

Taking Care of You and Yours During the Deployment

Helping Children Through a Deployment

Parents can help children understand and accept the separation and their feelings about it by planning ahead. Anticipate the problems and discuss them with the entire family.

Before the Separations

The pre-family separation period is stressful for parents and children. Confronted with an extended absence of a parent, family members sense a loss of continuity and security. Children may not fully understand why one of their parents must leave. Very often young children may become confused and fearful that Mommy or Daddy will desert them. Children are not very good at expressing fears and feelings in words. Anger and a desire for revenge, as well as guilt for feeling that way, are often demonstrated in the child's behavior. Change is puzzling to children. They want everything to remain the same. When changes occur, children usually have no other way to release anxieties, and nowhere to go for help. At a time when the separated spouse's responsibility to the Guard becomes more demanding of their time and energy, the remaining spouse may feel overwhelmed, as they prepare to solely support the children, home and car.

What can be done about relieving stress during the period before the Service Member departs?

✓ **Talk to your children about the assignment or deployment before it happens.**

Communicate your thoughts and feelings about the separation. Be open and honest. Some parents worry that advance warning will only give the child more time to fret. However, children can sense when something is about to happen and worry more when they are left in the dark. Knowing about the assignment or deployment in advance helps in adjusting to the idea.

✓ **Build on Your Emotional Bond**

The departing parent needs to spend some QUALITY time with each child before they leave. Younger children (under 8) will be willing to accept a half hour of face-to-face communication. Don't be afraid to hug your child. A display of affection is powerful communication. Older children (8 and over) appreciate being consulted when deciding how long and where this "special" time together can occur.

Use this time to share pride in your work, your unit, the National Guard, and the purpose for your assignment or deployment. Children of school age are beginning to understand that some events must happen for the good of everyone. It is a little easier to let go if Mom or Dad's job is seen as essential to the mission of the National Guard.

Often when asked if something is bothering them, a child will say "no." But there are ways to get through. Make some casual reference to your own worries or ambivalent feelings about the impending assignment or deployment, something that enables parent and child to share similar feelings. It also helps a child to realize their parent is a real person who can cry as well as laugh, and it models an appropriate way to release feelings-- talk about them.

Family Deployment Handbook

✓ **Visit Your Child's Teacher(s)**

Frequently children react to the assignment or deployment by misbehaving in class or performing poorly in their studies. A teacher who is aware of the situation is in a better position to be sensitive and encouraging.

✓ **Children Need to See the Parent's Workplace**

Very young children need to see where Mom or Dad eats, sleeps, and spends some of their day when away from home. You can do this through pictures or TV videos. This provides them with a concrete image of where the parent is when they can't come home. Older children can learn a great deal from the parent about the function of his or her job, the sophisticated technology, interdependence of each division of the military with the other, and of course, career direction. (Statistics indicate that about 30% of our present day military personnel were raised in a military family.)

✓ **Plan for Communicating**

Expect children to stay in touch with the departed spouse. A lively discussion needs to take place before departure. Encourage children to brainstorm the many ways communication can occur in addition to letter writing, such as cassette tape exchanges, photographs with their parents, encoded messages, "puzzle messages" (a written letter cut into puzzle parts that must be assembled in order to read), unusual papers for stationery, and pictures drawn by preschoolers.

✓ **Help Children to Plan for the Departure**

While the spouse is packing their bags, allow your children to assist you in some way. Suggest a "swap" of some token, something of your child's that can be packed in a duffel bag in return for something that belongs to the departing spouse. Discuss the household chores and let your children choose (as much as possible) the ones they would rather do. Mother and Father need to agree with each other that division of household chores is reasonable. The role of disciplinarian needs to be supported by the departing member.

✓ **Being a Long Distance Parent**

Parenting while away from home is not easy. Some separated parents find it so emotionally difficult they withdraw and become significantly less involved in the lives of their children while they are apart. This, of course, is not good either for the parent or the children, not to mention the difficulty it causes the parent/ caregiver who is at home alone. The most important aspect of parenting from a distance is making those small efforts to stay in touch. Doing something to say the parent is thinking about and missing the child is what is most important.

Here are some practical suggestions to help keep the absentee parent involved with their children:

- ✓ Letters and cards from mom or dad are important. The length and contents are not nearly as important as the presence of something in the mail from the absent parent. When sending picture post cards, make little notes about the place or write that you stood right here "x" in the picture. Any small thing which makes the card personal will have tremendous meaning to children at home.
- ✓ Cut out and send things from the local paper or magazines. This is a tangible way to help them feel connected and give them an idea of what life is like there.

Family Deployment Handbook

- ✓ For older children, a subscription to a favorite magazine is a gift that keeps on giving.
- ✓ When using a tape recorder, remember to be creative: sing "Happy Birthday," tell a story, read scripture, take it with you on your job or when visiting with other members of your unit. Don't try to fill a tape completely in one sitting. Make sure you describe the surroundings, the time of day, and what you are doing, etc.
- ✓ Try not to forget birthdays and special holidays which would be important to a child, particularly Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, Halloween, or Valentine's Day.
- ✓ Try to schedule phone calls when children are likely to be at home. Keep a mental list of things you want to talk about with each child, such as their friends, school, ball games, etc. Ask each child to send you something from the activities they are involved in at school, home or outside activities like dance lessons, youth groups or scouts.
- ✓ If your child has a pet, make sure to ask about it.
- ✓ Send an age appropriate gift for each child. It should be something special just for them. Some interesting and creative gifts include a special notebook for school, a book for coloring or reading, or something unique from where you are stationed.

Tips for the Parent/Caregiver Left Behind

- ✓ It is very possible you will admit feelings of sadness, self-doubt, fear, or loneliness to your spouse and children. Most parents will agree that these are acceptable risks, and the feelings revealed are much easier to deal with when they can be expressed within the comfort and security of the family.
- ✓ Give children a method of measuring the passage of time. Families use such techniques as a ceremonial crossing-off of each day on a calendar as it passes, or of tearing a link off a paper chain consisting of the number of days or weeks the departed spouse will be away.
- ✓ Make sure the departed spouse stays well informed. Do not make the mistake of depriving your spouse of knowledge of what is happening at home, or the way things are being handled, out of fear of "distracting" or "worrying" him or her on the job. *(One parent was "spared" the knowledge that his or her son had to be hospitalized for emergency surgery.)*
- ✓ Be responsible for all disciplining. Do not fall into the trap of using "Just wait until your Father or Mother gets home" as the ultimate threat. How can a child be expected to greet with joy and affections a parent that has been held over their head for months as the ultimate punisher.

Taking Care of Yourself During the Deployment

There are times that you need to be a little selfish. But, don't think of it that way. When you find ways to take care of yourself during the deployment, you are actually being a good steward of your resources - and the greatest resource you have is YOU and your physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

Family Deployment Handbook

- ✓ Take time out for yourself. Be a bit selfish. Find things fun to do. Attend a college course you have always wanted to take.
- ✓ Stay healthy – exercise, eat right. Learn how to deal with stress and the conflict that comes from a separation.
- ✓ Stay positive – There are many negative things involved in deployment. Spend time with positive friends and get together with other Guard spouses and other loved ones.

Be Prepared for Emergencies or Disasters

Create an emergency preparedness kit. Store all the items together in a waterproof plastic container.

- ✓ Flashlights - or other battery-powered light source. With extra batteries.
- ✓ A portable radio – again, with batteries.
- ✓ A first aid kit – also, it wouldn't be a bad idea to take a first aid course through American Red Cross or some other agency.
- ✓ Water – always have at least one gallon of water available for each person in your household. Store five days worth.
- ✓ Food – nonperishable items that don't need to be cooked or refrigerated. Five days worth is a good rule.

Safety and Security

- ✓ Use good judgment. Don't advertise that your spouse is away and be careful about discussing your spouse's absence in public.
- ✓ Confirm all inquiries about your Service Member before giving out personal information.
- ✓ Keep a list of emergency numbers near your phone.
- ✓ Keep family and friends aware of your schedule.
- ✓ Install deadbolts and use them.
- ✓ Observe OPSEC -_The objective of OPSEC is to protect our operations because the enemy is watching us, listening to us, and monitoring our communications within the operations area and outside to include communications to the home front. For more information on OPSEC for the family go to www.army.com/articles/item/3305.
- ✓ Make sure your smoke detectors are working.
- ✓ Secure your windows.
- ✓ Check all the lighting inside and outside your house.
- ✓ Know how to deal with blown fuses and tripped circuit breakers.
- ✓ Check your major appliances.
- ✓ Have all the tools you need to deal with breakdowns or emergencies.
- ✓ Have a list of people/shops that service/maintain your car and appliances.
- ✓ Make sure your insurance is up to date.
- ✓ Make a photo/video inventory of your valuables. (Place with your important documents.)

Family Deployment Handbook

Casualty Notification

There are a couple key items you must know about the notification procedure.

- 1) If there has been an incident in-country lines of communication are interrupted until all family members are notified. If you have not been able to be in contact with your Service Member **DO NOT** assume that he or she has been involved in an incident.
- 2) Notification will **ONLY BE MADE IN PERSON** by a military team in uniform. Notifications are **NEVER PERFORMED** via telephone (except in the case of a WIA, see below) or other means of communication. There are people out there who:
 - a. ...feel it their duty to inform the family prior to official notification by whatever means they have at their disposal. This may be happen but do not trust the information until it can be verified officially by the Casualty Notification Personnel.
 - b. ...want to use the implied loss of a loved one to their monetary gain. **AT NO TIME** will the government ask for personal information about a Service Member (i.e. Full Name, Date of Birth, Social Security/Service Number, or Unit Designation). If you are confronted with a call such as this or in person please call the authorities immediately!
- 3) Unit Full Time Staff and Family Assistance Center personnel **ARE NOT NOTIFIED PRIOR TO THE FAMILY** being notified so if you are worried whether or not your Service Member has been involved in an incident do not call them to ask.

If a Service Member is wounded in action (WIA) the family will generally be notified by the Service Member him or herself to help place everyone at ease. If the Service Member is unable to do so the family will be notified through official channels.

- 1) The family is cautioned against planning travel to the evacuation hospital site, generally in Germany. Once the Service Member is stabilized they are evacuated to the United States on the first available flight. As a family is in flight to the evacuation hospital site they have often been in a situation where the Service Member has already left for the United States.
- 2) Once the Service Member has been admitted to the hospital Stateside the family may travel to that location to be with them. However, it is asked that the family wait a couple of days for the following to happen:
 - a. The hospital can complete admission procedures and perform a triage to set up a care plan
 - b. Invitational Travel Orders (ITO) may be processed for the family to travel. ITO's cover the travel expenses and allow for daily per diem and lodging for the family.

If there is an incident where a Service Member has lost their life (KIA) the following will occur in this order:

- 1) Casualty Notification Officer (CNO), usually accompanied by a Chaplain, will notify the family in person in person and in uniform. At that time they will be informed that the Casualty Assistance Officer (CAO) has been assigned and will be working with them to help them through arrangements, protocol and assist in protecting their privacy.

Family Deployment Handbook

- 2) The Casualty Assistance Office (CAO) will contact the family and assist in working out any arrangements that need to be and the CAO will act as a liaison between the family and the media, military and general public.
- 3) The Unit Full Time staff will complete any paperwork that is required.
- 4) Counseling for the family is available.

An Emergency at Home

If there is an emergency at home that requires the Service Member return home on emergency leave, the first place to call is your local Red Cross Chapter or 877-272 7337. They are the ONLY organization that can verify the emergency and then contact the unit chain of command to request the leave. After contacting the Red Cross, be sure to call your Family Readiness group leader. He/She will have other resources that can help you during the emergency situation. Also, remember there are only a couple situations that would allow the Service Member to return home on emergency leave: a death or serious illness/injury of an immediate family member. The births of a child or a broken limb are not considered emergencies.

National Association of Child Care Resources & Referral Agency (NACCRRA) www.naccrra.org/MilitaryPrograms/army.php

Operation: Military Child Care (OMCC)

Our Goal for You

- We'll provide child care fee assistance for National Guard and Reserve who are activated or deployed and whose children are enrolled in non-DoD licensed child care programs
- We'll also provide child care fee assistance for deployed, Active-Duty Military (Army, Marine Corps, Navy, and Air Force) whose children are enrolled in non-DoD licensed child care programs

Am I eligible?

- Families/legal guardians of the children of National Guard & Reserve Service Members who are currently activated/deployed are eligible
- Families/legal guardians of the children of deployed Active Duty Service Members who are unable to access child care on military installations are eligible

How will it help me?

- Help locating licensed child care options in your community
- Reduced child care fees, through a subsidy
- Eligible to participate during the period of the Service Member's deployment period and for 60 days after the return of the Service Member
- Provide a subsidy for 60 days while a non-military spouse is looking for work

You can download the application on-line!

www.naccrra.org/MilitaryPrograms/assistance.php

To get the online brochure:

www.naccrra.org/militaryprograms/docs/OMCC_brochure.pdf

Family Deployment Handbook

Below are a few resources for youth and children of Military Families.

FREE IMMUNIZATIONS: www.health.state.mn.us/military/ Counties offer FREE immunizations for all children 2 months through 18 years of age. (Also has information on County CCR&R and Crisis Nursery for each county ¹)

MN PROJECT BACKPACK: www.projectbackpacks.com. Provides FREE backpacks of school supplies for K-12 students and scholarships to college bookstores for post-secondary supplies.

FREE SAT/ACT PREP PACKAGES: www.eknowledge.com/military FREE SAT/ACT preparatory courses for all Active Duty and Retired Military Service Members and their dependents.

CHILD CARE RESOURCE AND & REFERRAL: www.mnchildcare.org CCR&R assists in finding Military Families monthly Respite Care. State licensed providers volunteer 2-4 hours twice monthly for FREE childcare and located throughout the state. Find the representative for your area from the above link to take advantage of this program.

OPERATION MILITARY KIDS: www.operationmilitarykids.org Operation: Military Kids, as part of the 4-H/Army Youth Development Project, is a vital part of the Army Integrated Family Support Network (AIFSN) delivery system. Families and youth can access information about OMK programs, link to OMK partner programs on this OMK website or by contacting their State 4-H Military Liaison.

SPEAK OUT FOR MILITARY KIDS: www.operationmilitarykids.org/public/somk.aspx SOMK is a community service opportunity for OMK State Teams to train military and non-military youth to establish Speakers Bureaus to advocate for military-connected youth affected by deployment. The expected Outcomes for SOMK are:

- Raise community awareness of issues faced by geographically dispersed military children and youth
- Foster community support for the sacrifices military Families make
- Youth acquire knowledge and skills in developing creative and informative presentations using a variety of different media
- Youth gain leadership, research, organization and public speaking skills