

ROCK SOLID

Practical strategies to boost emotional
wellbeing, help prevent suicide and
keep families strong and happy.



Mining & Quarrying
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH &
SAFETY COMMITTEE



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Disclaimer

Mining Family Matters aims to break down the barriers of isolation and the stresses of living away from family and friends. Although this guide provides general advice from a psychologist, the content should never be regarded as a substitute for professional health services or crisis services. Always speak to your doctor or specialist provider for advice on a specific medical condition. If you are depressed and require urgent assistance, contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 (for calls within Australia).

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Rock SOLID

This guide is funded by the Mining and Quarrying Occupational Health and Safety Committee (MAOOSHHC) as part of a joint initiative with Welsey LifeForce and Mining Family Matters.

MAOOSHHC proactively supports and promotes work, health and safety and best hygiene practices, with a mandated aim to prevent injury and disease within the South Australian mining and quarrying sector. We're committed to improving the safety of mining and quarrying workplaces, and this includes raising awareness about the importance of emotional resilience and wellbeing among workers.

Everyone finds life tough sometimes – no matter what the industry. Mining and quarrying workplaces are no exception. These environments present their own unique challenges, whether you're working at a quarry, outdoors operating plant or machinery, or travelling away from home on a fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) or drive-in, drive-out (DIDO) roster.

In the coming pages you'll find emotional resilience tips and expert advice from Welsey LifeForce, the largest provider of suicide prevention programs in Australia. Their goal is to educate people about suicide, challenge attitudes and teach basic engagement skills. We hope this information will empower you to look out for your workmates and identify warning signs if you need support yourself. We also acknowledge that your home life can have a major impact on your emotional resilience at work, and that's where the Mining Family Matters team comes in with professional advice and practical strategies for keeping your relationship strong and your family happy. Much of the advice offered is by Mining Family Matters' registered psychologist Angie Willcocks.

IDENTIFYING stress & depression

According to Beyond Blue, around one million adults in Australia live with depression and over two million have an anxiety disorder. The good news is that both are treatable.

But it's very common for adults, particularly men, to misinterpret symptoms of depression as signs of stress. ("I'm just stressed" seems much easier to admit than "I'm really struggling.")

So how do you tell the difference between depression, anxiety and stress? It's true they are similar in some ways, but they've all got 'classic' signs or symptoms that can be readily identified. Here they are:

DEPRESSION

- Feeling sad and low most or all of the time (for at least two weeks)
- Losing interest or pleasure in things that would usually be enjoyable

- Feeling physically 'heavy' or weighed down, tired and lethargic

- Common thoughts: "What's the point?", "I can't be bothered", "I hate my life", "Everything sucks" or "I'm boring"

- More focus than usual on death and dying – not necessarily suicidal, but thoughts like "It wouldn't be so bad to be dead" or "When will I die?"

- Outsiders might notice a withdrawal from things that are usually enjoyed, and a generally negative tone

- Disrupted sleep, particularly waking in the early hours (classically 2am to 5am) for no apparent reason

- Change in appetite. Alcohol intake often increased (experts discourage this)

- Depression might be triggered by a life event (divorce, job loss) or come out of the blue

- Those who have had depression in the past, or with a family history, are more likely to experience depression

ANXIETY

- Feelings of nervousness or uneasiness with accompanying worry

- Often precedes a challenging event (exam or job interview)

- Physical symptoms: shortness of breath, chest tightness, dizziness, trembling in the hands, racing heart, shakiness, feeling sick and an overall feeling of being close to panic

Overcoming stress, ANXIETY AND SADNESS

[5] LIFE :: mining.m.com.au

Everyone knows about Mondayitis: that feeling you get when you're headed back to work after a great weekend with friends and family. For workers in mining and quarrying, who might not always work normal Monday to Friday rosters, mood swings can be just as common.

work, or what they will miss this time. They might think about not being able to go to important family events, or anticipate missing their loved ones. All of these thoughts lead to feeling sad or low – which in turn might make them 'clingy' and needy, or they can go the other way and become distant and withdrawn.

For some workers, it's a day of feeling sad; for others it's a day of anxiety or stress. (Please note: we're not talking about depression here – if you think that's more likely to be affecting you, check the previous chapter on getting help as soon as you can.)

For others, it's about anxiety (felt as unease, restlessness or irritability). Anxiety generally relates to nameless fears so it's hard to generalise, but they might include something bad happening to the family or something going wrong with a relationship.

If you're one of those people who regularly experiences mood swings and they're affecting your relationships (for quarry workers it might be feeling anxious or stressed on a Sunday afternoon before starting the working week) it's important to work out what exactly your individual experience is. This will help to determine what can be done to make life easier to bear.

For others still, it's about stress. Like anxiety, stress makes people feel wound up and edgy. But the thoughts that go with stress are more 'realistic' and usually relate to being busy or having too much to do. Stress is often caused by your mind switching back into work mode before you're physically back at work.

Try these strategies:
▶ Next time you feel your mood changing, think about whether you're experiencing sadness, anxiety or stress. What are your thoughts about? How are you acting (needy, withdrawn, snappy)? Sometimes, even just

- ▶ Common thoughts: "There's something wrong with me", "I can't breathe", "I can't cope" or "Something dreadful is going to happen"
- ▶ Outsiders might notice the person worrying about every little thing, looking uptight and pacing around a lot
- ▶ Difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep
- ▶ Appetite often reduced. Alcohol intake increased in a bid to avoid anxious thoughts (experts strongly discourage this)
- ▶ Anxiety can appear after a life event or just come out of the blue
- ▶ Those who have experienced an anxiety disorder in the past, or with a family history, are more likely to be diagnosed

STRESS

- ▶ Feeling keyed up and finding it hard to relax – often relating to external factors such as a demanding time at work, financial pressures or moving house
- ▶ Feeling physically tense and 'wired'. Mind racing with everything that needs to be done
- ▶ Common thoughts: "I've got too much to do" and "I'm not sure I can cope with all this"

If you think you might be suffering from depression, stress or anxiety (or know someone else who is) the most important thing you can do is take action. A first port of call can be the many great websites like www.beyondblue.org.au or www.moodgym.com.au. Visit your GP as soon as possible – if they think it's warranted they'll organise a psychologist and/or anti-depressant medication. For immediate assistance call Lifeline on 13 11 14.

If you remember only one thing from this little book, let it be this: depression and anxiety are treatable, and skills can also be learnt to manage stress. There's no need to go it alone.

Further reading:

- ▶ *Taking care of yourself and your family: a resource book for good mental health*, by John Ashfield and available through Beyond Blue
- ▶ *The Mindfulness and Acceptance Workbook for Anxiety*, by John Forsyth and Georg Eifert

a book, call a friend or start a hobby to keep busy.

ANXIETY

- Ignore or challenge any 'irrational' thoughts that make you anxious. For example, if you're prone to worrying that you're going to stuff up at work, remind yourself that you're a capable, experienced worker who's been doing the same job for a long time (or that you're new to the job and able to ask for help when you need it).
- Keep busy with something fun the day before you go back to work.

STRESS

- Make a 'to do' list of the jobs that need your attention back at work, or at home. Place them in order of priority and also make sure you identify which jobs can be delegated and which aren't really that urgent.

➤ If you work FIFD/DIDO and often feel sad or lonely, it might help to increase connections with loved ones while you're away too. (Try more phone calls, texts, video calls or even reading the same books or watching the same TV shows.)

➤ Train yourself to shift sad feelings.

Like all feelings, sadness doesn't tend to hang around for too long unless it is 'hung onto' with thinking. Here's an example: Let's imagine you're *feeling sad*. You then *think* something like "I'm so sad" and start to dwell on the causes of your sadness, such as "I'm here all alone". This then increases the feeling and makes it much more difficult to bear.

➤ Deliberately focus your thoughts on more uplifting topics, such as an upcoming event. Listen to music, read

➤ Stress management techniques will help you manage your mood swings – you'll find lots of books and internet sites on the topic.

➤ If you're stressed about jobs that need doing around the house, and never having time to get to them, consider asking a friend or family member to help you catch up.

If you or someone you know needs assistance, call Lifeline's 24-hour hotline on 13 11 14 to talk with a trained volunteer telephone counsellor (www.lifeline.org.au).

[7] LIFE | www.lifeline.org.au

KNOWING YOUR mental health first aid

Mental health first aid is the help offered to a person experiencing a mental health crisis, or developing a major mental health problem.

Like physical health first aid, it's about assessing the level of danger or risk, taking any action that is needed, and then staying with the person until the crisis passes and/or until additional help is organised.

Anyone can perform mental health first aid. Remember this: it's not the job of the first aider to fix the problems that have led to the crisis, any more than it would be their job to fix the problems that have led to a heart attack. You don't need to solve the problems that have led to the person feeling so desperate. Instead, here's what you need to do:

1. ENSURE THE PERSON'S SHORT-TERM SAFETY

If you've asked the question "Are you OK?" and your workmate, friend or family member says "No", you need to muster up all your courage and ask them if they have thought of taking their own life, or harming themselves in any way. If the person you're talking to has got as far as thinking

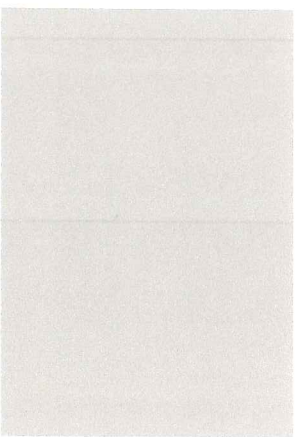
through what they would actually do to themselves, you need to listen very carefully to their answer and then take a few steps.

➤ **If you're at work**, stay with your colleague. If you're not confident about handling the situation, ask another workmate to stay with them while you seek assistance. Also remove any means of potential harm. Ideally you'll know the company's reporting policy on mental health issues. If in doubt, talk to your immediate supervisor.

➤ **If you're off work and a friend or family member is in danger**, again take steps to remove the means of potential harm. If you feel confident to do so, stay with them for as long as you need to. This might mean changing your plans. Don't drink alcohol or take drugs with them, and don't take part in any risky behaviours. If you can't stay with the person or don't feel confident in handling the situation, immediately contact friends or family to help.

2. CONNECT THEM WITH PROFESSIONAL HELP

Crisis care is important, but longer term care is also vital. This will ensure the person at risk of suicide has ongoing support so they can



work through the issues that led to the crisis. If you're at work, the appropriate supervisors should be able to take care of the situation for you. If you're off work, you have a few options for crisis care. If you're near a hospital with an Emergency Department, you can organise to take your friend or family member there, or you can call a crisis assessment team in your area. (Check out the Wesley LifeForce service finder on page 15.) Persist until you find someone who is willing and able to assist your friend. If neither of these options is available to you, you need to stay with the person until they can get some help from another source, like a GP. You'll need to let the GP's receptionist know that it is an urgent situation and you might need to physically take the person to the appointment. In Australia we are lucky that many of our GPs have a good understanding of mental health issues.

If you or someone you know needs assistance, call Lifeline's 24-hour hotline on 13 11 14 to talk with a trained volunteer telephone counsellor (www.lifeline.org.au).

Finally, of course there's a chance that someone you're trying to care for might lie to you or mislead you about their suicidal thoughts and intentions. This is tragic, but ultimately their choice. Remember: you can't be expected to mind read and you can't control whether or not someone tells you the truth.

[9] **LIFE** | mindingmycorner.au

FIGHTING fatigue

There's nothing quite like fatigue – the feeling of bone tiredness that makes day-to-day tasks seem like major life hurdles.

So how can you tell if you're a just bit tired, or really fatigued? According to Safe Work Australia's *Guide for managing the risk of fatigue at work*, the following signs are a good indication: excessive yawning or falling asleep; short-term memory problems and an inability to concentrate; reduced capacity to communicate; impaired decision-making and judgment; reduced hand-eye coordination or slow reflexes; repeatedly arriving late for work; or increased rates of unplanned absence.

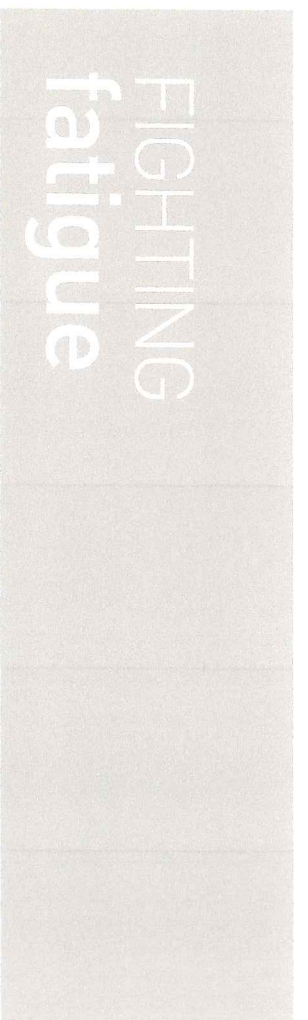
You might also experience symptoms not so obvious to others, including: feeling drowsy; headaches; dizziness; difficulty concentrating; blurred vision or impaired visual perception; or needing extended sleep during days off work.

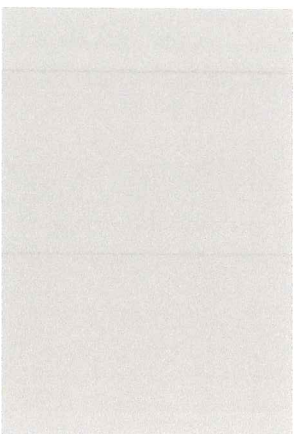
Sleeping problems and fatigue can be caused by lots of things – some relating to work and others not. These can include: medical conditions; alcohol or drug use; prescription

medications; grief; depression, anxiety or stress; shift work and long shifts; repetitious work or repeated long days including driving to and from your worksite.

Often you can't control your work hours or the work conditions that might add to tiredness, but you can influence your amount and quality of sleep. If you're often sleep deprived, try these:

- ▶ **Identify any major lifestyle factors** and consult your GP if needed.
- ▶ **Avoid napping during the day** (or night if you do shift work).
- ▶ **Limit caffeine after 3pm** (or halfway through your shift if you're on nights).
- ▶ **Ensure your bed is comfortable** and your bedroom is dark (use blackout curtains during the day). Use ear plugs and an eye mask if it's still too light.
- ▶ **Develop a bedtime routine:** warm shower, hot milk or herbal tea and a quick read (nothing too interesting).
- ▶ **Maintain the room temperature** between 18 and 24°C.
- ▶ **Avoid alcohol, cigarettes** and screen time (mobile phones, computers) before bedtime.





► **Eat a balanced diet** and exercise regularly, but not in the couple of hours before sleep.

Most adults need around seven to eight hours of sleep per night for good health and wellbeing. If you're working long hours or shift work and accumulate a 'sleep debt' of 10 or more hours over the course of a week, sleep experts suggest adding three to four hours of extra sleep over the weekend followed by an extra one to two hours per night for the following week.

And on a final note, mining and quarrying families often say that a big fatigue concern relates to loved ones driving home at the end of a DIDO roster or long shift. Companies generally issue their own directives on this for the safety of workers, but it's worth reinforcing that nothing is as important as getting home safely.

Government road safety websites urge us not to get behind the wheel when we're tired; not to drive when we're normally asleep; to take 10-minute breaks every two hours; and get plenty of fresh air.

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LIFE | mining | message

SURVIVING IN A TOUGH working environment

Ever been at work and heard the term 'toughen up princess'? Sadly, it's pretty common in male-dominated industries such as mining and quarrying.

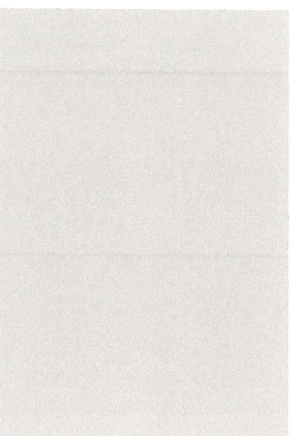
The tough attitude might be funny if it didn't deter people who are struggling from reaching out to workmates, and if it wasn't symptomatic of workplace environments that are often made more difficult by factors such as long hours, harsh conditions and contract staff trying to fit in with company workers.

That said, it's important to note that mining and quarrying workers don't necessarily need to be any more resilient than workers in other industries. Lots of workplaces are tough. However, if you're FIFO/DIDO and not heading home each night to debrief and re-group (or even if you're just not a great communicator) things can sometimes get you down a little more than normal. If you want to build your general resilience, consider these six key factors...

► **Work out your values:** We all have them, but some of us don't stop to think what they are. Identifying your core values will help you to make positive decisions and guide your behaviour when the going gets tough. Start by listing all the people you have ever admired (real people as well as fictional characters from movies, books) and name the specific characteristics you admire. Examples are compassionate, assertive, strong, intelligent, innovative and calm. Refer to your values when facing a tough time professionally or personally.

► **Set goals:** Goals keep you moving forward. Short-term, medium-term and long-term goals help to keep your mind occupied with problem-solving at challenging times. Enlisting the support of a trusted manager, supervisor, workmate or friend in setting and reaching goals can also help.

► **Adjust your thinking style:** Believe it or not, this a skill that can be learnt. Thinking well is not just about thinking 'happy thoughts,' but about realising you have control over what you think about, and how you think about it. A good thinking style



includes positive problem-solving skills, and a generally optimistic view of the workplace and your position in it. When working in a tough or tricky environment it's very important not to fall into unhelpful thinking patterns. Common thinking traps are magnifying (blowing a problem out of proportion), personalising (making the problem all about you) and over-generalising.

➤ **Stay healthy:** Physical health is important for any career, and especially in industries like mining and quarrying, which can be more physically demanding and located in harsher environments.

If you or someone you know needs assistance, call Lifeline's 24-hour hotline on 13 11 14 to talk with a trained volunteer telephone counsellor (www.lifeline.org.au).

➤ **Keep your emotions in check:** Emotional regulation is about recognising your feelings (or emotions) but not being swept away by them. Basically it means recognising that you are angry, upset or excited, but keeping these feelings in check so they don't feel overwhelming. Knowing yourself is important for emotional regulation. For example, know what situations are likely to bring up strong emotions for you.

➤ **Control your impulses:** This is like emotional regulation, but refers to behaviour, not feelings. Good impulse control means that you are able to think and feel strongly about something, but keep your behaviours in check. It's not just about keeping your cool when you feel angry, but also about being able to act assertively and confidently even when you don't feel confident.

HELPING PREVENT suicide in Australia

Suicide is the leading cause of death for Australians between the ages of 15 and 44.

In 2012, 2535 Australians died by suicide, more than the number of people killed in motor vehicle accidents over the same period. That is an average of seven Australians taking their life each day. It is thought that for every death by suicide another 30 people attempt to take their lives.

There is no simple explanation why people take their life. The causes appear to be a complex mix of life events, social, geographical, cultural, family and socio-economic factors, combined with mental and physical health factors, levels of family and social connection and the ability to manage life events and bounce back from adversity.

There are a number of protective and risk factors which may influence whether someone is likely to be suicidal. Protective and risk factors are often at opposite ends of the same continuum. People who attempt suicide usually have many risk factors and few protective factors.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Protective factors reduce the likelihood of suicidal behaviour and work to improve a person's ability to cope with difficult circumstances.

Protective factors include:

- supportive relationships with family and friends
- mental health
- physical health
- financial stability and/or security
- social connectedness through church participation or community organisations
- a sense of belonging and purpose

RISK FACTORS

Risk factors are sometimes called vulnerability factors because they increase the likelihood of suicidal behaviour. Risk factors include:

- alcohol or other substance abuse
- previous suicide attempt
- family history of suicide
- mental health problems
- gender: male
- family breakdown
- social or geographical isolation
- financial stress
- chronic illness
- bereavement





THE WESLEY LIFEFORCE

SERVICE FINDER

Wesley LifeForce has developed a responsive website that provides fast and reliable access to suicide prevention, crisis support and mental health services from any location in Australia. The Wesley LifeForce service finder is:

- ▶ accessible via computer or mobile device
- ▶ fast, providing reliable access to suicide prevention and crisis support services
- ▶ readily available to anyone, anytime, anywhere

Suicide prevention services are listed by state and region and are easily accessed by entering a postcode or town/city. Your location can also be identified through your phone or device.

To open the application on your computer or device's browser visit: www.wesleymission.org.au/wesleylifeforce/reservicefinder

If you or someone you know needs assistance, call Lifeline's 24-hour hotline on 13 11 14 to talk with a trained volunteer telephone counsellor (www.lifeline.org.au).

SUICIDE IN THE MINING INDUSTRY

In January 2013 Dr Samara McPhedran, Senior Research Fellow at the Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention (AISRAP), wrote:

"There are no solid, up-to-date statistics on suicide among fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) or drive-in, drive-out (DIDO) workers and their families, or within specific communities that have a high number of FIFO/DIDO workers. Despite this, based on what we know about risk factors for suicide, it's fair to say that FIFO/DIDO work has the potential to create stresses and challenges that may exceed some individuals' coping abilities."

ASSISTANCE FOR PEOPLE AT RISK OF SUICIDE

Wesley Mission has been a leader in the suicide prevention field for many years, establishing the Lifeline movement and Wesley LifeForce.

Established in 1995 as a response to the growing number of suicides in Australia, Wesley LifeForce provides suicide prevention services that educate and empower local communities, supporting people most at risk.

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SETTING SHARED GOALS and working together

All good relationships are based on team work. In mining and quarrying, when the hours are long or you work away, it's more important than ever for couples to develop a team plan with shared goals. If times ever get tough, these goals can be your focus.

Think about what you both want to achieve in the short, medium and long term, both personally and professionally. Some couples set a medium-term goal of budgeting for a holiday, together with a longer-term goal of saving to buy a home or investment property and setting themselves up financially. (You'll find more on money in the next chapter.) Other couples plan for a family, or set a goal of achieving further education and training or reaching a certain management level.

When it comes to setting goals, remember to keep them SMART (that's short for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timed). It's not SMART to say "we want to go on holiday" but it is SMART to say "we will go to New Zealand for two weeks next November". Likewise, it's not SMART to say you want to lose weight, but it is SMART to say "I'm going to exercise four times a week and eat less takeaway food to lose 3kg by the end of the year".

Here are some other quick tips to ensure you're a united team:

- ▶ **Take the time to understand how your other half lives.** This is especially important if you work away or in an environment that's completely foreign to your partner. Some mining and quarrying workers take photos or short videos on their phones of workmates, the machinery and work life. Lots of little kids think their FIFO Dad or Mum works on a plane, because that's where they go to work. If you put them in the picture, it will give you more to talk about and make you all feel more connected.

- ▶ **Remember that we all have different ways of dealing with difficult situations.** Some people need as much contact as possible, others prefer to withdraw when they're feeling overworked or a bit low. This can be challenging when all you have is phone contact. So if your partner seems distant and unwilling to remain on the phone sometimes, try not to take

MAKING your money work

it personally. And if you're the partner who doesn't want to talk, explain why in a loving way.

➤ FIFO and DIDO are becoming increasingly common in Australian mining and resources, but some friends and family might still find it a little weird – and even question your judgment. Comments like "I couldn't do that to my kids" can leave you feeling crappy and alone, but they're generally not about you. They're about a general lack of understanding on the realities of life in mining and resources (including the fact that many rosters give you blocks of quality time to spend with your children). So take a deep breath and explain why a FIFO/DIDO roster is the best option for your family right now. Let them know that although this lifestyle is the 'right choice, you still need their love and support.

clear on why you are working away, seek out strong support networks and mentors and stay focussed on the positives.

➤ **Above all, regularly reassess how you're all coping.** Be positive and proactive and remember that nothing matters more than the people you love.

We often assume our partner shares our views about money. Often this isn't the case, and as a result money can become a major cause of anger and frustration.

One of the first steps in reducing arguments about money is to think about your own beliefs and behaviours. It's surprisingly simple and yet not many people do this. Think back on your history with money, and perhaps write down your thoughts.

Consider questions like: as a kid did I feel rich or poor? Where did I learn about money? Did I grow up in a house with a lot of money, just enough or no cash? How was money talked about in my home? Was money important to my parents? Next, think about how you approach money as an adult. Do your childhood experiences affect you now?

Ideally, you should ask your partner to do the same exercise, and then you should sit down and talk about it. Try starting the conversation by saying something like: "I've been thinking about why we argue over money, and trying to understand my share of what's going on." There is often a lot of blaming and criticising in

arguments about money, and this exercise can start to shift that pattern and encourage some understanding and compassion for each other.

Try these ideas too:

➤ **Set shared financial goals**, and make sure they're SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timed). For example "Let's save \$20,000 towards a home loan by the end of next year" is more SMART than "Let's save for a house".

➤ **Make a point of knowing where your money goes.** If you don't help with the grocery shopping or look after the household bills, you can develop an unrealistic view of how much it costs to run a family home, and underestimate basic living costs. Try doing the weekly shopping with a list prepared by the usual household shopper. This simple exercise can be very powerful for some couples.

➤ **Often the person paying the day-to-day bills tries to cover up or avoid discussing how much things cost,**

➤ **While we're on the topic of unfair criticism, mums working away**

can also cop flak for not assuming the 'traditional' role of primary carer for the children. There is no one-size-fits-all rule when it comes to families these days – you've got to do what works best for your little team. Just be very

SIMPLE WAYS to stay connected

for fear of an argument. This does not help in the long term. It's more effective to be upfront about what is being spent when and where.

➤ **Go over your bank accounts for the past three to six months** and record everything you have spent and what you've spent it on (schooling, gifts, power bills, insurance, petrol). You can do this individually or together as a couple. This exercise is primarily to collect information, but it can also lead to good reductions in spending.

➤ **Be clear about what you see as important in life** and be willing to have difficult conversations with your partner. For some people, a really nice car is essential, while their partner cannot see the point. Others are committed to private schools for their children, while their partner believes the public system is just fine.

➤ **Always remember this basic fact:** you must earn more than you spend to get ahead as a couple. Be brave and go over your family income and expenses and see what the numbers are. If you can't see a way forward on your own, perhaps ask around for recommendations on a respected financial planner.

➤ **For free advice on setting up a household budget** and tracking your spending, visit the Federal Government website <https://www.moneysmart.gov.au/managing-your-money>

Unfortunately, some couples seem unable to stop arguing about money – in fact, they can't even talk about it. If this is you, it's worth considering relationship counselling sooner rather than later.

When two busy people have multiple commitments and competing priorities, it's very easy to let your relationship slide to the bottom of the 'to do' list. Here are some simple strategies to stay connected.

➤ **Be positive and work as a team.** Plan to stay together and live with the working assumption you can get through whatever life throws at the two of you.

➤ **Watch how you think about your partner.** It's easy to pay attention to, and mentally 'stew' on all the little annoying things your partner does. Over time this makes them seem more important than they really are, and can lead to a loss of perspective about what is important to you as a couple and a family. Next time your partner talks with food in her mouth or leaves his shoes in the hallway, tell them it's annoying before choosing not to think about it again.

➤ **Pay attention to the things your partner does that you appreciate.** Tell your partner what you like about them on a regular basis.

➤ **Give your partner the benefit of the doubt.** It's often noted in relationship counselling that couples automatically assume the worst about their partner's intentions. An example is getting home at night to a dark house, and immediately assuming your partner purposefully didn't put the light on for you. It's quite likely they just forgot to do it.

➤ **See issues or problems as shared.** Use lots of 'we' rather than 'you' or 'I'. Instead of saying "What are YOU going to do about this problem?" try asking, "What can WE do about this problem?"

➤ **Be brave and share your thoughts,** feelings, hopes, dreams and fears with your partner.

➤ **Listen to your partner's thoughts,** feelings, hopes, dreams and fears, too. This takes as much courage as sharing your own.

➤ **Try to learn more about your partner every day.** Stay curious about daily issues, as well as their long-term hopes and fears (these can change over time, as can preferences for food and music).

➤ **Look after yourself,** physically and emotionally.

Sharing time AND AVOIDING CONFLICT

At Mining Family Matters, we're often contacted by couples who are sick of fighting about how they spend their time together during precious days off from the quarry or mine site.

➤ **Express affection to your partner,** physically and verbally (daily if you can). Even something as simple as a text that says "I hope you have a great day".

➤ **Work together towards shared goals.** Examples are buying a house or saving for a holiday.

➤ **Foster shared interests (no, not just the children!).** These provide a sense of intimacy, as well as something to talk about. Examples include sport, reading, cooking, gardening, renovating and watching a TV series.

➤ **Know each other's lives.** Keep a diary of important dates. Happy couples make a point of connecting often about the 'small things', like texting before your partner's big meeting or event.

➤ **Be open to getting outside help to ease pressure on the relationship.** For example, if you keep arguing about money, see a financial adviser for non-biased help with your budget. See page 18 for more help on this.

➤ **Learn your partner's love language.** Some people feel most loved when their partner buys them a little gift, or makes them dinner, or hugs them. Do you know when your partner

feels most loved by you? Read Gary Chapman's *The Five Love Languages* for more details.

➤ **Use technology to connect when you're apart.** When texting, keep the messages simple and clear: "I'm thinking of you"; "I love you"; "I'm missing you". Don't use texts to tell your partner information you should say in an actual conversation.

➤ **Prioritise time together.** Some couples love 'date nights'. Others find them too forced, or they don't have the money or child-minding resources to go on regular 'dates'. If this is you, spend time together in other ways: watch a movie, cook together or go for a drive.

➤ **Have fun together.** Watch funny movies, play games and look for ways to make your partner laugh.

➤ **"Be the change you want to see."** Rather than spending time and energy thinking about how you want others to change, focus that time and energy on making positive changes in your own life.

Should these days be dedicated solely to partners and children? What about friends and wider family?

Generally, there are two issues at play with these conflicts: the first is lack of communication; the second is differing priorities. And the result is dissatisfaction and/or resentment.

The first thing you should do when any major issue arises is discuss 'the problem' as a symptom of the lifestyle, rather than as a relationship problem. By seeing problems as outside of your relationship, you can tackle them together as a team instead of getting caught up on the idea that there is 'something wrong' with your relationship or either one of you.

For example, when one of you is getting irritated because the other is forever ducking to a friend's house, or extended family is always turning up during your precious days together, try asking yourselves: "What can WE

do about this problem of how time is spent?" Options might include agreeing on (and sticking to) a set number of nights that will be spent together versus socialising together or apart.

Remember, even in the most perfect relationships, there will always be times when one partner does not meet the other's expectations. That's life, and it shouldn't be a problem so long as both parties are prepared to talk things through.

Another important element of resolving conflict in your relationship is to identify your individual priorities. Here's how!

Separately, you both need to think about the different areas of your life and rate the importance and satisfaction in that area. The ratings are out of 5, with 1 being 'not at all important/satisfied' and 5 being 'very important/satisfied'.

Here's an example for the area of work/career. How important is your work/career to you?

1 2 3 4 5
(circle the appropriate number)

Next have a think about how satisfied you are in that area of your life, with 1 indicating 'very dissatisfied' and 5 indicating 'very satisfied':

1 2 3 4 5
(circle the appropriate number)

Do your ratings match? It's great if importance and satisfaction are both at the 5 end of the scale. It's not so good if importance is high and satisfaction is low.

Repeat this exercise for the following areas: intimate relationships; parenting; friendships/socialising; education/learning; parents/siblings; finances; health; spirituality/religion; fitness/sports; community life (volunteering etc).

Are there some areas of your life where the importance is high but satisfaction is low? Ask yourself "what would it take to move my level of satisfaction up one number?" (from 3 to 4, for example).

Now have a look at your partner's sheet – without being judgmental! If it's done right, the exercise will highlight shared goals, shed light on why arguments might be happening, and open up communication about each person's struggle to balance all the important things in their life.

You shouldn't stress if the same importance isn't put on each of the areas – it would be unusual for couples to totally agree, and agreement is not necessary for a successful partnership. However, any discrepancies should shed light on why disagreements keep happening. For example, if family is 'not at all important' to you, you're likely to feel annoyed if your partner spends hours on the phone to his/her family. Once you realise that family is 'very important' to your partner, you might be able to have a quiet word with yourself when she/he is next on the phone to family and you're getting irritated.

Successful couples respect each other's goals and priorities and support each other to do better in the areas of importance. This is not always easy, because priorities compete and time is limited. As ever, compromise is vital.

RAISING resilient children

Good parents encourage problem-solving, optimism, resilience and happiness in their children.

It's impossible (and probably unhelpful in the long run) for parents to fix all problems in their children's lives. It is painful, though, to see your child distressed about something that cannot easily be 'made better'. Parental separation, friendship problems, distance between family members or the loss of a loved one or pet are the sorts of things that cause real distress. And they can't be easily fixed.

When parents start thinking they can't 'make it all better', they often become overwhelmed and anxious themselves. However, if the focus is taken off *fixing* the problem and moved to *supporting the child to cope*, there's actually a lot parents can do.

Coping well (for adults as well as children) does not require positive feelings about the situation. Take the example of a parent who works away or does long hours: it is quite normal for children to feel upset, angry and disappointed if parents miss events or can't be home at mealtimes. Children

should be encouraged to identify and express their feelings in appropriate ways (being angry is ok, hitting people is not!)

These feelings do not need to be *fixed* – rather the child can be encouraged to think through what might make the situation easier to cope with. Something like this: "I know you're disappointed that I can't come to sports day. I wish I could come too. Is there something we could do to make it a little easier?" Examples might include a relative or friend coming along, recording the event to watch later or wearing something of yours so that it feels like you are close by. Kids are amazing at coming up with practical suggestions, and these should be encouraged. Suggest some of your own ideas as well.

Some children (like some adults) might need a little more help than others. This is largely due to temperament, as some people just do seem to feel things more deeply and have more trouble shifting their thinking.

Generally speaking, you can help your children to develop good coping strategies in the following ways:

PARENTING on the same page

Mums and dads all over the world have disagreements about rules and discipline for their children. It is normal for one parent to be stricter than the other, for one to think the other is 'too tough' or 'too soft', and for both to think their way is the best way.

When one partner works away or does long hours, these normal disagreements about discipline can become significant family issues.

For some people, this can take the fun out of parenting and even make coming home stressful.

Couples most often disagree in three key areas: expectations, the rules and discipline.

Expectations refer to what is expected of the child. Day-to-day expectations relate to things like manners, toileting and sleep. Broader expectations relate to things like schooling, success and relationships (with friends and family).

The rules relate to what sorts of behaviours are unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

Discipline refers to how these expectations and rules are managed. It's not just about punishment after bad behaviour, but also encompasses clear rules, praise and encouragement, planned ignoring and consequences.

Active parenting involves both parents working together to reach a point of agreement or common ground about each of the three areas. It won't always be easy. And don't worry if you don't reach a point of total agreement. It's not necessary, or even desirable for you and your partner to parent in exactly the same way. It is the basic underlying principles that matter.

Here are some practical ideas:

➤ **Take the time to have a think about the three areas of parenting** - expectations, the rules and discipline. In what areas do you think you and your partner agree? What areas do you disagree? Can you think of reasons why you might disagree about this particular area? (Reflecting on your own upbringing and life experiences as well as those of your partner can help.)

➤ **Make a time to discuss parenting with your partner.** Give your partner time to have a think about the areas on which you agree and disagree as well.

➤ **Demonstrate positive problem-solving in your own life** (and allow the kids to see it). If the kids see you trying to work through a problem in a logical manner, they are more likely to try the same strategies.

➤ **Allow feelings to be discussed and examined within the family,** but then move on and shift the focus. Feelings come and go all the time. Any given feeling does not last long unless we keep *thinking* about whatever generated the feeling in the first place. It's ok to say "what might make you feel a bit better now" to take the focus off the feeling and shift it onto thoughts and/or actions. Kids are actually quite good at this - they generally don't 'over-analyse' issues like adults often do.

➤ **Encourage and support good self esteem:** This refers to the way we think and feel about ourselves. Good self esteem does not just come from being told how wonderful we are, but from experiencing the buzz of *doing* things well. Encouraging good self esteem means supporting kids to develop age-appropriate skills, talents and interests that they can feel good about. Skills can be as simple as tying shoelaces, running,

skipping, unpacking the dishwasher or kicking and catching a ball.

➤ **Allow your kids to make use of available support.** Resilient kids will tend to do this naturally, be it at school, church, through sporting activities, their extended families or friends. Encouraging and supporting community involvement can be important in helping kids to cope.

➤ **Encourage and support the development of skills** such as relaxation and visualisation in your child's life. These are invaluable skills that will provide benefits for many years to come.

➤ **A healthy diet, adequate sleep and physical activity** are always important, but especially so at times of increased stress.

Further listening:

➤ *Relaxation And Meditation For Children*, a CD by Gillian Ross.

BE A GREAT PARENT to your teenager

Adolescence is confusing for kids at the best of times. They fluctuate between wanting to be emotionally close to their parents, and needing to be emotionally distant, and this can happen several times a day!

When one parent works long hours or travels away for work, this can complicate things even more, because your teenager can't choose when to be close and when to be distant. They might miss you desperately when you're away, but ignore you when you're home. The trick here is to watch your own thinking: ignore thoughts like "She doesn't even notice if I'm away or home", which are likely to have you pulling back. Instead, think "I am her parent, she loves me and I will be available to her". It might be tough, but it will help you to take things less personally.

There's no doubt that teenagers can seem pretty selfish. Everything is about them. To an extent they can't help it, as brain development at this age means they are not really inclined to bother about the feelings of others.

As a rule, if they want to hang out with you, they expect you to be available. But if you want to spend time with them, they might not be around.

It's important, then, to be clear about family expectations and rules, and not be too bothered if your teenager isn't

keen on participating. For example, you might have a rule that the teenager will watch a movie with the family at least once a week; will help out with certain jobs; and will cook breakfast for everyone on the weekend.

Some parents who work away for work extremely long hours feel guilty or sorry for their kids, and so expect less of them. Strangely enough, this can be bad for a child's self-esteem. Although they won't thank you for it now, encouraging and expecting your teenager to take part in family activities is not only good for them, it's great for setting up opportunities for communication.

Contrary to popular belief, most teenagers do want good relationships with their family members – they often just don't have great relationship skills. As the parent, you need to assume responsibility for the tone of the relationship with your teenager.

Create multiple opportunities for conversations. It's a mistake to think they will talk to you 'on demand' or if

➤ **Together, work towards reaching some common ground for your kids.** You might need some help coming up with plans and solutions for discipline. There are lots of books available – read the ideas, think about them, talk about them.

➤ **Create a list of family rules.** Depending on the age of your kids, involve them. Write them up and stick them to the fridge. Make it fun as well as practical (we know of one family that practises the moonwalk, as directed by the five-year-old daughter in the house) and re-visit your family rules at least every six months.

➤ **Remember the golden rule for families:** the rules apply all the time, whether you are home or not. Children thrive on consistency.

➤ **For FIFO families, try to communicate with your partner while you are away** so you know what the current issues of concern are. Catch up about 'what to expect' before coming home so you can hit the ground running with family rules and expectations. Be guided by your partner when you first return. Trust each other and give each other the benefit of the doubt.

Note: if you are separated, most of these tips can still be useful, though the discussions will obviously need to be with your ex-partner and/or current partner. When a child lives in two different houses, different rules can apply in each of the homes, though if they are too different this can be confusing and unsettling for the kids.

Further reading:

➤ www.parentingideas.com.au

FAMILY GUIDE TO BEING happy and healthy

something is bothering them. Try to be available as often as you can (as much as possible given your work commitments): make sure you're the one who drives them around, goes to their sports and helps out with their homework. Practise active listening (lots of eye contact, smiling and encouraging noises like 'aha').

Don't use work as an excuse for not knowing what's going on in your child's life. Keep a diary of important events and school activities, and call or text regularly so your teen knows that you are interested in what's going on. (Remember, "What did you buy for Sally's birthday present?" is likely to encourage a much longer answer than "How was your day?")

Expect good behaviour. They might miss you, but this is no excuse for poor decisions, being disrespectful or not doing their jobs. All feelings are fine, but certain behaviours are not. You can be angry and not hit someone; you can be sad and still go to school; you can be grumpy and still speak nicely to your sister.

Model positive thinking and problem-solving skills. If there's a problem, let your teenager see you work through it in a positive way. Also, encourage

positive relationships outside of your immediate household with relatives and friends' parents.

Importantly, try not to immediately judge what your teenager is telling you. For example, don't get angry if they tell you about something stupid they did at the weekend. You don't need to always agree, and of course you can comment on silly things that put them in danger, but choose your battles and aim to keep your teenager talking rather than shutting them down.

Finally, it's normal for teenagers to be critical of their parents. For some, this is part of creating their own identity. This criticism might extend to your choice of work. Kids have not yet had to face up to the realities of life and it's easy for them to be scornful about the decisions you have made, such as working away. It's quite possible that the criticism stems from their desire to have you at home, but whatever the case it's important that you don't take it too personally.

Further reading:

► *How to talk so kids will listen & listen so kids will talk*, by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish.

Lots of people think achieving a good work/life balance means spending less time at work. When that's impossible, you can still achieve a more balanced life by maximising the time you do get with your family.

We know it's hard, because long work hours can leave you feeling exhausted, but try to be as proactive as possible on days off. When they're older, your kids will remember the great times you shared – and not the amount of cash you forked out on them. There's no need to spend a fortune. Just spend time together.

Here are some easy ideas for keeping your family happy, healthy and connected:

Make the most of free attractions across Adelaide and SA. The cultural institutions on North Terrace in Adelaide (like the South Australian Museum, the Art Gallery of SA and the State Library of SA) all offer free entry.

Go bush: Nature Play SA is a new initiative aimed at getting South Australian kids to enjoy more unstructured play outdoors.

You can get a great little 'passport' online, suggesting 15 things kids should do before they're 12 (planting something and watching it grow, camping out under the stars, and catching a tadpole and releasing it). Get yourself a copy and show the kids how it's done. www.natureplaysa.org.au

If you've got teenagers and you're going through a phase where the family isn't quite connecting, take the emphasis off *talking* by spending quality time *doing things* like going to the movies, ten-pin bowling, playing tennis or bike riding. Organise a fun family project or go out with family friends to focus your minds on new things and give you fresh topics of discussion.

Every now and then, enjoy quality time with your partner (away from the kids). Swap babysitting duties with friends or call in the grandparents to ensure you get free time together to relax and reconnect. Simple ideas with minimal distractions (like a country drive and picnic) take little organising but offer a great chance to unwind and spend one-on-one time with your partner.

About us

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MAQOSHSC

The Mining and Quarrying Occupational Health and Safety Committee (MAQOSHSC) is the only organisation of its kind in the world – specifically funded by South Australia's mining and quarrying industry to make workplaces safer. With a history dating back to 1941, the committee works with mines and quarries to develop safety management systems, provide health and safety talks at toolbox meetings, conduct workplace inspections and health screenings and offer general guidance on legislative requirements and safety auditing.

www.maqohsc.sa.gov.au

Mining Family Matters

Mining Family Matters was launched by two Adelaide mums in 2010 with the aim of boosting the emotional resilience of families and workers and mining, oil and gas. Their award-winning, free website offers professional advice and practical strategies to overcome the challenges of working away, doing shift work or living in remote areas. Highlights include columns by psychologists and lifestyle experts, a free Q&A service with psychologist Angie Willcocks and career, financial and health advice.

www.miningfm.com.au

Wesley Mission

Wesley Mission has been a leader in suicide prevention for many years, establishing the Lifeline movement and Wesley LifeForce in response to the growing number of Australians taking their own lives. Established as a not-for-profit organisation in 1995, Wesley LifeForce delivers evidence-based training that focuses on educating people about suicide, challenging attitudes and teaching basic engagement and suicide intervention skills.

www.wesleymission.org.au

Other recommended resources

- ▶ Lifeline: 13 11 14
www.lifeline.org.au
- ▶ beyondblue: 1300 224 636
www.beyondblue.org.au
- ▶ MensLine: 1300 789 978
www.mensline.org.au
- ▶ Australian Drug Information Network: www.adin.com.au
- ▶ Relationships Australia: www.relationships.org.au

FURTHER RESOURCES | miningfm.com.au