Communicating with Your Family about R&R

The Rest and Recuperation (R&R) period can be an exciting and sometimes confusing time for the whole family. Generally, children and other family members feel excited about seeing the deployed parent again, but may also feel anxious or stressed about the reunion. Communicating openly about what will happen during R&R and expectations about R&R can help prepare your family so the R&R is less stressful. Your pre-teen and teen may be upset about the deployed service member’s absence. Ask your child how he/she feels about R&R so that you can prepare for the coming and going of the deployed parent. It can be helpful to “brief” the service member on new household routines and the small and not so small crises the parent that stayed at home and children may have had to deal with since the service member left. Most families will have changed, children may have grown and they may have different interests than when the deployment started. Adults at home may have become more independent. Open communication about these kinds of changes will help the R&R go smoothly for the whole family.

What to Expect from your Family during R&R

Different family members will react to and feel differently about R&R. Generally, children feel excited, but may also feel anxious. Your pre-teen and teen will probably want to spend some special time with the deployed parent doing things they did before the deployed parent left. Some children may need a period of time to readjust to the returning parent. This should not be misinterpreted or taken personally. Remember that your child is developing quickly and may have changed since the deployment started. The deployed service member may seem preoccupied about their experience with deployment, and may talk about it a lot or choose not to talk about it. The at-home parent may want extra attention and time with the deployed service member since they have had to keep the family going during deployment. Hold off on the “to-do” list for each other and just spend time together. Remember, R&R plans can change at the last minute.

Your Pre-teen and Teen:

— Is developing physically faster than at any time in their life
— Is using various types of technology throughout the day (cell phones, Facebook, video games, etc.)
— Requires a lot of sleep (8-9 hours a night)
— Is experimenting with new behaviors and identities

Parent Tips:

— As much as possible, try to keep your and your pre-teen and teen’s routines the same so there is not too much disruption caused by R&R
— Your pre-teen and teen may be learning about history and war at school and may have questions about the deployed service member’s experience. Be open to their sharing about what they are learning and their ideas
— Make sure your pre-teen and teen knows that the deployment is not over! Encourage your child to come up with their own way of keeping track of time during the deployment.
Deciding Whether to See Family during R&R

The decision of whether or not to see each other during R&R varies from family to family. Some families feel very strongly that they would like to spend time together during R&R, and others choose to not see each other.

Families that choose not to see each other during R&R may believe that seeing each other for just a few days may confuse the children and make the remaining months of deployment much more difficult. Sometimes, the idea of the deployed parent leaving again can cause a lot of anxiety for the children.

Families that choose to see each other believe it will help their family maintain connection during the deployment. It also may help children to spend time with the deployed parent and break up the long deployment. While it may be difficult to leave again after this short visit, children may also appreciate even the small amount of time with the deployed parent.

Keep in mind that the whole family may not agree on whether or not to see each other, and it is important to discuss the pros and cons together.

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.

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Upcoming Topics Volume 7
Talking to Extended Family and Schools about Deployment

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