

Preparing for Deployment:

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD'S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Although a deployment presents a difficult time for everyone involved, there are things you can do to help prepare your child.

Provide Consistent Support and Love

Unfortunately, children often assume responsibility for any distress in the family. Tell your child often you love them and how much they mean to you. Praising your child's importance in the family ensures your child knows they are supported and loved.

Talk Openly

Talk about your feelings in front of your child. Sharing your feelings allows your child to see that negative and scared feelings are normal in this situation. They will be able to see that there will be good days and bad days during the time the family member is away.

Involve Your Child in the Process

Your child will catch on to the preparing and planning the family member is taking prior to deployment. Be truthful. Explain what is happening with the deployed family member to your child. Using a map or globe, show where the deployment destination will be. Explain weather conditions, products produced in that region, or even cultural norms for the destination. If there are any family functions within the unit, encourage your child to attend. They will see that there are other children going through the same situation and they are not alone.

Design or create a daily activity that will help mark the time. The daily activity will be part of a routine for the child to help them understand when the deployed family member will be home.

Communicate with Other Involved Adults

If your child is in school, make sure to communicate with teachers, principal, or school counselor. The teacher could develop a variety of classroom activities to help your child and their peers understand what is going on. Providing insight to the school will also help them notice any potential negative behavior changes in your child.

Parents, teachers, and others with close relationships to the child may not always be able to prevent distress in the child during the deployed time. The following are signs of separation anxiety your child may exhibit while the family member is away:

Preschool or kindergarten age children

Clinging to people or a favorite object; unexplained crying; choosing adults over same-age play mates; increased acts of violence toward people, animals, or things; sleeping and/or eating difficulties or change in patterns

School age children

Any of the same signs from school age children; rise in complaints about aches and ailments; irritable and crabby; anger toward family members at home; problems in school;

Adolescents

Any of the previous signs; persistent acting out with trouble at school, home, or with law enforcement; low self-esteem or criticism; consistent anger; loss of interest in doing usual hobbies or activities

Experiencing a military deployment can also promote positive growth and resilience in your child. Children experiencing deployment:

- Develop a better understanding of the world and how to function within a community at an earlier age.
- Take on new responsibilities within the family while the deployed family member is gone, which allows for development of new skills and discovery of hidden interests or abilities.
- Learn what it means to be independent at a young age and become more resourceful self-starters.

Resources

www.militaryonesource.mil/;
www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Building-Resilience/Pages/Deployment-and-Children.aspx

www.realwarriors.net/family/children/stay-connected.php

