



Effects of Deployment on Children and Adolescents

(Information gathered from Tripler Army Medical Center
Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Service)

Objectives

- Review the emotional cycle of deployment
- Discuss the effects of deployment and loss on children and adolescents
- Discuss ways that adults can help students cope with deployment
- Briefly review when referral is warranted



Emotional Cycle of Deployment

1. Pre-deployment - 1-6 months before
2. Deployment - first month after leaving
3. Sustainment - 2-5 months during deployment
4. Re-deployment - last month
5. Post-deployment - 3-6 months after



Pre- Deployment: Service Member

- Train-up, bonding with units
- Mental and physical distance from family
- Getting affairs in order: will, power of attorney, finances, insurance, family plan, housing, medical, dental.

Pre-Deployment: Families

Pre-separation stress causes:

- Anger—a primary emotional reaction
- Denial—why us? “They will probably call it off.”
- Anxiety—what will the future hold?
Will service member return safely?
- Others—fear, sadness, resentment,
clinging, distancing



Deployment



- Mixed emotions from soldier, spouse and children:
 - relief - anger -sadness - numbness - guilt
- Sleep difficulties
- Phone calls - email - waiting for that 1st call
- Worries about "Can I handle everything?"





Before a Parent Goes Away Kids May Feel:

- Sadness, fear, resentment, anger
- Self-blame... "I was not good so Mom/Dad is leaving."
- "He/She doesn't love me"
- Clinging, attention seeking, aggressive or regressive behaviors.

What to look for in preschool students



- Thumb sucking
- Bedwetting
- Clinging to parents
- Sleep disturbances
- Loss of appetite
- Fear of the dark
- Regression in behavior
- Withdrawal from friends and routines

What to look for in elementary school children



- Irritability
- Aggressiveness
- Clinginess
- Nightmares
- School avoidance
- Poor concentration
- Withdrawal from activities and friends



What to look for in Adolescents



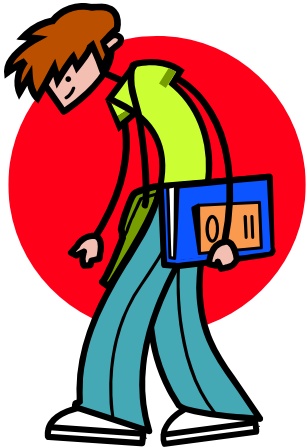
- Sleeping and eating disturbances
- Agitation, increase in conflicts
- Physical complaints
- Delinquent behavior
- Poor concentration





Considerations for students with cognitive limitations

- Children with developmental or cognitive impairments may not understand events or their own reactions to events and images
- They tend to respond based more on observations of adult and peer emotions
- Discussions need to be specific, concrete and basic





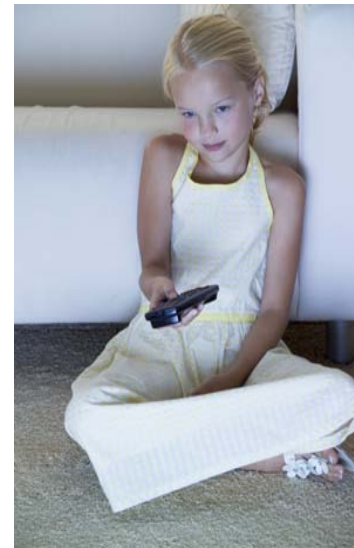
What can adults do to help?

- First....take care of your own needs!
- Talk to other adults
- Take care of your physical health (proper nutrition, rest, exercise)
- Make time, however small, to do things you enjoy
- Avoid spending sprees



What else can adults do to help?

- Limit family television viewing (news of the war can be disturbing)
- Maintain a normal routine
- Keep in touch with positive people
- Reassure safety – especially that other parent is not going to leave



Model calm and control



- Avoid appearing anxious or frightened
- Provide structure
- Express own emotions in a matter of fact way
- Listen and empathize
- Be optimistic
- Help children do something to help others



Increase the four “A’s” of Parenting

- **Attention**...quality time spent listening, talking and doing things together
- **Appreciation**...express thanks for specific tasks and behavior that help the family
- **Acceptance**...let kids know they are liked just the way they are now
- **Affection**...physical and verbal ways love is expressed to children

You can't spoil children by giving them too much of the four A's!

Helping kids cope

- Have deploying parent make a good morning and good night tape for each child.
- Place a picture of the child alone with the deployed parent next to their bed.
- Encourage children to share their feelings and tell them that whatever they feel is okay.



Discipline During Deployment

- Remember: Discipline means “To Teach”; what will the child learn from the situation?
- Don’t relax the rules or excuse behavior.
- Avoid bribing, pleading, nagging or threatening...words are weak discipline tools.
- Stop talking or yelling, take action and be consistent. (Spanking is not effective)
- Parenting classes or books can give you ideas on what actions work best depending on the age of the child.



Sustainment Phase

- New routines established
- New sources of support – Family Readiness Groups are wonderful resources for information, activities and recreation.
- Feel more in control after being ‘tested’
- Independence; self-reliance
- New confidence – “I can do this.”

**Avoid rumors: listening or repeating*



Re-Deployment

- Anticipation of homecoming
 - Can be agonizing with changing schedules
- Excitement and apprehension
 - Changes during time away
 - New independence
- Burst of energy- “nesting” - getting ready
- Difficulty making decisions



Post-Deployment/ Reunion



- Honeymoon period
- Loss of independence
- Need for “own” space by soldier and spouse
- Renegotiating routines, responsibilities
- Reintegration with family
 - 1 y/o might be scared - preschooler guilty
 - School aged kids often want attention
 - Adolescents might pretend not to care; moody

How Adults Can Help Children Cope with Reunion

- Don't force hugs and kisses; give them time to warm up to the returning parent.
- Listen to them with undivided attention and accept their feelings.
- Try not to criticize or be judgmental.
- Teens: respect privacy and friends; don't tease about fashion or music; answer questions honestly.

What Teachers or Counselors Can Do to Help Throughout this Cycle of Deployment

- Discussions on deployment
 - What, where, why, how long
- Personal journals or make a scrapbook of educational progress while parent is away.
- Take pictures of events, projects to send
- Bulletin board – share pictures, experiences
- Record on calendar deployments and re-deployments of parents

Warning Signs for Referral


- Persistent fears that interfere with daily life
- Sleep disturbance over weeks
- Loss of concentration / irritability
- Behavioral problems that are atypical
- Increase in physical complaints without cause
- Withdrawal from friends and family



GREAT WEBSITES!

MILITARY HOMEFRONT:

<http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/>



For more information and additional resources, contact your school counselor or school liaison officer.