



Helping your expat team cope with isolation and loneliness

As a manager you know that working in another country is a great opportunity to acquire international business skills, but it's easy to feel lonely, isolated, and homesick. And while technology helps us stay in touch with friends and family back home, it can also make us feel more alone. Creating a strong social network in our new location not only helps make the adaptation process easier, it makes the whole experience more enjoyable – and successful.

The importance of friendships

Close relationships play a huge role in our lives. Trusted friends and loved ones have our best interests at heart and can be relied upon to give honest advice and support us in good times and bad. They help us deal with stress, overcome obstacles and bounce back from adversity.

Since most expatriates arrive at the host location without a strong support system, many experience isolation and loneliness.

The effects of loneliness

With the demands of settling into a new home and fulfilling immediate business and professional objectives, expats often don't realize that feelings of isolation and loneliness are emerging, which can include:

- Sadness, depression and anxiety
- Homesickness
- Irritability, anger and resentment
- Use of alcohol or drugs to cope
- Unwillingness to interact with other expats and locals
- Inability to concentrate and solve simple problems
- Fear of doing new things or going to new places

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.



Unfortunately, the more isolated and lonely we feel, the harder it is to get out and meet new people and the more isolated and lonely we become. Making friends and establishing a new support system needs to be a priority for expats.

Making connections

While children usually adapt quickly to a new location, adults often have difficulty. Here are a few tips for expats to help lay the foundations to a new social circle and support system:

- Does your organization have social gatherings – picnics, sports teams, or perhaps local expat mentors for newcomers? These can be comfortable first steps for newcomers to start to learn about their new environment.
- You can help your expat staff and families settle in by providing them local information such as information about:
- Opportunities to get involved in their local expat community by providing a list of clubs, sports teams and events. No matter what their home country, other expats can provide information and offer support.
- Professional associations in the new location. These provide opportunities to meet people nearby with similar interests and experiences – and expand professional networks.
- Suggest they contact their university or college alumni association. Most have branches around the world that hold events.
- If they are a member of a faith community, you can provide a list of places of worship so they can participate in activities and volunteer their time.
- They can get involved with their child's school and get to know other parents through school activities.
- Are there local teams to play a favourite sport or learn a sport popular in the new location? If they're musical, you can provide information about a band or choir if available.

Similar to the above suggestions, expats who can form friendships with locals from the new location often find cultural mentors to help them adapt to the new culture and even a new language and feel more at home. Here are some tips for expat staff and families to consider:

- **Volunteer.** Coach sports, teach a class or get involved with a local charity.
- **Learn a new skill.** Master an activity popular in your new location.
- **Investigate meetups.** Many cities have meetups – groups of individuals with shared interests who plan events. They're often free and are another great way to meet like-minded people.

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- **Celebrate both your own traditions and those of your new location.** Host get togethers and invite neighbours, business associations (where appropriate), new acquaintances, and fellow expats. Accept invitations from locals (again, when appropriate) to participate in their religious or cultural celebrations.

Helping employees deal with loneliness

Feelings of loneliness and isolation can not only affect your performance as a manager, but that of your team. As much as you may want to help another expat employee who is having difficulty adapting, it may not be culturally appropriate. Personal advice may be interpreted as a failing or loss of face and could impact other team members. Seek the advice of cultural experts with your Expatriate Employee Assistance Program on how to best support the different needs of your team. Your organization understands the importance of support for expatriates and that's why they offer the expatriate employee assistance program for expatriate staff and dependents whether on assignment with the employee or living elsewhere. Don't hesitate to contact us or suggest this benefit to expat staff.

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