




Children & Separation Issues of Deployment


Presented by Military & Family Life Consultants

Learning Objectives

- » Children and the Emotional Cycle of Deployment
- » Developmental Issues
- » Common Stress Reactions In Children
- » Coping Strategies
- » Positive Aspects of Separation
- » Knowing When to Seek Help


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Introduction

- » Military separation is difficult for both parent and child
- » Children are resilient
- » Children can feel secure and loved with only one parent in the home
- » How well children cope can be influenced largely by how parents handle the separation
- » The deployed parent's continued contact with the child is most important

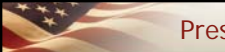
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Children & the Emotional Cycle of Deployment

- » Pre-deployment
 - Anger, denial, anxiousness, clinging, distancing
- » Deployment
 - Loss, sadness, resentment, guilt, anger
 - Tearfulness, changes in sleep or eating habits, irritability
- » Sustainment
 - Feeling connected to absent parent
 - Adjustment to new routines
 - Acceptance of change

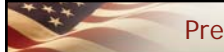
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Preschool-Age Children (3 - 5)

- » Developmental Issues
 - Have no concept of time
 - Abandonment issues are prevalent
 - Need lots of repetition

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Preschool-Age Children *continued*

- » Possible Stress Reactions to Deployment:
 - Regressive behaviors such as:
 - bed-wetting, baby talk, asking for a bottle
 - Fearfulness
 - Clinging to caretakers
 - Uncontrollable crying
 - Irritability and acting out
 - Changes in appetite and sleep patterns

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Elementary School-Age Children (6 - 11)

- » Developmental Issues
 - Concept of time is better
 - Understanding of separation is more developed
 - Have very concrete thinking
 - Concerned about practical things
 - Need routines and lots of reassurance

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Elementary School-Age Children *continued*

- » Possible Stress Reactions to Deployment:
 - Increased irritability and acting out
 - Anxiety
 - Increased complaining
 - Poor concentration
 - Decline in grades
 - Withdrawn from family and friends

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Adolescents (12 - 18)

- » Developmental Issues
 - Developing abstract thinking
 - May be thinking philosophically and questioning parent's mission
 - May have more heightened level of self-consciousness
 - May have difficulty seeing shades of gray
 - May be trying to establish their own identity
 - Wants more responsibility but within limits

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Adolescents *continued*

- » Possible Stress Reactions to Deployment:
 - Irritability and agitation
 - Self-esteem issues
 - Engaging in high risk behaviors
 - Withdrawing from family, friends and activities
 - Decline in grades, skipping school

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General Coping Strategies for Children & Adolescents

- » Communication is key:
 - Children need advance notice if possible
 - If possible, both parents should talk to the child together
 - Use age appropriate language
 - Be honest

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General Coping Strategies for Children & Adolescents *continued*

- » Communication cont...
 - Anticipate your child's questions
 - Encourage them to talk about their feelings
 - Listen without being judgmental
 - Let them know they are not to blame
 - Help them recognize the importance of your job
 - Answer what is asked

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General Coping Strategies *continued*

- » Spend some special time with each child
- » Let them know you love them no matter what
- » Provide an atmosphere of stability
- » Develop plans for staying in touch
- » Let your children help with preparation activities

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General Coping Strategies *continued*

- » Praise your children often
- » Comfort them as often as needed
- » Encourage them to spend time with friends
- » Keep teachers and school counselors informed
- » Make sure they get plenty of rest, exercise and good nutrition
- » Take good care of yourself

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Additional Coping Strategies for Young Children

- » They will need lots of repetition
- » Exchange special comfort tokens with your child
- » Tape record your child's favorite books
- » Encourage them to draw, paint and play
- » Hug and cuddle them often

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Additional Coping Strategies for Adolescents

- » Accept that they may have mood swings
- » Encourage them to connect with peers and stay involved in outside activities
- » Ask their opinions
- » Let them know you hear them and respect their opinions even if you don't agree

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Parenting Long Distance

- » Send lots of cards and letters to each child individually
- » Send pictures or articles from local papers or magazines
- » Take a supply of greeting cards for all occasions

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Parenting Long Distance *continued*

- » Exchange jokes with your child
- » Send a special gift for each child – something unique from where you are stationed
- » Ask your child to send you something special
- » Offer to correspond with your child's class

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Positive Aspects of Separation

- » Could increase independence & self-confidence
- » Relationship with deployed parent might strengthen through exchange of letters, packages, emails, phone calls
- » May strengthen the relationship with the parent at home
- » Develop closer family ties as all family members work together for common goal

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When to Seek Help

- » Most children adjust to separation within a couple of months. Seek help if the following difficulties persist:
 - Decline in grades
 - Withdrawing from friends and activities
 - Increase in behavioral problems
 - Frequent crying
 - Changes in appetite and sleep patterns

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Summary

- » The deployed parent's contact with the child is most important
- » Communication is key
- » Plan to send lots of cards and letters
- » Deployment can also have positive aspects increasing independence in children
- » Seek help if your child continues to have adjustment issues for an extended period of time.

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Questions



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Resources

- » Chaplains and Local Clergy
- » Behavioral Health Services available through TRICARE www.tricare.osd.mil
- » Military OneSource (800) 342-9647
- » Veterans Affairs www1.va.gov/directory

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References

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- » www.defenselink.mil
- » www4.army.mil
- » *Predeployment Ongoing Readiness*, Operation R.E.A.D.Y.
- » www.militarychild.org
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