

Deployment

Pack for families

Below are some ideas that you may find helpful to support your child before, during or after the deployment of a parent.

Before deployment

- Ask the deployed parent to record a voice recording of the child's favourite story onto a CD/iPad/computer.
- Write letters to the child to be opened whilst the parent is away.
- Look at a world map and find the place where the parent is going.
- Ask the deployed parent to leave a sensory bag of special items for your child(ren) to look at whilst the parent is deployed. It could include a piece of clothing which has been sprayed with the parent's aftershave/perfume, a stone/pebble for the child to hold, a photo of the deployed parent or a favourite object belonging to the parent.
- Storybook Waves: Storybook Waves provides facilities for a deployed parent to record a bedtime story for their child. The story will be edited, sound effects added and a personalised Storybook CD will be sent to the child(ren). It is free for Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel serving away from home. Please see <http://www.aggies.org.uk/storybook-waves> for more information.
- Huggable Heroes: When a parent is deployed, the school can purchase a Huggable Hero for the child(ren). Please see <http://www.huggableheroes.co.uk/> for more information and let us know at school if you would like one.

During deployment

- Fill in a diary or record a virtual diary. This could be used by parents and older children to record events or as an opportunity to offload thoughts and feelings. This could be shared when the deployed parent returns if you wish to. Children could draw

pictures and/or write words/sentences. The diaries can also be used as a countdown to the parent's return.

- Take photos of significant events to be shared
- Tick off the days until the parent returns on a calendar. Alternatively, fill a jar with marbles to represent the number of days until the deployed parent returns. Each day remove a marble from the jar.
- Cut out faces from magazines showing people displaying different emotions or draw faces showing different emotions. These could be used to help younger children identify and express their own emotions.
- Children could write about significant events on postcards or use them to draw pictures.
- Take part in a Reading force activity: Read a book and complete the activities together <https://www.readingforce.org.uk/>

After deployment

- Share the diaries and/or photos together

Advice

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

Tips for helping a child cope with the deployment of a parent:

Children may find it very difficult to adjust to the absence of a parent. Some children may not understand why a parent has to leave, while others may be afraid for their parent's safety. Some children may even be angry with a parent for leaving. It's important to keep talking to your child and watching how they are handling the separation.

Talking with a child about deployment

When talking to a child about a parent's deployment, you can

- Help your child understand that they have not done anything wrong. Young children may think a parent is leaving because of something they've done. Try to explain that serving in the military - and going away from time to time - is the parent's job, just as going to the factory or office every day is what other parents do for work.
- Talk about where their parent will be and what he or she will be doing. Post a map where the child can see it. Spend some time together learning about where the parent will be. If the deployed parent has gone to another country, learn something about its customs or language. Being familiar with and talking about the deployed parent's daily routines and getting a better picture of where he or she is can help your child cope with the separation.
- Be as honest and give as much information as possible. The child may have many questions about the military, and why the parent has to leave or whether he or she is safe. It's important to give your child as much information as possible in words that they will understand.
- Make sure the child doesn't feel like they have been abandoned. Telling the child that their parent is "on assignment" or "at work" may help them understand the separation and that this is a normal part of military life.
- Encourage your child to talk about their feelings. Let them know that it's OK to admit that they miss the parent or feel lonely.
- Help your child find ways to feel better when they missing the parent. This could be by listening to a tape recording of the parent reading a story, looking at pictures of the missing parent, or even just talking about where he or she is.
- Talk about the deployed parent frequently. Tell stories or jokes, or even say things like, "This is the sweater Daddy gave me for my birthday," or "Mum loves spaghetti, let's have that for dinner tonight." Talking about the parent will help keep his or her presence in the child's life.

- Tell the child how much the missing parent loves and misses them. Sometimes children need to hear reassuring things over and over again - remind the child of this as often as possible.

Different children may cope differently with deployment. Some children may react by trying to "bend the rules" when one parent is away, while others may have trouble sleeping or feel lonely. Pay attention to the child's behaviour and look for any changes that may indicate they need some help coping.

Maintaining routines

Children thrive on routines and consistency, especially during a difficult time like a deployment. Try to stick with your regular routines as much as possible during the deployment period. Here are some ways to do that:

- Be consistent with discipline. Don't change your "house rules" just because you're managing as a single parent. It's important for children to understand that even though things have changed, they can still count on the rules that you have established staying the same.
- Try to give your child a sense of stability. Try to maintain the same daily and weekly routines. You may also want to establish some new routines or rituals, such as spending a few minutes at bedtime talking about the deployed parent or looking at family pictures.

More tips for helping children cope with deployment

- Involve the child in writing letters or e-mails or making things to send to the parent. Also encourage the deployed parent to send individual letters to the child.
- If it's possible, find a way to count down the time until the parent returns in a way that the child will understand. Some families make calendars, while others may fill a big jar with stickers or sweets for each day until the family member returns. There may be some situations in which you may not have an exact date of return or the deployment is extended. If that's the case, you could make a paper chain and add a link for each day that the parent is gone, then use the chain as a decoration when they return.

- Plan special outings or activities. A trip to the movies, a visit to the grandparents, or even a bike ride together may help a child feel better. You may also want to plan events with children from other families that are coping with deployment.
- Limit television watching, especially of military action. Watching media coverage of conflicts or wars - even ones that the parent is not involved in - can be emotionally draining. If your child is interested in watching television coverage of military action, try to do it together so that you can monitor what the child is seeing, answer questions, and offer reassurance.
- Make sure your child's teacher is aware of the deployment. If your child's teacher is informed of the situation, he or she may be able to understand and cope with any behaviour changes your child might have.

Links to information that may be useful around this time

Ideas to help children cope with deployment

<http://militarykidsconnect.dcoe.mil/parents/coping/coping-ideas>

Deployment support for families from army.mod.uk

<http://www.army.mod.uk/welfare-support/23208.aspx>

Supporting children, young people and families during periods of deployment. A guide for parents and carers

https://www.army.mod.uk/documents/general/20090620Parentbooklet_deployement.pdf

A guide for the families of mobilised members of the Territorial Army and the Regular Reserve

http://www.army.mod.uk/documents/general/201005_DeploymentGuideFamsofTAandRREd5Jun10.pdf

Information from the Royal Navy about deployment

<http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/welfare/deployment>

Information about INtouch (system to replace E-blueys) from the Royal Air Force

<https://www.raf.mod.uk/community/news/intouch-replaces-e-blueys/>

A practical guide for parents: What can we do for our children when something distressing happens?

<https://www.raf.mod.uk/community/documents/a-practical-guide-for-parents/>

Supporting children and young people from Royal Navy and Royal Marines families

<https://nff.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/PCCNaval-families-leaflet-for-schools.pdf>

We really appreciate your feedback. If you have any more suggestions for things to be included in the pack or any other ideas, please let us know so that we can continue to improve the support given.