

Helping Children Adjust While Their Military Parent Is Away

Every child and family is different and each requires help based upon individual needs. Teachers, parents, or child-care providers may notice behavioral changes which indicate that the child is not coping well. Teachers and counselors may need to get involved. If the child is being neglected by either a babysitter or parent who feels helpless, referrals can be made to social services, commanders, chaplains, community service or civilian agencies.

Even when there is a healthy, stable family, the children can be helped during the absence of a parent. Here are some suggestions:

- ◆ Be available to listen to the child. Watch expressions and behaviors which may communicate more than words. Allow children to express feelings of fear, loneliness, sadness or anger.
- ◆ Help young children realize the reason for the departure, that the parent did not leave because of a child's misbehavior and that the child is not being abandoned.
- ◆ Maintain family routines to provide consistency.
- ◆ Assure the children of your love.
- ◆ Keep joy and laughter in your life.
- ◆ Give children time to play.
- ◆ Watch that children do not assume adult roles and responsibility while a parent is deployed.
- ◆ Encourage regular correspondence while the military parent is away. If the location of the deployment is unknown, notes written before the departure may be forthcoming.
- ◆ Remember birthdays.
- ◆ Post a picture of the absent parent.
- ◆ Put up a world map and connect the child's and parent's location with a string.
- ◆ Use a large calendar to show how days and months do pass. Plan events and post them on the calendar to show that there are activities to anticipate.
- ◆ Ask the school or military center if they have groups for children of deployed parents. Other kids provide real assurance and support.

Helping the Nonmilitary Parent During a Spouse's Extended Absence

- ◆ Make sure you take care of yourself. Join support groups, call on friends, family, religious and community groups for help.
- ◆ Don't overreact to a child's drop in grades or misbehavior.
- ◆ Children do need reasonable limits, but strict punishment or long restrictions probably will not help. Most children will test the limits when one parent leaves.
- ◆ Plan something relaxing or fun for weekends. Full-time care of children, household, cars, pets, and jobs is overwhelming for the strongest parents.
- ◆ Help children communicate with the absent parent by writing letters, making cassettes or sending packages together.

How Children Benefit From Relocation

- ◆ Military Children get to experience firsthand much of what they read about in their social studies textbooks through their visits to different regions and countries.
- ◆ Military children experience different schools and school systems. If they have difficulty in one school, they will have an opportunity to go to another.
- ◆ Military children make friends all over the world.
- ◆ Military children may be fluent in several languages because of time spent in different countries.
- ◆ Military children often become more responsible by having to deal with new situations in an adult way.
- ◆ Because of the changes faced by the military family, family members are closer and depend more upon each other for safety, security and companionship.

Other positive aspects associated with being a military child are the ability to:

- ◆ be more open to those of different backgrounds and cultures
- ◆ organize efficiently because of frequent moving experiences
- ◆ make new friends quickly and easily
- ◆ learn to adapt and be flexible