



# 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](http://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](http://www.militarychild.org)
- [www.wholefamily.com](http://www.wholefamily.com)
- [www.familyeducation.com](http://www.familyeducation.com)
- [www.parenting-ed.org](http://www.parenting-ed.org)
- [www.askdrsears.com](http://www.askdrsears.com)





**THANK YOU**