Co-Parenting During Deployment

Cooperative parenting and caregiving during deployment can give your baby or toddler stability during the deployment cycle and help him or her maintain close relationships with his or her parents and other caregivers. Babies and toddlers adjust to new routines during deployment more easily when their parents and caregivers feel secure and confident. Communication about co-parenting is key during this transition and helps both the non-deployed parent or caregiver and the deployed service member feel secure and confident that their baby or toddler will be taken care of during deployment.

Plan strategies together for handling everyday issues, like what to do if your baby or toddler is sick, and having back-up plans for child care in the event of an emergency can 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. Ask your friends and family to help you with creating this list.

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. Exchange pictures, stories, or send audio or video clips. Put pictures all around your baby’s crib and at the front door where they can be seen frequently. Have your baby say good morning and goodnight to the picture of the deployed parent. Talk about mom or dad often and include them in your conversations about what you are doing. In order to help with the transition back home, have someone other than the primary parent feed your baby or change your baby. This way, when the deployed parent gets home, your baby will be used to be taken care of by multiple adults. Send a pillow case home or spray some of the service member’s cologne or perfume on a special doll. Smell is an important part of a baby’s everyday world. Set up Skype at the high chair during meal times. This way the deployed parent can share in the day to day routines and the baby will get used to them being present.

Your Baby & Toddler:

— Is becoming more coordinated and active (crawling, walking, throwing, climbing, stacking).
— Has a limited attention span.
— May want to be more independent in dressing, brushing teeth, etc.
— Temper tantrums are common.

Parent Tips:

— Sight, sound, touch and smell are very important facets of a baby’s life. Allow the deployed parent to be present as much as possible during deployment through pictures and scents.
— Use pictures to talk about the deployed parent. Create a photo book or tape pictures on the walls around your home.
— Make sure people of the same gender as the deployed parent hold and play with your baby so they don’t get used to only women or men interacting with them.
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 babies and toddlers form routines and expectations around when they will hear from their deployed servicemember.

Some military families keep pre-addressed envelopes and paper around the house, in their car, or at daycare 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 military families 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

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