



# Military Families: Child Care Support During Deployments

For your family, it may be that frequent moves have made it harder for children to know grandparents and other relatives. On the other hand, these family members may play a vital supportive role to your children during deployments ([/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Pages/Deployment-and-Children.aspx](#)) and will have the opportunity to forge close lifelong relationships.



**If extended family will play a greater role in caring for your child during deployment than they did previously, there are key things to keep in mind to allow smoother transitions.**

## Planning Ahead = Smoother Transition

**Try to make transitions between caregivers go as smoothly as possible.** For example, grandmother may arrive in advance of the deployment so she will represent continuity and be associated with the loving nature of your home. Beyond that, children will benefit by seeing that the temporary caregiver has genuine respect for the deployed parent. If she arrives the day of departure, she may be associated with confusion or be viewed as a replacement.

No child will appreciate anyone replacing a parent, and that can breed unnecessary resentment. Fostering closeness between your children and a temporary caregiver far in advance will make your children feel more secure.

Try to have the caregiver connect prior to deployment through visits, phone calls, or social media. If you will be relocating to a family member's home while your spouse is away, try to visit there prior to the move or, if that is not possible, use digital photos to familiarize your children with the environment.

## Communicating Your Plan to Your Children

**Children and adolescents need to know "who will take care of me"** and that the adults around them are sensitive to their needs. You and your spouse should have a discussion with your children and caregiver.

The discussion should be targeted to the age of your children and should include the following key points:

- You have given a great deal of thought about who can best help to care for your children.
- Explain why this person was chosen. Ideally, you should be able to say that you have chosen someone who also loves your children.
- Reinforce that this is temporary and that the caregiver does not replace the deploying parent.
- The caregiver represents you and should be respected.
- Explain that the distant parent will always be thinking of the children and will stay in contact whenever possible, but because of distance will be unable to give the daily attention the children deserve. Because you care so much for your children, you have carefully chosen someone who will do a good job of caring for those everyday needs.

## Discussing Your Parenting Style with the Caregiver

**You and your spouse should also find the opportunity to discuss your parenting approach with the caregiver.** It's important that your children experience consistency of care rather than having to adjust to new approaches. You should discuss parenting style, and the blend of control and rules with warmth and support. Ideally we strive for a balance between rules and warmth, remembering that discipline means guidance, not control, but adults disagree on these things. Even married couples don't always see eye-to-eye on parenting style, but well-functioning parents do the best they can to disagree behind the scenes to present a united front to the children. When they do, children learn to play parents off of each other. It's important that you discuss this openly in advance so children don't receive confusing messages.

If the temporary caregiver clearly understands your approach, hopefully she will remain as consistent as possible in maintaining that approach. Don't be surprised if your extended family member from a different generation holds a different parenting philosophy than you do. She may be more lenient, or she may think you are too passive and she would be stricter. This is all the more reason to work this through openly in advance. This will make the household run more smoothly during deployment and hopefully prevent the returning service member from having to respond to a 7-year-old shouting, "Grandma never told us what to do."

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## Additional Information from HealthyChildren.org:

- Deployment and Children (/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Building-Resilience/Pages/Deployment-and-Children.aspx)
- Smooth School Transitions: Tips for Military Families (/English/family-life/family-dynamics/Pages/Smooth-School-Transitions-Tips-for-Military-Families.aspx)
- Helping Children Adjust to a Move (/English/family-life/family-dynamics/Pages/Helping-Children-Adjust-to-a-Move.aspx)
- A Message to Military Families: Staying Connected (/English/family-life/family-dynamics/Pages/A-Message-to-Military-Families-Staying-Connected-Video.aspx) (Video)
- Resiliency of Military Children (/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Pages/Resiliency-of-Military-Children-Video.aspx) (Video)
- Caring for Military Children (/English/family-life/work-play/Pages/Caring-for-Military-Children-Video.aspx) (Video)
- Health and Mental Health Needs of Children in U.S. Military Families (<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2013-0940>) (AAP Clinical Report)

## Additional Resources:

- CNN Reports on New AAP Clinical Guideline on the Health and Mental Health Needs of Children in US Military Families (<http://thechart.blogs.cnn.com/2013/05/27/docs-urged-to-address-military-kids-mental-health/>) (CNN.com)
- Coming Together Around Military Families (<http://www.zerotothree.org/about-us/funded-projects/military-families/>) (zerotothree.org)
- FOCUS (<http://focusproject.org/>) (Families OverComing Under Stress™)
- FOX News Talks to Pediatrician on the Effects of Deployments on Families (<http://q13fox.com/2013/07/24/military-deployment-kids/#axzz2Zzpf187>) (Fox.com)
- Government form to release medical or dental records to a new provider (<http://www.jpc.capmed.mil/docs/dd2870.pdf>) (PDF)

**Last Updated** 3/8/2022

**Source** Building Resilience in Children and Teens: Giving Kids Roots and Wings, 3rd Edition (Copyright © 2015 Kenneth R. Ginsburg, MD, MS Ed, FAAP, and Martha M. Jablow)

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