

MAINTAINING A GOOD FIFO RELATIONSHIP

Fly-in-Fly-out (FIFO) jobs require workers to fly in to their work site for the duration of their roster, before flying out to their preferred location during their time off. They have demanding rosters, which vary depending on work type, location, and required skills.

Many of the challenges experienced in FIFO relationships result from repetitive cycles of being away and being home. This places different demands on couples and their families, and coping with these demands often requires the use of different skills and strategies. Although the financial gains are attractive, this lifestyle can be extremely difficult and creates challenges for both partners in a relationship. The FIFO working arrangement means that they will have to negotiate a different way to keep their relationship healthy, manage household responsibilities, and how the FIFO partner fills their 'off' time.

Some of the challenges related to FIFO employment include:

YOUR RELATIONSHIP For the both of you

- Maintaining effective communication
- Feeling lonely, isolated or disconnected
- Maintaining physical intimacy
- The FIFO partner being absent from key events For the FIFO partner
- Managing isolation
- Coping with the pressure you may feel from your partner to provide support while you are away
- Coping with your partner's desires or household demands on your time and attention when you come home tired
- Some people find that they end up using alcohol/drugs to manage stress and disrupted sleep, or alleviate boredom
- On-site physical exertion and fatigue can challenge some people's ability to maintain their fitness and health, and can mean that it takes you longer to 'recover' For the partner at home
- Having to live independently for long periods of time without help
- Juggling work and all of the home duties, including the demands of families

- Having to manage practical tasks which fall outside their normal role, e.g. mechanical repairs

- Being required to make 'big' decisions without consulting their partner

Below are some tips to help you maintain a happy and healthy relationship and make FIFO work for you.

If you are considering this lifestyle: Make sure the decision to work FIFO is mutual.

- Discuss the reasons for your FIFO decision and what your joint goals are. Ensure you can both see the value in this decision and that you both agree on the benefits you will gain.

- Consider how long you would like to commit to this lifestyle – You may

- Disturbed routine when FIFO partner returns

like to discuss whether it would suit the both of you to continue this arrangement indefinitely, or to undertake this type of work for a set period of time in order to achieve a specific goal e.g. pay off a mortgage, get ahead financially.

If you are currently a FIFO worker: "Communication and Trust is key"

- Communicate regularly. Discuss the practicalities of how you will do this – You may prefer to schedule your phone calls/text messages. It may be a good idea to share each other's rosters so you both know when the other is available to contact.

- Keep each other up to date with what is happening in your lives through social networking, photos,

and real-time video applications such as Skype or Facetime – Take an interest in the smaller details of how your other half lives!

- When you have time together, talk about things that are working, or not working for each of you. That way, you can resolve the problems as they come up, rather than letting them build up over time.

- Sort out your problems early and before the FIFO partner flies out. Arguments can be difficult to resolve once at work due to time constraints and/or poor-quality communication services.

- When you spend so much time away from each other, it is not unusual to experience anxiety and insecurity – Being able to trust each other is important. Your ‘conduct’ should be the same regardless of whether you are together or apart. Address intimacy issues

- Being apart for extended periods can lead to difficulties connecting in the bedroom, particularly if either

Set routines

- Make sure you set clear expectations to avoid unnecessary arguments – E.g. How much time will be allocated to friends and family? How much time will you spend together when the FIFO partner is home?
- If you have family – It is important that any standards and routines can be met by the partner who stays at home for extended periods without support. In general, routines put in place by the stay-at-home partner should be adhered to whether the FIFO partner is at home or away. This way, the FIFO partner provides extra help when they are home, but

partner is feeling particularly stressed or isolated in response to the demands of this lifestyle – Recognise that these difficulties are a sign that greater attention needs to be paid to maintaining effective, supportive communication and helping each other cope with the practical challenges.

everything does not fall over when they are away. Plan ahead

- Plan activities in advance to make the most out of the FIFO partner’s break.
- You may choose to celebrate special events such as Christmas or birthdays on an earlier or later date to avoid missing out.
- The partner at home could schedule their annual leave to coincide with when their FIFO partner has leave. Build your resilience to stress
- Ensure that you both have a good social support network and that you

are accessing it. Talk with your friends and family.

- There is often a reluctance to seek help among FIFO workers due to reasons such as a culture of not discussing problems, embarrassment, a need for trust in the support person and assurance of confidentiality. A lack of insight to their own stress is also another barrier to support seeking –

Regularly check in with your partner to see whether they are okay. Encourage them to access support through Lifeskills Australia 1800 870 080

- Maintain fitness such as training in the gym or doing yoga. Regular exercise can promote good sleep,

improve your mood, and reduce stress. So set aside time for your mind and body to stay refreshed and stimulated. You could also try meditation, or simply relax to music.

- Eat better – If you have limited options at work, consider using your checked luggage to bring extra food, protein powders, or vitamins. Engage in healthier coping strategies to deal with boredom.

- Access recreational facilities/activities provided at camp such as the gym, basketball courts, fitness programs or after-work programs.

- Take part in social or sporting activities.

The FIFO lifestyle can facilitate stronger partnerships when they apply sound communication skills and provide adequate support for their partner. It can also provide an opportunity to strengthen their feelings towards one another and allows for a separate work and home life. However, should you try all of these strategies and yet either one of you remains unhappy with the lifestyle, you may need to evaluate whether the arrangement is still working for the both of you. The FIFO lifestyle can be rewarding but might not be suitable for everyone.