School Connections and Moves

Connections to schools are vital to children’s academic success. Whether you are new to an area or well-established, building relationships with teachers, principals and counsellors are a key way to support your children in a school environment. Sharing updates with them about deployments and having their contact information close at hand can be invaluable. Volunteering or joining the local PTA is a great way to meet other parents and build connections in the community.

Although many military children report that traveling and meeting new people is a great part of military life, moving can be one of the toughest parts of military life, especially when children start a new school. School age children may worry about fitting in, and the school requirements may be different. Here are some tips about making a smooth transition:

- Check out the school website with your child as far in advance as possible to look for information about school schedules and deadlines. When you arrive, plan on an in-person visit before your child’s first day in the new school.
- Make an appointment with the school to deliver school records in person. This is especially important for students in special education and 504 programming.
- Do what you can to help your child fit in. Encourage them to get involved in sports or after school activities like debate teams, chess or choirs.

Staying Connected to a Child’s Education

When parents and schools work together during the deployment cycle, children benefit emotionally and academically. Here are some ways to support your child during the deployment cycle:

Predeployment—Communicate details of deployment with children as soon as you can. If possible, talk to the principal and teachers to share details such as the length and location of the deployment. Build memories, take pictures and spend quality time with the kids before you go.

Deployment—The deployed parent can ask about homework, tests and activities during phone calls. The caregiver at home and teachers can take opportunities to measure time in tangible ways like paper chains or map geographical locations where parents have been deployed.

Reunion—Homecoming can actually be the most challenging time as children anticipate the reunion with a mixture of excitement and anxiety. Parents can let their children know nervousness is normal. Teachers should be aware of the date of the homecoming and discuss new behaviors with both the caregiver at home and the deployed parent.

Your School-Aged Child:

- Greater ability to talk about thoughts and feelings
- Increasing awareness of the future
- Starting to take another person’s perspective and understand that it might be different from their own
- Peers play an increasingly important role in their social world.
- Much more aware of the social and political climate

Parent Tips:

Keep in close contact with teachers—they can be an extra set of eyes and ears for parents to rely on, and often they are the first to see changes in behavior or performance.

After deployment, arranging for the returning parent to visit the classroom and share about the trip can help the student feel pride in the mission their parent has completed.
ADAPT is gearing up for the next wave of the project. You can help us better understand reintegration in military families and have a say in future resources and services provided to reintegrating military families!

If you live in Minnesota, are a parent of a 5-12 year old, and have been deployed (or your spouse/partner has been deployed) since 2001, we want to hear from you!

To learn more about the ADAPT project, go to www.cehd.umn.edu/fsos/adapt. For more information, you can call us at 612-624-4830 or e-mail us at adapt@umn.edu.

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