

Did you know?

- According to the Military Child Education Coalition, about 700,000 children in the United States today have at least one parent deployed.
- Children are also impacted by the deployment of siblings, aunts and uncles, and grandparents.
- The U.S. Armed Forces have partnered with the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies to support military families.

INTRODUCTION

Military deployments can be a time of stress for the entire family, but especially for children. Based on their experiences and developmental levels, children respond differently to deployment and separation from a parent. Working with very young children comes with unique challenges due to their limited vocabulary and inability to identify and regulate their own emotions. Changes in behavior are to be expected and may include anger, sadness, feelings of abandonment, anxiety, increased aggression, withdrawal, and confusion. When deployment separates a child from a loved one, the child can become sensitive to the lack of control over his/her environment.

Child care providers play an integral part in a child's daily life. The care providers' responses to children experiencing deployment will play a critical role in helping children build skills to cope with the trauma and stress they may be experiencing. Regardless of the child's age, the consistent presence of a child care provider provides a daily opportunity to help the entire family through this transition.

HOW to HELP

Military Families as a Child Care Provider

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

When working with infants:

- Establish a secure and trusting relationship. Infants need to be surrounded by people they trust in order to build healthy relationships in the future.
- Keep the deployed parent in the child's world. Encourage families to provide pictures, voice recordings or other personal items to help maintain connections.
- Maintain routines to allow for consistency. When everything else is changing in an infant's life, security is created through routines.
- Watch for signs of stress in the parent or guardian at home. Infants mirror the feelings of the important adults in their lives.

When working with toddlers:

- If the toddler becomes agitated or disruptive, remain calm and patient. Their behavior could be in response to stress or insecurity they are feeling in other areas of their lives.
- Maintain daily routines. Toddlers like to know what comes next.
- Allow toddlers to keep reminders of the deployed parent around. Have the parent's picture in a sturdy frame or ironed on a pillow to help bridge the miles between child and parent.
- Expect some regression, such as lapses in potty training. This is a normal response. Work with the child's parent or guardian at home to grow through these setbacks.

When working with preschoolers:

- Help children express emotions in positive ways. Give them words to describe what they are feeling.
- Provide opportunities to express feelings through play. Dramatic play opportunities are essential.
- Display and read books that relate to parental separation.
- Listen to children's fears and concerns. Reassurance that the deployed parent is working hard and loves them is important.
- Set clear expectations and limits. Children will attempt to test boundaries. It is important that they feel secure in familiar routines and know that the adult will protect them.

THE MILITARY FAMILY RESEARCH INSTITUTE at Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47907 • 765-496-3403 • mfri@purdue.edu

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HOW to HELP *Military Families as a Child Care Provider*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Helping young children navigate through a loved one's deployment can be challenging. Educating child care staff members is vital to the overall well-being and development of each child affected by deployment. Resources are available to assist in helping children with experiences related to the deployment and separation of a parent. The most important resource is the child's parent or guardian at home.

Working with the parent or guardian at home to provide a supportive environment for the child is imperative. Establishing a close relationship with the current caregiver helps both the child and the entire family. Each family member is affected and supporting the entire family goes a long way in helping them thrive during the deployment.

There are many websites and resources designed to provide additional information about how child care providers can help military families. The more you learn, the more you will be able to help children in your care.

For More Information

- *ZERO TO THREE*, www.zerotothree.org
- *Military Child Education Coalition*, www.militarychild.org
- *Military OneSource*, www.militaryonesource.com
- *American Academy of Pediatrics*, www.aap.org/sections/uniformedservices/deployment
- *Sesame Street Workshop's Talk, Listen, Connect*, www.sesameworkshop.org/initiatives/emotion/tlc
- *National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies*, www.naccrra.org/militaryprograms

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