Maintaining a close bond during deployment

Bonding and attachment refer to the close emotional ties that preschoolers have with their parents and guardians. Every preschooler bonds with his or her parents and guardians differently. Bonding and attachment are important for your preschooler because they are part of the foundation that he or she will use to develop future relationships with friends and other adults. The time with the service member spent prior to deployment will be very important to your preschooler. Ask the preschooler to choose some special activities that they love to do. Quality time to your preschooler may mean playing sports, riding bikes, going to the zoo, or just spending time at home playing with toys or reading a book. Remember to take photographs of your time together so that the preschooler and the service member can preserve a snapshot of time spent together. Photographs are very helpful for this age group since they can’t easily retrieve events from their memory. Display these images around your home—this is a nice way to keep memories alive for your preschooler during deployment. The service member can tell a story that goes along with the photograph so that while he or she is away, the story can be retold to your preschool child.

Bonding and Attachment During Deployment

Every child has different needs and responds to separation differently. Some children may worry about what will happen and think that the non-deployed guardian might leave too. It will be important to tell the preschooler that they are safe and will be taken care of. It will also be important to show them that they are safe and loved by maintaining routines. Non-deployed parents, guardians, and adults can help keep the preschooler’s bond to the deployed parent strong by reminding the preschooler how much the deployed parent loves them. Some service members and preschoolers “swap” a special item like a bear, blanket, or toy to help maintain the attachment bond to the service member during deployment. Some deployed parents may record their voice in a toy or on a CD that can be played during deployment, or write a letters or stories before and during deployment.

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<th>Your Preschooler:</th>
<th>Parent Tips:</th>
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<td>— Relies on routines to feel secure and confident.</td>
<td>— Quality time together doesn’t mean spending a lot of money. Include your preschooler in the choice of what to do together.</td>
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<td>— Is interested in nature, science, animals, time, and how things work</td>
<td>— Place photographs around your home or make a special photo-book for your preschooler. Include photos of the deployed soldier interacting with your preschooler. Write brief stories that go with each photo that can be retold.</td>
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<td>— Learning about common shapes and primary colors</td>
<td>— Give the preschooler concrete ways to feel connected to the soldier on their own, like suggesting that when they look at the moon, the soldier is looking at the very same moon.</td>
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<td>— Wants to be more independent and do things without help</td>
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Saying Goodbye

Your preschooler will not fully understand what is happening during your good-byes. There may be some starts and stops along the way—with trainings and other pre-deployment preparations. The individual needs of the service member and the individual needs of the preschooler will be different during good-byes. Some preschoolers may appear excited or happy to say goodbye while others may be teary or sad. It is important to let your preschooler process the goodbye in his or her own way—though it may not be what you expect. Your preschooler might also imitate older siblings or adults who are present during the good-bye. He or she will be looking closely at others’ reactions to gauge how to respond. Emotions like sadness and anger are healthy.

Don’t try and hide your emotions from your preschooler—by watching you they will learn how to deal with emotions themselves. However, if you are going to become overwhelmed with emotion—you might want to think about creative strategies so that your child does not also become overwhelmed. Possibly have them say good-bye at home and not at the airport.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

ADAPT is beginning to recruit 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 will be reimbursed for their time and will be part of cutting-edge research on supportive parenting programs for military families.

E-mail adapt@umn.edu or call 612-624-4830 for more information

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Upcoming Topics Vol 3:
CO-PARENTING FROM AFAR: STAYING CONNECTED

- Communication—too much / too little?
- Keeping the soldier present in the home
- Maintaining connections/bonds from afar

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