



## Support for Children Before, During and After the Deployment of a Parent

Below are a number of strategies that may be helpful in supporting your child before, during, and after the deployment of a parent.

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### Before Deployment

- Encourage the deploying parent to record a voice message of the child's favourite story.
  - Write letters for your child to open while the parent is away.
  - Explore a world map together to identify the location where the parent will be deployed.
  - Ask the deploying parent to prepare a sensory bag containing special items for the child(ren) to look at during their absence. This may include a piece of clothing with the parent's aftershave/perfume, a stone or pebble to hold, a photograph of the parent, or a small personal item.
  - **Storybook Waves:** This service enables a deployed parent to record a bedtime story for their child. The story is professionally edited, sound effects are added, and a personalised Storybook CD is sent to the child(ren). This service is free for Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel deployed away from home. More information is available at: <http://www.aggies.org.uk/storybook-waves>
  - **Huggable Heroes:** Schools may purchase a "Huggable Hero" for children whose parent is deployed. Further details can be found at <http://www.huggableheroes.co.uk/> - please contact the school if you would like one.
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### During Deployment

- Keep a written or virtual diary. Parents and older children may record events, thoughts, and feelings to be shared when the deployed parent returns. Children may also draw pictures or write simple words or sentences. Diaries can serve as a countdown to the homecoming.
- Take photographs of significant moments to share later.

- Count down to the parent’s return using a calendar, or fill a jar with marbles representing the number of days until the parent’s return, removing one marble each day.
  - Create or collect pictures of people showing different emotions. These may help younger children identify and express their own feelings.
  - Encourage children to write postcards describing important events or to draw pictures for the deployed parent.
  - Take part in a **Reading Force** activity by reading a book and completing shared activities: <https://www.readingforce.org.uk>
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### **After Deployment**

- Share diaries, photos, and other recorded memories together.
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### **Advice for Supporting Children with Parental Deployment**

*Adapted from:* <http://www.military.com/spouse/military-deployment/dealing-with-deployment/help-child-cope-with-parents-deployment.html>

Children may face difficulties adjusting to the absence of a parent. Some may not understand the reasons for the separation, while others may feel worried or upset. Continued communication and observation can help you understand how your child is coping.

### **Talking with Your Child About Deployment**

When discussing deployment:

- Reassure your child that the separation is not their fault. Young children may mistakenly believe the parent is leaving because of something they did.
- Explain where the parent will be and what they will be doing. Display a map and explore the location together. Learning about the country, customs, or language can help the child feel more connected.
- Provide clear, honest information in age-appropriate language.
- Reassure your child that their parent has not abandoned them. Explaining that the parent is “on assignment” or “at work” may help normalise the situation.
- Encourage your child to express their feelings and reassure them that emotions such as missing the parent or feeling lonely are normal.

- Help your child find activities that bring comfort, such as listening to a story recorded by the deployed parent or looking at family photos.
- Talk about the deployed parent often through anecdotes, memories, or simple references to things they enjoy.
- Remind your child frequently that the absent parent loves and misses them. Repetition is often reassuring.

Children may react to deployment in different ways. Some may test boundaries, while others may experience difficulty sleeping or increased feelings of loneliness. Monitor changes in behaviour and provide support as needed.

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### **Maintaining Routines**

Children benefit greatly from predictable routines during challenging periods such as deployment. Consistency provides a sense of security.

- Maintain consistent boundaries and expectations even when parenting alone.
  - Preserve daily and weekly routines wherever possible, and consider adding small rituals such as talking about the deployed parent at bedtime or looking at family photos together.
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### **Additional Strategies for Supporting Children**

- Involve your child in writing letters or emails or making small items to send to the deployed parent. Encourage the parent to send individual letters in return.
  - Use a visual countdown system such as a calendar or stickers, one for each day until the parent returns. Where return dates are uncertain or subject to change, you might create a paper chain adding one link per day, which can later be used as a welcome-home decoration.
  - Plan enjoyable activities or outings to lift your child's spirits, visiting relatives, going for a bike ride, or meeting with other families experiencing deployment.
  - Limit exposure to television coverage of military events, which may increase anxiety. If your child does watch such coverage, try to watch together to provide reassurance and context.
  - Ensure your child's teacher is aware of the deployment so they can offer appropriate support and understanding.
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## Useful Links and Resources

- RAF Deployment Support for Children: <https://www.raf-ff.org.uk/family-support/deployment/children-specific-support>
- Parental Absence Guide – Naval Families: <https://nff.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/6656-NFF-Parental-Absence-Guide-DI.pdf>
- Supporting Royal Navy and Royal Marines Families: <https://nff.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/PCCNaval-families-leafletfor-schools.pdf>

## Key Resources & Guides

- **Armed Forces Covenant:** Information on reducing disadvantages faced by service families.
- **Families Federations (RAF FF, NFF, Army):** Provide guidance, newsletters, deployment resources, and educational support.
- **GOV.UK:** Official information on childcare, education, and entitlements for service families.
- **The Royal British Legion:** Guidance for supporting service children in educational settings.

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## Feedback

We welcome your feedback. If you have suggestions for additional content or ideas to enhance this pack, please let us know so we can continue to improve the support available.



