

DEPLOYMENT AND YOUR STUDENTS

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YOU MAY HAVE AN AT-RISK CHILD IF HIS OR HER FAMILY IS EXPERIENCING A DEPLOYMENT.

It is almost certain that one or more students in your school will be affected at any given time. National Guard and Reserve families often live far from military bases and associated support systems. You are a significant and valuable resource in the lives of these students.

Deployment can cause prolonged stress because it results in changes in family structure and is beyond the child's control. Prolonged stress alters brain chemistry and function, resulting in problems with concentration, memory, behavior and control of emotions.

UNDERSTANDING DEPLOYMENT

Definition: An individual or military unit is moved within the U.S. or overseas to accomplish a task or mission such as training exercises, humanitarian efforts, peacekeeping activities, or combat.

Pre-deployment- Family is notified that member will be deployed, several weeks to a year in advance.

- General shock and disbelief; security, and safety of family may feel shattered.
- May feel like service member is already "psychologically deployed".

Deployment Phase- From the time the service member leaves home through the first month of deployment.

- Mixed emotions-may include feeling abandoned, angry, sad, numb and relieved.

Sustainment- From first through next-to-last month of deployment.

- Majority of families reach a "new normal" and resume life with renewed resiliency and hope.
- Level of adjustment varies from family to family, and from child to child; families with multiple pre-existing problems and/or troubled family members are at a higher risk for adjustment problems.

Pre-Reunion-The month before service member is scheduled to return home.

- Mixed emotions-excitement, anticipation, and apprehension.
- Unrealistically high or low expectations.

Reunion- Typically lasts 3 to 6 months, beginning when service member returns home.

- Initially reunion is experienced with euphoria and joy for many families.
- Family structure and roles will need to be renegotiated because all family members will have changed.
- Child's response depends on age; may display significant anxiety for up to a year.

AS A FACULTY OR STAFF MEMBER, HOW CAN I HELP?

1. Rely on your wisdom and knowledge of childhood development.
2. Maintain a predictable, structured class schedule with specific rules and consequences. This helps student to feel a sense of security and belonging in class, and that school is a safe, caring place.
3. Plan for shorter lessons and proceed at a slower pace if necessary.
4. Be approachable and sensitive; limit frightening or hurtful communication.
5. Children may express themselves inappropriately in an effort to cope with overwhelming emotions. They may become overactive and disruptive, or quiet and withdrawn.
6. Acknowledge that feeling sad, angry, and hurt is normal when someone we care about leaves.
7. Reinforce ways to express negative emotions without hurting self or others.
8. Reassure students that everyone adjusts to change at a different pace.
9. Be sensitive to needs of students whose parents or caregivers speak a different primary language.