

# Preparing Children to Cope with Separation During Deployment

Handout available for download on the [YRRP website](http://www.yellowribbon.mil/yrrp/handouts.html) at:  
www.yellowribbon.mil/yrrp/handouts.html

Emotions/Behaviors	Strategies to Assist
<b>Babies, Toddlers, Preschoolers</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Clinginess and trouble separating from parent</li> <li>■ Changes may hold pleasant surprises or may cause conflict</li> <li>■ Increased demands for attention</li> <li>■ Irritability</li> <li>■ Aggression, angry outbursts, and temper tantrums</li> <li>■ Return to younger behaviors (e.g., more thumb sucking)</li> <li>■ Sleep disturbances</li> <li>■ Unexplained crying or tearfulness</li> <li>■ Eating difficulties or change in eating patterns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Keep routines consistent and predictable</li> <li>■ Stay calm and patient</li> <li>■ Be available for comfort and reassurance as much as possible</li> <li>■ Provide lots of affection, spend time together playing and having fun</li> <li>■</li> <li>■</li> <li>■</li> <li>■</li> <li>■</li> </ul>
<b>School-aged Children</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sadness, confusion, and worry – crying, questioning, clingy</li> <li>■ Irritability, anger, and moodiness – testing, arguing, acting out at home and school</li> <li>■ Illness complaints and other physical symptoms – headaches, stomachaches, trouble sleeping, loss of interest in eating</li> <li>■ Problems at school (drop in grades, does not want to go, or general complaining)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Provide consistency and structure/routines</li> <li>■ Keep the deployed parent present</li> <li>■ Keep in touch with deployed parent through technological communication</li> <li>■ Encourage communication</li> <li>■ Stay involved, and acknowledge expressed feelings and behaviors</li> <li>■ Set clear rules and expectations, and follow through consistently on age-appropriate discipline</li> <li>■</li> <li>■</li> <li>■</li> <li>■</li> </ul>

Emotions/Behaviors	Strategies to Assist
<b>Teens</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ More awareness of dangers and adult stress</li> <li>▪ Depression, worry, and feelings of being alone</li> <li>▪ Withdrawal - ignore or deny stress</li> <li>▪ Misdirected anger</li> <li>▪ Acting out behaviors (trouble at school, home)</li> <li>▪ Declining academic engagement or performance</li> <li>▪ Appearance of apathy (e.g., loss of interest, non-communication)</li> <li>▪ Low self-esteem and self-criticism</li> <li>▪ Loss of interest in usual interests and hobbies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Remember – they are not adults</li> <li>▪ Balance - being a teen and knowing there will be additional responsibilities</li> <li>▪ Stay involved, provide support, and demonstrate your love and care</li> <li>▪ Encourage them to talk</li> <li>▪ Help build support system</li> <li>▪ Structure: routines, consistent enforcement of developmentally appropriate expectations</li> <li>▪</li> <li>▪</li> <li>▪</li> </ul>

Strategies for Deployed Parents	Creative Ways to Stay Connected
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Keep everyone involved and updated</li> <li>▪ Decide on creative ways to stay involved and connected once deployed</li> <li>▪ Outline what type of information you may be able to share</li> <li>▪ Work with home caregiver</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Writing letters</li> <li>▪ Looking at pictures and videos</li> <li>▪ Saying a special prayer</li> <li>▪ Counting down days on a calendar</li> <li>▪ Finding where the Service member is on a map</li> <li>▪ Making a scrapbook</li> <li>▪</li> <li>▪</li> <li>▪</li> </ul>

**NOTES:**

## Family Readiness Checklist to Prepare Children for Deployment

The following checklists are designed to help prepare Service members and their families for deployment. These checklists provide tips that may be helpful in readying Service members, their children, and their children's caregivers during the deployment.

### Deployment Readiness Checklist for Expecting Parents

- Have the Service member and spouse discussed their feelings about being separated during pregnancy and the birth of a child?
- Will the spouse send pictures of herself throughout the pregnancy?
- Will the spouse write or keep journals about doctor visits, the baby kicking, sonograms, and so on?
- Can the Service member and spouse share books, articles, and websites about pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting?
- Do the Service member and spouse communicate openly about hopes, dreams, fears, and expectations each has for the child?
- Do the Service member and spouse have a support system – someone each can talk to about concerns and feelings?
- Have the Service member and spouse talked about using the American Red Cross for notification of the baby's birth?
- Is there a plan in place for when the baby is born? Is a family member attending the birth? Who will be caring for other children while the spouse is in the hospital?
- Do the Service member and spouse talk about how life will be different after the baby arrives and the deployment is over?

### Deployment Readiness Checklist for Parents of Infants and Toddlers

- Do the Service member and spouse, or the child's guardian, have a plan to keep the Service member informed of the developmental milestones, such as crawling, walking, learning to talk, infants or toddlers are achieving while the Service member is away?
- Are the Service member and spouse or guardian aware of infants' or toddlers' preferences, so the spouse or guardian can maintain a steady routine?
- Does the spouse or guardian know how infants or toddlers react to stress?
- Has the Service member talked with the spouse or guardian about maintaining the rules and routines in the family as much as possible during the deployment?
- Does the spouse or guardian have a plan for personal time?
- Do the Service member and spouse or guardian have a good child-care provider?

- Do the Service member and spouse or guardians have a plan for keeping the Service member connected with items, such as pictures, video/audio tapes, and journals?
- Has the Service member considered reading and recording his or her children's favorite books or songs on audio or video tape for them to listen to during the deployment?
- Has the Service member considered giving children a special photograph of himself or herself with each child to have during the deployment?

### Deployment Readiness Checklist for Parents of Preschoolers

- Do the Service member and spouse or guardian have a plan to keep the Service member informed of his or her preschooler's developmental milestones, such as expanding their vocabulary?
- Does the spouse or guardian know how the preschooler reacts to stress?
- Has the Service member explained to his or her preschooler about the upcoming deployment and that he or she has to go away for work for a while?
- Can the Service member schedule extra one-on-one time with his or her preschooler before the deployment?
- Has the Service member spoken with the child's school or day care teachers, informed them of the upcoming deployment, and asked them to send copies of schoolwork?
- Can the Service member arrange for the preschooler to spend time with grandparents or other caring adults?
- Has the Service member considered reading and recording his or her child's favorite books or songs on audio or video tape for the child to listen to during the deployment?
- Has the Service member considered creating a photo album of pictures of himself or herself with the child as a special keepsake for the child during deployment?

### Deployment Readiness Checklist for Parents of School-age Children

- Does the spouse or guardian know how the child will react to stress?
- Have there been family meetings to discuss the deployment?
- Has the Service member told the child where he or she is going and why he or she is going there?
- Has the Service member discussed when he or she will be returning home, if known?
- Has the Service member addressed any concerns his or her child may have about safety?

- Has the Service member created a communication plan with his or her child and provided items, like stationary, pens, markers, stamped and self-addressed envelopes?
- Did the Service member include money in his or her budget for phone calls and gifts/souvenirs for the children?
- Has the Service member and the spouse or guardian made plans to help keep their children busy during deployment with fun activities, including sports, scouts, music, and church?
- Has the Service member spoken with his or her child's school teacher, informed him or her of the upcoming deployment, and asked that he or she send copies of schoolwork and report cards?
- Has the Service member asked if his or her child's school sponsors a discussion group or other program for children of deployed military parents?
- Has the Service member informed the school counselor of the upcoming deployment?
- Has the Service member informed extended family members about the upcoming deployment and asked them to keep in contact with the Service member's child?
- Has the Service member considered creating a photo album of pictures of himself or herself and the child doing things together?
- Has the Service member considered leaving a personal item for each of his or her children to keep until he or she returns?

### Deployment Readiness Checklist for Parents of Teenagers

- Does the spouse or guardian know how teenagers react to stress?
- Has the Service member held a family meeting to discuss the deployment?
- Has the Service member told his or her teenagers where he or she is going and why he or she is going there?
- Has the Service member discussed when he or she will return, if known?
- Has the Service member tried to address any concerns teens may have about the Service member's safety?
- Has the Service member created a communication plan with teenagers and given them email and regular mail addresses?
- Has the Service member reminded teenagers that schoolwork is important, and the Service member would like to receive progress reports?
- Has the Service member asked if his or her teen's school sponsors a discussion group or other program for teens of deployed military parents?

*Taken from Department of Defense Military Deployment Guide, Preparing You and Your Family for the Road Ahead.*