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. Your baby and toddler may be confused about R&R because they may not recognize or remember the deployed parent very well. Communicating openly about what will happen during R&R and expectations about R&R can help prepare your family so it is less stressful. Even if your baby and toddler does not fully understand, talking to him or her about R&R can make your child feel secure. 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 the children may have had to deal with since the service member left. Most families will have changed, children may have been born or have grown. 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. It may take some time to rebuild feelings of intimacy. Your baby/toddler may not recognize the deployed service member or may act shy. Some children may need a period of time to warm up and readjust to the returning parent. This should not be misinterpreted or taken personally. Remember that your child is young and needs time to adjust to changes. 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 Baby & Toddler:

— Is developing their sense of touch and using their lips and cheeks to explore the world
— Is starting to learn and respond to his or her name
— Is incredibly curious
— Is starting to develop his or her independence

Parent Tips:

— As much as possible, try to keep your and your children’s routines the same during R&R. Routines are comforting to your baby and toddler and disruptions in their routine can cause stress and anxiety
— Just like when you were preparing for deployment, transitional objects like photos and stuffed animals can help comfort your child after the deployed parent leaves R&R
— Make sure children know the deployment is not over! You can mark time using the same tricks you did when deployment started (paper chains, jelly beans, etc.)
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 lots 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 to help 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, but 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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