Deployment and Single, Divorced, and Blended Families

Deployment is a challenging time for any family, but transitions related to deployment may be particularly stressful for single, divorced, and blended families. We know that military children and military families are resilient and resourceful during times of stress. We also know that consistent routines and regular communication with the deployed parent are important for your school-aged child. Although it may be difficult to communicate with your extended family or partner or spouse’s family, it is important to think about what your school-aged child needs during this stressful time. Keeping the routines and the people in your school-aged child’s life as normal as possible will help your child cope during deployment. Some families keep their school-aged child’s routines as normal possible by continuing to arrange family time or play dates with their school-aged child’s half- or step-siblings.

Families also try to keep things normal by scheduling regular family outings with other extended family members that are familiar to your school. This helps you keep familiar people a part of his or her life.

Engaging Resources Available to You and Your Family

Some military families experience difficulty with negotiating communication and new roles in single, divorced, and blended families during deployment. It is essential for you to be able to engage resources that can help you communicate with members of your extended or blended family so your school-aged child can communicate with the deployment service member. Are there any mutual friends in your family that could help your school-aged child feel connected to the deployed service member? Is there anyone in your neighborhood or at your child’s after school program that can help you communicate with members of your extended or blended family? Think of these people as your built-in support system: Your extended or blended family may be more open to negotiating with a mutual friend or family member. Don’t get locked into a battle with your ex-spouse or ex-partner.

Your School-aged Child:

— Is able to focus less on himself or herself and has more ability to be concerned about others
— Can learn to ride a bicycle
— Wants attention from parents and teachers
— Wants to feel part of a group, like clubs or team sports

Parent Tips:

— Brainstorm family members who are trusted by everyone in your extended or blended family. Can they act as a link?
— Your child’s school may help write letters or send photos to the deployed parent.
— Photos and favorite books are a good way to help keep the deployed service member present in your school-aged child’s life. Keeping a special object at school, in the car, or at your extended or blended family’s house can help your child feel connected to the deployed service member.
Talking to Extended Family Members about Deployment

Talking to extended family members about deployment can be frustrating. Your family or your ex-spouse or ex-partner’s family may want more information about the deployed service member and your school-aged child than you are ready to give them. It may help to think about communication with your extended family as “baby steps”. A little bit of communication can go a long way, and it will take time before you and your extended family members can get into a routine about communication. Even though it may seem like a long time from now, it is important to start thinking about what it will be like when the deployed service member returns from deployment. Keeping your extended family members “in the loop” about your school-aged child and communicating with them about deployment may make the transition after deployment easier for you, your school-aged child, and the deployed service member.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

ADAPT is officially open for business! If you live in Minnesota, are a parent of a 5-12 year old and have been deployed (or your spouse/partner has been deployed) since 2001, we want to hear from you!

To learn more about the ADAPT project, go to www.cehd.umn.edu/fsos/adapt. For more information, you can call us at 612-624-4830 or e-mail us at adapt@umn.edu.

“Like” us on Facebook!

Contact Information:
Dept. of Family Social Science
University of Minnesota
Rm. 290 McNH
1985 Buford Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55108
ADAPT@umn.edu
612-624-4830

Upcoming Topics Vol 5:
Children with Special Needs

- How to talk to your child with special needs about deployment
- Using social stories with your child with special needs