Getting Ready for the Service Member to Come Home

While the service member who is deployed is going through many life-changing experiences, this is also true for the spouse, partner, or caregiver who stays at home. You probably changed your routines while the deployed service member was away, and these new routines will change again when the service member comes home. While preparing for reintegration is a very exciting time for families, it is normal to feel some anxiety around preparing for your service member to return home. Some family members think that all of the stresses associated with deployment will go away once the service member comes home, though this may not be the reality. While many military families have shared that they experience a “honeymoon” period during the first few weeks of reintegration, these families also share that adapting to new routines and division of household tasks is stressful and can disrupt family life. It is extremely important to start thinking now about how your family’s routines will change when the service member comes home. What are some tasks that you took over during deployment that the service member can do when he/she returns?

Tips for Spouses, Partners, and Caregivers

There are many things the non-deployed parent or caregiver can do to prepare for reintegration:

1. Expect changes in you, the deployed service member, and your children. Remember that most of these changes mean growth and maturity!

2. The deployed service member has been subject to daily routines during deployment and may rebel against schedules and planned events – leave some room for spontaneity

3. Expect that it will take 4-6 weeks to adjust to each other again

4. Do not hesitate to ask for help if you need it

5. Do not make any important or permanent decisions, including financial ones, for a few weeks, just spend time together before solving any big problems

6. It will take a while for things to feel “normal”

Your Pre-Teen/Teen:

— May be nervous about the deployed service member coming home
— Is starting to learn about and understand global current events
— Is adjusting to physical changes with their bodies
— Is thinking about his or her future (career and education)

Parent Tips:

— Continue to take care of yourself while the deployed service member is away. Make sure to eat a variety of healthy foods, get physical activity, and get enough rest. Set aside time for yourself (ask extended family to take your preschooler to the park one afternoon, etc.), and seek help when you need it.
— If some changes due to reintegration are negative, be patient; you and your family will have plenty of time to bring things back around to a position of comfort.
The challenges faced by a child when a parent or caregiver deploys are unique to the military community. MilitaryKidsConnect.org is a DoD-sponsored website to help military kids support one another and learn coping and resilience-building skills. MilitaryKidsConnect.org recognizes that when parents deploy, kids deploy too.

MilitaryKidsConnect.org was developed by psychologists at the National Center for Telehealth & Technology, the Defense Department’s primary agency for applying innovative technology to issues of psychological health and traumatic brain injury.

MilitaryKidsConnect.org features customized content for three age groups: children, tweens, and teens. Users visit an age-appropriate homepage where they find interactive maps; a personal scrapbook application; age-appropriate games; videos of military kids describing how they cope with deployment; instructional vignettes; a virtual personal space kids navigate with a customizable avatar; and moderated social networking message boards for tweens and teens (parent approval required for registration). Together, these features create a safe and comfortable place for young people everywhere, including those who live outside military base communities, to share with their peers and learn how to handle the pressures of being a military kid.

MilitaryKidsConnect.org also provides content for parents and educators of military kids. Here, adults can find information about the site safeguards and parental controls, site content, and how adults can use the content to encourage positive conversations about deployment with children. Information on common behavioral responses to deployment by age group and methods to cope with these behaviors is also included.

MilitaryKidsConnect.org launched January 2012 and will be participating in promotional events around the country.

ADAPT is gearing up for the next wave of the project. You can help us better understand reintegration in military families and have a say in future resources and services provided to reintegrating military families!

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! There are only 19 spots left for military families to help, so sign-up today!

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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