Co-Parenting During Deployment

Although your service member is thousands of miles away—you are still co-parenting together. This presents a challenge for parents (and children) during deployment. The more you, as parents, remain on the same page and present a united front, the more secure your child(ren) will feel. Children adjust to new routines during deployment more easily when their parents present a united parenting front. This begins by talking with each other about your expectations. Are you going to share every detail about a child’s day? Plan strategies together for handling everyday issues, like what to do if your child is sick or if your car breaks down. These initial discussions will help set a framework for your new parenting routine. They will also help you to figure out where there are missing pieces. Having back-up plans in the event of an emergency can also help the non-deployed parent or caregiver feel more secure while the service member is away. Create a list of people in your community that you can call in case the water heater breaks, the car needs new tires, your computer gets a virus, etc. This will make it easier to cope with potentially stressful situations when the service member is deployed. If the needs of the two parents are at odds—who else can fill the needed role (a sister or uncle?).

How Do I Keep the Service Member Present in the Home?

One of the biggest challenges is figuring out how to stay connected while maintaining busy routines. Encourage your child(ren) and the deployed parent to exchange pictures, stories, or send audio or video clips. Have the service member send pictures of his/her living arrangements while they are away. This can help your school-aged child relate in a way that is meaningful to them. What do they eat? Where do they sleep? Bring some of those routines into your child’s day. If the deployed parent eats eggs on Monday, you can too. On the phone or Skype—try playing a game or another activity that you would typically do at home together. It’s hard for young children to talk about their day and they will often give short yes or no answers to your open-ended questions about their day.

Your school-aged child:
— Is beginning to form and express his or her own opinion
— Is beginning to understand right from wrong
— Is able to focus less on himself or herself and has more ability to be concerned about others
— Is learning about patience

Parent Tips:
— The most important thing for your school-aged child during deployment is to know that the deployed service member loves him or her and is thinking about him or her. The length and content of communication is not nearly as important as the predictability of the communication together.
— Have you played Battleship with your child? Send a set overseas and play through Skype. What about Yahtzee?
— Make a photobook of where the service member lives.
— What about exchanging a pillowcase or a stuffed toy?
Communication — Too Much or Too Little?

Every family is different and has different needs regarding communication during the deployment cycle. Some families will want to communicate with each other every day, and for other families, less communication may be better. Talk openly in your family about how often your family wants to communicate during deployment. Keep in mind that one family member may want to communicate more while another wants to communicate less. Having a routine or schedule for communication can help school-aged children form routines and expectations around when they will hear from their deployed servicemember.

Some military families keep pre-addressed envelopes and paper or video cameras around the house, in their car, or at school to make it easier to write letters or draw pictures to your servicemember during family activities. Be creative — there are lots of ways to add personal touches to e-mails, letters, and photos. Brainstorm as a family about ideas that have special meaning in your family.

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 4:

Single, Divorced, and Blended Families

- Special considerations for single parents and those in divorced or blended families
- Talking to extended family members about deployment