



Kansas: Operation Military Kids

Typical Children's Reactions to Deployment and Prolonged Absences

During parental deployment or long absences, children often experience negative changes. Many of these changes are normal. However, it is important to know how to deal with these changes and know when to seek additional assistance.

Infants and Toddlers

- may become clingy or want more attention from their caregivers through crying and whining;
- may show changes in their sleeping and eating patterns;
- may show signs of withdrawal or show less interest in activities.

Preschoolers

- may start to regress in skills such as potty training, behavior, sleeping alone, thumb sucking, and “baby talk”;
- may become clingy or want more attention from their caregivers;
- may express fear of the remaining parent or caregiver leaving as well.

School-age Children

- may show anger or aggressiveness;
- may start to act out;
- may start to have difficulties at school such as a lack of interest, behavior issues, and a drop in grades.

Teenagers

- may start to have difficulties at school such as a lack of interest, behavior issues, and a drop in grades;
- may deny any problems or changes — caregivers must be persistent, keep the teen engaged, and be available for the teen to talk out their feelings when they are ready;
- may show signs of isolation and may be especially critical of themselves.

Unfortunately, some children may have greater difficulty than others adapting to the stress of parental absence. If children display serious problems over several weeks, a visit to the family doctor, mental health counselor, or parent educator is indicated. Keep in mind that all children experience changes and stress simply due to normal development. In addition to typical developmental issues, military-connected children may have the added challenge of military separation, frequent moves, and transitions.

The information on this page is adapted from:

Deployment: Keeping Relationships Strong, published by Zero to Three. Available on Zero to Three's website: www.zerotothree.org.

The Emotional Cycle of Deployment: A Military Family Perspective, by LTC Simon H. Pincus, USA, MC; COL Robert House, USAR, MC; LTC Joseph Christenson, USA, MC; and CAPT Lawrence E. Adler, MC, USNR-R. Available at the Army's HOOAH 4 Health website: www.hooah4health.com/deployment/familymatters/emotionalcycle.htm.

How You Can Help

- Establish a local Kansas: OMK team in your community or join the state team.
- Sponsor educational, recreational, and social events.
- Sponsor a family day out.
- Provide transportation to school activities, sporting events, or club meetings.
- Sponsor community covenant signings that publicly acknowledge the military-friendly nature of the community and its support networks.

Resources

Institute for the Health and Security of Military Families — www.militaryfamilies.k-state.edu

Military Child Education Coalition — www.militarychild.org

Military OneSource — www.MilitaryOneSource.com

Kansas National Guard — http://www.kansastag.gov/ng_default.asp

National 4-H Military Partnership — <http://4-hmilitarypartnerships.org/>

For more information, contact

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