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 baby and toddler. 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 baby and toddler needs during this stressful time. Keeping the routines and the people in your baby and toddler’s life as normal as possible will help your child cope during deployment. Some families maintain their baby and toddler’s routines as normal possible by continuing to arrange family time or play dates with your baby and toddler’s half- or step-siblings, or by scheduling regular family outings with other extended family members that are familiar to your baby and toddler.

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 your extended and blended family so your baby and toddler can communicate with the deployment service member. Are there any mutual friends in your family that could help your baby and toddler feel connected to the deployed service member? Is there anyone in your neighborhood or at your baby and toddler’s day care who 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 Baby & Toddler:

— Is beginning to distinguish emotions by the tone of your voice
— May experience anxiety when separated from his or her primary caregiver
— May want to be more independent in dressing, brushing teeth, etc.
— Is starting to understand simple commands

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 daycare may help write letters or send photos to the deployed parent.
— Use a transitional object, such as a bear, photograph, or book whenever your baby or toddler is going somewhere new or spending time with the deployed service members’ family.
Talking to Extended Family Members about Deployment

Talking to extended family members about deployment can be frustrating. Your or your ex-spouse or ex-partner’s family may want more information about the deployed service member and your baby and toddler 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 baby and toddler and communicating with them about deployment may make the transition after deployment easier for you and your baby and toddler.

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!

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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

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