How and When to Talk about Deployment

*When:* Unless your child suffers from severe anxiety, it is good to start talking about deployment several months in advance. *How:* Your school-aged child will have a much better idea of time than younger children. For five-seven year old children you might want to talk about the timing of deployment by using changing seasons, birthdays, holidays, or things that they already have experienced. For older children, they might want to use a calendar as a reference point. Almost as important as how long the soldier will be away—your school-aged child will want to know what to expect while he or she is away. With this age-group, you will want to include them in some of the planning and decision-making. Use maps and globes to show where the soldier will be deployed, talk about routines and how things will be different and how they will be the same during deployment. Start to establish new routines—who will take out the trash, when will homework be done? You can start to hold “family meetings” to discuss changes in the household routines. These meetings can continue during deployment and will become part of the new family routine that will help your child feel safe and secure during deployment. Children thrive on routine and predictability.

How Much Information Should I Share about Deployment?

Before you talk to your child about deployment, talk as adults about what you will say. Kids at this age will have many questions and fears. Your answers will vary greatly depending upon their age. Each family is different, there are no right or wrong answers. We do know, however, that your children will do much better with the information if it is delivered by a calm and reassuring parent. It will also be important to establish guidelines around how much you will watch the news or what to do if kids at school are sharing scary information. Form a plan so your child will know that they can come to you and that you will offer them more accurate information than their peers.

**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:**
- Fill a jar with jellybeans (one jellybean per day of deployment). Remove and eat one jellybean per day. Your child will see the passage of time as the jar becomes empty.
- Make a paper chain, one link per day of deployment. Remove a link each day. The chain will get shorter. Have your soldier write notes on the links and have your child write notes on the back to make it even more fun.

*As members of the 1st BCT learned in a prior deployment, deployments can be extended, so be sure to add extra jellybeans or links.*
Your Deployment Routine

Start your deployment routine early. Do not wait until the soldier is heading out the door. Transition into your new routine gradually and steadily. If Mom is going to be the disciplinarian instead of Dad — Dad, gradually step out of that role. If Grandpa is going to be picking your child up at school, let him start to do it one day a week starting now. From your child’s perspective, if the soldier leaves for deployment and his or her routine looks and feels very similar to before the soldier left, your child will feel safe and secure and will have a much easier time adjusting to the deployment. We understand that it might be hard for the soldier to step down from some of his or her time with your child, but gradual changes are going to create a much more successful transition.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

ADAPT is beginning recruitment for our newest project.

We want to talk to Minnesota National Guard and Reserve families who have been through deployment and have at least one child between the ages of 5-12 years of age.

Participants are reimbursed for their time and will be part of cutting-edge research on supportive parenting programs for military families.

Call adapt@umn.edu or 612-624-4830 for more information

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