

Our
JOURNEY

as a
MILITARY FAMILY

PARENTS & KIDS



A **WORKSHOP** to help families cope, communicate and connect.



PURPOSE OF THE WORKSHOP

PARENTS

Understand some of the common reactions of children to the departure of a parent.

Develop a plan to stay connected with children during the separation.

Learn what resources are available to assist families with the deployment and separation related stress and reactions.

CHILDREN

Network with other children with deploying parents.

Understand what "deployment" is.

Learn how to stay connected with deployed parent.

Who can a child go to if they need assistance?

Deployment means different things to different ages. For many children, it just means the parent has packed and left on a bus. They are unsure if the parent will return and when. In order for our children to understand deployment, regardless of age, we need to be able to explain what a deployment is. This will allow our children to begin to understand that the separation is temporary and why the parent has to leave sometimes.

Have you talked about the upcoming separation with your child/children?
What did you say and what was the reaction? (We will share as a group)



When someone leaves the family for a deployment, we have to re-organize the household, adjust to a possibly more stressful environment until the family gets used to the absence, adapt to additional responsibilities and emotional pressures, and the sadness that comes with any good-bye. All of these things disrupt the stability and consistency we develop as families that help us manage day to day life.

We as adults need to understand the reactions of our children are just as important as our reactions. Many times their ability to communicate their feelings is different or not as well developed as ours. They have the same emotions as we do but many times they will express those emotions through a physical reaction, depending on their age. Why do they have these emotional reactions?

1. Our children may fear for the safety of their deploying parent.
2. Our children may think they have been forgotten because the deployed parent misses significant events in their lives.
3. The parent at home takes on many additional responsibilities for the deployed parent so they may not be as available to the children as they would like.
4. Sometimes our families relocate during a deployment and this may cause more additional stress for the children.

So now knowing the things that may cause additional fears for our children, we can work on preparing ourselves for the departure and developing realistic expectations for the deployment to include ways to keep family members connected through the deployment. This preparation will also develop resiliency in us and our children. Resiliency refers to the

ability to positively respond (or adapt) to and cope with a stressful experience. A resilient family will continue to grow through their life experiences and the family will successfully manage all of the challenges of military life. The first step is PREPARATION and UNDERSTANDING.



SECTION I

Birth to 3 Years Old

- Children may have changes in their sleep patterns (restless nights, frequent waking or night mares)
- Ask frequent questions about their parent, particularly because they do not fully understand what is going on
- Demonstrate behavior changes

4 to 5 Years Old

- Cry at unexpected times.
- Have continued changes in their relationships with peers.
- Become more shy or withdrawn.
- Regress to earlier developmental stages or behaviors (sucking thumb or wetting accidents).
- Show changes in their eating or sleeping habits.

6 to 8 Years Old

- Exhibit behavior changes: crying, tearfulness, relationship changes, or irritability.
- Exhibit changes in their relationships with friends, including wanting to be with adults rather than peers.
- Be more aggressive, more withdrawn, or shy.
- Regress to earlier developmental levels or behaviors.
- Have frequent complaints of being sick, or aches and pains with no real cause.
- Have problems in school, including falling grades or refusal to do work.

8 to 12 Years Old

- Have frequent complaints of being sick with no identifiable cause.
- Exhibit behavior changes: irritability, easily upset, or poor frustration tolerance.
- Express anxiety and worry about parent who is away, including worrying about her safety and well-being.

13 to 18 Years Old

- Continue to exhibit behavior changes, including irritability or aggression.
- Continue to have anxiety and worry about parent's safety.
- Try to disconnect from their family.
- Feel angry and resentful that their parent is missing important events in their life (graduation, proms, sporting events).
- Be angry at increased responsibilities at home.



How can you as a family develop realistic expectations for this deployment?

How will the responsibilities of your children change depending on their age?

How will your responsibilities change during the deployment?

Some of the questions you may ask to **DEVELOP REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS** through all of these types of reactions may be:

How will you handle the new family dynamic?

Discuss as a family how you will approach these expectations. Ensure the open lines of communication are there throughout the entire preparation process and deployment as well as the reintegration once the Marine returns.

One thing we as parents struggle with is how to maintain a cohesive family unit when a significant part of the family unit is physically not there. We also realize how important these connections are to our children of all ages. It seems the more a parent is gone from the home, the easier it is for the parent to never really reconnect when they return. Maintaining connections with loved ones develops the confidence and sense of safety our children need to maintain resilience. Healthy connections will increase successful management of challenges. It can be compared to multiple layers of support that offer different levels of security and support for our children, regardless of moves, schools, and deployments.

Each family will have to develop their own strategy for staying connected during a deployment. That strategy will be determined by the ages of your children, how well your communication network is working, and the approach of the caregivers/parents to each deployment as unique. Generally, the following information will help you develop the strategy that will work for your family for this deployment.

1. Realize that relationships in the family will start to shift long before the Marine departs. **Prepare for the separation and plan for connections.**

2. For our older children, they need to **avoid "parentifying" their role in the family.** This is the perception that they may function in a role equal to a parent during the deployment. Once the Marine returns, they may resent the additional guidance and authority the returning parent brings into the home. Remember their role is to grow, learn, and develop into healthy productive adults.
3. You can **adjust some of the responsibilities in the home along age-appropriate lines.** Some younger children can start helping with some of the day to day chores. The goal should be to reinforce positive behaviors with in a support system, not to confuse their roles in the family.

4. With younger children, they need **positive reminders of the absent parent.** Their view of the world is based on tangible, physical reminders such as photographs, clothing, and reminders of events that are special to them. They will also most likely be interested in the day to day routine of the parent that is gone. They will ask about the sleeping and eating arrangements of their parent. Have photos of day to day things put into a booklet they can carry around with them as tangible reminders of their parent.
5. For all ages, **family rituals and routines need to be maintained.** If you have rules and consequences, they apply all the time, even during the deployment. If you have daily routines, like dinner around the table, Saturday game night, or “pizza Thursday” maintain those rituals during the deployment. This consistency will help maintain an identity with the family unit through deployments and the frequent moves of military families.
6. **Listen to what your children say and almost as important, what they do not say.** Children of all ages will ask difficult questions that we as parents will struggle to answer. Do not avoid the topic altogether but let the children guide you to the information they are really asking for. Many times it is more important to listen than to speak and this gives our children a chance to express emotions.
7. As we listen to what they are not saying, we also need to **note behaviors they may have that are different than the norm.** Sometimes a stomach ache is an expression of additional stress, sometimes it is just a stomach ache. You know your children and you know what may be different. You can ask leading questions that will help them express emotions they may not know how to express.
8. Many times our children are more open when they are engaged in a comfortable activity or in their comfort zone. Maybe during bath time you can start a gentle conversation to check on how your child is doing. Sometimes as you are working on a school project together or washing dishes together, an opportunity may present itself. **Encourage the open lines of communication by knowing when and where your child is comfortable and ready to share.**
9. If our emotions are not as calm as they should be, **take a “time out” to calm yourself.** Deal with your own emotions before you talk with your child. This will allow you to focus on the child and not yourself. This response will foster security and safety and child will feel free to express their own emotions.
10. In order to feel they have a part of the “mission” that their parent is on, **allow the children to pick a mission of their own that mirrors their parent’s job.** Research opportunities for them to volunteer or “adopt” members of another unit or family going through a deployment. This “shared mission” will help them feel a connection to the deployed parent.

HOMECOMING



DEPLOYMENT



Each family needs to design a strategy that addresses their family at that time in their lives. Each deployment will mean some adjustments to this strategy so that the development of their family is addressed uniquely each time.

As the parent at home, the passage of time during a deployment may seem to drag at times and sometimes it may feel as if there is not enough time in the day to get everything done. For our children that need a tangible reminder of the parent deployed, time may not seem like a big deal. But the longer the separation, the more difficult the reunion may be if there is no way to tangibly connect them to the passage of time.

There are a lot of activities you can do to help children of all ages with this in a way that keeps the deployed parent present in their minds.

- Share milestones in the words of the children, with your interpretation in parentheses so the parent deployed may read it.
- Download *Sesame Street for Military Families*. The app has great stories and activities for adults and children.
- Many people show deployment progress on a map, depending on the type of deployment.
- You can also do a paper chain, pulling off a strip with each day that passes.

These are just a few suggestions and you will likely get other suggestions from fellow spouses that have been through previous deployments. Your Marine may have ideas on how to pass time so take some suggestions from them as well.



Parents

- Understand common reactions their child may exhibit due to return and reunion, and reintegration related stress.
- Be able to describe at least one age-appropriate activity that their Marine can do with their child to reconnect during reintegration.
- Be able to describe at least one way to support their child during reintegration.
- Learn what resources are available to assist families during return, reunion, and reintegration.

Children

- Network with other children whose parents are returning from a deployment.
- Understand what "homecoming" is.
- Learn ways to communicate with their parent once they return home.
- Who can they go to for questions or support during the reintegration process.

As you come to the end of the deployment it is important to balance accomplishments that have been made by the family and each family member with the challenges that have been faced. We tend to focus more on the challenges and fail to see the accomplishments.

So, what would you say are some good things that have come out of the deployment?



"When going through rocky periods it's important to recall specific happy memories"

-John Gottman

It can be helpful to notice how reactions can change with each deployment among family members.



Have you seen any new challenges, or changes, that have come out of this deployment?

Behavior Challenges _____

Emotional Challenges _____

Educational Challenges _____



How did you overcome those challenges?

SECTION IV

A challenge for some service members coming home, and even for the family members, can be fitting back into the family. Some service members feel disconnected.

- As a result a service member could...
- Look to resume control throwing the family out of its routine.
- Get lost in work or hobbies, etc.

Multiple deployments might result in reintegration taking a little bit longer than for those with fewer deployments.

What should be considered in order to overcome the challenges of reintegration?

According to the American Psychological Association during times of uncertainty, children and parents alike benefit from



The Three Rs' provide a shared family narrative – a constant and expectable series of events in family life – that can help in reestablishing family equilibrium upon reintegration. (Helping Military Families Through the Deployment Process: Strategies To Support Parenting)

Were you able to incorporate *The Three Rs'* into your family during deployment? Did you have any challenges to overcome in order to establish them?



Children tend to look to resume activities they enjoyed with the deployed parent upon return of that parent. Have you spoken with your child about what activity they would like to resume when the deployed parent comes home? To communicate effectively involves being...

- Tactful
- Timely
- Forgiving
- Objective

Listening is an important and sometimes absent element in communication

On the show *Are you smarter than a 5th Grader* Kelly Pickler commented to Jeff Foxworthy "I'm listening to what you are saying, but I only hear what I want to hear."

What are some hindrances to good listening skills?

- Mind-reading
- Rehearsing
- Judging
- Dreaming
- Identifying: my situation is just like yours

Now, how do we put all of this together for a grand reunion?

For those who came for the *Kids-N-Deployment* you developed a strategy for making it through the deployment. For those of you who made one, was it helpful? Those who weren't at a *Kids-N-Deployment* should not worry. We are going to work on a strategy now for reintegration. Those who did it for deployment should look at how this plan can also help them reintegrate, and maybe what needs to be modified for effective reintegration.

Let's put together a strategy to ensure a successful reunion.



Are there any issues that you face as you prepare for homecoming?

1. _____
2. _____



Are there any issues your children face as they prepare for homecoming?

1. _____
2. _____

SECTION IV

What challenges will you have to overcome to keep *The Three Rs*' in place, or re-establish them after homecoming?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

What steps can you take to ensure a smooth transition for homecoming?

Examples of needs:

- There are children who need a peaceful environment and close companionship. They need to feel valued by those around them; and they want and need those personal touches that make them feel important.
- Some need consistency and security; what the rules are; and what is to be expected.
- Others need things to explore; toys appropriate to their age and maturity; encouragement to spend time in recreational and social activities; and help in setting priorities.
- Finally some need movement; excitement; to be taught to get along in society; and to have respect for rules.
- Once you understand the needs and expectations of your child and your deployed spouse, you can work on a strategy to ensure your homecoming transition goes smoothly.

	NEEDS	EXPECTATIONS
CHILD		
PARENT		
DEPLOYED PARENT		

AGE	ACTIVITY
0-12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Hold your baby often.○ Bathe and change your baby often.○ Feed and play with your baby often.○ Be patient – your baby will warm up.
1-3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Give your child space and time to warm up.○ Don't force interactions.○ Sit and play at their level (play on the floor with them).○ Be gentle and fun; speak with a soft voice.
3-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Listen to your child without criticism.○ Accept your child's thoughts and feelings.○ Play games with the child that he/she chooses.○ Tell and show your child you love him/her.○ Find out about the new things in your child's life (friends, books, a TV show, a new sport, etc.).
5-12 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Praise your child's accomplishments since you've been gone.○ Let your child show you his/her pictures, homework, or scrapbooks.○ Be positive; don't criticize.○ Get involved in your child's education and activities.
12-18 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Share what has happened during your deployment.○ Listen to your child's stories with undivided attention.○ Be positive; don't criticize or be judgmental.○ Respect your child's privacy and friends.○ Don't tease your child about his/her interests.○ Get involved in your child's education and activities.

MCB CAMP LEJEUNE

Chaplain	910-451-2414
Community Counseling Center	910-451-2864
Chaplains Religious Enrichment Development Org (CREDO).....	910-449-8292
Marine Corps Family Team Building	910-451-0176
Domestic Violence Helpline.....	910-376-5675
FOCUS.....	910-450-5635
Military & Family Life Counselors.....	910-358-8840
New Parent Support Program	910-449-9501

MCAS NEW RIVER

Chaplain	910-449-6801
Community Counseling Center	910-449-6110
Chaplains Religious Enrichment Development Org (CREDO).....	910-449-8294
Marine Corps Family Team Building	910-451-0176
Domestic Violence Helpline.....	910-376-2155
FOCUS.....	910-449-4527
Military & Family Life Counselors.....	910-988-9541
New Parent Support Program	910-449-9501

GENERAL RESOURCES

DSTRESS	877-476-7734
Military Children Education Coalition	254-953-1923
Military OneSource.....	800-342-9647
Tricare	877-874-2273

MARINE &
 *Family*

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