

By Chen Ximeng

Raising children can be a challenge at the best times, but when long-distance parenting is part of the family dynamic it can become all the more difficult. The reality for some expat parents in China is that not all have the chance to help their children with their homework, read them bedtime stories or tuck them into bed at night.

American Wesley Ingram can't help but miss his Chongqing-born wife and 4-year-old son each time he looks at their photos. Ingram, 35, lives in Beijing where he works as branch manager of Links Moving Beijing, a company providing relocation services.

The family lived together at their home in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, until 2012 when Ingram moved to Shanghai and his wife and son moved back to his home state of Arizona in the US. Ingram relocated earlier this year to Beijing, where he hopes his wife and son will come join him in 2015.

"My concern is always does my son have enough 'dad time' or is he receiving too much 'grandparents time,'" said Ingram, whose parents help raise his son.

The 15-hour time difference makes communication tough between both sides, who mainly use Skype to chat and contact one another.

"It is also very challenging to watch how much a young child can change in a short period of time," said Ingram. "Doing that from a distance is tough."

Currently, the family is enjoying a brief reunion in Beijing over the summer, but are contemplating moving permanently to the capital in 2015.

"I want to reunite the family out here, although we have much anxiety over the relocation," explained Ingram.

As an accredited member of the British Association for Counseling & Psychotherapy (BACP), Naomi Taylor has dealt with many families with parents separated by long distances.

"There are other families who have come to China together and then split locations due to family illnesses, or further studies. It can be hard to strike a balance between meeting the needs and expectations of family members, and one's job in China," said Taylor, a Beijing-based counselor.

Barbara Kiao, an Australian licensed clinical counselor in Shanghai, has also come across many similar cases.

"Long-distance parenting can have far-reaching consequences for children regarding their adjustment and mental health," said Kiao.

"Time together must always be scheduled in advance, which can leave little chance for spontaneous moments of closeness and connectedness," said Kiao. "Besides, children could lose out on having both parents in their day-to-day activities. Some could even feel abandoned by the parent who is not with them."

Kiao believes the secret to effective long-dis-

tance parenting is strong, regular communication and setting goals for the next planned trip home or to China.

"If the absent parent keeps a manageable level of input on day-to-day activities, it can keep the closeness and strengthen the connection," added Taylor, suggesting parents help their children with homework over Skype to stay a part of their lives.

But Ingram said the most important part of long-distance parenting is treasuring every moment together when reunited. "We spend almost all vacations together, which has been good for our son's growth," he said. "During spring or winter holidays we try to go to other locations, such as the Rocky Mountains [in Colorado, US] for a week or two."

A father or mother working away from home can make the raising of a child a more challenging task. Photo: IC



RoundUp

Dorm room blitz

College dorm rooms have become "hot property" during these summer months, as vacationing college students have rented out their campus accommodation, the Legal Mirror reported.

The cheap rent on campus dorms meet the demands of many students who have come to Beijing for summer internships or training classes. Wang Ying, a student from Sichuan Province rented a bed at a university in Haidian district for 500 yuan (\$80) per month,

which is much lower than the average rental of 5,000 yuan per month in an apartment.

Despite colleges prohibiting students from renting dorms to people outside their university, such activity still exists. A dorm manager at the Beijing Language and Culture University said the university would enhance the inspection of dorms so as to maintain dorm security.

Thief steals heart and more

Instead of finding the love of her life, a woman surnamed

Zhou, 50, found herself robbed and stranded as her date made a getaway via bicycle, the Beijing Times reported.

Zhou said she met a man surnamed Hu at a dating party for seniors in May of this year. After Hu claimed he fell in love with Zhou at first sight, he asked her out saying that to show his sincerity he wanted to buy her some gold jewelry.

Next day during a bicycle trip, Hu waited for Zhou to get off his bike before pedaling away with Zhou's purse in the bicycle's basket, which con-

tained over 10,000 yuan, bank cards and her mobile phone. Hu has been arrested by police, who revealed that he has previously imprisoned for rape.

Stricter smoke regulations

Officials in Beijing have suggested that teachers and parents should be punished if students in elementary and middle school smoke, the Beijing Daily reported.

The draft of the cigarette control regulation in Beijing was reviewed in the 12th meeting of the Standing Committee

of Beijing Municipal People's Congress on July 26.

The committee members also suggested that tobacco products cannot be sold within 500 meters of any kindergarten, elementary or middle schools. Surveillance cameras should be installed in stores so regulators can monitor the selling of cigarettes.

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