Bonding and Attachment Before Deployment

Bonding and attachment refer to the close emotional ties that children have with the parents and guardians. At this age—bonds have been well established. The focus during the teen years is typically more on peers than on parents. However, even the most independent teenagers are still quite dependent upon their parents and guardians for a sense of emotional security—whether they want to admit it or not. Deployment will often bring to the surface fears associated with the loss of a parent. As the service member prepares for deployment—your teen may struggle with the desire to be independent while coping with feelings of being scared or insecure. If the teen tries to push the service member away—acknowledge their feelings and hold fast with your love and support. Don’t let them shake you—they are just trying to exert some control in a situation where they may feel none. Overall it will be important to support your teen in continuing his/her routines as usual. Other parents and guardians can also encourage your teen to spend a bit of extra quality time with the deploying parent. This time can be spent doing an activity that involves doing something you used to do when they were younger—taking a bike ride or going bowling. It will be important to also have a conversation about what to expect during deployment. Form a plan that they can depend upon. For example, how often you will keep in touch with them while deployed.

Bonding and Attachment During Deployment

Every pre-teen and teenager has different needs and responds to separation in different ways. Some pre-teens and teenagers may begin to act out or be more moody than usual—this could be because they are not sure how to express their emotions and about how they feel. Non-deployed parents, guardians, and adults can help by encouraging the teen to find a way to keep in touch that feels comfortable. Possibly playing games online or watching a ball game. Try and keep your communication as “normal” as possible. Reassure your teen that mixed emotions are normal during deployment.

**Your pre-teen and teen is:**
- exploring his or her identity through clothing, music, friends, and hobbies
- Beginning to question and challenge authority
- May be self-conscious of his or her appearance
- Starting to think seriously about their future and career
- Much more aware of the social and political climate

**Parent Tips:**
- Don’t let your teen throw you off balance. Stay consistent and firm in your routines.
- Talk about how you will communicate during deployment (and how often). Let your teen have input into the type and amount of communication.
- Remember that you often don’t sit down face to face to have long meaningful discussions with your teen. Plans for communication during deployment will feel more comfortable if they resemble the type of things you do now. Think about games or events that you might share together over the internet or on the telephone.
Saying Goodbye

Your pre-teen and teenager will be fully aware of what is happening during goodbye. The individual needs of the soldier and the individual needs of the pre-teen and teenager may be quite different. Your teen may be distant, may not want to talk about the goodbye, or express emotions openly. It is important to let your teen process the goodbye in his or her own way, though it may not be what the service member wants. It is normal for the pre-teen or teenager to be in denial, and he or she may express this denial by withdrawing or refusing to discuss how they feel. Remind them that they are not alone and that they are loved. If possible, give them some control of how and where they say goodbye. Reassure them that even if they are unable to fully express all of their emotions that you understand that they will miss you and that you will miss them too. Acknowledge that goodbyes are hard—even for adults. If you think they might be holding too much inside, you can ask them how they are feeling and whether they think it would be helpful to talk.

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