet)
- Beads, charms, jewelry
- Local children's toys
- Children's books in local language
- Accessories: odd belts, sashes, camel bells
- Country flag



Your Spouse

During separation, the remaining parent (or designated primary caregiver) will undoubtedly be the rudder, hold, and main stay for the family as well as the bridge between you and your children. Predictably, children's initiative towards doing the things that maintain relationship with you will wax and wane. Your spouse's encouragement and facilitation of contact will ensure it happens. Alternately, if you neglect your relationship with your spouse, chances are family connections will not flourish to the same degree that they might have had you been more attentive. Moral of the story: invest in connecting with your partner – it pays big dividends.

To do for Your Spouse

Virtual dates: Schedule regular “dates”, keep and treat them as you would a face-to-face date --except you’ll have to get creative around the dinner and movie part. It sounds corny and feels awkward, but it is possible to have a romantic time in cyberspace. Just because time differences and busy schedules dash spontaneity, doesn’t mean that you can’t have fun! All you need is come creative effort, willingness to expand your sense of humor and a few good friends to help.

Ideas:

- **Treasure hunt date:** Send an item of interest to a helper (older child or Go-To helper) with instructions to hide it somewhere in the house; ask them to also write the numbers separately on bits of paper and hide these in different rooms according to your instructions. On date night, send an e-mail riddle or clue to your spouse to find the first number. Once found, he/she e-mails you for the next clue; the hunt goes on from one room to another until all the numbers and at last, the item, is found.



- **Dinner by web cam date:** Order in your spouse’s favorite take-out food, to be delivered at date time. A friend or older child can assist with ordering and paying, even with candles and mood music. Bring the best post food you can get to your end of the virtual table. Eat, chat, be merry. Describe smells, tastes and textures. Repeat with other take-out foods or picnic baskets (see Appendix B for suggestions).
- **Exchange date:** Like a gift exchange, only using unique items and notes. Ahead of time, you and your spouse mail something small to each other with a limerick or note (e.g., local newspaper clipping, native dish recipe, or letter written on non-official embassy paraphernalia, etc.). Open these on date night.
- **List date:** Send each other a short list of odd things to find (just locate not buy) in the local environment; report findings at next date, perhaps show photos of listed items. For example, you might ask your spouse to find a *burqa* or *hajib*, or cardamon pods, or a thin cow wandering a major urban road. In return you might be asked to find a car seat, toddler’s sippy cup, a chess piece, or a blonde lady.



Surprises: Engage your spouse's Go-To people and enlist their help in brainstorming and orchestrating surprises. They'll probably be delighted to be asked. Some ideas they can help with:



- Deliver a special item or clandestinely place it on your spouse's pillow
- Arrange child care for a day so your spouse can have a break
- Take your spouse out for adult conversation, coffee, a movie - on you
- Take comfort food to your spouse when he/she or the children are ill
- Coordinate the children's contributions for Mother/Father's Day or spouse's birthday
- Set up virtual date themes (e.g., treasure hunt)
- Serenade your spouse (old college buddies are good at this)

Special dates: Important occasions such as birthdays and anniversaries take more planning to celebrate from afar, so begin things like ordering gifts at least a month ahead of the occasion. While your spouse will be facilitating these events for your children, there may not be anyone doing that for his/her special occasions.

- Use your spouse's internet wish lists
- See Appendix B for international flower delivery
- Once during the separation, consider asking friends to help with more elaborate plans for a surprise birthday or anniversary party in honor of your spouse

Gifts: Couples do not always agree on gift giving. Some like to give what they know the other wants, others like to give what they'd like to have. Still others think gifts are a waste of money. Whatever the case, most agree that the motive behind gift giving determines how it's received.

Consider:

- Delivery time when ordering on-line, especially if your spouse is not in U.S.
- Services rather than items: a massage, pedicure, one-time maid service
- Extended expiration dates if giving gift vouchers
- Items with personal meaning, e.g. CD of music that reminds you of when you met
- Themed gift kits related to hobbies, or interests: e.g., if your spouse likes to read or do crosswords, gift a best seller or puzzle book, a new mug, coffee beans/tea, a pillow or blanket

Thank you letters: Sincerely written appreciative words from you will be the best gift you could give. A timely letter conveying your love and respect goes a long way to buoy up your spouse.



Psychosocial Development in Children

A child’s developmental level affects how they will relate to you and the world. Refer to this chart when tailoring your interactions with children of different ages.

AGE	PSYCHOSOCIAL FOCUS AND TASK	RESPONSE (Parents)
0-12 months	<p>Main focus: Trust. Is my world predictable and supportive?</p> <p>Task: Social attachment; gross motor, sensory and perceptual interaction; soothing physical needs.</p>	<p>Provide consistent food, safety, structure, warmth; stimulation; ensure child is thriving.</p> <p>Result: Attachment; ability to trust and hope.</p>
1-3 year	<p>Focus: Autonomy. Can I do things myself?</p> <p>Task: determination to exercise free choice and control as physical growth increases; locomotion; fantasy play; language for communication.</p>	<p>Provide safe structure as child explores; model behaviors.</p> <p>Result: child imitates, gradually makes behaviors his/her own; growing sense of will.</p>
3-6 years	<p>Focus: Initiative vs. guilt. Am I good or bad?</p> <p>Task: beginnings of moral development, self-esteem. Explores relational roles (group play, gender roles, authority relationships etc.). Thinking is egocentric and magical.</p>	<p>Provide socialization in formal and informal settings; model and shape gender- and age-related behaviors.</p> <p>Result: beginning to incorporate the behaviors and values identified with perceived “good” people. Growing sense of purpose and belonging (family identity).</p>
7-11 years	<p>Focus: Industry vs. inferiority. Am I successful at what I do or worthless?</p> <p>Task: Build self-confidence and mastery by acquiring new skills; completing tasks; exercising intelligence; evaluating; persevering through frustration and failure. Team play becomes important. Able to understand symbolic representations; thinking is less concrete.</p>	<p>Provide education and stimulation; give realistic encouragement, praise, and practical instruction.</p> <p>Result: Growing academic intellect, mastery, and sense of competence.</p>

AGE	PSYCHOSOCIAL FOCUS AND TASK	RESPONSE (Parents)
12-14 years	<p>Identity vs. role confusion: Where do I fit? What do people think of me?</p> <p>Task: Group affiliation, identification with peers as physical and sexual maturation brings new level psychological development. Thinking becomes more abstract.</p>	<p>Support friendships; increase expectations of responsibility and self-control as the child vacillates between wishes for independence and dependence.</p> <p>Result: Developing a stronger sense of self, individual tastes and interests, and relationships with friends.</p>
15-18 years	<p>Identity vs. role confusion: Who am I? Where am I going?</p> <p>Task: Making lasting friendships; ability to freely pledge and sustain loyalty to peers. Sexual maturation; internalizing values; increased freedom and mobility with advent of work and driving. Thinking is more sophisticated yet view of world is naïve.</p>	<p>Provide more flexible but firm home structure; respect privacy and friendships; give more “real-world” consequences for infractions. Allow for increased independence.</p> <p>Result: Loyalty; maturation; group identity</p>
18-23 years	<p>Intimacy vs. isolation: Am I lovable? Will anyone want me?</p> <p>Task: Forming close friendships; looking for a mate; develop inter-dependency. Focus on future career, adult life, how to use freedom.</p>	<p>Launch into independent living (e.g., via college;) provide support and encouragement during adult “firsts”, e.g., first job, serious boy/girl friend or child.</p> <p>Result: A competent, confident adult with loving and stable relationships.</p>

INFANTS

About Abandonment and Attachment:

You may have heard it said that children are resilient. That your baby will experience his or her first few months of life primarily with one parent may be harder on you than the baby. As long as your baby forms a primary attachment to the main caregiver, he/she will likely be fine. As long as the caregiver, presumably your partner, has some support during this time, he/she'll be fine too. It's only the time line of establishing the attachment to a secondary caregiver that will be delayed, and in this case, you will be a tertiary or fourth caregiver figure. While this loss of stature is a difficult trade-off for employees to accept, it doesn't mean the child will never form an attachment or bear long lasting emotional scars.

An attachment is formed over time as the child associates regular positive outcomes with a particular person -- usually someone who is warm and loving -- the primary caregiver who is with the child the most. He/she gradually learns to connect his/her own needs with that person who meets those needs satisfactorily. A dance develops between child and caregiver where each cues the other with facial expressions, vocalizations, and touch. Gradually, the child comes to see the world as a generally safe, loving, and trustworthy place where they belong. During the first year of life, a baby learns primarily via the five senses of touch, smell, taste, sight, and hearing. They experience the world physically and learn about themselves physically. Because of this, there can be no substitute for the physical presence of a caregiver, and thus, one cannot expect a child to attach fully to an absent parent.

Having said that, it is important not to equate absence with parental abandonment. Abandonment is experienced when the baby's needs are not met and there is no consistent primary caregiver so that the baby does not form a consistent attachment in the world. In these extreme circumstances, research has shown that babies react by extinguishing the attachment need, essentially ignoring internal needs because they will not be met. This is generally not the case for UT families. Whether you are a single parent or you have a partner to rely on, just by making efforts to ensure that your baby is well cared for by a trustworthy caregiver while you're gone, and by your being available with continued love and attention when you are present, you are ensuring that your baby is not abandoned.



ABOUT ADOPTION:

Although the time-line may vary, the *course* of development for the adopted child follows the same stages as that of a biological child. Depending on various factors including age, prior physical and mental condition of the child and birth parents, type of nutrition and stimulation, a particular adopted child may demonstrate some developmental delays. Generally speaking, however, most adopted infants who have no significant impairments adapt quickly and thrive in their new environments.

In rare instances, parents are confronted with an UT assignment at a bad time in the adoption process. As most parents do not enter the lengthy adoption process lightly, asking for another assignment is often the best solution. Those who are not reassigned reconcile themselves to frequent visits planned around adoption milestones.

FORMING AN ATTACHMENT WITH YOUR INFANT:

The first task with any infant, biological or adopted, is to establish trust. This is done over time within the context of a consistently warm relationship where loving actions meet the child's needs, even if the child's behavior appears initially rejecting. Because of your absence, expect your infant to initially hold back from you.

- Give him/her time and space to observe you at their eye level; let him approach you
- Use just a few simple, monosyllabic words (especially if the child was raised with a different language)
- Establish a routine early on; maintain the structure – this helps the child to see the world as predictable and orderly rather than chaotic
- Avoid large or noisy movements initially to minimize startle response
- Create a “holding environment” with your soothing tone of voice and clear limits
- Ease into physical touch with short sessions of cuddling or lap time
- Introduce a transitional object¹ early in your relationship
- Make sure the child's basic functions are happening regularly: eat, sleep, and poop
- Check with adoption agency whether certain stimuli were associated with pleasant and unpleasant experiences, e.g., noises, colors, bearded men, pets, etc.



¹ A transitional object is an item that the baby, over time, associates with comfort. The object can be used for self-soothing and making transitions from one state to another less jarring, e.g., from wakefulness to sleep, from being together to being alone, or saying goodbye to Daddy or Mommy. Items can include blankets, pacifiers, or Daddy/Mommy's shirt or photo imprinted on a soft toy.



DEVELOPMENT AND SEPARATION IN INFANTS

The developmental chart below lists some of the characteristic milestones associated with the first year of growth.

AGE	Physical changes	Developmental task	For Employee
0-3 months	Weight gain; orienting to external as well as internal stimuli (visual, sound, touch cues, hunger, cold, gas, etc. ;) building muscles in neck and back.	Fundamental systems: breathing, sucking, sleeping, eliminating; waking and soothing; crying in response to internal need. Developmental tasks: latching on to primary caregiver for feeding; learning to signal caregiver by crying.	When present: take part in late night feeding, diaper changes, carrying baby around. When away: give positive feedback to your spouse; make recordings of your voice for baby.
3-6 months	Sits when propped up; general muscle tone improves; begins to wave legs and arms; uses hands to convey things to mouth; uses mouth to explore the world. Begins to roll over. Teeth begin to come in; moves lips to blow bubbles.	Fundamental systems: beginnings of gross motor movement with exponential growth; social smiling; begins to recognize primary caregiver. Developmental task: beginning to learn about the physical world by interacting physically with stimuli (reaching for objects; mouth used for exploring as well as eating;) begins to experience control of objects.	Take part in feeding with bowl and spoon; play hand games and tickle games. When away: play peek-a-boo game; send objects from post that can be “gummed” safely.
6-9 months	Begins to “scoot” and crawl (backwards or forwards;) vocalizes. Stranger anxiety develops by 9 months - reacts to being separated from caregiver. Solid foods introduced as teeth come in.	Fundamental systems: active gross motor movements; begins to communicate and recognize Dad and Mom; responsive smiling. Developmental task: establish specific attachment to primary caregiver as opposed to other; developing motor control and purposeful communication.	Play on the floor; play chase and hiding games. Offer to relieve your spouse even though child prefers her/him; expect objections. When away: “talk” with baby often with pretend conversation; be involved with soothing rituals around bedtime

AGE	Physical changes	Developmental task	For Employee
9-12 months	Crawling, “cruising” and walking introduces a larger world to explore. Specific babbling and expressive communication begins.	Fundamental systems: gross and fine motor control in relation to gravity; speech comprehension and production; beginning of symbolic representation in memory. Developmental task: active learning via interaction with the physical world through increased coordinated locomotion and verbal communication. Able to move away from and return to primary caretaker.	Provide helping hand for cruising and walking. Allow time for baby to come to you. Show and tell about new sights. Rough and tumble play. When away: send a pair of toddler shoes from post; talk with baby often using basic concepts, (e.g., opposites, family names.)

What not to expect

Do *not* expect your baby to:

Y Understand or experience time as you do.

- Babies cannot tolerate frustration for more than ten minutes
- Babies cannot delay gratification for more than a few minutes – they will quickly escalate in rage and distress if you make them wait too long and will be harder to soothe
- Babies and caregivers operate better with structure: build a routine that helps to maintain a sense of order, e.g., naptime, meals, play time, etc.



Y Not cry: Typically babies cry for one of seven reasons listed below. Go through each on the list before you resort to going to the doctor (item 7 below).

1. Hungry: needs feeding
2. Gas: needs burping and to pass gas
3. Sleepy, tired: soothe to sleep and ensure regular, adequate sleep times
4. Too hot: take off a layer of clothes
5. Too cold: put on more layers of clothes, including a hat
6. Teething: often accompanied by drooling, rash, fever; may need baby analgesic
7. Illness: note symptoms (fever, diarrhea, vomiting, etc.); take to doctor if necessary.

DISTANCE BONDING ACTIVITIES FOR INFANTS

There is no magic trick to bonding with a baby. The ingredients for bonding are simple: an open mind, time, attention, and genuine interest in mutual discovery. Although you might find some interactions repetitive and downright boring, everything you do will be new and fascinating to your child.

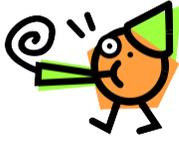
The suggested “distance bonding” activities involve variations on infant games done over the web cam -- the next best thing to being there. While there may be logistical challenges owing to time zones and lags between images, the activities can be enjoyable and will help you to feel a part of your baby’s daily life. Like any activity, however, whether you are virtually or really present, it’s the quality of time spent engaged with your baby that matters more than the actual task. Indeed, an activity can be skipped from time to time without lasting negative impact, but with distance bonding, extra effort must to be made to ensure that complacency does not get a foothold and lead to neglect. Both parents would do well to get in the habit of spending time with the baby just as they would if the employee were at home.



Ground rules to remember for effective bonding (whether at “distance” or in person):

- Y Give your full attention to your child: A few minutes spent fully attending to and playing with the baby will be more effective and efficient use of time than if you’re trying to play while distracted and the child has to keep interrupting to get your attention.
- Y Don’t discuss other business with your spouse on the baby’s time. Make separate phone dates for specific purposes.
- Y If you must share time and cannot make separate phone dates, pay attention to your child first, then talk about other matters. It is likely that the baby’s needs and noise will make it difficult to finish a sentence, so remain flexible and be patient.
- Y With babies, shorter and more frequent contact works better than longer sessions.
- Y Be aware of your baby’s routine and use common sense to pick interactions appropriate for certain times of day. For instance, avoid playing games that rile the child up during mealtimes and sleep times.

Games



Infant games are very simple and repetitive. Follow your baby's cues – she/he will let you know when an activity is “too much.” With infants, the aim of distance bonding items and games is for the infant to become familiar with your image, voice and associate that with pleasant times.

For 0-3 months:

- Provide “you”-related stimuli:
Newborns respond most to visual contrasts (i.e., edges between black and white). Laminate a simple black and white photo of your head among other black and white geometric shapes including a drawing of a face. Your spouse can leave this display in places where the baby can easily see it (e.g., crib side, facing car seat). Similar laminated photos can be used for placemats during meals for older infants.
- Mirror: babies are fascinated by reflections. Give a shatter proof mirror with your image superimposed via a transparent sticker.
- Place transitional objects (see previous section on Transitional Objects) near by your infant during transition times, e.g., from wakefulness to sleep, and when saying goodbye.
- Make recordings of your voice: reading a simple book; singing a lullaby; and saying goodnight. When you are together again as a family, your baby will already be familiar with the soothing lilt of your lullaby and voice.
- Ask for frequent photos of your child; keep up on clothing sizes and developing tastes in case you need to get a gift.
- Virtual hugs and kisses:
Babies will naturally want to kiss and touch the computer-screen Daddy/Mommy when told to kiss goodbye. You can send a kiss or hug “through the wire,” so to speak, by acting out the motions and having your spouse deliver the squeeze. Discuss with your spouse before hand what special kind of hug and kiss will be characteristic only of you; give it a special name so that the baby associates those kinds of loving touches with only Daddy/Mommy. For example, your spouse can help deliver soft “Daddy butterfly kisses” to the baby’s nose upon your cue, and when you are present, you can give butterfly kisses in the same context.
- Give one of your gloves that has been kissed (literally) for baby to hold; make sure it can be safely sucked on without falling apart.



Web cam games for 3-12 month-olds:

- *Where's Daddy/Mommy?*
A variation on the “peek-a-boo” game: when you’re on-line, your spouse covers the monitor with a small blanket. She says “Where’s baby?” (or you can say “Where’s Daddy?”), pulls the blanket off, and says “There he is!” This can be played repeatedly and carried through during R&R or homecoming to reinforce that Daddy/Mommy is a real person, not a computer.
- *Where's Daddy/Mommy's nose?*
With web cam at the ready, ask “Where’s Daddy’s nose?” Point the web cam at your nose; squeal delightedly when the baby touches the screen. Repeat with ear, hair, eye, mouth, etc.
- *Pretend conversations:*
As your baby begins to babble, you can talk about almost anything in a loving tone of voice and he/she will respond with vocalizations. Have nonsense conversations, complete with the range of social expressions and noises. From this the baby learns the back-and-forth of conversation and prosody (the pattern of intonations used in speech) long before he/she understands language. These are best enjoyed with visual contact (on screen rather than on phone) where the baby can pick up facial cues.
- *Come to me:*
While on-line, call to the baby “Come to me,” holding out arms and making encouraging sounds as Baby scoots, crawls, takes steps towards the monitor. At-home spouse delivers a hug when Baby reaches you/the screen. Experiment with putting the computer monitor safely at Baby’s eye level.
- *Find Daddy/Mommy's shoe:*
Your spouse hides one of your personal objects like a shoe or brush in an easy-to-find place. Play hide-and-seek with the baby over the web cam: you give clues and directions as the child gets close to the object; squeal with delight when she/he finds it.
- *Find the Bug:*
“Hide” a large picture of a shape (like a circle, or bug, or the baby’s photo) somewhere behind you in the visual field of the web cam. Ask the baby to find the item on screen – your spouse will cue you to applaud when Baby points in the right place. At the next web cam contact, move the item. Start out with very obvious places like the chair or shirt.



Spending Virtual Time with infants and toddlers

Experiment with different ways of involving yourself via technology in some of the baby's soothing and bedtime rituals. For instance, your spouse and the baby can listen to you over the computer monitor or speaker phone (see suggestions below) for a short time before the baby goes to sleep. To the baby, it's the cyber equivalent of being "tucked in," including a blown kiss from you. This will take some trial and error, depending on logistics; when you hit on a combination that works for you, try to be as consistent with the ritual as possible so it becomes part of the baby's routine. Remember that it's the baby's time, and not an occasion to discuss other things.

You can:

- Read a story
- Sing a lullaby
- Say a short rhyming prayer or bedtime saying
- Blow a special kiss, delivered by at-home parent
- Say night-night or other affectionate closing phrase that you'll say when you next see Baby



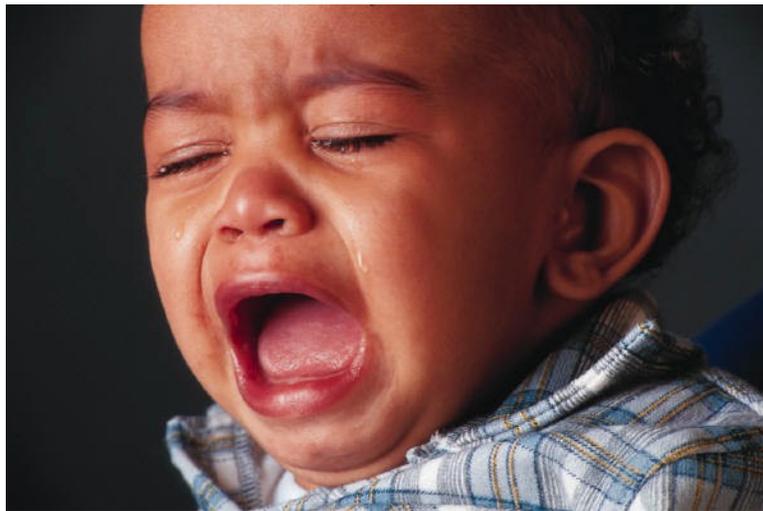
TODDLERS

From 1-3 years of age your child will continue on an exponential growth and learning curve that will make you tired just thinking about it. On the one hand, the rapid development of speech, social, cognitive, and motor skills transforms your infant into a little person who is more engaging. On the other hand, their boundless energy, complete dependency, and constant need of monitoring are utterly exhausting. Separation at this time does not preclude a child's ability to attach per se, provided his/her needs are consistently well met by a warm caregiver. It can, however, interfere with the speed of attachment to an absent parent. For this reason, it is wise to plan as many visits home as feasible.

At this age your child:

- Needs a lot of emotional refueling in between explorations (e.g., demanding that primary caregiver be around, and insisting "watch me, watch me"). The caregiver's physical presence is as important as a reassuring "touch base" as your child's range of territory expands. When you are together for R&R, give your child some time and space to warm up to you while your spouse is in the room. Don't take it personally if he/she pushes you away or objects when your spouse leaves the room. Eventually, your spouse will quietly go to another room while your child plays with you so the child can begin to see you as a safe and loving refueling base as well.

- Begins to conceive of a world that consists of “Me” and “not-Me” but does not understand that others are separate from him/herself, (e.g., treats Mom’s arm as an extension of own arm, commands Mom, and becomes frustrated with Mom’s limitations). Eventually as frustration with not being able to control the “not-Me” grows, you may enter the so-called “terrible two’s” – rather a misnomer as it can occur anytime between 2-5 years. In general, setting limits and maintaining consistent structure is important in helping the family navigate these waters. It is important for both parents to agree on limits, consequences, and consistent follow through. Prior to R&Rs or eventual reunion, discuss current methods of handling defiant “no’s” and outbursts with your spouse.



- Forming internal ideas of external objects as memory and symbolic learning increases. This is the beginning of knowing that something (including you) exists when it is out of sight. Thinking is very concrete and bound to the stimuli before them. This implies that:
 - With very young children, simply removing forbidden things from their sight works better than saying “no, don’t touch.” They will cry for a short time, but will recover quickly as their attention is attracted to something else.
 - When it’s time to say goodbye, keep your farewells short. Prolonged farewells might actually serve to escalate their distress.
 - If you are separated for a long time without any contact, expect your child not to know you. Understand this as a developmental issue rather than as a personal rejection.

About Play

Play is the main avenue that young children use to express themselves and to incorporate their ever-expanding world. At first, toddlers play beside rather than with each other. Around ages 4-6, play becomes more interactive and role-oriented (as opposed to “parallel” play), and it is common for play to reflect the experiences and concerns that occupy a child’s day. The following themes or elements are common to play:

- Power and control: e.g., good guys vs. bad guys; winning vs. losing; destruction
- Relationships and authority: e.g., mommy-daddy-child; teacher-student; sibling; peer-peer; and boy-girl
- Rules of engagement and competition: being right, good or in control of rules
- Magical thinking: anthropomorphizing inanimate objects; space- and time-warps
- Ego-centrism: sees things only from own point of view

Ask for your partner’s observations about your child’s general mood if there are recurring play themes about family separation. They can provide insights as to how your child is adjusting to changes; however, be cautious of over interpreting or passing judgment over play actions.



Enrich your child’s play arena by incorporating items sent from post and allowing them to wear your clothes and shoes left at home. A box of dress-up things, including clothes from post, fires the imagination of both boys and girls and even children who don’t play dress-up enjoy role-playing with new items from overseas. Don’t be surprised if the egg-beater from Sudan becomes a laser-firing weapon!

PHONE CONVERSATIONS

Young children: It almost doesn't matter what you talk about or that you might not understand your child's speech, just make interested noises – young children extract more meaning out of your tone of voice than your words. Important information needs to be repeated (e.g., I love you, Happy Birthday, I'm coming home next month).



Ages 5-10: Use open-ended questions (those that can't be answered in one word); keep conversations short and frequent. Expect toilet humor, noises, and silliness.

Suggested questions:

- Tell me about what you had for breakfast/ dessert/ lunch? Who was with you?
- Who's your best friend at school; what do you most like about them?
- What's the worse thing about your teacher? What's the best thing?
- Where do you sit in your classroom? Who sits next to you?
- If you could have any superpower, what would it be? How come?
- Tell me about what you saw on TV today? What happened in [favorite show]?
- [If you have pets] How's [Pet] these days? Tell me something he/she did today.
- Are there any new kids in the neighborhood/ school?
- Are there any new toys/games out that I haven't seen?
- Tell me about the most boring thing you did today. I bet it wasn't as boring as the thing I had to do today.

AGES 11-14: Generally, girls are more socially mature at this age than boys. Expect social awkwardness; changing voice in boys; tentative skirting of sensitive subjects like opposite sex, body hair, and acne, etc. Engage with open-ended questions and stories of similar experiences when you were their age.

- What kind of person do you think you're shaping to be? Do you like you – would you be your friend?
- Friends: describe your buddies and what you like about them.
- Do you think any one has a crush on you? How can you tell, whether yes or no?
- How do you know when someone's a good friend?
- Fill in the blanks: If I had a...., I would....
- What kind of music are you listening to these days?
- Where do kids you know hang out? What do they like to do?



AGES 15 and above: Conversations can be longer and more adult-like. Use open-ended questions and avoid the temptation to give advice unless they ask for it.

- What're your best and worst classes this term? How come?
- Tell me about [girl/boy friend]; what do you like about her/him?
- Your Mom/Dad tells me things are OK at home, what do you think? What are the OK and not-so-OK parts for you?
- How do you chill out these days?



- What's playing at the movies? Tell me about a good movie (or book) you saw.
- Describe any new techno-gadgets out that I haven't seen.
- Where do people go to party? What are kids your age into?
- Where will your friends be going to college/ after college?

TELL ABOUT POST

Send home short lists or descriptions that give snap shots of your life at post:

Things I really, really don't like about post



Post Top 10's: (best things, worst dressed, best cafeteria food, bloopers, best part of the day, etc.)

Who's who at post: (Give an organizational chart or photos showing main people at post who affect you: e.g., the Ambassador; DCM/ CG; translator; cashier; housing people; guards; cook; the bread lady; mailroom staff, Marines, telephone people.)

Weird things I've seen at post

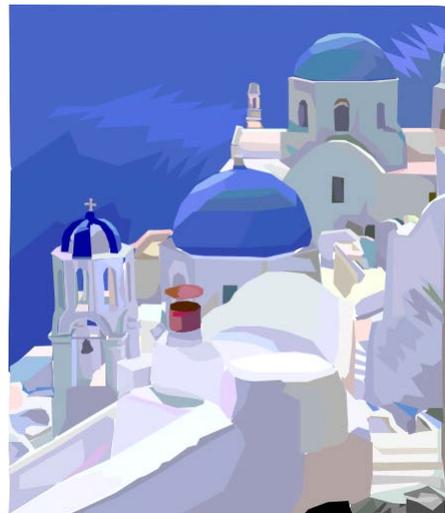
Interesting local phrases and word usage

Daily living at post:

- Your routine
- Map of where you live and work
- What you read, where you eat
- How you get your mail
- Hang out spots

Features of the country or city:

- Animals, birds, bugs
- Modes of transportation
- Local money
- Flowers, trees, and terrain
- Smells
- Food: what you eat, what locals eat
- Sports; popular local sports
- Humor
- List of local words
- Hand gestures and what they mean
- Local entertainment
- What young people and children do for fun
- Marriage and rites of passage
- Shopping
- Architecture and landmarks



Tell About You



Send your family musings, thoughts, or lists that tell them something about you, e.g. “My Favorites list” (next page)

Things that I miss

If you were here I would.....

Things about me I want my family to know

If I had lots of money, I would....

My best friends in life

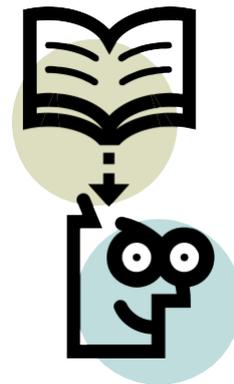
The best things in the world are....

Three things I want on a deserted island and why

Things I want to do

Places I want to see before I’m too old

If I only knew this when I was 12....





My Favorite... .



Thing to Do: _____

Person to be with: _____

Color: _____

Food: _____

Drink: _____

Thing to wear: _____

Book: _____

TV show: _____

Cartoon character: _____

Place to go: _____

Place to go when I'm feeling down: _____

Music: _____

Sport: _____

Time of day: _____

Day of the week is _____ because _____

Way to spend an hour: _____



By: _____

Date: _____

ACTIVITIES TO DO WITH YOUR CHILDREN

Foot Prints

Here's a fun way for you and your family to see each other's world from a unique perspective. Take a photo of your foot (that's right, your foot) in different places, doing different things. You'll have to sit or lay down so your foot is in the foreground of an interesting background you want to show your family. One time your sneaker-clad foot might be on your office desk; another time your flip-flopped foot might be on your bed. Send one photo at a time, so you can spread out the laughs. Ask your kids to send back photos of their feet wanderings.

Suggestions: Show your foot in:

- A sock, in colder weather
- On the dirt, showing local vegetation (or trash)
- A shoe looking at a sunset
- Exploring a new part of town
- In the shower
- Inside a car, on the dash board, showing street scene beyond
- In the rain
- In the embassy/consulate/PRT
- Listening to an iPod, or talking on the phone
- In front of your computer
- On your bed, with view of your room beyond



Photo jigsaw of your room

- Take a series of shots of a room at post such that the photos fit together like a jigsaw. Pick a room where you spend a lot of time, e.g., bedroom or office. Each photo should show only a small detail of the whole.
- First send several related pieces home that will help the family get started; later, send home one piece of the puzzle at regular intervals. In time, the family should have a picture of your room(s).

Screen Play

Write a movie or story with your child on-line, a paragraph at a time. This should be a continuous story about characters you both make up; let the characters and plot develop over time. Be as ridiculous and creative as you please; enjoy your collective imagination.



Steps: to be done via e-mail using a specific subject title (so you can find it again easily), e.g. Subject: Our Story

1. Write a beginning sentence (or three) and send them to your child. For example, “The setting is a In the scene there’s a man named ... who ... with ...”
2. Your child fills in the blanks. She/he develops the scene more by adding two or three more sentences and leaving a trailing sentence for you to finish by return e-mail. Using the example mentioned above, “The setting is a...dark, large room, with animal sounds in the background. In the scene there’s a man named.... Mike Farraday. He’s a genius who ...lives in a barn that converts into a secret lab... with his family, a dog and two cows. None of his neighbors suspect he is anything more than a humble used car salesman....”
3. You finish the trailing sentence, add a few more beginnings of sentences, and re-send back to your child. Repeat from Step 2, and so on. For example, “... car salesman, not even his family is aware of Mike’s secret lair beneath the feeding trough. Only he knows the code to enter the lab where he.....” “One day, quite unexpectedly....”

Share editing privileges and follow your child’s lead as to when one story is done.

Managing Transitions: R&R

Expect and plan for family disruptions during transitions from one routine to another. R&R, though a joyful time, can be very stressful owing to a mixture of logistics and hyped expectations. At home, children (and pets) react as soon as they see the suitcases come out. When you are together, make transitions as smooth as possible:



- Maintain sleeping and eating patterns. Although excited, everyone will be tired.
- Plan for jet lag, if necessary. It takes younger children about two weeks to adjust to time zones; don't expect them to be chipper on R&R if they need to adapt to more than three hours' difference.
- Keep R&R plans simple and appropriate for your children's developmental ages. Families report that calmer vacation spots such as a beach or cruise are less stressful than places like Disneyland or even being at home where one has to juggle extended family's wishes.
- If your kids have not been with you for a long while except for R&Rs, expect them (especially younger ones) to relate to you like Santa Claus – someone exciting and special who comes and goes and might not be real.
- Have a favorite comfort item (e.g., teddy bear, blanket, pacifier, or Dad/Mom photo shirt) close at hand, especially for newborns and young children.
- Be mindful of your children's pace. Expect regressive behaviors from younger children: this may be an anxiety reaction to changes in routine and/or an invitation to engage you with more "baby" ways. Go at the pace of your slowest child, on their level, and follow your spouse's lead. They will soon warm up to you and as routines become more established, their usual behavior will resume.
- Giving a special gift to be opened after departure can take the sting out of saying goodbye. If you cannot get something special at post, ask your spouse to wrap and pack gifts for you to present to your children.
- Keep goodbye's short. Children might cry and protest, but prolonging the transition with lingering hugs and lengthy goodbye's tends to heighten distress.

Returning home



Reality Check

This section discusses what you can expect in the final stage of separation. A few weeks prior to return, the ups and down's of anticipation, excitement and anxiety will be mixed with fatigue over departure preparations. After return, you can expect the family to take at least 6-8 weeks to readjust, possibly longer. Employees often report that reunions are more stressful than the separation, regardless of marital and family status.

Stages of Reunion:

1. Pre-arrival Stage: The week or two before leaving post, you will likely be working long hours trying to make sure you leave things at post in order. Your family will be engaged in homecoming plans and getting things ship shape for your return. Expect:

- Fantasizing about reunion
- Excitement
- Interrupted sleep patterns
- Fatigue and getting physically run down
- Preoccupation with details of leaving and receiving plans
- Irritation at “interfering” factors, including co-workers’ and children’s needs

2. Reunion Stage: the immediate meeting and first few days after return. Honeymoon, bliss; a time for being happy, not bringing up painful things or making major changes.

Expect:

- Physical changes in each other;
- Immediate excitement and relief, mixed with anti-climatic experience of daily demands;
- Pride in each other for making it through;
- Family trying to make everything easy and happy for you;
- Initial insecurity and anticipation about intimacy and sex with your partner;
- Courting your spouse again;
- Social events as friends and family call or drop by;
- A small homecoming celebration;
- Extreme tiredness with a readiness for relaxation;
- Jetlag;
- Special attention to the children;
- Gifts;
- Intense curiosity, lots of questions, and longing to get caught up;
- A need for time and space to “unwind;”
- Marveling at advancements in U.S. culture, services and products; and
- Urge to spend money (either budget for it or try to resist this).



3. After the Honeymoon Stage: within the first month of return. Problems surface as normal family life and expectations march on and family members have to readjust to having another authority figure around who isn't yet up to speed. If the family has healthy communication, these problems will naturally and diplomatically resolve with time. Expect:

- Assertion of independence, especially from older children and a more able spouse. Employee may feel slightly hurt or displaced at not being needed.
- Employee's deep fatigue and need for space; resistance to spouse's regimen and resenting being told what to do, when.
- “Who had it worse” and hard time stories.
- Focusing on differences – ways of doing things; a tendency to hear comments as criticisms and replying defensively.
- Competitiveness and bracing against changes – who's right, whose way is better, who should change.
- Logistical awkwardness over readjusting routines (transportation, chain of command, managing schedules and duties).
- Financial concerns; disagreement over how money is spent.
- Specific children's issues (school performance, homework, chores, etc.).
- Control issues: awkwardness over relinquishing or taking control of things again.
- Negative thoughts about the other's motives and ability to fully appreciate you.
- Hesitant decision making with an urge to make changes and “get on with it.”
- Petty jealousy and trust issues as you see your children prefer your spouse, and hear about how spouse and children spent time getting close to other people.
- Children taking advantage of parental confusion over authority and rules.

4. **Communication Stage:** about 4-6 weeks after return. This is the time to renegotiate new routines, to define new roles and expectations, and to make arrangements that fit new realities. Ideally, in order to build mutual acceptance of new controls, decisions, and rules, communication will be open, frank and inclusive of all family members.

Expect:

- Renegotiation;
- Forging trust through discussion and compromise;
- Reconnection with deeper understanding of needs, motives and expectations;
- Acceptance;
- Explanation of new rules as they pertain to present realities; and
- Children to test limits of new rules.



5. **Achieving Normalcy Stage:** about 2-4 months after return. The family reaches a new equilibrium with new routines, sharing all the joys and trials of being a family. You may feel a need to work through UT-related effects more deeply. Non-foreign service friends, even some family members, are unlikely to have a real sense of what post was like, and may not relate or want to know. Do not take this personally and do not isolate. Instead, talk with people who have gone through similar postings; it'll help bring closure and validation to your experiences.

Expect:

- Establishment of new routines;
- A new family rhythm;
- Acceptance of changes;
- Clearer expectations and view of problems, if any;
- Personal growth as you integrate past and present experiences;
- Spouse's frustration if you are not adjusting well or not taking up family responsibilities as a primary parent; and
- Fleeting interest about the UT from non-foreign service family and friends.

CHILDREN'S REACTIONS TO YOUR HOMECOMING

AGE	REACTION	RESPONSE
Birth to 1 year	<p>Crying and fussing.</p> <p>Does not recognize returnee.</p> <p>Clings to primary caregiver, wary of strangers.</p> <p>Problems with “pooping and peeing.”</p> <p>Changes in sleeping and eating habits.</p>	<p>Hold the baby; give lots of hugs.</p> <p>Relax, be patient; spend time with the baby and your spouse. The baby will warm up to you after a while and will come to you when spouse is out of sight.</p> <p>Bathe, feed, change, and play with the baby, making soothing sounds.</p> <p>Carry the baby.</p>
1 -3 yrs	<p>Clinging to primary caretaker; shyness; wants reassurance.</p> <p>Does not recognize returnee; pulls back, looks afraid of returnee.</p> <p>Crying; temper tantrums; desire to punish or retaliate against returnee.</p> <p>Regression: temporary loss of new skills, e.g., toilet training, sleeping through the night.</p> <p>Wanting to be in parent’s bed.</p>	<p>Give child space and time to approach you; don’t force holding, kissing or hugging.</p> <p>Be gentle and approachable.</p> <p>Sit at their eye level.</p> <p>Do not take their pulling back as a personal rejection; in time, they will warm up.</p> <p>Take turns with spouse putting toddler to bed; be involved in bedtime rituals.</p>
3 -5 yrs	<p>Initially very excited about return; may have odd ideas about why Dad/Mom went away.</p> <p>Talking a lot and showing off to update the returnee.</p> <p>Angry outbursts and defiance.</p> <p>Demanding attention.</p> <p>Acting out behaviors to get your attention.</p> <p>Feels bad if told off.</p>	<p>Listen and pay attention; dispel odd ideas about why you went away.</p> <p>Play with them at their level.</p> <p>Be patient with all their “updates;” set a clear time limit beforehand if needed.</p> <p>Set firm limits; be consistent with established consequences and structure.</p> <p>Reassure that you love them.</p> <p>Learn about their interests</p>

AGE	REACTION	RESPONSE
5 – 12 yrs	<p>Excitement about homecoming; makes big plans that are sometimes unrealistic. Relief at arrival.</p> <p>Eager to please and be seen as good.</p> <p>Worried about not being good enough.</p> <p>Dreads discipline for things left undone or being in trouble.</p> <p>Pride in parents; boasts to others; feels important.</p> <p>Abiding anger for separation.</p> <p>Surprise in changes in returnee’s appearance; initial awkwardness.</p> <p>Vacillation between regressive and pre-teen behavior and language.</p> <p>Competition with same-sexed parent; initial attempts to split parents.</p>	<p>Spouse: involve child in homecoming plans; talk about realistic expectations without dampening enthusiasm.</p> <p>Employee: Praise them and tell them how proud you are of all their efforts.</p> <p>Learn about their interests, school friends, teachers, etc.</p> <p>Look together at scrapbook, school work, photos.</p> <p>Try not to criticize.</p> <p>Give lots of hugs.</p> <p>Praise them for new skills and achievements since separation.</p> <p>Recognize their efforts; reaffirm that you’re the parent and reassure you’re back to take care of things.</p>
13-18 yrs	<p>Excited about homecoming; want things to be perfect. Relief at arrival.</p> <p>Anxiety over not living up to standards.</p> <p>Worry about how things will change: rules, responsibilities.</p> <p>Hopes for greater freedom and independence.</p> <p>Braces against being told what to do. May be rebellious or defiant; unwilling to change plans to accommodate parents.</p> <p>May hide things or keep secrets if they think parents will disapprove.</p>	<p>Spouse: discuss their expectations prior to return; involve in homecoming plans. Acknowledge upcoming changes will affect everyone; encourage them to keep talking to you.</p> <p>Employee: Be open about what has happened with you.</p> <p>Listen with undivided attention; do not judge or tell them what to do.</p> <p>Respect their privacy.</p> <p>Learn - don’t tease - about their friends, music, fashion, driving, job.</p>

* Adapted from Fort Bragg MWR ACS Return, and Hooah4Health Reunion

After Homecoming: Time to Readjust

Timing and Communication are two main keys that help families adjust to being together again.

Timing:

Be patient. Give family members, including yourself, time to get used to each other again. Initially there may be awkwardness, frustration, or misunderstandings. This is normal for the situation and will get better in time as your family finds a new rhythm.



1-2 weeks after reunion:

- ./ Family time: Pick easy and casual things to do together that are fun for all.
 - Look over the treasures sent from post
 - View Family Video or listen to Family Cassette all together
 - Home movie night, or hot chocolate and games night; jigsaws.

- ./ Allow one-on-one time with children for each child to introduce you to new things in his/her life, e.g., their work, interests, friends, possessions, and new skills.

- ./ To avoid being overwhelmed with too much information at once, ask your spouse to write down things for later reference, e.g., family schedules, calendar of appointments, current chore cycle, etc.

- ./ Take the leave from work that's due you; sleep in.

- ./ Send thank you notes to all the family Go-To Teams and other helpers.

3-4 weeks after reunion:

- ./ Have a Welcome Home party for larger family, Go-To Team members, and friends

- ./ Continue with routines as they were during separation; don't make major changes

1 month after reunion:

- ./ Family Reunion Discussion (see Discussion format at end of this section)

- ./ Unbury the family time capsule

- ./ Slowly adjust schedules and routines as agreed in the discussion

Communication



Besides talking, communication involves active listening to what is *not* said as much as what *is* said. Pay attention to tone of voice, and feelings conveyed in stylized communication patterns (e.g., sarcasm, defensiveness, etc.).

Problem solving TIPS:

- Identify and define the conflict: what exactly is the problem, and who is experiencing it as a problem? Listen to the needs and feelings involved without assigning blame or being defensive.
- Look at possible solutions creatively. Brainstorm; write solutions down so as not to dismiss off hand ideas offered by those less mature than you (i.e., children).
- Evaluate the options, looking at costs and benefits of each. Talk until you find a compromise acceptable to all.
- Chose the best solution and accept the trade-off's. Mutual agreement and commitment are vital to making a solution work.
- Act on the solution. Determine how and when to evaluate progress. Agree to revisit the topic and make changes as needed after the solution has been tried for a while.
- Re-evaluate the results: does the solution address the problem? Or have other underlying needs surfaced that redefine the problem? Brainstorm further and be persistent in the problem until it's solved.

Fighting FAIR

Disagreements, tension and stress are part of human life and relationships. Healthy open communication can minimize arguments but if you do fight, fight “fair.” Keys to fair fighting are:

1. The ability to see and validate another’s point of view without losing your own, and
 2. To consider their interests above one’s own.
- Know your own threshold of tolerance and anger: if you’re reaching a boiling point, take a 10-20 minute time-out to cool off as confrontation can escalate the problem.
 - Do an attitude check before you engage: Do you want to solve the problem for mutual benefit or do you want a pound of flesh? If your intention is to hurt the other, to win the argument at all costs, or to gather emotional ammunition, then it’s better not to talk. Wait until your spiteful or defensive mood passes. Remember, you’re on the same side; choose to act on your better intentions.
 - *Listen* when your spouse or child is talking, without fidgeting or merely thinking about your next retort.
 - Ask questions for clarification rather than assume you know what is meant.
 - Take turns in talking out a conflict: try not to either take over the conversation or to be tight-lipped.
 - Stick to the issue at hand. Big issues cannot be solved in one sitting; take on little bits at a time over multiple sessions.
 - Accept the bad with the good. People of all descriptions, including you and your partner, are rarely “all bad” or “all good.”
 - Control yourself, not someone else -- it works better. You control your own “bad” by reining in the urge to attack your partner or child with your attitude, words or actions. In this way you choose to be good or not to do bad, even if provoked.
 - Don’t “hit below the belt,” meaning stay away from attacking another’s sensitive spots, e.g., appearance or intelligence. Attacks in these areas are designed to hurt and will stop, if not destroy, communication.
 - Timing matters. Wait for a good time to bring up emotionally charged bones of contention or make an appointment if need be. It is not fair to bring up a hard topic when your spouse needs to sleep or is rushing out the door, and then say “never mind.” If you write an email in the heat of anger, wait to re-read it once you have cooled off before sending it.



FAMILY REUNION DISCUSSION

About one month after homecoming, it is helpful for the whole family to do a post-mortem of the separation and to decide together what routines make the most sense now. Encourage each family member to complete their own list (in their respective manuals) for the discussion.

Suggestions for discussion:

Two things the family did for me since I've come home that I really appreciate:

Two things that aren't working so well since I've returned:

Schedule: Dates and times for activities I do now (or expect to do):

Mondays: _____

Tuesdays: _____

Wednesdays: _____

Thursdays: _____

Fridays: _____

Saturdays: _____

Sundays: _____

Chores: changes I'd like to make:

Discuss the following:

- . / Whom do the kids go to first for permission and decisions about money, rules, and requests?
- . / Access and control of common use items, e.g., TV, bathroom, computer, phone, car
- . / Current curfews, methods of discipline, limits, and consequences
- . / Expectations around having friends over; what conditions have parental approval?
- . / Expectations around going out:
 - o What should happen if kids go out
 - o What should happen if parents go out
 - o Baby sitting options and instructions
- . / Hopes for future:
 - o Current posting: where, how long?
 - o R&R or vacation plans
 - o Housing
- . / Money and allowance: Revisit the family budget, including family income(s), college costs, financial aid; car insurance and gas/transportation money; fees for childcare, school and activities. Estimate upcoming needs as children grow.
- . / If there is a young adult moving away from home, discuss expectations for moving help, things they need to take, visiting, and circumstances under which they can return home.
- . / Mention any important dates or events to note: e.g., graduation, prom, exams.

Other points I want to bring up:

U.T. RETURNee FAQ's

What is Post-Traumatic Stress and how do I know if it's a problem?

It is normal and expected that anyone exposed to prolonged stress will experience some kind of stress reaction. Stressors may include exposure to trauma directly or indirectly (including natural disasters, abuse, neglect, prolonged lack of food, violent events, and injury), whether one-time or over time. People typically react to stress with immediate shock, disbelief, temporary disorientation, heightened arousal, hypersensitivity, and anxiety. Sometimes flashbacks and nightmares may occur. Reactions vary depending on the person's functioning capacity prior to the trauma and on the nature and intensity of the trauma and subsequent events. As the immediate shock wears off, these reactions typically subside by themselves, given time and "space." If, 1-3 months after return home, you find yourself hyper-aroused (continually on edge, easily startled, reactive, can't sleep, or "tuned out"), and withdrawing from support systems, contact any of the relevant support services listed in Appendix A. You may be having difficulty readjusting even if you do not perceive a problem.



I've been really moody since coming back. Why am I not happy to be home? Should I be worried?

After the initial euphoria of finally leaving post and coming home, the psychological effects of the UT begin to surface as you let down your natural defenses and come out of survival mode. Depressive reactions are not uncommon for people exposed to prolonged stress and separation from loved ones. These reactions can appear as the "blues," moody irritability, a general despondency, or as physical complaints, to mention but a few. Employees often report feeling isolated from family and the general community because few can relate to the reality of their experiences, so there is little outlet to "vent." The difficulty within the family context is that these reactions come at a time when family demands and expectations can further compound frustration and misunderstandings.

Although it doesn't look like it, the fact that you are beginning to show all the emotions that were pent up for so long indicates that you are feeling safe enough to do so. That's a good thing, but it's a matter of things getting worse before they feel better. Talking with other employees who have "been there" can be cathartic and help you gain perspective on your feelings and thoughts, and it may be necessary to emotionally grieve some of the events that occurred during separation. Talking with other employees also means you're less likely to vent your negative feelings at your family. The State Department's ECS and FSI/Transition Center jointly run a debriefing program for personnel returning from high stress posts (see Appendix A). This would be a good place to start.

Just "suck it up" and get on with it. What's the problem?

Most employees who choose to work overseas have a healthy dose of denial that, at post, serves to help the employee live with the hardships and get the job done. At home, however, this same asset can be a liability if the employee views the intrusion of unpleasant emotions as a weakness and denies their expression. If you are one of these people, it's likely that your family members will point out a problem where you think there is none.



Feelings in themselves are not problems: they carry data that informs decision-making and motives, just as thoughts do. However, what one *does* with feelings can become a problem. If you continue to deny the impact of strong feelings, they don't just go away; they express themselves in other behaviors or in bodily aches and pains.

When do I ask for help? How do I know I need it?

Typically, it takes about three months for the effects of UT to surface and for the employee to fully realize the strain he/she has been living under. Seek professional help if you notice the following signs, lasting more than a few months:

- Feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, sadness, tearfulness
- Change in weight (gain or loss)
- Can't get to sleep or stay asleep
- Excessive irritability
- Emotions appear to be "flat"
- Lack of pleasure in things that used to bring pleasure
- Withdrawing from family and social network
- Not functioning well at work; can't get out of bed
- Increasing indecisiveness
- Memory problems
- Suicidal thoughts: Seek help immediately if you have even fleeting suicidal or homicidal thoughts, especially if you have access to a weapon.

We're having marital problems since I returned; is this "normal"?

Some rough and awkward patches as your marriage readjusts is to be expected. There will be frustration together with love. Some families not only survive the separation but are greatly strengthened, while others do not recover. In general, trying experiences such as unaccompanied tours magnify the substance of your marriage: whatever was there before the UT, good or bad, will be amplified after. If you were having problems as a couple before the UT, it's likely that they will be there when you return, though perhaps complicated with guilt and "you owe me" attitudes. Marital counseling would be beneficial to air long shut-away concerns.

Sex is awkward since I came back; will this change?



The majority of returnees require "down time" to recuperate and reorder their insides. During this time, spouses are "on hold," often reporting a loss of intimacy and an emotional distance as communication is reduced to exchange of information and meaningful connection is lacking. This affects sexual relations as sex is a physical expression of an emotional bond. Although one can go through the sexual motions, it may be difficult to feel truly close as intimacy requires the ability to be

vulnerable and open. This does not necessarily indicate a festering marital problem. Given time (about 2-4 months), the issues usually resolve themselves as the employee comes out of survival mode and is more able to open up.

A few of the more common conflicts that UT families report when they are reunited include:

- Extra-marital affairs
- Loss of religion or faith
- Increased drinking
- Withdrawal from family and friends; loss of interest in family
- Money problems
- Conflict related to living with in-law's or temporary housing
- Conflict arising from childrearing disagreements and parenting shortfalls

Less common but needing immediate attention:

- Domestic violence
- Drug use
- Finding out secrets e.g., HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases
- Intention to divorce

To avoid these pitfalls, frank discussion is necessary. If your spouse refuses to talk, it's time to ask for help; if he/she does not want to go to counseling with you, go yourself.

I'm drinking more than I used to, but every FSO I know drinks like a fish. Is it a problem?

It is true that a culture exists within both military and foreign services where the inability to deal with stress and personal problems are seen as a weaknesses, and that many employees turn to alcohol and tobacco products (even food) to numb out the internal noise in order to cope with stress. While the use of alcohol is not officially condoned, it is often found at community events that improve morale and cohesion. You are responsible for yourself. Employees are expected to function at their jobs, and you should be aware of your threshold of tolerance. Alcohol definitely dulls ones faculties. If you are consistently going over your threshold and you can't function as well, you've got a problem.



If you, or any family member are using alcohol, drugs, or nicotine products in a manner that is interfering with the ability to function at school, work, or home, it's time to seek help. "Poor functioning" does not necessarily mean falling-down drunk; in most cases it appears as clouded thinking, slower reaction times, or skipping work because of hangovers. The actual quantity of substance used is not the issue – a person of smaller stature does not need as much substance to get high as a larger person. Nor is the perceived control one has over the substance a deciding factor in seeking help. Counseling can address both the substance using behavior as well as the forces that drive their use. See Appendix A for a list of counseling resources.

What else should I expect in a typical readjustment cycle?

At three months: with time-zone, energy and routine adjustments more or less complete, you may go through a reverse "culture shock" as the stark contrast between the present life and the UT post comes into sharper focus. Talk with other personnel who have been in similar posts to help you work through the experiences of both the UT post and returning home.

Anniversaries: e.g., the 1-year date since leaving post, or date marking a traumatic event that might have occurred at post. Expect a subdued mood; allow time for somber reflection and grieving. Consider taking appropriate actions to recognize those you wish to honor.

APPENDIX A: SUPPORT SERVICES and IMPORTANT NUMBERS

EMERGENCY:

Department of State Operations Center (for emergencies only):

(202) 647-1512

e-mail: SES-O@state.gov

Department of State Main Operator:

(202) 647-4000

FIRST-LINE SUPPORT:

Unaccompanied Tours Support Officer, Family Liaison Office (FLO/UT)

U.S. Department of State, Harry S. Truman Building, Rm 1239,
Washington, DC 20520

Telephone (202) 647-1076, 1-800-440-0397; fax (202) 647-1670

internet: www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo

intranet:

https://intranet.hr.state.sbu/Benefits_Compensation/Family_Services/Pages/UnaccompaniedTours.aspx

E-mail: FLOAskUT@state.gov

Contact UT Support Officer with any UT family questions and for information on meetings and social gatherings for the UT community in Washington DC as well as ‘virtual’ meetings (i.e. conference calls, simultaneous web casts, etc.) available worldwide. The UT Support Officer is a particularly important resource for those not in Washington as well. Besides covering UT issues, FLO has a wealth of information on re-entry into Washington, spousal employment, education options, adoptions, naturalization, and evacuations. FLO also operates the Job Seekers Network and publishes a number of articles on all aspects of Foreign Service family matters.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES:

Deployment Stress Management Program (MED/DSMP)

Main Office, 1800 N. Kent Street, Rosslyn, VA 22209

Telephone: (703) 875-4828

Email: MEDDSMP@state.gov

Managed by the Bureau of Medical Services, the DSMP offers prevention, intervention, assessment, treatment, counseling, education and referral services covering the spectrum of the pre-deployment cycle through after reintegration. DSMP can also help you increase your resilience or manage any concerns during deployment and reintegration. These services are available to employees and families who are experiencing the effects of being assigned to a high stress/high threat post.

Employee Consultation Services (MED/ECS)

Main Office, Columbia Plaza, Room H246, Washington, DC 20520-2256

Telephone: (703) 812-2257

Email: MEDECS@state.gov

Managed by the Bureau of Medical Services, ECS's licensed clinical social workers offer limited free confidential counseling and evaluations for employees and family members.

FOR RETURNING EMPLOYEES:

High Stress Assignment Out-Briefing Program (run by ECS and FSI/TC)

Telephone (703) 302-7272 or (202) 663-1903

E-mail: FSITCTraining@state.gov

Intranet: <http://reg.fsi.state.sbu/CourseCatalog.aspx?EventId=MQ950>

INFORMATION and REFERRALS:

Overseas Briefing Center: Foreign Service Institute

National Foreign Affairs Training Center, Rm. E2105

4400 Arlington Blvd, Arlington VA. 22204-1500

Telephone: (703) 302-7267; fax (703) 302-7452

e-mail: FSIOBCInfoCenter@state.gov

Information on posts including cultural data, schools, spousal employment, medical facilities, housing and post reports. Post To Go and Post Personal Insights give a bird's eye view of life at various posts.

Transition Center at the Foreign Service Institute (same address as above) Website:

<http://www.state.gov/m/fsi/tc/c1932.htm>

Information on returning to Washington including schools, adult education, housing options, child care, employment, and pet services. Courses for family members on various aspects of Foreign Service life, including maintaining long-distance relationships.

Foreign Service Youth Foundation: (FSYF)

P.O. Box 39185, Washington, D.C. 20016

Telephone: (301) 404-6655

Email: fsyf@fsyf.org

Website: <http://www.fsyf.org>

A non-profit organization that advocates and develops programs for internationally mobile youth in all U.S. Foreign Service agencies. Publications on Foreign Service life for youth may be ordered.

WorkLife4You

(800) 222-0364 (24/7)

(888) 262-7848 TTY

www.worklife4you.com

Free resource referral service focusing on a wide range of life issues, including child and eldercare, contracted by the State Dept for Foreign Service and Civil Service employees. Free sessions with a financial manager and an attorney can be arranged through IQ. Specialists are available to assist you 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. New users must register.

OTHER GOVERNMENT OFFICES:

Office of Allowances: (ALS)

Telephone: (202) 261-1121

Website: <https://aoprals.state.gov>

ALS develops and coordinates policies, regulations, standards, and procedures to administer the government-wide allowances and benefits program abroad. Relevant UT articles may be downloaded.

Office of Casualty Assistance (OCA)

Department of State, Room 1241

Washington, DC 20520-7512

(202) 736-4302; (877) 887-5996

e-mail: oca@state.gov

In the event of a critical incident including death of a loved one, kidnapping or carjacking, OCA provides on-going support to US government employees and families serving under Chief of Mission and to DOS employees in the U.S. The OCA is your number one resource for information on insurance (including which ones honor claims from a war zone), wills, benefits, and various Powers of Attorneys.

Office of Retirement (RET)

(202) 261-8160 or 261-8180

e-mail: Retirement@state.gov

Administers Foreign Service (FS) Retirement and Disability System, and the FS Pension System.

Payroll Customer Support Center

Call toll free 1(800) 521-2553 or 1(877) 865-0760

If you are in Charleston call (746-0538 (X60538)

E-mail: PayHelp@state.gov

The Payroll Customer Support Center provides a single point of contact for DOS domestic and overseas American employees with questions regarding salary payments, withholdings, or time and attendance. Your source for W-2 reports.

APPENDIX B: USEFUL WEBSITES

This list is for your convenience only; it does not represent an endorsement by the U.S. State Department.

Expatriate living:

Families In Global Transition: www.figt.org for their homepage. Or go directly to <http://www.incengine.org/incEngine/> for lots of information and web links to other sites on expatriate life: education, shipping, third culture children, careers, travel etc.

Dads At a Distance: www.daads.com

Moms Over Miles: www.momsovermiles.com

Activities that long-distance parents can do with or for children.

Long Distance Couples: www.longdistancecouples.com

Activities for long-distance relationships, including “distance dating.”

College scholarships, financial aid, internships:

Education and Youth website: www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c21958.htm

Lists information and web links for scholarships, college finance programs and internships.

APPENDIX C: REGULATIONS, READING, DVDs, LINKS

Regulations:

Travel of Children of Separated Families, 3 FAM 3750

<http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c23130.htm>

Separate Maintenance Allowance Regulations, DSSR 260

http://aoprals.state.gov/content.asp?content_id=215&menu_id=81

Separate Maintenance Allowance: Questions and Answers

http://aoprals.state.gov/content.asp?content_id=162&menu_id=81

www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c23131.htm

DVD's, Books and Articles:

Managing your Unaccompanied Tour Successfully – a DVD/CD set from FLO covering aspects of a UT from the initial decision process to re-unification of the family. Available through FLOAskUT@state.gov.

APPENDIX D: SAMPLES, TEMPLATES AND CHECK LISTS

Templates for checklists:

Family Pre-Posting Discussion Checklist
My Go-To people
Emergency Contacts
Financial check sheet: Budget and Monthly Expenses
Family Reunion discussion: suggested topics

Five Wishes: Living Will:

U.S. Department of State, HR/ER/WLP
(202) 261-8176

Free copy of this advance health care directive and living will document is available to permanent DOS employees upon request. The format is user-friendly and the document is legal in 35 states.

FAMILY MEETING

Task: Discuss the UT with your Family, Make a Plan Together:

Questions about the Unaccompanied Tour:

- ? Where are you going? When? For how long?
- ? When will you be back?
- ? Why can't I go with you?
- ? Why did you choose to go there?
Can't you tell them you don't want to go?
- ? Will you be in danger?



- ? How will I find you? Your e-mail address: _____
Your address: _____

Ground rules for communications: Cheaper calling times are _____
Time differences: Post is + or - _____ hrs. from me
Best times to call Dad/Mom: _____

Best times to call me: _____

What if I forget to call or aren't home when you call sometimes? _____

What kinds of things interest you that we can talk about over whole the separation (e.g., sports teams, favorite TV show, etc.)? _____

Things that I'm interested in talking about on the phone:

? When will we see you again? Discuss:

- Your expectations around family time, R&R and holidays _____

- For married children: which holiday visits will you be spend at in-law's: _____

- It's most important for me to be with Dad/Mom at the following holiday or event: _____

Questions about what will happen to us:

? Will we have to move too? If so, when and to where?

? Who will take care of us?

? What do I do in case of an emergency?

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____



? What do I do in non-emergency trouble? If they're not available, whom do I go to?

? What will happen to me if something happens to you?

? What happens when you come back?

? Will you be mad at me if I notice something is wrong when you come back and I tell someone about it?

Here's my list of people that I want to have as support contacts.

- Fill the blank Go-To list (next page) when you've decided who will be on your Go-To Team. They should be people you trust who know you and who will be able to help you easily if ever you need them.

Picking "safe" Go-To people

When you're bummed out, you need people to turn to who can help in a way that you find useful. Let's face it, some of your friends and relatives may mean well, but their brand of "help" can be more trouble than it's worth. Pick "safe" people for your Go-To lists.

A safe person is someone who:

- Keeps your confidences (doesn't blab your business about)
- Listens without judging you
- Is able to understand your point of view
- Can hear "no" or handle disagreement without getting their feelings hurt
- Handles anger without slinging it back or retaliating
- Doesn't "should" all over you



My Go-To Team

	NAME	NUMBER	E-MAIL	Notes
1				
2				
3				

- Code Word: _____
- Call them individually every once in a while just to check in.

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

Personal contacts: name, number

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____



Family Doctor: _____

Pediatrician: _____

Local hospital: _____
address/tel: _____

Fire: _____

Poison Centre: _____

Police: _____

MONTHLY LIVING EXPENSES:

1. Housing

Rent/mortgage (including taxes, insurance) \$ _____
Utilities (gas, electricity, water, garbage) \$ _____
Home owners' association fees \$ _____
Telephone (land and cell) \$ _____
Cable TV/ internet \$ _____ TOTAL: \$ _____

2. Food:

Groceries and household supplies \$ _____
Eating out \$ _____
School lunches \$ _____ TOTAL: \$ _____

3. Car and Transportation

Gas and oil \$ _____
Car payments \$ _____
Parking \$ _____
Other (maintenance, car wash etc) \$ _____
Public transportation (metro, bus, train) \$ _____ TOTAL: \$ _____

4. Clothing

Family clothes and shoes \$ _____
Laundry and dry cleaning \$ _____ TOTAL: \$ _____

5. Personal

Hair (barber, beauty salon) \$ _____
Toiletries and cosmetics \$ _____
Cigarettes/ tobacco \$ _____
Medication \$ _____ TOTAL: \$ _____

6. Entertainment

Media (newspaper, magazines, books) \$ _____
Baby sitters \$ _____
Outings: Movies, bowling, games, clubs \$ _____ TOTAL: \$ _____

7. Medical, Dental and Vision

Doctors (pediatrician, ob/gyn, GP) \$ _____
Dentist and Orthodontist \$ _____
Glasses, contacts, etc. \$ _____ TOTAL: \$ _____

8. Other expenses

Allowances \$ _____
Child support/ alimony \$ _____ TOTAL: \$ _____

9. Annual expenses (divide by 12 for monthly expense)

Auto insurance \$ _____
Car: License plates, taxes \$ _____
Property Taxes \$ _____
School fees \$ _____ TOTAL: \$ _____

GRAND TOTAL MONTHLY EXPENSES (Add 1 - 9) TOTAL: \$ _____

FAMILY REUNION DISCUSSION

Suggestions for discussion: around 1 month after reunion

These two things worked well for the family while Dad/Mom was gone; explain why:

Two things that aren't working well since Dad/Mom returned:

Schedule: Dates and time for activities I do now:

Mondays: _____

Tuesdays: _____

Wednesdays: _____

Thursdays: _____

Fridays: _____

Saturdays: _____

Sundays: _____

Chores: changes I'd like to make:

Discuss the following:

- ./ Who do we go to first for permission and decisions about money, rules, requests?
- ./ Access and control of common use items, e.g., TV, bathroom, computer, phone, car
- ./ Current curfews, methods of discipline, limits, and consequences
- ./ Expectations around having friends over; what do parents find acceptable?

- . / Expectations around going out
 - What should happen if kids go out
 - What should happen if parents going out
 - Baby sitting options and instructions

- . / Hopes for future
 - What's Dad/ Mom's current posting: how long?
 - Any R&R or vacation plans
 - Housing

- . / Money and allowance: Revisit the family budget, including family income(s), college costs, financial aid; car insurance and gas/transportation money; fees for childcare, school and activities. Estimate upcoming needs as children grow.

- . / If there is a young adult moving out from home, discuss expectations for moving help, things they need to take, visiting and circumstances under which they can return home.

- . / Mention any important dates or events to note: e.g., graduation, prom, exams.

Other points I want to bring up:

APPENDIX E: FAQs SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES – WHAT TO DO

Seek additional help from the relevant support services listed in Appendix A if you are worried about any of the following concerns:

What if I come back with a physical injury?

If you return home injured, the course of readjusting to home life will be more complicated for the whole family. Depending on the nature of the injury, physical limitations and treatments demand longer term logistical changes, financial and emotional worries. A good counselor can help you and your family develop new strategies for working with the impairments, first attending to physical security and pain management, and next to your emotional needs as well as those of the family. During this time of adaptation, children are particularly vulnerable to being overlooked as spouses are overwhelmed with the magnitude of changes. This is a good time to engage people in your support network, and the wider community.

What if I don't come back?

No one wants to think about it, but the possibility exists even if the probability is low. As with any negative potentiality, preparing your family for the possibility of losing you is as much an exercise in containing anxiety (both yours and theirs) as it is in contingency planning. Preparations to set your house in order before you leave will help to mitigate the full impact of their loss. Some parents have found it comforting (and actually more fun than they expected) to write letters to each child for significant milestones, to be opened when they graduate, get married, have a child, etc. These loving declarations can still be kept and delivered on the appointed days by yours truly in the more likely scenario – that you will return.

Preparations include:

- completing a will
- completing a living will (see Appendix D Five Wishes)
- having meaningful conversations about dying and death, including wishes for funeral
- making mutual decision about continuing care for your children, such as setting up a trust and naming a guardian
- making mutual decisions about the disposition of your most important assets: house, car, valuables and items of sentimental value
- some employees have written letters to their children to be opened at future milestones (e.g. graduation, marriage, birth of child); these can still be saved and opened at the appropriate time together if all goes well

If you are killed at post, your family will likely find out about it via telephone from post personnel – since unaccompanied posts usually make for tight communities and you can be sure the staff there will be feeling the loss deeply. They will want to talk directly to your spouse or other designated point of contact and will make efforts to avoid leaving messages with children or others. They would have contacted the Office of Casualty Assistance which will be their single point of contact for all administrative and

supportive needs. They will contact FLO as well and other government offices to begin follow-on procedures. Alternately, your loved ones can call FLO for support. A number of resources are available for helping your children cope with their grief. There is no question that anyone in this situation will need extra support to deal with the loss plus the added concerns. Appendix A lists government offices that can assist with fiscal aspects; OCA provides excellent and active help with guiding your family through the maze of details from the return of the body to referrals for counseling.

I've been told my partner is not an "eligible family member". What does this mean and why can't we get the same help if we're going through the same things as official "EFMs"?

U.S. governmental regulations spell out who is considered a family member for legal and funding purposes, and in turn, who qualifies for services that must be paid for by the government. Unfortunately the legal requirement used to determine access to benefits creates an artificial differentiation between those who are deemed "eligible" and "ineligible." In practice on the field and at home, FLO uses a much broader definition of what constitutes "family."

The list of "eligible family members" (EFMs) includes:

- legally married spouse of the officer
- children aged 0-18 (or 21 or 23 depending on the context) years, including legally adopted children and step-children (unborn children are added to amended orders after birth)
- some other adults including children unable to care for themselves or elder parents who depend on the officer for more than 51% of their support, including parents-in-law. The requirements are quite strict.

Not included:

- Non-married partners, whether same or opposite sex
- Children other than those covered by the EFM definition above.
- Relatives taking care of officer's children in USA while he/she is away, including ex-spouses, siblings, grandparents.
- Parents or grandparents whom the officer is supporting 50% or less.

EFMs must normally be listed on the officer's travel orders to receive benefits which include:

- Travel expenses for R&R
- Access to information about the officer via governmental offices
- Funds from various allowances to cover costs incurred by UT (e.g., Separate Maintenance Allowance, Away from Post Education Allowance if child is in boarding school)
- USG Direct Support services (ECS etc.)

FLO makes very effort to assist those in need with information and referrals. Many grandparents, significant others, and relatives have stepped in to care for disengaged family members and are no less deserving of recognition or assistance. For information on the services available to you, please contact FLOAskUT@state.gov.