



PARENT TIPS TO RESILIENCE HELPING YOUNG CHILDREN WITH DEPLOYMENT

Reactions To Deployment That Occur More Than Usual or Are Different Than Before:

Infants Reactions: Birth to 3 years

Cry or fuss | Aggressive behavior, temper or outbursts | Out grown behaviors return such as toileting accidents, baby talk or thumb sucking | Changes in sleeping or eating habits | Difficult to comfort | Pretend play trying to make sense out of the situation | Not recognize or pull away from the Parent-Soldier when they return or cling to caregivers and fear separation from them | Shy, withdrawn or frightened by a new adult voice | Signs of jealousy of their parents spending time together

Preschoolers Reactions: 4 to 5 years

Sad, frustrated, demanding or aggressive | Irritable, confused, angry outbursts and guilty – may think they caused the parent to leave | Out grown behaviors return such as toileting accidents, eating with fingers or sucking their thumb | Afraid at night or have bad dreams | Pretend play trying to make sense out of the situation | Ignore the returning parent or become clingy to ensure that the parent does not leave again | Poke or hit the parent to test their real presence | Try to impress the returning parent with new skills or good behavior | Feel utterly content or elated, having the security of the family unit being together again

What Can Parents Of Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers Do To Foster Resilience?

- Show patience and resilience
- Hold and cuddle frequently
- Provide increased attention and reassurance
- Do comforting activities that brings you closer together
- Delight in everyday activities like meals, story time, bath time and uninterrupted conversations
- Let children know their feelings are okay (sad, angry, frustrated, scared) – *It's okay to feel sad.*
- Acknowledge that you are upset too reassuring children that you will keep them safe: *I don't know the answer to that, but I do know that we are safe here at home. Your Mom is well trained to do her job.*
- Assure children that they are not the cause of your feelings
- Maintain normal routines and help children regain control when clingy or aggressive
- Provide safe ways for children to express feelings through art, pretend play, story telling and conversations



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- **Create a sense of connectedness between the deployed parent and infant/toddler:** Correspond frequently & involve child in process: letters, email, & care packages | Send pictures & videos back and forth | Prior to deployment, video and audio tape the deployed parent reading stories to the child or playing together & frequently listen and watch the tapes | Send ink prints of child's hand and feet, information from baby check ups, and milestone dates | Make a child size photo album of the family for toddler to carry especially pictures of the deployed parent | Keep the parent-Soldier informed of children's progress and needs related to interventions | Allow sufficient time for child to feel comfortable with and trust the returning parent | Provide a calendar or visual way to count down the days until their parent returns, allow flexibility in the return date for an extended deployment.
- **Delight in conversations that are simple and of interest**
- Ask questions to clarify what children think and are ready to understand before explaining ideas or even answering questions
- Answer questions with simple, concrete and confident answers even when they ask numerous times, and follow-up by asking questions to see if they are ready for more information: *Does that make sense to you? What does ____ mean to you? What do you think about ____? How do you feel about ____?*
- Have honest conversations that are appropriate to level of understanding – avoid graphic details or abstract explanations
- Help find answers to questions – show a picture and say *Dad is eating things like _____. This is a picture of where he sleeps.*
- Allow children to make choices when possible
- Offer reassurance that the Parent-Soldier is well trained for their job, and they are not the cause of the separation/ deployment
- Rely on beliefs related to ones faith and values to explain reasons or answer tough questions
- Turn off the TV and radio so they cannot see and hear about war and violence

What Can Deployed Parents Do To Prepare Themselves?

- Take it slow, do not force affection
- Have whole family hugs at first
- Look for ways to interact that are pleasing
- Plan quality time with each child
- Model caring interactions between the parents
- Work together with other caregivers on other suggested tips

Seek Support of Friends, Relatives and the Community When Needed

It is important to discuss children's behaviors and feelings with caretakers, and ensure children receive support from health and other professionals at first signs of distress.

Key Contacts

Army Family Web Site

www.MyArmyLifeToo.com

Military OneSource 1-800-432-9647

www.militaryonesource.com

Operation Military Child Care

www.childcareaware.org

Military Child In Transition and Deployment

www.militarystudent.dod.mil

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