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. Pre-teens and teens with special needs are quite dependent upon routine and changes in routine may have more extreme consequences than for other children. Therefore, it is important to try and maintain as much of your pre-deployment routine as possible. Identify those friends and family who have been able to soothe your teen and create a calm environment. Engage them in helping you take care of your child. It is also highly recommended to get professional help during this time. A pre-teen or teen with special needs will benefit from professional support during periods of high stress. Communicate with your child’s school in advance so that they are aware of the change that has happened or will be happening in your household. Ask the deployed parent to send home photographs of where he or she works and sleeps. You can use maps to show where in the world the deployed parent is located. Focus on now and not as much on what could happen in the future since this can be overwhelming.

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 child with accurate information about situations that he or she may find difficult or confusing. The story, in this case a parent or caregiver’s deployment, is described in detail and focuses on important social cues, the events and reactions your pre-teen or teen might expect to occur in the situation, the actions 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, detailing what your child might expect during a situation and what may be expected of him or her. This newsletter contains a sample social story about deployment you can use with your pre-teen or teen.

Your Pre-teen and Teen:

— a child with autism is likely to be more dependent upon routines. Disruption to the routine may result in rage.
— a child with ADHD may already feel socially isolated. Deployment may contribute to an increased sense of failure or criticism.
— a child with severe anxiety may look for extra assurances that everyone is safe and secure.

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 alone time.
— Connect with professional resources that will help support you and your child with special needs.
— Write your own social story for you and your school-aged child to read together.
Your pre-teen or teen may seem moody, angry at his or her parents and caregivers, and may be withdrawing from friends and family. 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 school psychologist may have some 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 child may hurt herself or himself, 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!

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Upcoming Topics Vol 6:
Rest and Recuperation

- How do families choose to spend R&R
- The challenge of short reunions during long deployments

http://www.cehd.umn.edu/fsos/adapt
Sample Social Story

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