



Guilt trip?

Ease the pain of separation

By Christa Melnyk Hines

FOR THE PARENT who travels for business, nothing feeds guilt like a long goodbye with a sobbing child wrapped around his or her leg. Traveling away from the comforts and relative predictability of home can be stressful enough, but factor in a child's anxiety and life "up in the air" can seem downright painful.

"When we feel guilty, our stress level tends to go up. And when our stress level is high, we tend to be more short-tempered with our children, have problems sleeping, have problems focusing. None of that is good for you or your children," says Costco member Dr. Elizabeth Lombardo, a psychologist, physical therapist and author in Lake Forest, Illinois.

Road warrior David Kolner, a senior vice president for Virtuoso, a corporate travel agency, has traveled to five continents in the last two years. The Seattle resident says his sons, ages 4 and 5, struggle with his absences in varying degrees.

"This morning my older son tried to hide my suitcase and said he wanted to talk to my boss to 'know why Papa has to go on this trip,'" says Kolner, a Costco member.

Rather than stewing in guilt, parents can take creative steps to ease the sting of separation.

Prepare for departure

Surprising your child with a trip can fuel anxiety. "Let your child know before you leave and when you are coming home," Lombardo says.

Point out your destination on a map and use a calendar to mark the days you will be

away. For younger children, create a paper chain. They can cut a ring off the chain for each day you're away, with the last ring marking your return.

Costco member Haisley Smith, director of marketing for Brownell Travel and a mom of two, ages 7 and 6 months, travels internationally from her home in Birmingham, Alabama, throughout the year. A few nights before a

Focus on quality time

- Plan a movie or game night.
- Schedule a family outing.
- Take your kids to breakfast.
- Look through your kids' school work together.
- Work on a project together, such as a puzzle or model car.

trip, she and her oldest daughter browse YouTube videos of her destination and her hotel. "We'll also pick out outfits for her in advance because she doesn't want to leave that to her daddy!"

Video messaging

Sharron Saunders, mom of two, ages 4 and 6, and a public relations professional with Oakwood Worldwide in Gaithersburg,

Maryland, travels a week each month. The Costco member documents her travels through short videos and emails them to her kids.

"For example, I went to Seattle, where I took a video from the top of the Space Needle," she says. "They love it so much I often catch them playing the videos when I am home again."

Ask your family to do the same for you, especially if you will miss an important event such as your child's soccer match or choir performance. "You and your child can relive it when you return," Lombardo says.

Souvenirs and gifts

Many parents bring souvenirs home to give their kids a taste of their travels. Smith's daughter recently shared Turkish delight from Istanbul with her classmates during show-and-tell.

"This gives her something to look forward to and also adds an educational component," Smith says. "During times of stress and guilt, I remember how much she gains, even if she's not with me."

Costco member Vickie Evans, a mom of two, ages 7 and 10, is often on the road for her speaking and training business, Red Cape Company in Austin, Texas. She purchases small stuffed animals for each of her sons at the beginning of her trip and takes pictures of them at her hotel or buckled up in an airline seat.

"The gifts became more like characters on the trip than just a souvenir, which was more meaningful to them," she says.

Tech connect

Olathe, Kansas, resident Travis Allen, a Costco member and healthcare management consultant with Accenture, zigzags across the country every week. He says phone technology makes linking to his 6-year-old daughter easy and fun. They exchange texts on her iPod touch and talk using FaceTime.

"She likes to send me silly pictures and sometimes she'll text, 'I love you, Dad—Amelia,'" he says, smiling.

Happy homecomings

While his departures are sometimes bumpy for his kids, Kolner finds that down-playing his return makes leaving easier. "Instead we try and tie my return to a family event, like going out to dinner," he says. "Of course, my partner and kids are happy for me to take on all rituals on return—baths, park trips, bedtime stories—which is a fair trade-off!"

Costco member Christa Melnyk Hines is a freelance journalist and author. She and her road-warrior husband are the parents of two boys, ages 6 and 8.