

Supporting children, young people and families during periods of deployment

A guide for parents and carers



This booklet has drawn upon the experiences of children and families, as well as a very wide range of professional staff. Deployment is part of military life and families told us how they learn to deal with the challenges. Their experiences have helped to produce this booklet.

Our work to support children and families is ongoing; we are always pleased to receive any comments that may help us improve this material.

If you would like to give feedback, or would like further copies please contact us at the address below.

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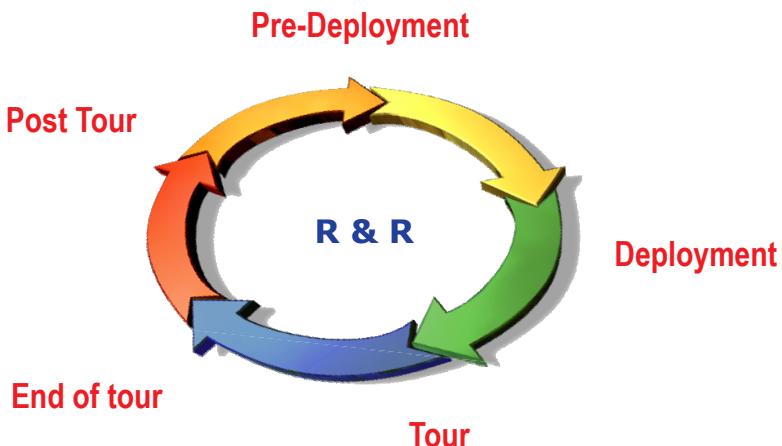
INTRODUCTION

Service families know that being in the Forces is not a routine day-to-day job. Deployment is what the services train and prepare for; it is at the heart of what they do.

Deployment brings special challenges for those left at home. It affects family life and tests our ability to cope with change. But change is a fact of life; everyone responds differently and manages in their own way.

Most families cope very well and find that they grow stronger as a result of their experiences. This booklet has been prepared with the help of a very wide range of people, including parents and children themselves, who shared their thoughts with us.

Each deployment brings with it new challenges. The booklet looks at the issues for children and families, during each of the stages of deployment represented in the illustration below.



PRE – DEPLOYMENT

Pre-deployment is the phase of preparation for departure and separation. This may last a few weeks or a few months depending upon the length of notice given for the deployment.

Those deploying are focussed on training and the military task ahead.





The practicalities of having to manage the family alone are uppermost on the minds of those remaining at home.

The pattern of family life starts to alter and even the youngest can feel it.

Changes can worry children:-

They sometimes need to feel able to share their thoughts and feelings as they make sense of what is happening. It helps to create a climate in which they can talk openly and honestly with:

- you... their family;
- friends;
- teachers;
- and other trusted adults.

QUALITY TIME WITH YOUR CHILDREN

All parents know the value of spending quality time together; it is not about providing special treats but giving personal time and just enjoying simple things in each others company.

The most important priorities are to provide the time and space for your child to talk to you and to listen to them when they do. Often bath and bed times can be a good chance to chat and reassure.

Allow time in your regular routines for simple conversations about day-to-day things. This will also give you the chance to notice any of the less obvious signs that your child may be feeling troubled..

Parents who set aside regular quality time to chat with their children from an early age, as a simple part of their routine, tend to develop better relationships and be more approachable.

Be sensitive to the fact that your child may not want to talk about some things but if necessary say:
"I can tell something is bothering you; would it help to share it?"
Talking about things that make



them unhappy can sometimes make them feel worse – so be careful not to dwell - allow times when they can get feelings off their chest when they need to and then move on. Sometimes children simply do not know why they feel troubled; there does not have to be a reason. It is simple, familiar day-to-day routines and chat that helps reassure and bring a sense of normality and security.



QUESTIONS ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLES' MINDS at this time are.....

Where are you going?

What is it like there?

When will you be going?

How long are you going for?

Why are you going?

What will you be doing?

Who else is going?

Will the family rules change?

Will I have to do extra jobs?

Will I still be able to.....?

Who will look after me if.....?

They may have lots more questions... listen carefully and let them talk... encourage them to share what is on their mind... keep your answers simple and avoid too much detail... share the conversation with your partner to make sure you are not giving mixed messages... mixed messages confuse and can cause unnecessary stress... above all -

Be truthful

Children often sense when they are being lied to.

Don't underestimate their resilience.

If you are not sure how to reply to a question,

look for the answer together.

ANSWERING YOUR CHILD'S QUESTIONS

The following may be useful ...

Where are you going? What is it like there?

- ... spend time together finding the location on a map of the world;
- ... talk about how you will be getting there;
- ... put the distance into context by comparing it with a journey they know;
- ... concentrate on describing the climate, terrain and
- ... your living conditions; children often like to know simple things such as where you will sleep, or what the food will be like.



Older children may want to know more about what the geography, the climate, the terrain, the lives and customs of people there.

When will you be going? How long are you going for?

The Unit's deployment date may be firm but timing for individuals can often change to meet operational and local needs... don't be too specific until your dates have been finally confirmed - last minute changes happen frequently and can cause additional upset.

Why are you going? What will you be doing?

Reassure your children that you are going because you are doing a special job for your country.

Remind them that you are a highly trained professional and that you will be doing everything possible to keep safe.

Older children are often aware of some of the background to the deployment; this is usually based on information from TV and newspapers, which is not always accurate and may be slanted. It is worth spending time talking it through to dispel concern as well as check they are not watching too much.



Who else is going?

Young children sometimes have odd ideas about cause and effect; they may feel that you are going away because they have done something wrong... or that you don't love them any more.

Knowing who else is going - especially a friend's mum or dad - can be reassuring and help establish a support network.

Will the family rules change?

Some changes to family routines will be needed when there is only one parent at home.

Try to stick to familiar routines, regular meal and bed times, and keep changes to a minimum.

Keep to your usual rules and expectations and ways of enforcing them - it avoids problems of readjustment when the family is together again.

Be careful not to threaten children with what will happen “when your father gets back” - it undermines your own authority and may affect the way they view the homecoming. Also, be careful never to suggest, “If you don’t behave yourself daddy/mummy won’t want to come back”.

Will I have to do extra jobs?

Being a ‘lone parent’ is demanding – young children like to feel they can help and it can take their minds off things that may be worrying them. Avoid telling children they are now in charge, or that they need to look after mummy. Instead, talk with them and identify a few specific regular tasks that can be their responsibility.

Choose tasks that are age-appropriate and make sure they are ones they can easily succeed with, such as... putting out the rubbish, setting the table, taking the dog for its daily walk, feeding the fish.

Older children need to know they have a part to play and sharing the chores can also be a good time to chat.

Let your children know you are proud of them and appreciate the extra help they will be giving.

Will I still be able to...?

Boredom and inactivity allow time for anxieties to fester. So social and recreational time is important.

Taking part in clubs and activities helps keep young people and children...

... stay occupied;

... maintain friendships;

... and enables the parent at home to balance time with others in the family, catch up on tasks or have time for themselves.



Being a lone parent may make it difficult to get to and from the activity, but the benefits are worth it... others are often in the same situation, sharing the task with another parent helps both families and can provide companionship.

Who will look after me if?

Should an emergency occur the military welfare services will provide support At other times things can crop up that may mean you need a friend to help. If children/young people know who will look after them if you are unavailable for some reason – they are less anxious if a problem should arise.



Consider choosing a 'trusted friend' who can be contacted if you are not available... without committing them; discuss the possibility to gauge your child's reaction... make sure they are able and agree to take this on... provide the school and Unit with their contact details and confirm both parties agreement to the arrangements.

What will we do if he/she gets hurt?

Do not give false reassurance such as, "of course he/she won't be hurt"... at first, deal with the emotions behind the question rather than try to give a direct answer... acknowledge these emotions - 'I know that you are worried about Daddy/Mummy'... this allows space to try and balance fears with other ideas that shift the focus.

Sometimes young children can feel a general sense of unease or anxiety without really knowing why, or without being able to give a reason. It helps them to describe the feelings they are experiencing and to learn how to deal with them; also encourage them to notice the times when they are able to forget for a while or find it easier to deal with feelings. Dwell on the good times and happy memories.

Offer re-assurance that it is Daddy/Mummy's job and that they are good at it... explain that is why they spend a lot of time training... and that they will do everything they can to stay safe.

They may have lots more questions... listen carefully; do not overwhelm them with details - keep your answers simple; share these conversations with your partner – mixed messages can cause confusion and distress; if you don't know the answer – say so calmly and with confidence and then find out together.

Be truthful - it helps build trust. Don't underestimate the resilience of even very young children. Children/young people often sense when they are being lied to.

TAKE PROPER CARE OF YOURSELF

You will need a break from time to time, and you also need to maintain good habits like regular exercise and a balanced diet. You really will cope better if you do.

Coping with the family on your own creates new demands, but remember you are not the only one and there are plenty of people you can turn to for support.

Stay in touch with your friends and look for ways to support others in the same situation or become a volunteer;

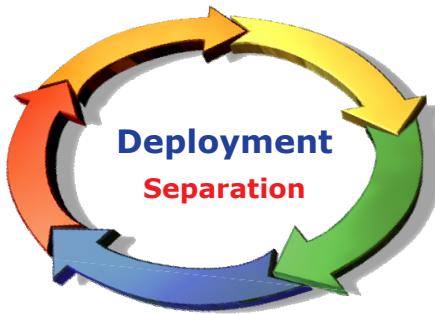
- Share some of your feelings with your children but don't overburden them with worries or fears;
- Knowing you have feelings helps them manage theirs too...

Make time for yourself and make sure that you talk over your feelings and concerns with other adults. Don't spend time alone dwelling on what might happen and fearing the worst; focus on the positives and things to look forward to.

**How you deal with
your feelings will
affect how they
deal with theirs.**



PREPARING FOR DEPARTURE



Some children take a parent's departure in their stride, particularly those children who have had lots of experience of separations. Most children (and adults) are likely to feel sadness. This is normal and natural, although there are some things you can do to help.

Things that make a difference:

- keeping family routines as normal as possible right up to the day of departure;
- reminding them of other times when they have been able to cope in similar situations;
- making plans for ways of staying in regular contact;
- involving them in your preparations;
- planning ahead for events and occasions that will happen during the deployment (such as birthdays and anniversaries);
- short goodbyes.

A few ideas for the person preparing to deploy...

- Letting your children help you prepare (roll your socks in balls, count teeshirts... nothing too crucial!)
- Making sure they see you find a special place for their pictures.
- Exchanging 'comfort items' (a stuffed animal or a personal keepsake to look after during the separation.)
- Spending individual time with each child before you leave.



- Planning ways in which you will keep in touch.
- Making sure the children each have a family photo to keep with them.

Practical ideas for Planning Ahead

- Record your children's favourite stories for them to listen to at bedtime. Hearing your voice can be very reassuring. A video recording can be even better. Check to see if 'Storybook soldier' sessions are being offered at the HIVE or Education Centre to help with the recording.
- Buy and write in birthday and other cards for events that occur during the time you are apart – if for some reason the mail lets you down – they will know you thought of them.
- Create a "Memories Box" of things that remind them of good times together; sit down with your children, give ideas and help them decide what they want to put in it – photos, tickets, badges, old toys, hats, scarves, (things the child could put on), pressed flowers, after-shave. Objects with a story behind them that can be re-told, the funnier the better!

As the time for separation draws closer

family emotions can be mixed...

**will they be ok? - concern - guilt - sadness
excitement - it's what I joined to do
adrenaline rush - lets get on with it**

**anxious - confused - fearful - let down - upset
worried - sad - irritable - conflicting feelings**

**pride - anger - sadness - determination
sense of loss! fYgI]YbW"**

They all can be normal reactions - but sometimes they are difficult to share... hugs and cuddles can often say more than words.





SAYING GOOD-BYE

There is no easy way to do it... although it may be upsetting - it is less upsetting than not having said farewell.

Keep it short ... If, having said good-bye, the transport is delayed, consider if it is wise for young children to have to repeat the upset for the sake of a couple of hours.

After the initial sadness - almost all children and young people do adjust - some more quickly than others.

ADJUSTING TO SEPARATION

With departure the child's world changes; home feels "different". At times like this it is the familiar and regular aspects of their lives that provide comfort and reassurance. This is why routines are important. School is part of that continuity and can be the least disrupted part of their world.

A feeling of loss

Life is about change, and from a very early age children have already begun to learn about coping with change and transition.

Children have told us about what it is like for them at such times. Generally, reactions tend to vary according to age and development; but all children learn their own ways of adapting.

For very young children it has been described as being rather like the experience of looking for something you have lost and becoming so confused that you almost forget what it was you were looking for. Something feels 'different' but it is hard for them to explain.

They are aware of a generalised feeling of unease, anxiety or discontent without really linking it specifically with the fact that something is missing or that dad/mum is not at home. The young child's sense of time is also different from that of an adult.



Memories of the absent parent are more likely to fade over time and there can be a reduced sense of permanence. Familiar objects, pictures, pre-recorded stories on audio/video can all help to keep memories fresh.

Children up to about 8 years old sometimes have odd ideas of cause and effect, they may remember an argument before Mum/Dad left and somehow blame themselves for them leaving. As children get older they develop a better understanding and question more effectively. Memories of the absent parent have a greater sense of permanence and the child is better able to appreciate that the person still exists but is simply in another place.

WHEN CHILDREN ARE UPSET

When a child is troubled the commonest reaction is one of emotional regression; the child may simply act as they did when younger or earlier childhood difficulties (such as bedwetting) may return. This is all perfectly normal and usually temporary.



Reactions vary depending on the age and development of the child. Some may become clingy or fretful, reluctant to separate or unwilling to attend school. Some may become moody, irritable and argumentative. Some may generally lose interest in things and become withdrawn.

These are normal reactions to unusual events.

A minor or brief change is not a cause for concern, often these sort themselves out with patience and understanding – but where there is a persistent and obvious change you may need to seek advice.

As a parent you will already have successfully dealt with many of these things in the past by:-

- taking their minds off things for a while;
- listening sympathetically;
- being patient, calm and tolerant;
- keeping to principles but making allowances;
- reassuring and supporting;
- not being over-protective;
- calming and defusing when feelings are running high.

Be forgiving : when children are distressed or upset they may say very hurtful things they don't really mean... try not to react in the heat of the moment... when they are calm explain how you feel... and that you understand that sometimes we all say things without thinking.

Be tolerant and understanding of changes in your child's behaviour. But, being understanding does not mean allowing them to get away with behaviour you find intolerable, or becoming over-indulgent and showering them with treats and presents in an attempt to make them happier. Children are reassured by consistency and firmness, so being clear, calm and keeping to your principles reduces confusion and anxiety. Choose the right time to talk things through, and never in the heat of the moment.

Be honest and share feelings. Your child will be aware if you are stressed, even when you try to hide it. They will find it easier if you can say for yourself why you are snappier, or quieter, or sadder than usual. Do not lie about where dad is – it is better if you tell them than they hear it from other children. Also it is confusing if a child has anxiety around them but is told that everything is normal.

Reassure them, but do not give false reassurance. Explain things to them in simple terms and try to answer their questions, but protect them from worrying detail in news reports

Reassure them of your love and support. Some children may not understand that dad has to be away, and can feel abandoned, unloved and unimportant, or even sometimes that they have driven him away. Physical reassurance is important. Make opportunities for cuddles, hugs and being close.

Most children and young people cope very well... many even benefit... learning how to cope better with life's challenges.. although some may require help. If you are worried that problems are becoming persistent you should talk to your child's teacher to see if further help might be needed.



Anger and Tantrums

This may be the way in which they are expressing their sadness. In childhood, anger and sadness are very close to one

another, and it is important to remember that adult experiences of depression are very similar to what children feel when they express anger.

Anger and aggression are not the same - anger is a temporary emotional state often caused by frustration; aggression is an action that may hurt a person in some way or damage their property. When anger and aggression coincide they can be very difficult for a parent.

An expression of anger or distress can be an emotional release valve – respond calmly, defuse the situation and lower the tension; give space and allow time to recover. (Don't back off, but avoid argument or discussion when tensions are raised). Once the tension has reduced it can be possible to talk things through.

If the child has behaved unacceptably reassure them that you understand why they might be feeling upset – feelings can be shared and talked about. **The problem is the behaviour – not the person** – children can learn to deal with their feelings and adults that set consistent boundaries help children to feel secure.

Keeping calm, defusing the situation and maintaining clear boundaries are all important. Children that are very agitated or upset rarely respond to reasoning, or being argued with (Adults are the same!)

Aggression

The first priority is to **bring the situation under control** for the safety of the child and those around them; do so in a way that **calms things down**; you are in control if you are calm and the risks are reduced. It may be necessary to remove the child to a quieter place to calm.



- **being calm puts you in control and,**
- **calming your children enables them to listen and do as you ask,**
- **giving them positive choices allows a way forward.**

As a simple guide:

1. **Deal with the behaviour but feel for the child.** Set your boundaries consistently – as soon as it happens - make sure you have the child's attention and state clearly, firmly, and

calmly that this behaviour must stop. ("I understand you are upset but cannot allow you tohurt...swear...kick...etc...")

2. **Reduce risk and calm the situation** as soon as possible. Physical punishment should not be used; it only winds things up even more. If another child is at risk of being hurt an adult may block an action or restrain briefly; it should only be sufficient to stop the action, never prolonged or with unnecessary grip (sometimes a light touch is all that is needed). With younger children, taking them to a quieter place for a "time out" can be very effective. Make sure that the child does not become too distressed or frightened that they are themselves losing control.
3. When the child is able to listen, **state calmly what you will** do if the behaviour happens again. ("If I am not able to stop this happening we will have to....go home and not go out for a treat later...it is a shame because I know you were looking forward etc...") Don't threaten, but think through what you may need to do.
4. **Calm the situation** by the tone of your voice, using positive physical contact (gentle touch, normal affection); show you understand; soothe the situation. If necessary distract by focusing the child's attention on something else ("I need someone to carry this bag for me...") Be clear about what you want the child to do next ("In a minute we are going to go back to the car and I want you tohelp me decide what we have for lunch...choose whether this is now going to stop so we can enjoy being together...")
5. **At the first opportunity focus on something positive and notice as things improve.** ("That's so much better....good to see that smile again.... I think if we continue like this for a while we might still go out for a treat later..?") Give children choices and for the older child make it easier to comply without loss of face.
6. When the time is right and you have the child by yourself later in the day, perhaps just before bedtime routine, take time to talk things through. Show appreciation of good behaviour that has happen since ("It is so much nicer to have good time together....")Help your child to understand why you could not allow the behaviour, but show that you still love the person.

Bedwetting

For a child who has been dry for some time, this can be extremely embarrassing and they will need reassurance and comfort.

For younger children a simple chart with sticky self-adhesive pictures to represent a "dry" night often works.

Be wary of allowing the younger child to come and share your bed if they have wet theirs, (not just for the obvious reasons!). This habit can become hard to break.

For older children it is important to talk the problem through with them to build their confidence. Enabling them to be self-sufficient so they can help manage the routine (changing bedclothes and sheets) can reduce embarrassment and build confidence.

If the problem persists seek advice through your doctor or health visitor.



Clingy immature behaviour

A very clingy child can be very tiring and can try your patience to the limit - try to remain calm - they need reassurance and love to help them feel secure. Increased physical contact and longer bed time routines with extra quality time together can help.

Do not simply react to the clinging behaviour by immediately providing comfort; this can be habit-forming and makes it much harder for the child to break.

Give time on your terms, wean away from clinging but spend more quality time together.

Children of all ages enjoy simple comforters; it can be a photograph, a simple object chosen from the "Memories Box", a personal item or a preferred piece of clothing.

Communication is crucial, find time to share your feelings – bed times or bath times are often a good relaxed time together. Even if they have not had bedtime stories for some time it is often a good idea to return to this simple routine.

Sleep problems

Decide on some simple rules and routines with your child, e.g. bedtimes, reading times, what you will do if they wake during the night, when they may come in to see you in the morning.

Some parents have found the use of a 'warm pack' helps – these can be purchased in a variety of shapes and warmed in the microwave – but do take care to check that it is not too hot when placed in the bed. Be wary of allowing them to share your bed – it can become a habit and create tensions on the return of your partner. Build in some time together and try to avoid excitement or stimulation just before bedtime from such things as playing on the computer or watching unsuitable television programmes.

Simple things such as nightlights and soft music played at bedtime can often be helpful. Stories, especially the favourite ones they like to hear over and over again, have a very important place. A good story teller can have children on the edge of their seats or have them asleep in minutes, and dreaming nice things!

If a child is disturbed by unpleasant dreams - encourage talking them through - sharing can dispel the disturbing content.

Some changes in sleep patterns amongst older children may be more about changes in their body clock and hormones – it is not unusual for long periods of sleep and late nights to become the norm. Many popular soft drinks contain caffeine or other stimulants and also prolonged use of a computer can affect the chances of a good night's sleep.



Tearfulness

Tears are associated with the expression of all kinds of emotions; sadness, anger, ecstatic laughter, frustration, disappointment.



When children become tearful it is distressing for parents, especially when we think we know why they are unhappy or what may be the cause. Children need to be reassured that tears are "okay" and that grown-ups cry too.

Children are often embarrassed by their tearfulness and will want to be able to control it for themselves. It helps to think of it as a habit we get into when we feel upset; habits like that can be hard to break, especially if others react promptly with affection and comfort every time we start to feel tearful. That can make it harder for us to manage how we feel.

Children all learn to deal with their emotions in different ways and it is important that they should. As adults it is fine to give expression to our sensitivity but not to be handicapped by it; just as it is not helpful to be a slave to other strong emotions within ourselves.

Children in most UK schools and also SCE schools learn how to recognise and manage their emotions through the SEAL programme (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) and your child's school will be able to tell you more about this.

Withdrawn behaviour

Sometimes children become quieter and tend to opt out of the things for which they would normally show more interest. They may become more remote and seek time alone rather than want company or spend time with the family.

When this happens in a younger child it is usually a sign that something is playing on the child's mind; it helps if they are able to talk, usually it is temporary. At times like this the younger child may yearn for the feelings of comfort and protection they felt when much smaller, to be scooped up and cuddled if they felt fearful.

Often children find it easier to share their worries with someone other than their parent; it may be a family friend, a relative or a teaching assistant, a school nurse or some other professional. Think of these people as your safety net. If you are in the habit of spending regular quality time together you will tend to pick things up early, but not always.

For the older child, make sure they know that if something is troubling them they can choose how to seek help or advice and there is a range of professional people they can talk to. Most of them know how to deal with "secrets" that may be worrying the child (the teenage years are quite predictable!).

If in doubt always speak to your child's teacher; s/he will see how your child is in school and will be able to offer advice.

Schools also have full access to a network of professionals that you might like to speak to.

With sensible support from parents, most children and young people do learn to adapt. These experiences and how they cope with them are important in later life as adults; children that learn to cope with simple life transitions from an early age are better equipped to face the challenges of life as adults.

Some suggestions:

Let them be aware that children are never too old to have cuddles, and neglected Teddies that get left in the cupboard feel lonely from time to time!

Try to find opportunity to play alongside and to "be a child again". Being very silly together can be a valuable means of releasing feelings and opening up communication. Use of puppets and other toys can be very helpful, sometimes a child will talk "through" a puppet in ways that they would not directly.

Sometimes younger children are more responsive to 'silent friends' - maybe a comforter or a teddy... "Teddy's looking a bit sad / fed up..." "What do you think happened? What do you think he would say?"

Older children often just require space and time... maybe a lot of space and time... Being able to talk with the parent who has deployed may help.



KEEPING IN TOUCH

Staying in touch with the parent who has deployed is very important.

Letters

The best letters are 'daily blogs'. They are chatty, cheerful – full of news about life's routines – 'guess what happened' in 'favourite TV programme' - describing how young children have grown – how the 'team' is doing etc...



... Hi Dad... Mum's cooking dinner... I'm fine – too much homework... Love you...

Including young children's hand and foot prints, drawings, newspaper cuttings and photographs can add to the enjoyment when the letter is received.

Young people say that having the last letter you received in front of you and sometimes a photograph often helps when writing letters. It also helps to make sure that you have answered any questions asked.

Consider numbering your letters – it helps if the mail becomes delayed and letters arrive out of sequence.

Sharing what you have written in your letters with your children helps them know what to say... it also helps you to know what they have said.

E-bluey

Unlike ordinary emails the e-bluey is not instant but it is quicker than sending a letter.



You can either compose your message online or offline. Your message is sent to a server and downloaded by the Forces Post Office (FPO) in the appropriate operational theatre. It is then printed and enveloped before being passed into the local FPO mail stream. The system is private and personal as the text is only seen by the writer and the recipient. Keep your message short –

I did this today... I had a great... A nice thing happened...

Reread your message carefully – the risk of making mistakes increases when you type it – make sure that any humour you use can not be misinterpreted.



Telephone calls

Deployed Service personnel are normally provided with a card that enables them to make telephone calls of up to 30 minutes per week – additional time can be bought. The use of skype and mobile phones are discouraged partly as they can prove to be very expensive and may become a security issue.

Telephone calls can be an excellent way to bridge the distance between the parent who has deployed and the family – they can also be a source of tension.

There are often queues for telephones in 'theatre' – try to arrange a pattern of times when you can talk on the telephone and make sure that the phone is kept free – don't forget if you are not using broadband using the internet blocks the phone line.

Time goes quickly – think what to say – some things are better in a letter or email – keep the conversation two-way. Young children can be unpredictable during telephone calls – often eager to speak

prior to the actual call but freezing into silence during the call and then becoming upset because they didn't speak.

These ideas have worked for others...

- just saying "hello" and "bye", "love you" means a lot...
- rehearsing what they want to say – if they freeze – you can prompt – or even offer to say it for them - hearing their words can often help them unfreeze.
- recording their message and letting them play the message 'down the phone.'

Most SCE foundation settings have 'talkpods' and other similar devices that allow recordings to be made by the young child using very simple controls that they can operate – if talking on the telephone does become an issue consider asking to borrow one or consider purchasing one....

www.talkingproducts.co.uk/talk_pod.htm
– a ten second version cost about £5 and
a 30 second version with multimesage
facility about £6.50 – both are re-
usable – the disc fits easily against most
telephone microphones and the quality of
transmission is fine. The young child can
record their messages when they want
during the week and play it back during the telephone call.



HOW SCHOOLS CAN HELP

Schools help by providing children with

- ...a regular and familiar routine;
- ...a social network;
- ...a source of reliable information;
- ...a support network.

School also keeps them active and in a 'haven of normality' in their changed world, helping them to deal with difficult emotions and promote positive thinking.

School attendance

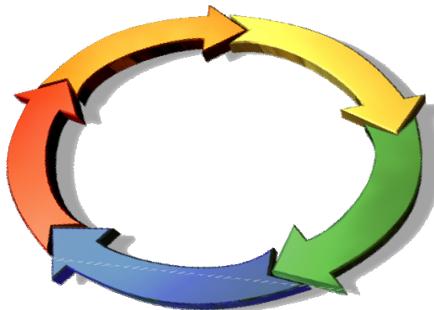
Avoid the temptation to change schools or keep children off school.

Absence disrupts their routine and may weaken friendships – hindering social development – and make it difficult for them to keep up with school work.

Headteachers have only limited powers to authorise absence for children to accompany their parents during pre and post deployment leave.

If there is a reason to request for special leave discuss it with your child's headteacher and check to see what is on the school calendar prior to making any firm arrangements.

REST AND RECUPERATION (R&R)



A period of Rest and Recuperation (R&R) is granted to each serving member who has been deployed, although this is dependent upon the length of the tour and local military requirement.

R&R can be a period of great joy – for the person deployed it is a period away from 'theatre' and time with the family; time to 'chill' and have 'down-time'. The family is also looking forward to reunion and time together.

Families tell us that it can also be a time of tension. Last minute changes to travel arrangements can cause delays (and even cancellation) of R&R; travel time may add restrictions.

Families also tell us to plan ahead to ensure that it is a restorative and mutually positive event:

keep it as simple quality time together and do not expect too much of each other;

keep up the family routines, but be flexible;

relax and avoid rushed outings, job-lists, sudden influxes of visitors, or making changes.



END OF TOUR – HOMECOMING AND REUNION

The end of the tour and homecoming of the deployed parent is often a long awaited, exciting time; it is also a time of further change and can be challenging or even stressful.

Everyone in the family will have experienced the separation differently and many things will have happened. It is natural for those anticipating homecoming to have mixed emotions.



Happy

Excited

Uncertain

Worried

Anxious

Proud

Apprehensive

Parents tell us that we must remember that the deployed parent, the parent who stayed at home and the children will all have changed and developed in some way.

Preparing for the reunion

Preparing children for the return of a deployed parent will help them adjust. Things that can be useful include:

- Talking about their parent's return so that they have time to think and get used to their feelings about the reunion. Answer their questions and be patient if they repeat them!
- Encouraging your children to think about how it might take time for everyone to get used to being together again. Assure them it is okay to be excited and nervous about what it will be like to have the parent home.
- Involving your children in the reunion preparations. They might want to do something special like make a banner, card or gift. They could also send a letter, video, photo or hand/foot prints before their parent returns so they can tell/show how they have grown and changed (the parent could send a recent photo back to the children too).
- Preparing children for how things may be different when the parent returns. Talk about ways to get the returning parent back into the family routines. Plan some favourite activities

that your children can do (to have special time alone with the returning parent). You could also plan some activities for the whole family but try not to over-schedule the first few days after the return. Remind the children that the parent might be tired when they do get home after all that travelling!

As the reunion gets closer...be prepared for excitement similar to that prior to a birthday. Try to maintain routines and sleep patterns as far as possible. Remind children that their parent wants to be home on a certain day but it is possible that they might be delayed...but it is not their parent's fault if they are late!

How will my children respond?

Individual reactions vary widely according to temperament and personality, but parents tell us that they found it helpful to be aware that re-establishing relationships takes time. Very young children may not recognise the returning parent and need to adjust to this 'new' person. Even slightly older children may be wary at first, but recognition is easier from about five years onwards.

Age	
12+	Excited but self-conscious, and not cool to let it show; likely to have changed most - uncertain - rebellious - independent - mature
5	Runs to - dominates conversation - might worry - excitable
3	Attention seeking - pushes the boundaries - tests for and needs reassurance
1	Unsure, tending to cling to those they know - but returning parent 'feels' familiar
	Unsure - may react to parent as a stranger - may become distressed.

Possible Response

Infants up to 12 months... will not yet have developed much of their ability to remember people and events; their recollections will be vague and they may not recognise the returning parent. They may well react to the returning parent as a stranger - crying, pulling away, fussing and clinging to the person who has been their primary carer during the deployment.

Be patient and let your baby set the pace of the reunion. Children are naturally inquisitive; familiarity is assured if the new person becomes part of routine activities together, such as bathing, feeding and changing.



www.DefenderServicesinDover.org

Toddlers (age 1 to 3)... might typically respond to the returning parent by hiding or clinging to the person who has been their primary carer during the deployment. The returning parent needs to re-introduce themselves to the toddler - remaining within easy reach of the primary carer, talking in a reassuring voice and lowering themselves to the toddler's eye level. Joining in with family routines - bathing, bedtime stories and playing games together - all help speed up acceptance by the toddler. It could also help to show pictures of the returning parent a few weeks before they return and mention them more in conversation.

Pre-school age (3 to 5)... still tend to have unusual ideas about cause and effect and think that their thoughts and feelings influence events in the world around them. A child may think their feelings or actions caused the deployed parent to go away. Fears or imagined thoughts of what could happen can easily get blown out of proportion and be very upsetting for them. Children of this age often express sadness through anger and may 'reject' the parent on occasions - 'protecting' themselves from further distress - whilst on other occasions 'testing the limit' of their parents' tolerance - as they try to establish which family rules still apply.

It is important that the child sees both parents working as a team - the returning parent taking a lead from the primary carer by supporting and following their disciplinary stance and both noticing and encouraging positive behaviour. The returning parent can help the re-adjustment process by being active in the child's life - talking with them, reading to them and playing their games.

School age (5 to 12)... children's reaction to reunion may be dependent on a number of things. Some tell us that it has a lot to do with how they think their behaviour will be viewed by the returning parent.

Those who feel secure in their parent's affections may well run up excitedly and give a very warm welcome. Some are inclined to try to monopolise attention and talk almost non-stop. Some may be uncertain, shy, withdrawn or even fear the return of a parent.

The primary carer can help the reunion by reassuring the child of their parents' love and excitement at being together again. Efforts and accomplishments should be celebrated. Misdemeanours have to be addressed but not dwelled upon; more important are the lessons to be learned and what can be done to make amends.

Adolescence (13 to 18). If you have a teenager in your family then you will probably be fully aware of the roller-coaster of emotions that are part of growing up. They may be excited about their parent's return, but children in this age group have often changed the most. If they have enjoyed more freedom and accepted greater responsibility for their own lives, they may be uncertain whether there will be a loss of this independence with the family re-united. They can be acutely sensitive about their appearance, and a sensible parent will think before commenting. They might hold back or feel uncomfortable about expressing their feelings openly in public so be aware of this and allow space to talk individually and exchange welcome hugs in private. Find time to discuss what is happening in their lives, and share their news.

Adjusting back to family life

Remember that reunion is more than just a single event, it is a process of readjustment - and like all processes, it will take time. Re-adjustment to life together may last 4 to 6 weeks - although some families will adjust more quickly and others will require longer. It is also possible that members of the family will adjust at different rates.

Things that can help make a difference include:

- accepting that changes have occurred;
- working as a team and trying to adjust slowly;
- making time for each other;
- being proud of, and celebrating, everyone's successes.



CONTACTS AND SOURCES OF HELP

Unit Welfare Officer
Commanding Officer
Unit welfare team
OC Rear party
Adjutant
RAO



Pupil and Family Services
Education Psychology
Education Social work
Inclusion team

Teacher
Headteacher
Teaching Assistant
Support staff

SSAFA
Padre
Hive
Relate
WRVS Social worker
Youth workers
Homestart
AWS



Midwife
Doctor
Practice Nurse
Health visitor
School nurse
Medical centre staff



Service Children's Education
Pupil and Family Services Team
HQ SCE
Building Number 5
Wegberg Military Complex
BFPO 40
Tel: 0049 (0)2161 908 2265
www.sceschools.com

Army Families Federation
Trenchard Lines,
Upavon, Pewsey,
Wiltshire SN9 6BE
Tel: 01980 615525
Mil Tel: (9) 4344 5525
Email: us@aff.org.uk



AFF Cyprus Branch Office
Room 129, Block E,
HQ Episkopi Support Unit
(near the Housing Office and PWS)
BFPO 53
Tel: 00 357 25 96 2110
Email: cyprus@aff.rg.uk



AFF Germany Branch Office
Hammersmith Bks
Herford
BFPO 15
Tel: 05221 9953180
Mil Tel: 948 82 3180
Email: germany@aff.org.uk

Navy Families Federation
Castaway House
311 Twyford Avenue
Portsmouth
Hampshire
PO2 8RN
Tel 023 9265 4374
Email: admin@nff.org.uk



RAF Families Federation
13-15 St Georges Road
Wittering
Peterborough
PE8 6DL
Tel: 01780 781650
www.raf-families-federation.org.uk



SSAFA Forces Help
19 Queen Elizabeth Street
London
SE1 2LP
Tel: 0845 1300 975
Email: info@ssafa.org.uk



RESOURCES THAT MAY HELP....

Most are primarily aimed at the American military family but have many transferable points.

Books For ages 3 to 8

Daddy, You're My Hero and Mommy, You're My Hero

by Michelle Ferguson-Cohen

(Little Redhaired Girl Publishing, 2005).

These board books look at deployment from a child's viewpoint in a comforting, reassuring way.

While You Are Away by Eileen Spinelli, (Hyperion, 2004).

Told in the voices of three children whose parents are deployed: a boy whose father is on a ship at sea, a girl whose mother is a pilot, and a boy whose father drives a jeep. Each child talks about what it's like to miss a parent, and the book ends with the day the parents return home. Gentle and reassuring, with colourful illustrations.

Books For ages 6 to 12

Deployment Journal for Kids

by Rachel Robertson (Elva Resa Publishing, 2005).

Created especially for military children, provides a place to record feelings and events during a loved one's deployment. It also contains calendar pages, writing ideas, interesting facts about common deployment locations, military definitions, and a pocket in which to keep mementos.

Books for adults –

all three books are aimed at the British military family.

Surviving Deployment: A Guide for Military Families

by Karen M. Pavlicin (Elva Resa Publishing, 2003).

Life After Deployment:

Military Families Share Reunion Stories and Advice

by Karen M. Pavlicin (Elva Resa Publishing, 2007)

- both above books offer good advice with first hand experiences and easy reading.

The Battle At Home When Your Soldier's At War

by Judith Bray & Shelley Kaplar (Raider Publishing, 2007).

Good information and advice – easy to read – written by the wife and girlfriend of soldiers who were deployed.

Web resources

<http://www.rafcom.co.uk>

Good web based activities for children and young people. Has attractive downloadable booklets for use with children around 5-9 years old (some adult help needed).

<http://www.deploymentkids.com>

A site sponsored by the publishers of My Deployment Journal. Offers free downloadable activities, including a time-zone chart, distance calculator, and spotlights on different areas of the world where a parent might be deployed.

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/tlc>

A Sesame Street site where you can purchase a DVD called 'Talk, Listen and Connect'. Good for use with 2-5 year olds.

<http://www.zerotothree.org/military>

Site has some resources relevant to military families with young children. Has short free video about deployment and families.



Dads are going away
What a way to start the day
In tanks and on buses
Lots of silly little fusses
When he goes I'm really sad
When he comes back I'm really glad
Wearing his army suit green and brown
When he goes he gives a frown
He gives me lots of toys
Then goes off with the boys

By AB