

Dual income abroad: Adjusting to life abroad when both partners are working

Being in a long-term partnership means committing to a lifetime of mutual support and often a lot of compromise. When one partner is relocated for work or is offered a big move to advance their career, it is common that their spouse chooses to go along with them. Oftentimes the partner who follows will play a more supportive role in the relationship: taking care of the practical matters that come with relocating, and helping children adjust if there are any. There are a growing number of expat couples in which both partners will work while abroad – either finding work in the new locale or taking advantage of flexible work arrangements with a current employer based in the home country. When *both* partners are working in a new, strange place, there are unique and often daunting challenges that come into play. Here we will look at some things to keep in mind that can help to maintain a healthy relationship and bring out the best for both of you while working abroad.

Be flexible

When two people are working abroad, chances are you're employed by different organizations, and those organizations may or may not be located in the host country location. For instance, your partner may have negotiated with their current organization to continue their role abroad. In this case, they may need to answer emails or attend conference calls during off-hours. Likewise, your own new role may require extra hours, a longer commute, or short business trips away from your host city. Being flexible and patient with the new schedule and demands of the role abroad will go a long way to make your partner feel supported during this new experience and help them perform better at work.

Trade notes

The knowledge and insight about people, customs and culture that you'll pick up on-the-job interacting with colleagues in your host country will be invaluable. When both partners are working abroad, imagine how much more you can learn and understand when you trade notes about what you see and experience every day in your new workplace. So, share a story over dinner or keep track of questions you have to ask your partner and/or other expats the next time you're out socially.

Learn together

Adjusting to a new culture and a second language can cause wonder and frustration in equal measure. Enroll in a local language course and/or a cross-cultural training together. This way you can support and encourage each other as well as help each other, through the tough times.

Spend time together

It can be easy to funnel all of your energy into your new job as well as the practical realities of living in a new place, such as finding somewhere to live, settling in, managing your new financial realities, and finding the right new schools for your children if you have them. It is of equal – or perhaps even greater – importance to make time for each other. A complicating factor may be if you are both in a position that requires afterhours entertaining and socializing with business contacts. Nonetheless, it is important to set aside time in both of your schedules to just be together. Try blocking time for date nights and family activities. You may need to settle for frequent shorter time together and creative

ways to touch base and stay in up to date with each other. Making time for each other will strengthen the bond between you, a crucial aspect of living somewhere new.

Seek external help

There are numerous resources available to people in exactly your circumstances. As a first step, see if your employer offers any programs to help families through this period of adjustment, or look to your Employee Assistance Program for this type of support.

When you uproot your life to move to a new place, you are in for a period of adjustment that is often uncomfortable, but also often exciting. Remember that this will likely be a difficult time that will put strain on your relationship, and don't be afraid to talk about your concerns and difficulties with each other, or with a counsellor. The better your communication is in this period, the more available you will both be to weather the change and come out on the other side fully engaged in your new life – and work - in a new place.

If you have any questions about this topic, or if you wish to discuss a personal situation you may be experiencing, we invite you to contact your EAP. Contact details can be found on your EAP brochure or you can call Canada collect to reverse the charges, by calling your local operator and asking to speak with an operator in Canada. Request to place a collect call to Canada at 905.886.3605 and you will be put in touch with our Care Access Centre who can arrange for help closer to home.