How and When to Talk about Deployment

**When:** Unless your teen suffers from severe anxiety, it is good to start talking about deployment several months in advance. **How:** Your pre-teen and teen will have a clear sense of how much time will be involved in deployment. They will want to know what to expect while the soldier is away. With this age-group, you will want to include them in some of the planning and decision-making. It will be helpful to give your teenager a chance to be involved in the responsibilities of the household. Talk about routines and how things will be different and how they will be the same during deployment. With teenagers it will be very important to be clear about the fact that they may have new responsibilities but that they are not responsible for taking the soldier’s place as a parent. Make clear that their main job is to continue to focus on school and other activities that they are involved with. 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 teen feel safer and more secure during deployment.

How Much Information Should I Share about Deployment?

Before you talk to your teen about deployment, talk as adults about what you will say. Teens may not have many outward questions—but they will certainly be filled with anxiety about what will happen to the soldier while they are away. Each family is different, there are no right or wrong answers. However, we do know that your teen 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 teen will know who they can go to for accurate information or support.

### Your pre-teen and teen

- Is much more self-conscious and wanting to “fit in” with peers and to not “stand out” as different or unusual
- Beginning to question and challenge authority
- Exploring his/her own identity through friends, music, clothes and hobbies
- Much more oriented to peers than siblings & parents
- Much more aware of the social and political climate

### Parent Tips:

- Identify another trusting adult that your teen has a good relationship with as the “go to” person if he/she has questions or concerns
- Talk to your child’s teachers and school staff and let them know what changes are happening in the household
- Do not try to “hide” your emotions about deployment but realize that your teen still needs to know that you are still the parent and that you are capable of handling the changes as adults.
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 your teen will have to go home to an empty house, start giving her/him time to practice now. From your teen’s perspective, if the soldier leaves for deployment and his or her routine looks and feels very similar to before the soldier left, your teen 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 begin to step down from some of his or her time with your teen, 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

Contact Information:
Dept. of Family Social Science
University of Minnesota
Rm. 290 McNH
1985 Buford Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55108
ADAPT@umn.edu
612-624-4830

Upcoming Topics Vol 2 (May):
Preparing for deployment, continued...

http://www.cehd.umn.edu/fsos/adapt