

FIFO Parenting Tips and Tricks!

Being separated by work, or FIFO (fly in fly out), is a minefield of stress triggers for parents and children. Approaches to keep you and your children as stress-free as possible are outlined below.

Routines are a brilliant stress reduction tool and provide everyone with predictability, security, and the chance to get lots of things done. I have found that when children are provided with consistency and routines, for example, helping with daily chores, getting ready for school, completing homework, and organising belongings, they are learning to take responsibility for themselves and their actions and take pride in what they can do. Through routines, children feel secure within their environment, which allow them to be confident and take risks when they need to.

Foster a team environment in the home and share how you are feeling positively and how you cope, in age-appropriate language. Being an open communicator will encourage everyone to talk about their feelings more, with no judgment, no direction, and just sharing and off-loading the emotional burden that can build up.

A skill that is worth gold to most FIFO families is **blending**. I have become a master blender. I can combine activities to meet everyone's needs and wants. I can blend to create a learning or fun space for my kids while I am getting a job done or relaxing. I find blending offers many opportunities to connect with my children, teach them new things, hear them, and be present with them entirely. As my children grow, I change where I need to, so as to fit in with their needs and values, at their current age.

Be aware of and recognise these six signs of stress and anxiety in children:

1. Tears for seemingly minor reasons.
2. Nervous behaviours such as nail biting and hair twirling.
3. Physical complaints, such as stomach aches, headaches, fatigue.
4. Regression to younger behaviours—bed wetting, eating with hands.
5. Withdrawal from school friends or siblings.
6. Any behaviour that your child doesn't typically do could be a sign of anxiety.

Eight suggested stress management tips for children:

1. Take the pressure and expectations off your children if they are feeling uncomfortable. Helping children cope with stress involves knowing their personalities and limits. Listen to and acknowledge how they are feeling and give them time and space with it.
2. Stick with the routine as much as possible.
3. Ask your children what makes them feel better. Do they wind down with music, reading, spending time with you, or playing with their friends, brothers, or sisters? Encourage them to do what helps them calm down and relax.
4. Make sure your children eat nutritious foods, drink lots of water, and get exercise. Reducing children's physical stress looks similar to minimising your anxiety.
5. Have tokens of support for your child. For example something little that Dad or Mum gives the child to have while away that is filled with *magical happy energy* that passes to them when they hold it. It could be anything, a rock, a photo, a small toy. Joseph, my youngest, slept with an old ID card under his pillow that his Dad had given him, for about six months. He said it made him feel close to Daddy. One dad I spoke to, set fun challenges for his boys to focus on and achieve while he was away, and followed up on them during phone and Skype calls.
6. Manage your stress. The less pressure you feel, the more relaxed your children will be.
7. Find ways to be involved in your community. Volunteering and contributing relieves feelings of stress and isolation. It is something that the whole family can be included in, and you will meet some lovely people. Your children will feel a sense of belonging and purpose, and so will you.
8. Lighten the mood with fun activities, comedy movies, park afternoons, and cozy chats with hot chocolate or ice cream treats—getting out, staying in, and laughing.

YouTube Video: <https://youtu.be/ZjRacEckCj8>



Kirsty O'Callaghan
CONSULTING