

# QUICK FACTS DEPLOYMENT AND YOUR STUDENTS



**YOU MAY HAVE AN AT-RISK CHILD IF HIS OR HER FAMILY IS EXPERIENCING A DEPLOYMENT. It is almost certain that one or more students in your school will be affected at any given time.**

National Guard and Reserve families often live far from military bases and associated support systems. You are a significant and valuable resource in the lives of these students.

Deployment can cause prolonged stress because it results in changes in family structure and is beyond the child's control. Prolonged stress alters brain chemistry and function, resulting in problems with concentration, memory, behavior, and control of emotions.

## UNDERSTANDING DEPLOYMENT

**Definition:** An individual or military unit is moved within the US or overseas to accomplish a task or mission such as training exercises, humanitarian efforts, peacekeeping activities, or combat.

**Pre-deployment – Family is notified that member will be deployed, several weeks to a year in advance.**

- General shock and disbelief; security, and safety of family feels shattered.
- May feel like soldier is already “psychologically deployed”.

**Deployment Phase – From the time the soldier leaves home through the first month of deployment.**

- Mixed emotions – may include feeling abandoned, angry, sad, numb, and relieved.

**Sustainment – From first through next-to-last month of deployment.**

- Majority of families reach a “new normal” and resume life with renewed resiliency and hope.
- Level of adjustment varies from family to family, and from child to child; families with multiple pre-existing problems and/or troubled family members are at a higher risk for adjustment problems.

**Pre-Reunion – The month before soldier is scheduled to return home.**

- Mixed emotions – excitement, anticipation, and apprehension.
- Unrealistically high or low expectations.

**Reunion – Typically lasts 3 to 6 months, beginning when soldier returns home.**

- Initially reunion is experienced with euphoria and joy for many families.
- Family structure and roles will need to be renegotiated because all family members will have changed.
- Child's response depends on age; may display significant anxiety for up to a year.

## AS A FACULTY OR STAFF MEMBER, HOW CAN I HELP?

1. Rely on your wisdom and knowledge of childhood development.
2. Maintain a predictable, structured class schedule with specific rules and consequences. This helps student to feel a sense of security and belonging in class, and that school is a safe, caring place.
3. Plan for shorter lessons and proceed at a slower pace if necessary.
4. Be approachable and sensitive; limit frightening or hurtful communication.
5. Children may express themselves inappropriately in an effort to cope with overwhelming emotions. They may become overactive and disruptive, or quiet and withdrawn.
6. Acknowledge that feeling sad, angry, and hurt is normal when someone we care about leaves.
7. Reinforce ways to express negative emotions without hurting self or others.
8. Reassure students that everyone adjusts to change at a different pace.
9. Be sensitive to needs of students whose parents or caregivers speak a different primary language.

# Social, Emotional & Educational Issues



## Educational Issues/Needs

Schools can be one place where stability and normal routine can provide an anchor for children during the challenges of deployment and the resulting disruptions to daily life. Alternatively, the stresses that may result from family separation have the potential to affect an entire school community and may interfere with the ability of students and staff to focus on learning. During periods of deployment children share the following educational needs:

- A classroom that is focused on the students and learning environment - Retain classroom routines and an emphasis on the importance of learning, always leaving room for tending to students needs.
- A structured schedule - Maintain a predictable, structured class schedule with specific rules and consequences to provide support and consistency for your students. When students are distressed about news from their parents or the circumstances of the deployment, you may want to find an appropriate time for students to share feelings, needs, and fears and have their feelings validated. It is important for students to believe that they are not alone emotionally and to be reassured that their school is a safe and caring place.
- Objective Educators - Respond to events in a calm and caring manner, answer questions in simple, direct terms while helping students transition back to their normal studies and activities. Regardless of personal political beliefs, as a professional educator entrusted with vulnerable children who need nurturing and support, refraining from expressing possible negative opinions about their loved ones involvement in the military is a significant contribution to their emotional well-being.
- A reinforcement of safety and security - After any classroom discussion of a deployment-related event, end the discussion with a focus on the child's safety and the safety measures being taken on behalf of their loved one. In the event of a deployment due to crisis or war, protect students from unnecessary exposure to frightening situations and reminders. Limit adult-to-adult conversations about frightening details in front of your students. It is best not to have television news as a backdrop when students are in class.
- Patient educators and a reduction of student workload if needed - Expect some temporary slow down or disruption in learning when a change affecting students occurs. Plan for shorter lessons and proceed at a slower pace when necessary.
- Approachable teachers/educators - Be approachable, attentive and sensitive to the unique needs of children coping with deployment and family separations. Let the children know that they can speak with you or with a school counselor, nurse, psychologist or social worker about their questions and concerns. Take time to discuss the deployment and provide factual information. It is important to reduce fear and prevent rumors from spreading. By allowing students to ask questions, they can gain information about the event which helps take away some of their confusion. Talk about events in terms they can understand. Limit scary or hurtful communication. Some children may express themselves inappropriately; however, it is important to recognize that this is also a way of coping with overwhelming feelings of fear, anxiety and confusion.
- A teacher who is sensitive to language and cultural needs - It is difficult to express or interpret feelings when children and parents or caregivers speak a different primary language. Bilingual/bicultural personnel are most important in providing intervention services. Teachers and other school personnel must be aware of, knowledgeable about and sensitive to the values and beliefs of other cultures in order to assist students and their families appropriately. Inquire about school, community and military resources that are available to assist.
- An acknowledgement and validation of their feelings - Help students develop a realistic understanding of deployment. Provide reassurance to students that the feelings of loss, anger, frustration or grief are normal responses to separation. Everyone reacts and adjusts to deployment and change at a different pace.
- A reinforcement of anger management - Expect some angry outbursts from students. While recognizing that it is natural to feel hurt and angry when someone we care about has left, there are



- appropriate ways to express anger without hurting yourself or taking your anger out on others. Reinforce age-appropriate anger management and adjustment interventions to ensure a climate of nonviolence and acceptance. Make a referral to the school counselor as appropriate.

### **Social Issues/Needs**

Depending on age, a child may experience significant social issues and needs during a time of deployment. While preschool and elementary aged children typically require increased attention from parents and school, social interaction with peers can often take on increased value with adolescents. Although school and family must still play a significant role in their lives, it is important for adolescents to spend time with peers. Conversations and/or news coverage about war or deployment issues should be monitored for age-appropriateness.

### **Emotional Issues/Needs**

While individual children's emotional needs and issues can vary drastically, all children need to maintain their daily routines at home and school to help cushion the impact of deployment. Common emotions during deployment include:

- Confusion
- Sadness
- Anger
- Fear

It is important to address these emotions with children and to provide them with reassurance and comfort. A child may exhibit a change in behavior while adjusting to being separated from his or her parent(s). However, if a child is exhibiting the following behavior six weeks after separation, a referral should be made to the appropriate parental, school, community or military service:

- Continues to experience separation anxiety and does not want to leave their parent/caregiver
- Continues to have high levels of emotional response such as continued crying or intense sadness
- Perseveres in conversation and/or play about war and other deployment issues
- Continues to appear depressed, withdrawn and non-communicative
- Expresses violent or depressed feelings in dark drawings or writings
- Intentionally hurts themselves or is a risk of hurting others
- Gains or loses a significant amount of weight in a period of weeks
- Discontinues taking care of personal appearance
- Exhibits a possible drug or alcohol abuse problem
- Has not been able to resume normal activities
- Continues to have difficulty concentrating at school



## HELPFUL WEBSITES FOR EDUCATORS WORKING WITH MILITARY STUDENTS

Department of Defense Educational Opportunities: [www.militarystudent.org](http://www.militarystudent.org)

Military Child Education Coalition: [www.militarychild.org](http://www.militarychild.org)

National Military Families Association; [www.nmfa.org](http://www.nmfa.org)

National Guard Youth Site: [www.guardfamilyyouth.org](http://www.guardfamilyyouth.org)

National Guard: [www.guardfamily.org](http://www.guardfamily.org)

Army: <http://www.myarmylifetoo.com>

Navy: [www.lifelines2000.org](http://www.lifelines2000.org) (*click on Deployment*)

Marine Corps: [www.usmc-mccs.org](http://www.usmc-mccs.org) (*click on Deployment Support*)

Air Force: [www.afcrossroads.com](http://www.afcrossroads.com) (*click on Family Separation or Teens & Youth*)

Reserves: [www.defenselink.mil/ra/](http://www.defenselink.mil/ra/) (*click on Family Readiness*)

National Children, Youth and Families at Risk Initiative: [www.cyfernet.org](http://www.cyfernet.org)

The Military Child in Transition & Deployment: [www.militarystudent.org](http://www.militarystudent.org)

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) [www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org)

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)