



## How to deal with life changing and significant events back home

As most of us who have made big or small relocations recognize, there are many difficult things about living far away from your loved ones and your familiar environment. What can be the most challenging, is when a significant event happens back home, and you are far away, unable to be close to those who matter most. This includes life events that are expected and unexpected. They range from weddings, births, family reunions, or a milestone anniversary to sad or traumatic experiences such as the death of a loved one, an aging or ill parent, and in rare cases, a natural disaster or act of violence.

The upside is that you can prepare for the impact of being away when and if significant events happen back home. We live in a time when communication has never been faster or easier, and so when important events happen, with a little forethought - you can be better prepared.

### Develop a plan

Before you move, develop a plan that you can put into action if unforeseen or anticipated important events occur. This can include financial planning as well as guidelines for communication.

Financially, it is a good idea to have a reserve fund for a plane ticket home in case of an emergency. As well as a care plan for children, in the event that one of the parents has to return back home.

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Before you leave, talk to your loved ones about how, how often, and when you will communicate. Being in touch regularly can help you feel closer to home and connected with developments there. For instance, if you anticipate declining health or death of an elderly family member while you are away, a family blog with updates from caregivers and visitors can help you stay in touch. When a loss or traumatic event happens, having a clear communication plan and ways to access each other can help you be available and involved as needed.

### **Consider your options**

With the knowledge that while you are away, life goes on back home and events happen, it is important to consider upfront when and for what situations you or other family members will return home. Something unexpected like a sudden death of a loved one is something you would likely travel back for. However, something that has longer-term repercussions like a family member's illness can be more unknown when and for how long you can travel home.

What do you need to do to stay involved and connected around events that you might not be able to travel back home for? Get creative about how you can be part of weddings and reunions through digital communication or by sending gifts or tokens to remind people that you care. While you don't need to have all the answers in advance, thinking about what you might do should a situation arise is helpful as you'll have already considered the possibilities.

### **Stay updated while staying present**

When something difficult is going on far away from you, it can become a preoccupation. This is actually something that can be exacerbated by digital technologies - it is now possible to be online and stay updated 24/7, be it via news reports on grand events, or text messages to your loved ones. While it is certainly important to stay up to date and informed, it can be exhausting to be connected to information every second of the day. Allow yourself to check in regularly while staying present in the day-to-day of where you are physically. If it feels like what is happening back home is consuming your time, energy and emotional resilience, talk to a counsellor to get help with finding balance.

### **Take care of yourself**

When faced with a significant event back home while you're on assignment, it's important to remember that taking care of your own health will help you be better able to cope with the situation. Regardless of if the event is positive and you're feeling lonely and homesick, or negative and you're concerned about the well-being and safety of your loved ones, self-care is important. Do your best to get plenty of rest, eat well, exercise, refrain from increased use of alcohol and use of drugs, and stick to a routine as much as possible. Talking to others who have similar experiences can help as does speaking with family and friends, or a professional counsellor.

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We all know that loss and grief, joy, and growth are part of life and relationships. When they happen while you are away, unable to give and receive support or to participate in the joys of life changes, these events can become particularly stressful. Remember: you are not alone. Use the resources available to you through your Expatriate Employee Assistance Program anytime, anywhere. With planning, communication, and sometimes outside help, it is possible to balance caring for what is happening back home and taking care of your life where you are. It isn't possible to be in two places at once, but it is definitely true that you can stay grounded and connected at the same time.

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