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 teens) during deployment. The more you, as parents, remain on the same page and present a united front, the more secure your teen 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 car teen misses their bus. 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?). If your teen will be taking on added responsibilities around the house (like taking out the trash), it will be important to emphasize that they are not expected to take the place of the deployed parent in his/her absence.

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 teen and the deployed parent to exchange pictures, stories, or send audio or video clips. On the phone or Skype—try playing a game or watching a sporting event together (or another activity that you would typically do at home together). When you are sharing fun activities together, it is more likely that your teen will bring up something important that is on his/her mind. Teens are not used to sitting face to face with adults and having deep conversations as much as they are used to spending time together in the car or at an event. This is where conversations happen the most. Include your teen in the conversation about how they would like to keep in touch. In a situation where they have little to no control—they will appreciate small opportunities to share their opinions.

**Your pre-teen and teen:**
- Is starting to think about their future education and career
- Is testing limits and boundaries
- May be self-conscious of his or her appearance
- Is placing more importance on peers and hobbies than family
- Much more aware of the social and political climate

**Parent Tips:**
- The most important thing for your pre-teen or teen during deployment is to know that the deployed service member loves him or her and is thinking about him or her. The length and contents of communication are not nearly as important as the presence of something in the mail from the deployed service member.
- You pre-teen and teen has his or her own preferences for how and when to communicate with the deployed service member.
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 your pre-teen or teen form routines and expectations around when they will hear from their deployed service member.

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 send videos to your service member 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

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