



CHILDREN & SEPARATION ISSUES OF DEPLOYMENT

Presented by Military & Family Life Counselors

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



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



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



PRESCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN (3 – 5)

Developmental Issues

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



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



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



Possible Stress Reactions to Deployment

- Increased irritability and acting out
- Anxiety
- Increased complaining
- Poor concentration
- Decline in grades
- Withdrawn from family and friends



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



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



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



Communication

- 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



GENERAL COPING STRATEGIES FOR CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS

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



GENERAL COPING STRATEGIES FOR CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS

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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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.





QUESTIONS?

RESOURCES

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



REFERENCES

- *Family Readiness*, Family Readiness Program, Robins AFB Georgia
- www.defenselink.mil
- www4.army.mil
- *Predeployment Ongoing Readiness*, Operation R.E.A.D.Y.
- www.militarychild.org
- www.survivingdeployment.com
- www.deploymentkids.com





THANK YOU

