How Do I Help My Child Understand Deployment?

Deployment is a challenging time for families, especially for those with anxious children or children with special needs. Typical reactions to deployment for preschoolers include mood swings, anger directed at parents, poor concentration, and trouble falling and staying asleep. There are some specific things you can do to help your child cope during this stressful time. Even if your child is not showing signs of stress, your child may benefit from having a trusted adult around (aside from the at-home parent) who is able to answer your child’s many questions and concerns. Another way to help your preschooler during this time is to use photos and other visuals. Ask the deployed parent to send home photographs of where he or she works and sleeps to talk about with your child. You can use maps to show where in the world the deployed parent is located. Talking about the deployed parent in the present tense is helpful so that your preschooler understands what the deployed parent is doing now and focuses less on what may happen in the future.

Using Social Stories to Help Your Child Understand Deployment

Social Stories are a tool for teaching social skills to children with autism and related disabilities. Social Stories provide your preschooler with accurate information about situations that he or she may find difficult or confusing. The story, in this case a parent’s deployment, is described in detail and focuses on important social cues, the events and reactions the individual might expect to occur in the situation, the action and reactions that might be expected of him or her, and why. The goal of Social Stories is to increase your child’s understanding and make him or her feel more comfortable in certain situations. Social Stories are relatively short, straightforward descriptions of social situations, specifically detailing what your child might expect during a situation and what may be expected of him or her. This newsletter contains a sample story about deployment you can use with your child.

Your Preschooler:
— Relies on routines to feel secure and confident
— Is learning about sharing with others and participates in imaginary play
— Is learning about shapes, colors, numbers, and ABCs
— Is learning the concepts of “same” and “different”

Parent Tips:
— Remember to take care of yourself so that you are better able to take care of your child. Consider asking a family member to babysit or hire a babysitter to make sure you get some quality time alone to relax.
— Write your own social story for you and your preschooler to read together.
When to Ask for More Help

Your preschooler may seem moody, angry at parents and caregivers, and may be more agitated than normal. These are common reactions to a parent or caregiver’s deployment. If these symptoms continue for more than three to four weeks, your child may need some extra support to cope with deployment. Your family doctor or daycare provider may have suggestions for how to help your child cope during this stressful time. If you notice extreme agitation, serious depression and/or withdrawal, increased visual or auditory hallucinations, or you think your preschooler may hurt himself or herself, get help right away.

You can find referrals specifically for families experiencing deployment at the following websites:

MilitaryHOMEFRONT website: www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/ismart/MHF-MI (Click on “Exceptional Family Member Program/ Special Needs” under the “Program or Service” drop-down menu.)

The Specialized Training of Military Parents (STOMP) website: www.stompproject.org to sign up for their list serv.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

ADAPT is looking for Minnesota military families to participate in their project! 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!

Follow us on Twitter @adaptmn

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 6:
Rest and Recovery

- Planning for R&R
- What to expect during R&R

http://www.cehd.umn.edu/fsos/adapt
A Social Story is usually a first-person, present-tense story used to provide your child with as much information about a social situation as possible, so he or she is better prepared to face, and act appropriately in, that situation.

There are three types of sentences used to present this information in a Social Story:

- **Descriptive sentences** objectively address the “wh” questions: where the situation takes place, who is involved, what they are doing, and why they may be doing it.

- **Perspective sentences** give a peek into the minds of those involved in the story; they provide details about the emotions and thoughts of others.

**Deployment**

Sometimes Mommy/Daddy goes away for the military.

Mommy/Daddy is helping other people.

I miss Mommy/Daddy when he/she goes away.

Sometimes I feel sad when Mommy/Daddy goes away for the military.

It is okay to be sad.

Sometimes Mommy/Daddy is sad when he/she goes away for the military.

I like to write letters and draw pictures and send them to Mommy/Daddy.

For more examples of Social Stories you can use with your child, check out:

http://kidscandream.webs.com/page12.htm