



PARENT TIPS TO RESILIENCE HELPING SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN WITH DEPLOYMENT

Reactions To Deployment That Occur More Than Usual or Are Different Than Before:

Children's Reactions (6-12 years old)

Feel guilty, confused, sad, depressed, irritable, angry, & worried | Complain, display anger or aggressive behavior | Experience rapid mood swings | Have changes in eating and sleeping pattern | Demonstrate disinterest in school, recreational activities, and friends | Feel resentment toward the deployed parent for missing certain events | Feel hurt by the parent's absence and try to say or do things that would return the hurt | Point out how other parents do things more efficiently or differently | Want to please the parent with new skills | Try to act "grown up" and impress the parent | Feel guilty for not doing enough or being good enough | Have fears that the returning parent will discipline them for things that happened during the deployment | Boast to friends about their parent's accomplishments or job | Talk endlessly to update the returning parent about things they missed out on

What Can Parents Of School Age Children Can Do

Ensure school-age children develop and maintain secure relationships with parent, peers, and other adults.

- Maintain routines and schedules, consistent expectations. Help children feel safe and secure.
- Spend quality time with children.
- Encourage friendships and get to know their friends—with other military children, unit connections, friends in school, faith and community groups, and groups of support—have children invite friends over or go on outings.
- Provide opportunities for children to be distracted from the stress of deployment—short trips, sports activities, playing with pets, drawing.
- Say "I love you." Identify children's strengths and encourage them to be proud of their accomplishments.
- Provide Family activities—hiking, bowling, movies, baking, crafts, projects.
- Be patient and calm, especially when children are irritable and withdrawn.
- Avoid snooping or eavesdropping on their private conversations, but be alert to feelings and moods—inquire about friends and provide adult supervision of activities.
- Ensure the development of a strong sense of competence in mastering new skills—encourage classes or development of skills for new responsibilities.
- Connect frequently with school teachers and leaders of community activities.



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Create a sense of connectedness between the deployed parent and school-age children.

- Engage in Family activities prior to deployment.
- Stay in touch through letters, cards, email, and phone calls.
- Send pictures, drawings, copies of school work, care packages, and videos.
- Together research the location of the deployed parent.
- Encourage children to keep a scrapbook or photo album of missed events to share after deployment.

Foster effective communication skills.

- Discuss how to deal with anger and fear. *“Sometimes when you are angry it helps to find out as much factual information as you can, talk to someone that you think can help you, or write about your feelings.”*
- Share what the deployed parent is doing.
- Engage in conversations that interest them.
- Be honest, but ensure conversations are appropriate for their age and level of understanding. Avoid graphic details that may cause unnecessary fear and anxiety.
- Ask questions to clarify what children are ready to understand (i.e., *What do you think about _? How do you feel about _? Tell me what you think about _.*)
- Answer their questions with confidence, followed up by questions to see if they are ready for more information (i.e., *Does that make sense to you? What does that mean to you? What do you think about _? Have you thought about _?*)

Include school-age children in decision making processes related to changes in roles, responsibilities, and routines.

- Help children find meaning and make sense out of deployment and the challenges. Encourage age appropriate discussions with peers and adults.

Prepare for the return of the deployed parent.

- Alert children to appropriate expectations for the reunion.
- Involve children in planning welcome home celebrations.
- Ensure quality time and plan activities.
- Alert parent-Soldier to changes in children.

Ensure school-age children receive support from health and mental health professionals, teachers, and community organizations as needed.

What Can Deployed Parents Do To Prepare Themselves?

Take it slow, do not force affection | Take care of oneself | Look for ways to interact that are pleasing | Plan quality time with each child | Model caring interactions between the parents | Work together with other caregivers on other suggested tips

Seek Support Of Friends, Relatives And The Community When Needed

It is important to discuss children’s behaviors and feelings with caretakers, and ensure children receive support from health and other professionals at first signs of distress.

Key Contacts

Army Family Web Site www.MyArmyLifeToo.com

Military OneSource 1-800-432-9647

www.militaryonesource.com

Operation Military Child Care www.childcareaware.org

Military Child In Transition and Deployment

www.militarystudent.dod.mil

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