

# Questions & Answers about deployment

## 1. How can I help my children deal with feelings when they either won't talk or don't seem to be able to talk?

Sometimes children just don't want to talk, and some children find it hard to talk about their feelings. Talking is not the only way your children can share their feelings. They can draw pictures about what they are feeling and thinking. You can help them make up songs or act out a story with dolls or stuffed animals.

Make sure you keep giving your children time to talk. They may tell you things while they are busy, so make time to do chores together, prepare or clean up meals, play board games, or toss a ball. Bedtime, when the lights are low, may also be a time when your children are more likely to talk.

## 2. Is it important to pre-

## pare my children for the possibility deployment?

Yes, parents will not always know when or how they will be deployed, but they usually know that change is coming. When your children know what to expect, they have a chance to ask questions about what will happen to you and them during the deployment. This will give them time to get used to the change and to deal with all of their feelings.

## 3. How can I prepare my children for my deployment?

First, make sure that your children know that they can talk about what they are feeling and ask questions. Help your children by telling them where they will be staying, what will change, and what will stay the same during the deployment.

Also, reassure children that they will be safe while you are

away. If you have been deployed in the past, it is good to remind your children how things worked out. If there were problems, talk about what can be done to make it better this time. Plan all the ways you can stay in touch during the assignment—letters, e-mail, and phone calls. Ask your children about the ways that they want to stay in touch.

## 4. How should I talk to my kids about their mother leaving?

There are more moms in the services than ever before. You can help by telling your children who will do all the things that their mom usually does. If she has been the primary caretaker, talk about who will prepare their meals, help with homework, drive them to activities, and put them to bed each night. Even if both of you have shared these activities, it is still important for your children to have a good idea about what to expect.

Your children will also want to know how they can stay in touch with their mother during deployment. Help your children make plans to stay in touch through letters, phone calls, e-mail, or other means.

To learn more  
about this topic,  
please contact:

Phone:

Fax:

Email:



<http://mfrc.calib.com/healthy parenting>

**5. What do I say to my preschooler when both of her parents are being deployed?**

It is very hard to explain to young children what is happening when both parents are going to be away for a period of time. Your child may not understand all the words, but it is important to tell her or him that you are leaving and, also, that you are coming back. It is also important for your child to know who is going to take care of her or him and who will do all the things that you normally do. Use a favorite doll or stuffed animal to show your child how they can feel safe and loved while you are away.

**6. Should I tell my children where I am going even if they know that there is fighting going on?**

Sometimes you cannot tell your children everything about your mission due to security issues, but you can give them an idea of where you will be. It is better if your children get information directly from you, rather than the news or other children. This will teach them to trust that you will tell the truth about what is actually going on. You may have to explain that they can't know everything so that other moms and dads can stay safe.

If you face immediate danger due to warfare, be honest with your children about what is involved. Give them a chance to ask questions. You don't have to tell them everything, but do explain how you will keep yourself safe.

**7. What are some ways to help my children understand the amount of time that I will be gone?**

One way is to make plans to track the time and talk about events, like holidays and birthdays, that may occur while you are away. Find or make a calendar. Help your children choose a place for it, and plan a regular time (maybe every Sunday) to count down the days until your return or the days that you have been gone. Children may find it easier to understand a time line with important dates marked. They can personalize it to make it more real.

A calendar also gives you something to talk about when you are gone. You can ask your children about what is coming up on the calendar—school events, report cards, favorite sports activities, or holidays.

**8. What do I do if I can't tell my children where their parent is?**

Sometimes even families can't know where a parent is located. Your younger children may only need a general description of where the parent is. Older children can better understand the need to keep some information secret for security reasons. It is important to explain to your children, no matter what age, why you can't give them all the information. Remind them that when it is safe, you will tell them.

**9. What are some ways to help my children adjust to a**

**parent's deployment?**

One of the most important ways to help your children adjust is to keep family routines as normal as possible during the time that a parent is away. As things change, talk about the new routines that need to be created. In general, routines help your children to feel safe and to know what will happen in their world.

**10. What are some things my children can do to help them cope when a parent is away on assignment?**

You can give your children some additional household chores. They may complain, but chores make children feel needed and capable. In other words, they are good for them! Chores can help your children think that they are doing something to help their country in a difficult time. Make a list of all the things that need to be done and talk about what each family member can do. Focus on what is important. Practice the chores and make sure each child knows how to do them. Set up a schedule and a way to record what is done. Review the plan after you have tried it out and make changes, if needed. Be sure to praise your children for what they do.

**11. When my wife gets deployed, everything at home gets a little crazy. We all miss her and even I don't feel like doing anything as usual, like bed or mealtime routines. After a while, it's hard to get everything back to normal. Is this OK?**

It is common for everyone to feel uneasy for a period of time after a parent is deployed. The remaining parent has a lot of mixed emotions about the deployment—anger, sadness, fear, and pride. Children also have mixed emotions. The days prior to deployment may be filled with much activity and excitement. It is only after the parent is gone that the reality begins to set in.

To help your children and yourself, it is important to get back into your usual routines. Make sure that you and your children get enough rest and eat healthy meals. Some family members may have trouble sleeping, so plan for quiet times and make bedtime routines calming. Try to have at least one meal together each day. Get back to all of your other routines. They can give you a sense of order in your daily life and, in doing so, can comfort you and keep you going during times of change or worry.

### **12. Is it a good idea to let my children help me pack when I'm getting ready to leave?**

Involving your children when preparing for your deployment can give them a chance to think and talk about what is happening. Sometimes this is not possible because of timing and security issues, but when possible, it can help your children prepare themselves for your departure.

You can ask your children to make special keepsakes or messages that you can take with you. You can also talk with them

about how you will stay in touch when you are gone. They can help you make a letter writing kit or a plan for e-mailing.

### **13. When my husband is gone it is hard to do the usual things. Does it make any difference if we do things differently?**

When one parent is gone, some things are different. That's okay. While it helps to keep routines as normal as possible, you can try new ways of doing things. Your children may feel special if they know that they have an important assignment in the home while a parent is away. This gives them a chance to learn responsibility and to feel proud about helping the family. Find a way of living that works and feels comfortable to everyone so that you can maintain healthy patterns, even if they are different.

### **14. When my husband is gone, we just don't feel quite like a family. What can we do to help us feel more like a unit?**

It is hard to carry on normally when you are missing someone, especially during special family moments. It is common for family members to feel as if something is missing when they go through the usual routines.

Don't avoid activities and events that are important to your family. Think about ways that you can involve the absent parent. If you have dinner together on Sundays, you can call or e-mail the parent before

or after the meal. If you always watch a particular sports team together, you can call or e-mail each other about what happened. None of these alternatives is as good as having the parent there, but they help to maintain the feeling of connection.

### **15. My husband has been gone for several months now. We have settled into a good routine, but last night my 6<sup>th</sup> grader couldn't go to sleep. He said he was thinking about his dad. Is this common?**

Even though children may adjust well while a parent is away, it is common for them to develop new issues or concerns along the way. Make time to talk with your child about feelings and watch for troubling signs, so you can deal with these issues when they come up.

If a child is especially worried, seek help from school counselors or the Family Center in your installation. Showing your child that you can deal with your problems in healthy ways can also help.

#### **Sources:**

Black, W.G. (1993). Military-induced family separation: A stress reduction intervention. *Social Work, 38*, 273-280.

Figley, C.R. (1993). Coping with stressors on the home front. *Journal of Social Issues, 49*, 51-71.

Kelley, M.L. (1994). The effects of military-induced separation on family factors and child behavior. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 64*, 103-111.

Wood, S., Scarville, J., & Gravino, K.S. (1995). Waiting wives: Separation and reunion among army wives. *Armed Forces & Society, 21*, 217-236.