



## General tips, continued

message that you can't talk about it). Children take their cues from you.

- Keep up the routine. Activities, such as games, schooling, bed times, are important to keep regular. Continue to celebrate birthdays or other special occasions with enthusiasm.
- Have your spouse before or while deploying record chapter books on a cassette recorder to be played back to young children. This helps with separation and attachment issues. Likewise, help your children create scrapbooks, video or journals to send or share upon return.
- Listen to your children and their concerns. Children may think a lot and have worries/concerns about their parents that are difficult to express. Be available when they are ready to communicate.
- Limit television and other media coverage of the war to help reduce anxiety and worries.
- *Take care of yourself!* Find time to rest, see a movie or do something just for you. Accept help from family or friends if feeling overwhelmed or in need of time out. We are all more vulnerable to stress when we are tired, and can manage better when we are rested and in tune with ourselves.
- Seek professional help from your military or civilian community in the event of special circumstances such as serious injury or death of loved ones. Help is available from people who are experienced in such matters and care.

### Additional Resources

For information on talking with children about traumatic events, go to:

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

<http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/DISASTER.HTM>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

<http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/TraumaticEvents/tips.asp>

## Communicating with Children about Deployment

Parents need to communicate with children in ways that are developmentally appropriate. Timing and what is being shared are important factors. At home parents also help their children communicate with the deployed parent in age appropriate ways. Here are some simple explanations of what children can grasp at certain ages.

### Three to four year olds

No concept of time. A three year old thinks that three months is next week. Parents need to use markers, such as, "Dad or mom will be home right before your birthday or before this holiday."

### Early elementary school

Better understanding of time. They understand that three months is a long time. Calendars are helpful. You can mark the calendar and say, "This is the day that Dad or mom is supposed to come home."

### Seven and eight year olds

Understand time and bigger concepts. They will be able to look at calendar and mark it. You can say, "This is the day dad or mom is supposed to come home." This age group understands concepts like good and bad. You can say dad or mom is going away to take care of the bad guys or bad things.

### Nine, ten, eleven and twelve year olds

Abstract thinking has begun. They are aware of the news and can understand concepts like the "national good." You can put out a return date, and they will understand the timeframe. Reinforce this age group's skills by providing them with pre-stamped envelopes, as well as private email accounts for communicating.

### Older adolescents

Challenging age group. This is an emotional period of time under the best of circumstances. It is an age when children need to identify with their same sex parent. If that parent is deployed, it is especially difficult for the child.

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