Bonding and attachment refer to the close emotional ties that children have with their parents and guardians. Every child bonds with his or her parents and guardians differently. Bonding and attachment are important for your child because they are part of the foundation that he or she will use to develop future relationships with friends and other adults. The school-aged child has an advantage over his/her younger siblings in that they are able to keep in mind their previous experiences with the deployed parent. The time with the service member spent prior to deployment will be very important to your child. Ask your child to choose some special activities that they love to do. Quality time together with your school-aged child may mean playing sports, riding bikes, or just spending time at home playing games or reading a book. Remember to take photographs of your time together. Display these images around your home or help your child make their own album—this is a nice way to keep memories alive during deployment. Some service members and their school-aged children practice writing letters or notes to each other or write a short storybook together of their special activities. Choose some games to take along on deployment that can be played over the phone or Internet.

**Bonding and Attachment during Deployment**

Every child has different needs and responds to separation in different ways. Some children may worry about what will happen and act out or become withdrawn in response to “being left”. It will be important to let your child know that they are safe and will be taken care of. It is also important to convey the idea that the deployed parent is not leaving the child — instead, convey that he/she has special training that other people do not have and that he/she has made a commitment to use those skills to help others. Non-deployed parents, guardians, and other adults can help maintain routines to ensure that the child will feel safe and loved. Perhaps there are certain special new routines that can be put into place. Some service members read books that help children understand the separation and reassure them that they will be OK.

**Your school-aged child:**
- Is asking lots of questions and finding ways to satisfy their need to know
- Generally knows right from wrong
- Wants to belong and feel special
- Is learning about patience

**Parent Tips:**
- Before answering questions from your child—ask for clarification so that you know what is REALLY being asked. Sometimes your child will be wanting information but sometimes he/she will really just be asking for reassurance.
- School-aged children may still want to hold-on to something of the deployed soldier. Think about a pillow-case exchange or making a string bracelet together. Just as certain toys provide comfort for younger children, older children will still value an object that they can hold onto that symbolizes the deployed parent.
Saying Good-bye

Your school-aged child will mostly understand what is happening during deployment and may be very upset. Your school-aged child is beginning to understand how others feel and is better able to understand why the goodbye is upsetting. At the same time, the individual needs of the service member and the individual needs of the school-aged child may look very different. He/she may have an impulse to “leave you before they are left” or to try and hold on and not let you go. It is important to let your school-aged child process the goodbye in his or her own way, though it may not be what you expect. If your child pulls away—stay firm in your expression of your own emotions—that you will miss them and love them. Try and help your child put words to the emotions that they are feeling.

Show your own emotion during the good-bye so your school-aged child continues to learn how to express him/herself. Your school-aged child will also be looking to the adults around them for an overall sense of safety during this transition. They will rely upon parents to not “fall apart” with emotion—this can still be overwhelming for a child in this age range.

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