



## “Should They Stay or Should They Go?”

### Tips for making work travel work for your family

by Ann M. Skoczenski, PhD, Program Manager, Office for Women's Careers

Balancing the need for work travel and the needs of your family can be one of the toughest issues for early career faculty. Attending and presenting your work at conferences is an important way to establish your national and international reputation, but the most critical years for work travel often coincide with the years when family obligations (from small children or elderly parents) are highest.

The Center for Faculty Development supports faculty at this career stage by offering the *Caring for Dependents (CFD) Travel Awards*. Each CFD travel award is intended to help defray up to a maximum of \$500 in additional care costs, (e.g., dependent travel, extended day care, extended elder care, caregiver travel) while the faculty member is traveling to an academic/society meeting which is directly related to his/her academic advancement. Since 2013, forty-seven CFD travel awards have been given to MGH faculty at the Instructor or Assistant Professor rank.

In an effort to share some advice from our CFD travel awardees with you, The Office for Women's Careers recently surveyed them, to learn some tips on making work travel easier on families. Twenty-one awardees responded to the survey....please see below for results.

#### Taking your children/dependents along for work travel

Seventy-six percent (16) respondents had taken dependents with them for work travel in the past two years, and of these, 94% would do it again. The advantages of traveling with dependents in tow included:

- Not missing out on family time, or young children's milestones
- Avoid interrupting the breastfeeding experience
- Children learn and benefit from travel experiences
- Less worry about their care/welfare

There are disadvantages of this travel arrangement, including:

- More difficult to attend networking/evening events at the conference
- Competition between work and family time can be exacerbated
- Can be more expensive than leaving children at home

### **Leaving children/dependents at home while you travel for work**

Eighty percent of respondents (17) had traveled for work while leaving dependents at home within the past two years, and 88% of these would do it again. The main advantages of leaving dependents at home were:

- Easier to focus on your presentation and the whole meeting
- Getting a good night's sleep and having relaxed meals and social/networking interactions
- Dependents can keep their routines at home

Disadvantages of leaving dependents at home included:

- Feeling compelled to leave the conference early or make travel as short as possible
- Guilt and anxiety of being away; missing young children; worrying about emergencies arising
- Can be very expensive to arrange extra care, especially if you are a single parent

### **Tips to help you balance work travel and dependent care**

- If possible, having a relative or other known caregiver at the place you are traveling to can help you get the most out of the conference.
- “I found it very helpful to fly together with close colleagues who are also parents and can understand.”
- “Plan ahead, leave contact numbers and emergency plans.”
- Plan ahead to get the most out of the meeting in the shortest amount of time.
- Share childcare at the meeting with other parents. This can make it more fun for the children and less expensive.
- FaceTime or Skype can help families stay connected during travel, though some parents find this may be hard for some children.
- “Put your kids first, work will work out. When you are happy traveling, you will get more out of your required work.”
- Spouses in the same field sometimes have an easier time bringing the kids to conferences and splitting the networking time. But at busier meetings, you must hire a caregiver at the meeting site.
- “While nursing/pumping, all hotels will provide a mini fridge free of charge if you request one for ‘medical necessity.’”
- “Communicate with your partner about your needs (as an employee and as a parent). Good communication makes all the difference when balancing career/family and schedules.”

- “Take some time while at the conference to do something nice for yourself! Even just one hour of uninterrupted relaxation can be hugely rejuvenating – go to restaurants you wouldn’t be able to go to with young kids in tow!”
- “I prefer to leave kids at home if you’re going to be busy and try to really condense your conference trip to the fewest number of days possible.”
- “It’s not just children, but we have care of elderly as well. Traveling keeps elderly physically active and gives them emotional well-being. I am so grateful to the CFD award in helping my father come with me to see me receive a national recognition.”
- “Take them if you can/want, there’s great memories that come from that. They will be okay without you if they stay back – and you will be able to focus.”

In summary, there is no single best way to handle work travel when you are responsible for children or elderly relatives. We hope this information will help you make the best decision for your career and family, and get the most out of your work travel.

**Resources:**

For more information on the Center for Faculty Development’s *Caring for Dependents Travel Awards*, please visit:

<http://www2.massgeneral.org/facultydevelopment/cfd/cfd-travel-award.html>