



Long distance relationships

In today's global economy, more and more people are leaving loved ones behind to further their careers abroad – and finding ways to keep their relationships alive and well. In fact, distance can be an opportunity to strengthen a relationship. It forces couples to compromise, explore individual interests, discuss common goals and, most importantly, develop great communications skills.

A 2014 study by researchers at Queen's University in Canada found that the farther apart each partner was geographically, the higher their level of communication, emotional intimacy and relationship satisfaction.

Effective long-distance communication begins with making a plan and sticking to it. This plan should include the following:

Before leaving

- **Discuss the status of the relationship.** Both of you need to be on the same page about the level of your commitment.
- **Understand what you're getting into.** The Queen's University research suggests that it's not the distance that places a strain on relationships but the disconnection between people's expectations and the realities of the situation. What will be the challenges for the partner in the new location? What are the implications for the person left behind – finances, children, etc. In addition, expect occasional miscommunications, irritations and struggles that will tougher to resolve at a distance.
- **Make long-term plans.** How long will be separation be? What happens afterwards? Making long-term plans helps give the relationship some structure and direction.

Let us help. Access your Expatriate Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) 24/7 by phone, web or mobile app.

Visit workhealthlife.com for worldwide access numbers or call your local operator and request to place a collect call to Canada at 905.886.3605.



During the separation

- **Set regular times to talk.** At home, there are hundreds of little opportunities every day to talk, laugh, touch and share. The long-distance couple needs to plan when and how to communicate. While texting or talking on the phone is fine, remember that 93 percent of communication is non-verbal – facial expressions, body language, and gestures – so Skype or Facetime as much as possible.

However, resist the temptation to send constant texts or emails. You want your conversations to be meaningful, not trivial or even worse, annoying. Use social media to convey everyday moments and stay connected to family and friends.

- **If possible, arrange regular visits.** It's important you both know when you'll see each other and how often visits will happen. Birthdays, holidays and anniversaries are especially important. If the distance between you is great, consider meeting halfway.
- **Be honest.** When couples are in the same location, they see each other in every possible mood. But long-distance couples may try to remain upbeat when communicating and not share negative feelings. This can lead to stewing about what's going on or imagining worst-case scenarios. Agree to be honest with how you're both feeling and not get upset if one of you is having a bad day.
- **Do the same things.** Go see the same movie, read the same book or watch the same TV show. You'll have something to discuss and share. Do things online together -- play a video game or engage in social media. You may want to consider learning the local language together and practicing on each other.
- **Be spontaneous.** Let your loved ones know you're thinking about them. Write a love letter, send small unexpected gifts and cards.
- **Keep busy.** Develop new interests and cultivate new friendships. Staying busy makes the absence less pronounced – and gives you more to talk about with your partner.
- **Be flexible.** Accept that even the best-laid plans don't always work. Sometimes connections fail, work schedules intrude, things come up. Be ready to go with the flow.

Most importantly, trust your partner. You'll both be spending more time with other people than with each other and that can cause anxiety and suspicion.

For more information on how you can make a global relationship work, contact your Employee Assistance Program.

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