

Helping kids cope

Children have their own range of emotions and thoughts about a parent who works away. It is quite normal for children to feel upset, angry, disappointed (among other feelings) when a parent is often absent.

It is unnecessary to overwhelm yourself with the need to "fix" the feelings or the situation. Listen to your child and encourage them to think through the situation. Something like: "*I know you're disappointed that dad can't make it to sports day. He wishes he could come too. Is there something we could do to make it a little easier?*"

Some useful tips:

1. Help your kids to cope - talk openly and honestly about their worries.
2. Dad/Mum is never 'going away'; Dad/Mum is 'going to work'.
3. Tackle issues as a united couple – do not threaten kids with: "wait till dad gets home". Maintain a united front with the kids and be on the same page with discipline.
4. Take the time to create some family rules and write them down for all to see - involve the kids so they feel they've got some say, especially about the consequences if rules are not followed.
5. Identify times and activities that you and your children can do together.
6. If you know you are going to be away on a special day (first day at school, birthday, graduation, etc), leave a note/card or small gift to communicate your interest and involvement.

Above all, don't be afraid to get help from your company employee assistance program if the going gets really tough.

The ideas and strategies outlined in this brochure are often beneficial, but are not comprehensive. Assistance from a professional counsellor may help you to make quicker progress. Remember to use your workplace EAP as a resource.

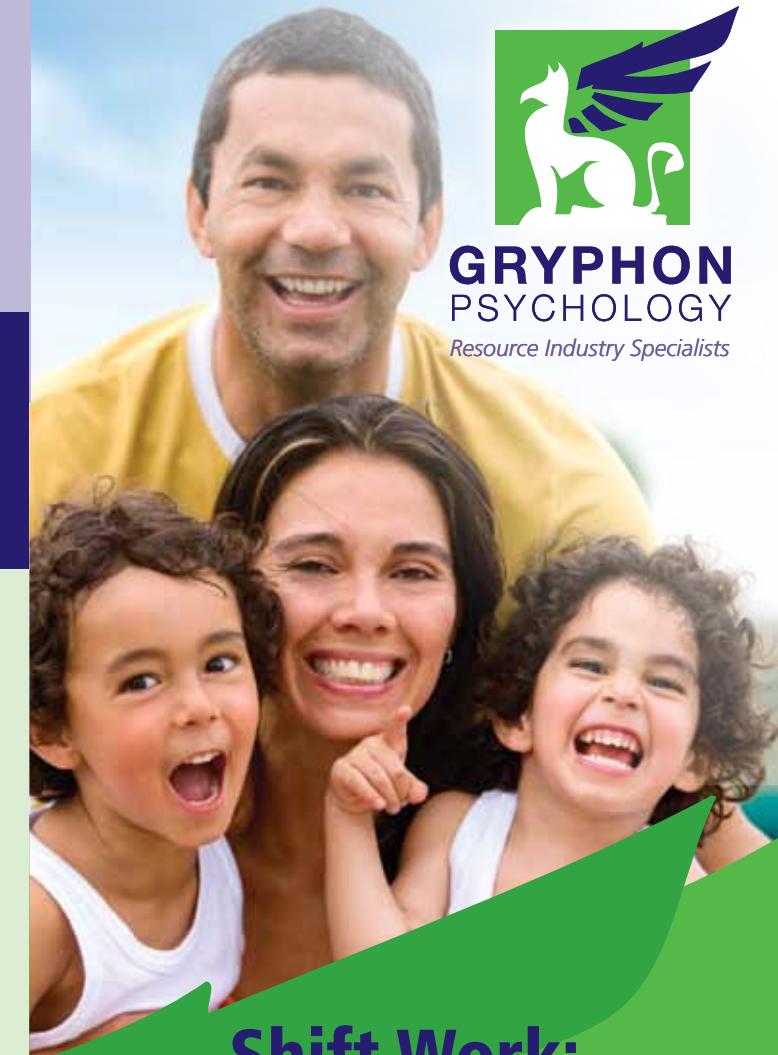
Call your EAP on 1800 056 076

Gryphon Psychology provide a free professional, independent and confidential counselling and consulting service. This service assists employees in both the private and public sectors to find solutions to any work or personal/family problems that are affecting their quality of life and which may be impacting on their effectiveness at work. If needed, our counsellors can make referrals to specialist agencies for particular problems, or for ongoing support.

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is completely confidential, and provided by your employer at no cost to you.



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Shift Work: Protecting your Relationship and Family Life

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Let's be realistic

The adjustment to shift work and being away from home over an extended period places many demands on relationships and family life. Some couples actually enjoy the space that this sort of lifestyle brings and it is not a given that all relationships would suffer because of it. Recognizing the possible challenges is a first and important step in preventing any possible problems.

Some issues that might arise are:

- Family and social activities are out of phase with the working roster and there is little opportunity for quality time together.
- Shift workers can sometimes feel excluded, less needed and guilty for missing out on important family events.
- Shopping, recreation, and socializing with friends are difficult to arrange at convenient times because of the need to rest on days off.
- Many shift workers simply find it too difficult to do anything on days off other than eat and try to catch up on sleeping, which reduces opportunities for leisure and family time.
- Spouses often complain that their partners are not available when they are needed, and they must develop their own interests, pastimes, and lifestyles.

- Fatigue and mood, sometimes complicated by stress and long shifts, make the shift worker less pleasant to be around. Sexual relationships can also suffer because of fatigue and reduced opportunity.
- Conflicts can accumulate over time, which can escalate in intensity or withdrawal.
- Both partners initially feel guilty over the resentment of work interfering in family life, and then they feel resentment toward each other.

Clearly, shift work places additional stresses on relationships, so shift workers and families must plan for dealing with these pressures. Let's look at how to do this:

Strategies to thrive

1. Be realistic about the challenges and rewards that shift work brings. Don't wait for a crisis to develop – plan ahead.
2. Use family meetings to discuss concerns, family responsibilities, and to draw up a family schedule calendar. Make dates with partner/children and set up a family bulletin board to ensure everyone's involvement.
3. Respect the first "golden hour" when your partner comes home. Do not flood him/her with big issues the minute they walk through the door – take some time to catch up and re-connect.
4. Express disappointment, insecurity or feelings of inadequacy in an honest, rational way.
5. Don't dwell on being apart. Remember why you're doing it and stay positive.
6. Demonstrate your love and commitment with small surprises (like notes or small gifts) that can be hidden in suitcases (for the travelling) or around the house (for the staying behind).

7. Plan household chores by preparing a list and then step back and let the other process the information. Sharing the load can strengthen your bond.
8. Talk often on the phone but don't force conversation. Respect the fact that opportunities may be reduced and look for alternatives like e-mail or texting.
9. Make sure you understand each other's sexual needs.
10. Agree on the amount of time you'll spend with friends and extended family during R&R (and don't waste precious time arguing).
11. Make time for each other without the kids.
12. Be smart about money and consult each other in major decisions.
13. Recognize that you may both feel fatigued. Ensure you both get time to yourselves and discuss and negotiate how this is going to happen.
14. Having no mobile coverage will require both you and your partner to be more creative in thinking of ways to stay in touch and feel connected and supported.
15. Make sure you get enough sleep, exercise and eat well in order to have energy to invest in your relationship and family.

If you think things are going wrong, a consultation with the employee assistance program (EAP) can be arranged. We can help you solve problems before a crisis emerges.