

## **Dear Parents,**

Welcome to the Children & Deployment site. As you may know, military Families and their Soldier endure a tremendous deal of hardships during long deployments. Families must sacrifice their personal comfort and adjust to a new routine during a Soldier's absence, which often times is a difficult adjustment. Although deployments can be hard and stressful to overcome for parents, it is much more difficult and complex for children and youth.

The demands on children and youth can be complicated as they are greatly impacted by the disruption of a deployment. As a parent, it is in the best interest of the children to help them find ease and comfort during the coping and adjustment process.

This site is intended to provide parents with helpful resources that will allow children and youth to cope positively with deployment and their changing routine. The site will also offer appropriate strategies for educators to practice on children and youth who are adjusting to a new and upcoming deployment.

For additional Information call CYSS Deployment Specialist at 910-396-4481

### **IMAGINE STEPPING INTO YOUR CHILD'S WORLD AND SEEING THINGS FROM HIS OR HER POINT OF VIEW.**

Use the checklist below as a guide for involving children as you prepare to leave.

#### **AS A PARENT, I:**

- Let my children help me get ready for deployment.
- Let my children pick a special place where I will keep their pictures while I am away.
- Make plans to include my children in family goodbyes at my point of departure, if possible.
- Plan to write each child a letter and hide it in a special place to be found later.

#### **AS A FAMILY, WE:**

- Plan to cook and share a special meal together before I leave.
- Each share a memory that everyone can cherish.
- Plan to celebrate a family member's birthday early so that everyone is involved.
- Make plans for fun activities that we can do together when I return.
- Share a goodbye hug if I am on alert status, knowing that I may have to leave on short notice.

## **Useful Websites for Teachers, Counselors, Parents and Children**

Each child and parent grieves differently, and there is no right or wrong way or length of time to grieve.

[http://www.nctsn.org/nctsn\\_assets/pdfs/military\\_grief\\_educators.pdf](http://www.nctsn.org/nctsn_assets/pdfs/military_grief_educators.pdf)

Military Homefront: (From the Homepage, click on Troops and Families; click on Parenting; click on Healthy Parenting Initiative; click on Deployment Issues and various articles and resources are available for teachers, parents and children here).

<http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/>

MILITARY ONE SOURCE: information about deployment for all services.

User ID: military | Password: onesource

<http://www.militaryonesource.com/>

Department of Defense Educational Opportunities: (Parents and teachers click on Issues tab; kids can select their age from the tabs and read wonderful articles on deployment and other issues written just for their age range)

[www.militarystudent.org](http://www.militarystudent.org)

National Military Families Association: (choose Deployment and You)

[www.nmfa.org](http://www.nmfa.org)

ARMY: My Army Life Too: (click on managing deployment, then choose Operation READY)

<http://www.myarmylifetoo.com>

MILITARY CHILD COALITION: (For Parents, Teachers and Counselors and click on Deployment/Separation Tab at the top of the homepage)

[www.militarychild.org](http://www.militarychild.org)

The American Psychological Association: Featured Topics

<http://helping.apa.org/>

## **Strategies**

### *Strategies for helping children deal with deployment*

Deployments are a fact of life for military families. Children will all react differently to the separation in different ways. The following are some tips to assist parents.

- Remember that you are the “expert” on your child. You know what is normal behavior for her/him and will be the best one to notice when things are out of sync.
- Reassure your children often that they are loved by those at home and by their deployed parent. Give lots of hugs.

- As appropriate: Be honest with your children. Trying to hide things from them will only lead them to imagine the situation a lot worse than it really is.
- Understand your child's level of development. Know what is normal behavior for your child's age. Be aware of changes and seek assistance early.
- Listen to your child and help to clear up any misunderstandings they may have (Mom/Dad does get to eat and sleep even though their bed/refrigerator is at home!). Be with your child when watching/reading news so you can answer questions. In times of crisis, limit their exposure to media so that it doesn't increase their anxiety.
- Expect regression, changes and stress due to separation.
- Talk about your child's feelings and allow him or her to do the same. Accept those feelings even though they may be very different from your own.
- Encourage your child to talk. Let them share options, suggestions and solutions for problems. Encourage them to express anger verbally, not physically.
- Provide additional adult relationships for your children, which may include grandparents, neighbors, friends, teachers, religious leaders, coaches, scouts, etc.
- Inform your child's teachers/guidance counselors about the deployment so they are better able to provide assistance if necessary. Ask if there's a deployment group at school.
- Remember, a picture is worth a thousand words. Children learn their coping skills from those around them. How well you cope with the deployment will have a significant influence on how your children will react.
- Take care of yourself. You need to eat well, get sufficient rest and exercise, and spend time doing things you enjoy. The better you take care of yourself, the better you will be able to care for your children.

## **Stress**

### *Stress Reactions in Children*

Children are affected not only by a crisis itself, but also by their parent's reactions to the crisis. How the child reacts depends upon how secure their world was prior to the crisis, the nature of the crisis, and their ability to understand what happened. Although it's not possible to predict how each child will react, many children of similar ages have these common reactions.

#### Infant/Toddler (Birth-2 yrs)

- Agitated behavior-crying, thumbsucking
- Aggression- kicking, hitting, biting, throwing things
- Changes in bodily functions- eating, sleeping, elimination

#### Preschool (3-5 Yrs)

- Separation anxiety- clinging, refusing to sleep alone and wanting to be held constantly
- Sleep disturbances, nightmares
- Regression in toileting, self help skills
- Rigidity- unable to adapt easily to minor changes in routine
- Withdrawal
- Aggression- both verbal and physical
- Brief episodes of sadness
- Reenactment of traumatic event in play

### School Age (6-10/12 yrs)

- Difficulties concentrating
- Behavioral changes- the quiet become frantic; the energetic become lethargic
- Physical ailments- headaches, stomachaches, dizziness
- Lowered impulse control
- Increased dependence
- Decreased trust in adults
- Fantasies about happy ending to situation
- Use of play, art, music, or dance to express emotions instead of words

### Adolescent (10/12-18 yrs)

- Resentment of unfairness of situation
- Unrealistic expectations of self and others
- Frustration- producing rebellion
- Avoidance and denial
- Reluctance to trust or open self to others
- Physical ailments
- Eating/sleeping disorders
- Depression; despair about the future
- Lowered impulse control
- Drug/alcohol abuse
- Decision to take on adult role to create sense of control

## **Talking to Children about Military Deployment**

*Suggestions for helping your children cope:*

### **Provide**

Provide extra attention and care; there will be an increased need for physical closeness.

### **Discuss**

Discuss the situation. Children need factual information as well as the opportunity to talk about their feelings. They need to hear that what they're feeling is normal and expected, although it may be uncomfortable. Be prepared to talk about it many times.

### **Accept**

Accept children's expressions of anger and frustration. Help them recognize and name the emotions they are experiencing. Model healthy ways to express them.

### **Look**

Look to the future. Planning for upcoming events is a step toward recovery.

### **Know**

Know and utilize your resources. Help is available to those who ask.

- Talk to children on their level. When trying to explain complicated concepts to young children (such as what war is or why it might happen), use examples from children's books, stories, or even cartoons.
- When talking about these complex matters with older children, it sometimes helps to introduce the subject, just say a few things and then wait to see if the child has questions. Sometimes older kids don't want to know much or may need to mentally shield themselves from their fear and sadness. You know your child best. Try to 'read' her or his reaction to what you are saying and adjust your approach accordingly.
- Encourage children to talk about the situation and ask questions. However, if discussing it seems to upset your child too much, you may want to space out these discussions over time or be sure to follow them with something pleasurable, like playing a game, watching a favorite movie or reading a book together.
- Limit your child's access to TV and media coverage about the military situation, particularly if he or she seems to be having strong emotional or behavioral reactions.
- Pay close attention to your child's behavior, especially changes like withdrawal or aggression. Children often show depression differently than adults, and you should be vigilant for any signs of abrupt, intense or chronic mood swings.
- The person who is leaving should be realistic and honest about how long he or she may be gone. Be careful about making predictions that are overly optimistic.
- If you are the one who is being deployed, reassure your children that you will do anything you can to be safe, and let them know how you will be contacting them. Be careful about making promises about how often you'll be in contact if you aren't certain you can keep them.
- During this time, children often need much more adult attention and involvement. If you are being deployed, maximize your time with your child before leaving. If you are the one remaining at home, dedicate more time to being with your children.
- Notify child care providers and/or teachers of the situation. Educate them about possible behavior changes, and encourage them to contact you if they have concerns.