

Helping Children Cope with Military Deployment



- **Deployments are hard.** Saying good-bye to loved ones, not knowing when you will see them again is difficult on an adult level. For children this uncertainty and stress that can result in challenges in behavior.
- **Children can appear** restless, moody, and unmanageable while they are struggling with these new emotions. These behaviors are often the way that children express negative feelings like fear, worry, anxiety, and loneliness.
- **Children show how they feel by their actions more than by words**, so pay close attention to body language and behavior.
- **Punishing the inappropriate behaviors will not stop them** and may make things worse.
- **Keep consistency in your routine** - Children need routines, consistency and structure. A predictable routine and home life can help to ease some of the insecurities children feel.
- **Good communication** - Children will have a lot of questions and daily, honest, age appropriate discussions about feelings (yours and theirs) can help ease tensions and relieve concerns.
- **Attention and good times** – This can be a great time to plan special events and start new hobbies. Children can feel neglected during deployments because one parent is gone and the other is busy and stressed. Children should have many opportunities to feel loved and connected during a deployment.
- **Healthy Lifestyles** – Maintain healthy diets, have time for exercise and don't spend a lot of time in front of the TV or video games.
- **Allow kids to be kids** – Do not discuss fears in depth with children and do not expect them to take the place of the deployed parent. Be mindful of how much exposure your child has to the news. Graphic and detailed depictions of war are shown on the news which may create new fears for children.
- **Reassurance** – During deployment situations, children often feel a loss of control and stability. They have experienced a major change and could do nothing to prevent it from happening. Remind them daily that you will always love them no matter what and that you will help each other during the deployment.
- **Have a good behavior plan** – It is important to remember that during deployment misbehavior can be the result of negative feelings. It is also important to set limits and have appropriate consequences for challenging behaviors. Leniency will not make the deployment easier and in the long run getting back on track when the deployed parent returns will prove more difficult.

(Adapted from Army Community Services and Deployment Family Services Resource Network)

Promoting Healthy Social Behaviors in Child Care Centers