

Raising children is something that all people share in common. However, we have different ideas about how to raise children, the role of parents, and how a career fits into it all. In the U.S. and Japan, having a career has become more important, and parents have delayed starting a family to pursue their careers. Both countries also share a cultural tradition of the mother being the primary caregiver to children, while the fathers are forced to work away from the home to provide. This, however, is changing in recent times.

In the January 15th article, Gender parity in parenting, published by NHK, Yuko Aizawa talks about how Environmental Minister Shinjiro Koizumi shocked Japan by saying he will take roughly 2 weeks off of work to help his wife when their child is born.

I would want to talk with my host family and learn how they feel about childcare. I would like to know how their experience was raising children. Was the host father able to take off work, or how did they adjust to their life as parents? I think, like most Japanese people, that they probably would not have been able to take leave, as it seems very surprising for men to do so. If they had no kids, what is their opinion on taking leave for child care? In the article, only 4% of Japanese politicians took time off for births, so I think that it must not be a popular idea in Japan for men to take leave.

I think that this conversation can highlight some cultural differences, and I would like to talk about my experiences with my father during his deployment. I was born when my father was deployed out of the country to help fight for the U.S during the Iraq War. My mother had to take care of me on her own during his deployment and it was difficult for her. When my father came back he was disappointed that he couldn't be there for my mother and me. He then decided to not deploy again when my brother was born. However, over the years my father did leave for months at a time for military and government work. As a child of a father who is in the military, it became normal for me to see him leave for weeks or months at a time. This is considered normal in my family and to many who have parents working in the military or the government.

I would like to tell my host family my father's story and ask them what they would do if they were in a situation like mine. Do they think that they would want to be there like my father did, or do they disagree with his decision, since his job was very important? I think that by talking about these decisions and issues with my host family, we can learn about each others' priorities and grow closer through our cultural differences.