

Artwork by April, 3rd Grade, Freddie Stowers Elementary, Georgia

# How to prepare our children and **stay involved** in their education during deployment...



The ideas in this booklet should be seen as flexible suggestions. Ideas can be easily adjusted for multiple uses.

For example, a parent might help their child begin a scrapbook during the predeployment phase, for continuation through the deployment. It can then be used to share and “catch-up” on memories with the reunion.

Please feel free to use these ideas as springboards...

Deployment can be a difficult time, for both the adults being deployed and the families they are leaving behind. Children face a host of special issues when one or both of their parents are deployed. This booklet was created to help parents and educators, two groups who care deeply about children, support children during this potentially stressful time. We also discuss ways that parents and educators can work together to ensure that the education process stays on track during a deployment.

The deployment cycle is best thought of as three separate phases: (1) predeployment, (2) deployment, and (3) reunion. Each phase has unique issues and requires different strategies. The following information has been grouped into three sections to parallel this structure. Special suggestions for parents and educators are also listed to help both groups anticipate the specific needs of children in that phase of the cycle and provide the necessary support.

Parents know their children better than anyone and can often predict how they may react to particular situations. Schools can provide stability and predictability to children during a period of great change. By working together, children get the benefits of both!

While several tips and suggestions are mentioned in the following pages, the most important concept to remember is the power of communication. When parents and educators keep each other informed and discuss concerns as they arise, children are *always* better for it. Remember that you both want the same thing – happy, well adjusted, well-educated children.



I love my Dad and I don't want him to go. But he told me that he has to go for our liberty. I'm sad because he is not going to be here... I do not want him to go but if he goes I'll be sad because he is going for five to six months but I love my Dad and love my family.

By AnaLucia, Fort Bliss, Texas

# I. Predeployment

The predeployment period can last several weeks to just a few hours. No matter how much time you have to work with, make sure that some of it is reserved solely for your children. Children need to be told where their parent is going (even if only general locations are available), when the parent anticipates returning, and why their parent is leaving. By discussing the deployment, you are helping your children understand you are not leaving because of something they did and that you will be coming home.

## Parents

- Details about the deployment should be shared (in person, if possible) with children. Do not think you are doing your child a favor by sparing them the details – they want to know where their Mommy and Daddy will be.
- Caregivers need to first make sure that they will be all right. Make sure that you are connected with other people – through groups on base, community groups, church groups, parent groups – so you will have your own support network during this stressful time. Children will be much better able to adapt to the changing situation when someone with strong physical and emotional reserves cares for them.
- If time permits, talk with your child's school administrators and teachers and let them know about the deployment. Details such as the anticipated length of deployment and the anticipated location during deployment can be very helpful pieces of information for your child's teacher. Make sure you have contact information and details about the teacher's schedule.
- If a guardian will care for your child during your absence, introduce your child's teacher and guardian to each other before your departure. This will enable them to establish communication and to avoid confusion in the future.
- Take this time to build memories with your children. Spend some special time with them before you leave and plan for something fun when you return.
- Leave remembrances for your children. Photographs, especially those of the family together, can be very powerful. Tape record yourself reading their favorite bedtime stories or videotape yourself singing their favorite songs. These will be treasured resources while you are away.
- Ask your child if they can give you something to take with you while you are deployed. A drawing or painting will mean a lot to you and your request will make your child feel very special.





## Educators

While it is impossible for educators to know about parent deployments without being informed by parents, teachers and administrators can do a great deal to encourage the sharing of such news. When schools work with military families to ensure continuity in education from the enrollment day, a powerful message is communicated. People are more willing to share when they know that someone will listen. Make sure your parents know you are always there to listen and to support their children!

- Constantly communicate the need for information to parents. When they receive new orders, they may be so overwhelmed by the day-to-day details that they may overlook the importance of talking with the school. Help them to understand the importance of this task.
- Create easy ways for parents to communicate with teachers. An established relationship will make things much easier when a deployment occurs.

I serve too, I'm a military child,  
I stay strong when my dad goes away.  
If there is a war and my dad is detached,  
I will help him fight back.  
With my braveness and courage I can stay strong,  
My family's support helps me carry on.  
Whenever we move, I start over again,  
I have to go to a new school, and make new friends.  
Even though people think I'm a military brat,  
I just don't quite see it like that.  
My daddy helps defend our country,  
So we can live in peace and harmony.  
So all the military children help their mothers and fathers  
Because we serve too, we're their sons and daughters.

By Kiara, 6th Grade, Belle Chasse Academy, Louisiana



By Ben, 3rd Grade, Cohanzie Elementary School, Connecticut

## II. During Deployment

There are many things parents and educators can do to keep parents connected to their children's education while away on deployment.

### Parents

- The most important thing the deployed parent can do is stay in touch! Ask about homework, tests, and special school activities. This will help you feel connected to family life and help your child stay focused on education.
- The caregiver should talk about the deployed parent every day. Questions like, "What do you think Mommy/Daddy is doing right now?," or "Do you think Daddy/Mommy would like this book?" can help ensure that your child continues to feel connected to the deployed parent. Posting a map of the parent's location can also be helpful.
- Create a way to illustrate the length of time the deployed parent will be away. While older children can understand the anticipated return date on its own, younger children and children with special needs may need more concrete ways to measure time. One way to represent time is to create a paper chain, with each day represented by an individual link. Another idea is to fill a basket with the appropriate number of Hershey's Kisses and Hugs so your child can get a "Hug from Daddy/Mommy" before bed. If the return date changes, make adjustments when the child is not around.
- Deployed parents should stay as involved in daily education routines as possible. Phone calls can include help on a math problem or discussion about a school play. Caregivers should remind children of the deployed parent's involvement. While helping with homework, you may say, "Daddy's good at history, let's ask him next time we talk."



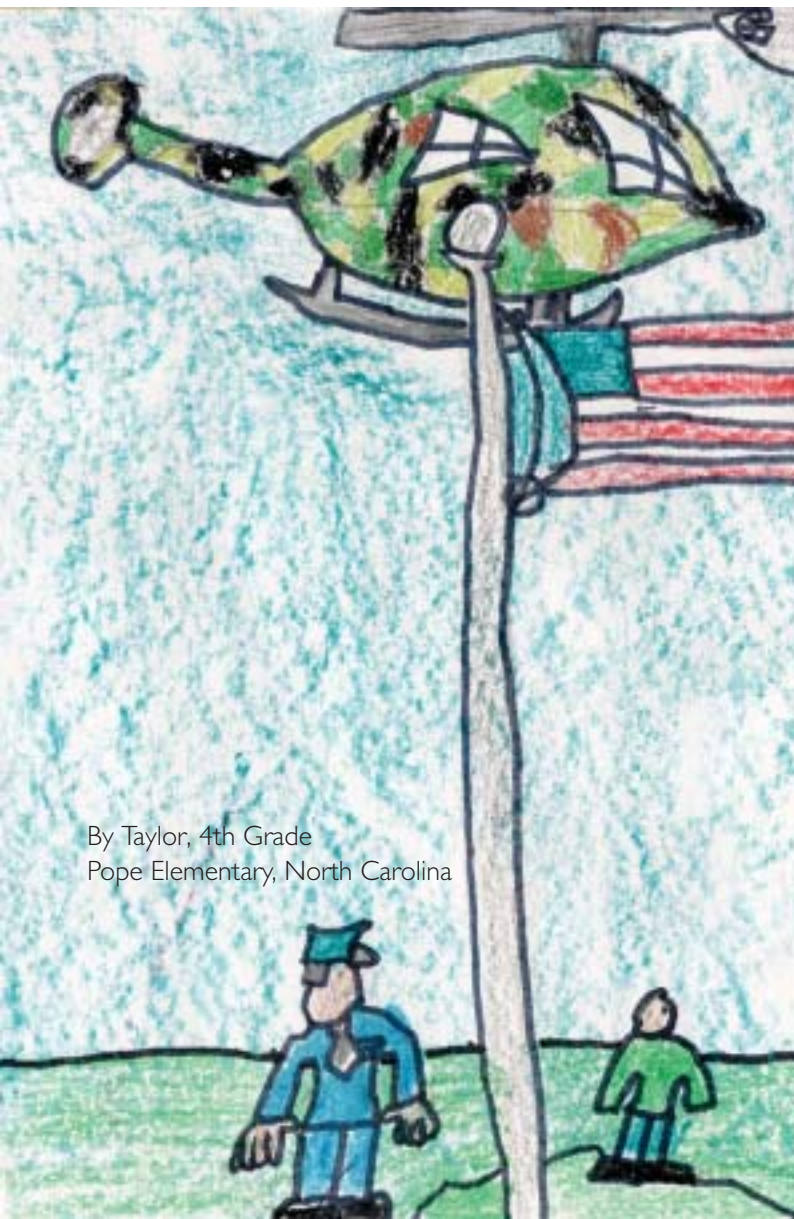
By Ashley, 4th Grade  
Pope Elementary, North Carolina



## Educators

Educators play a special role in the lives of children during a parent's deployment. When everything else is unsettled, school can serve as an oasis of stability for children. Due to the amount of time spent in school, teachers are often the first to notice behavioral or performance changes. Educators can serve as extra eyes and ears for the parent staying at home or the child's guardian. Given the number of additional burdens placed upon caregivers, this backup can be extremely useful.

- If your school has a website, suggest that a special section be devoted to parents who have been deployed. This is the perfect place to post a school calendar, pictures and descriptions of special activities, and homework assignments.
- Watch for any changes in a child's behavior or school performance. This can be a scary time for children. Their feelings and concerns may be expressed in a number of ways. Encourage the courage of children.
- Use deployments as a teaching opportunity. Geography (showing and discussing locations where people have been deployed), math (for example, discussing the miles to various locations and the time it would take to travel there using different modes of transportation), social studies (such as talking about the cultures of countries to which people have been deployed), and civics (for example, what it means to be an American) can be brought to life through discussion of deployments. Talking about these issues will also help other children in the classroom better understand the situation.



By Taylor, 4th Grade  
Pope Elementary, North Carolina

I serve too, I'm a military child,  
Paperwork's all finished and filed.  
Moving again, but I'm not riled,  
It's just the way military life is styled.  
Dad's got a job to do and so do I,  
I'll do my best and that's no lie.  
While Dad makes sure the planes fly,  
I work hard to keep his spirits high.  
I understand he can't always be near,  
He may be gone for a day, a week, a year.  
I'll be waiting, I'll be here,  
To welcome him with a great big cheer.  
I'll send him off with a kiss good-bye,  
I understand that he may die.  
And so I try, and try,  
To make sure he doesn't see me cry.  
So even when the world is wild,  
And more work on my Dad is piled,  
I do my job to keep his home life mild.  
I serve too, I'm a military child.

By Gloria, 3rd Grade  
Ramstein Intermediate School, Germany



### III. Reunion

The reunion phase actually begins a couple of weeks before the parent's return as the child begins to anticipate the reunion. Children feel a mixture of excitement and fear during this time. They will be wondering what the reunion itself will be like and questioning: "How has Mommy/Daddy changed?," "Will he recognize me?," "Will she know who I am?" This phase can actually be the most difficult for children, so support from parents and teachers is especially crucial as the deployment nears its end.

#### Parents

Parents should thoroughly discuss the homecoming with their children. Both the deployed parent and the caregiver should raise the subject with children in advance of the reunion so children will have a chance to prepare for the return.

- Caregivers, talk with your children about their excitement and concerns. Let them know it's normal to be nervous. Talk about all the updates children can share with the returning parent and guess what she/he may have to share with you.
- Plan special events and activities for the deployed parent's return. Creating handmade "welcome home" signs and planning to cook a favorite food or meal will help make the upcoming reunion seem more real. If children have an important project or event coming up in school, make plans to involve the deployed parents when they return.
- Deployed parents should express their excitement to be with their children again. Tell them what has changed about you. Let them know you can't wait to see and hear about their changes — a new haircut, new friends, their new favorite book or subject in school.



- Reunions, though happy, are stressful for the whole family. Children might assume that everything will be exactly as it was before. Let them know that it will take time for everyone to adjust and that this is part of the process. Anticipate that it may take several weeks for things to settle into a new routine.
- When things have settled down, set aside a special time to talk about school. Look over old homework and tests. Talk about ways to be involved in ongoing and future school projects. Children will have established a pattern of going to the parent that stayed home for educational support. Caregivers should encourage children to seek help from both parents. The returning parent should make a special effort to discuss school and school activities; by talking about it, children will see that it is important to you.

## Educators

Teachers should note the date of parents' returns and pay special attention to the affected students during the time surrounding the reunion.

- Create a special project that allows students to express their feelings: make a welcome home card or write a letter about "The Things I Missed Most About You" or "Why I'm Proud of My Daddy/Mommy."
- Discuss new behavior during this period with the student's caregiver. If possible, talk or write to the deployed parent about concerns you have so they have the information before they return home.
- If a student seems especially apprehensive, consider planning a counseling session for the student to talk about his or her concerns or invite the counselor to talk to the class about reunions.
- Invite the returned parent to class. The whole class can benefit from hearing about the parent's trip. This also contributes to a students' sense of pride in their parents and the difficult job that he or she completed.

I am the daughter of a soldier.  
I am afraid,  
to see him in uniform, to watch him practice  
for the unthinkable, to hear the planes of war  
overhead, knowing that one day the call will  
come to take my Daddy away.

I am the daughter of a soldier.  
I am proud,  
to know what my father represents is good,  
who he protects is innocent, and the ones  
that he fights are evil.

I am the daughter of a soldier.  
I am strong,  
I must be willing to give my father to those  
who need him more, ignoring the pain in my  
heart when he must go.

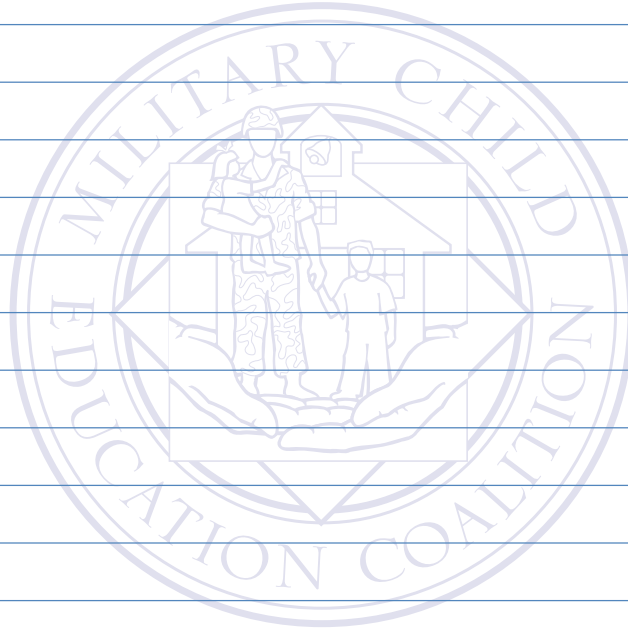
I am the daughter of a soldier.  
I have courage,  
when I look into my father's eyes,  
I see his courage.  
I see his pride.  
I see his strength.  
I see what no one else can see,  
I see my father.

By Haylee, 8th Grade  
Kaiserslautern Middle School, Germany





Notes:



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