

## Speaker Notes

### When a Parent Deploys (Children Ages 2-5)

#### Page 1 – Title Slide

- Parents can help children understand and accept the deployment of a loved one and their feelings about it by planning ahead.

#### Page 2 – Objectives

None

#### Page 3 – Developmental Issues

- No concept of time: They cannot conceive of “next month” or “next year” or even “next week.” What may seem like a short time to an adult seems like an eternity to a child.
- Abandonment issues are prevalent: Because one parent has left, they expect something will happen to the remaining parent.
- Need lots of repetition: They will need lots of reassurance, and you will need to repeatedly explain what has happened.

#### Page 4 – Common Stress Reactions to Deployment

- Regressive behaviors: Remember that this is a normal reaction to stress for this age group, and be patient with your child.
- Fearfulness: Fears of abandonment and fears for safety are common.
- Clinging to caretakers: Often a sign the child needs you to help him regain control and feel safe.
- Irritability and acting out: May engage in biting, kicking, hitting, throwing things.
- Changes in appetite and sleep patterns: The child may not want to eat or may suddenly only eat certain foods; they may also have more difficulty at bedtime or not want to take naps. Nightmares may be more frequent.

#### Page 5 – Preparing Children for Deployment

None

#### Page 6 – Talk to Your Children about the Deployment

- Parents should digest the information before they communicate it to the child.
- Children sense when something is about to happen and will worry more if they are left in the dark.

#### Page 7 – What Do I Say?

- Reassure them the deployed parent is not leaving due to their actions: Children often internalize that they were “bad” and that is why the parent/loved one has left the family. Young children only think in concrete terms and do not have the ability for abstract thinking. Try to explain that serving in the military –and going away from time to time– is the parent’s job.
- Let them know the parent is trained to do their job: Since children worry about the safety of the deployed parent, it is helpful for them to know the deployed parent is trained to do their job.
- Discuss changes in lifestyle that may occur: If deployment includes any changes like moving, new childcare, or school changes, the child needs to hear about them. Knowing about changes in advance helps the child to adjust to them.

### Page 8 – Prepare for Separation

- Reinforce the emotional bond: The departing parent needs to spend QUALITY time with the child before they leave. Don't be afraid to hug your child. A display of affection is powerful communication.
- Plan for communicating: Encourage the child to brainstorm ways communication can occur— letters, cassette tape messages, drawing pictures, etc.
- Help the child plan for departure: When packing bags, allow the child to assist in some way. This will help them think and talk about the deployment and give them an opportunity to ask questions they may be wondering about. Suggest a “swap” of some token, something of the child's that can be packed in a duffel bag in return for something that belongs to the departing parent.

### Page 9 – Ways to Help Children Cope

- Give them a method of measuring the passage of time: Since young children have no concept of time, parents need to use markers such as holidays or birthdays. It's also a good idea to ceremonially cross off days on the calendar. When there is no exact date of return or when deployment is extended, a paper chain with a link added each day that the parent is gone can be used for a decoration when they return.
- Let them see the deployed parent's workspace through pictures and videos: Seeing where the parent eats, sleeps and spends part of the day provides a concrete image of where the parent is when they can't come home.
- Letters and cards are important: The length and contents are not nearly as important as the presence of something in the mail from the absent parent with their name on the envelope.
- Talk about the deployed parent frequently. Tell stories or jokes about the parent. Talking about them will keep their presence in the child's life. Tell them how much the missing parent loves and misses them.

### Page 10 – Additional Coping Strategies for Young Children

- They will need lots of repetition: Young children need lots and lots of repetition. Since they have no concept of time and no abstract thinking, they cannot conceptualize the future. They will need repeated explanations of the deployment and reassurances several times a day for many days. It will take lots of patience.
- Tape record your child's favorite books: Recording books to be played back helps young children with separation and attachment issues.
- Encourage them to draw, paint and play: Children can't cognitively understand and express feelings. They express themselves and work out their feelings through their imaginative play and art.
- Hug and cuddle them often: They need lots of physical contact to feel secure and loved.

### Page 11 – Coping Strategies for Caregivers

- Maintain a regular routine with your child: Activities such as games, schooling, and bedtimes are important to keep regular. Continue to celebrate birthdays or other special occasions with enthusiasm.
- Turn on your “sensors”: Just because a child doesn't tell you about his concerns doesn't mean they are not troubled. Young children are not very good at expressing fears and feelings in

words. Help them identify feelings by naming them—scared, sad, angry, etc. Offer them safe ways to express feelings, such as drawing, pretend play or telling stories.

- Limit television and other media news coverage: Exposure to media coverage of military action—even ones the parent is not involved in—can result in increased anxiety and worries. Ask friends and family not to discuss scary events around your child.
- Be consistent with discipline: It is important for children to understand that even though things have changed, they can still count on the rules that you have established being the same. Do not fall into the trap of using “just wait until your father or mother gets home” as the ultimate threat.

**Page 12 – Take Care of Yourself**

- We are all more vulnerable to stress when we are tired, and can manage better when we are rested and in tune with ourselves.

**Page 13 – Conclusion**

None

**Page 14 – Questions**

None

**Page 15 – Resources**

None

**Page 16 – References**

None

**Page 17 – Thank You**

None

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