



HELPING CHILDREN COPE WITH POST DEPLOYMENT ISSUES

Presented by Military & Family Life Counselors

AGENDA

- Introduction
- Children's Concerns
- What to Expect
 - Toddlers/Preschoolers
 - School Aged Children
 - Teens
- Parent/Child Communication
- When to Seek Help



INTRODUCTION

- Reunion and reintegration is a big change for the whole family
- Children may have many conflicting feelings when the deployed parent returns home
- Although most children adjust well, some children may have difficulty coping with the change, especially if it means significant changes in their routine



CHILDREN'S CONCERNS

Children may have concerns such as:

- Will my parent be angry because I didn't behave all the time?
- Will my parent still love me?
- Will the rules change now that my parent has returned ?
- Will I have different chores now?
- Will I have to give up some responsibilities?
- How long will Dad/Mom stay this time?



ADDITIONAL CONCERNS OF CHILDREN

- May see returning parent as a “stranger in my house”
- May feel they don’t know how to respond to returning parent
- For older boys, may resent no longer being the “man of the house”
- May worry about possible anger of the returning parent due to experiences while deployed



WHAT TO EXPECT

- Children respond differently at different stages of development
- The following slides present possible feelings and reactions that children may have at different ages



TODDLERS/PRESCHOOLERS

What to Expect:

- May not recognize their parent
- Might cling to the other parent
- May have regressive behaviors
- Could test limits
- May want all of the returning parent's attention



SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

What To Expect:

- Could have mixed feelings about their return
- Might test the limits
- May cling to other parent or relative
- May want all of the returning parent's attention
- May feel very proud of the returning parent



TEENS

- May have mixed feelings about their return
- Could test the boundaries
- Might feel self-conscious about sharing their feelings
- May be very proud of their returning parent and excited they are home



WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Allowing the child to be heard and to be there for them is often the most important thing a parent can do
- Take time out for each child separately
- Treat them with respect
- Hug them often and let them know you love them
- Keep their routines – bedtime, bath time, meal time, etc.
- Encourage them to spend time with friends
- Keep teachers and school counselors informed of any special needs



ENHANCING RESILIENCY IN CHILDREN

Enhancing resiliency includes:

- Positive relationships including strong connection to parents, teachers, family, and other caring adults
- Ability to keep self calm (deep breathing, relaxation, etc.)
- Good communication skills
- Helping them express feelings
- A sense of humor
- Involvement in hobbies, sports or special interest
- Their belief system



PARENT/CHILD COMMUNICATION

General Guidelines:

- Don't interrupt – let your child tell their story
- Use “I” statements - Instead of “You'd better do this.”
Say “I want you to do this.”
- Ask open ended questions - Instead of “Did you have a good day at school?” try “What was the most fun thing you did at school today?”



COMMUNICATING WITH TODDLERS/PRESCHOOLERS

- Squat to your child's eye level and make eye contact
- Use simple and direct language with few words
- Feedback to them what you hear them say



COMMUNICATING WITH SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

- Ask for their ideas and input
- Provide lots of reassurance
- Avoid being judgmental or critical
- Validate their feelings



COMMUNICATING WITH TEENS

- Don't talk down to them – show respect for their opinions
- **LISTEN** more often than you talk
- Be open to learning something new from them
- Avoid being judgmental or critical
- Use written communication if talking is difficult



WHEN TO SEEK HELP

Most children adjust within a few weeks. 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

- Although most children adjust well, some have difficulty with post deployment issues
- It's important to provide them with a sense of stability and security
- Teaching children relaxation skills and helping them express feelings can enhance their resiliency
- Keeping communication channels open is essential
- If your children's adjustment issues do not subside within a few weeks and problem behaviors worsen, seek help





QUESTIONS?

RESOURCES

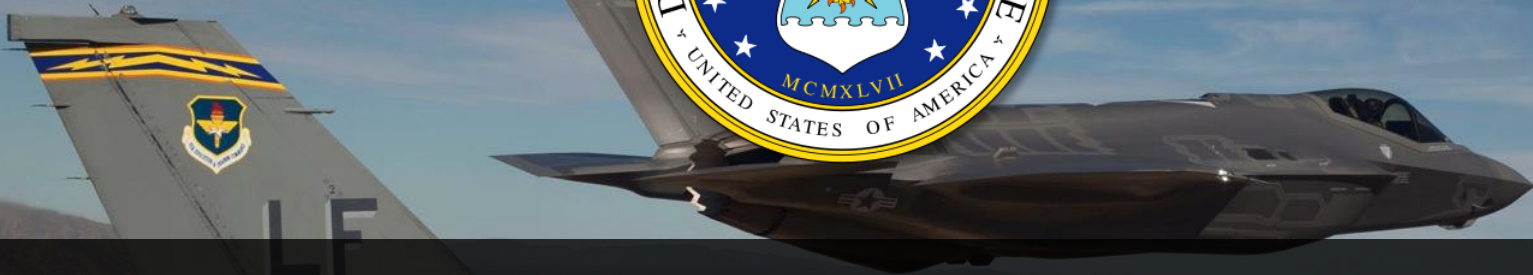
- Military Community Services
- Chaplain and Local Clergy
- Military OneSource (800) 342-9647
- TRICARE www.Tricare.mil
- Behavioral Health Services



REFERENCES

- *Family Readiness*, Family Readiness Program, Robins AFB Georgia
- *Predeployment Ongoing Readiness*, Operation R.E.A.D.Y.
- www.militarychild.org
- www.wholefamily.com
- www.familyeducation.com
- www.parenting-ed.org
- www.askdrsears.com





THANK YOU

