

Reactions to Deployment

School-age Children (ages 6 to 12) Summary

The following is a summary of different reactions School-age Children may have during a parent's deployment.

Anytime During the Deployment Cycle

Typical School-Age Children Behaviors

- A return to outgrown 'old' behaviors.
- An increase in somatic symptoms (i.e., headaches, stomachaches, etc.)
- More emotional overall, less able to control emotions periodically.

Parenting Ideas

- Maintain a consistent routine for your child as much as possible during a deployment.
- Talk with your children, ask them what they are thinking and help children put their feelings into words.
- Focus on staying in control of your feelings when with your children.

Before Deployment

Typical School-Age Children Behaviors

- Child will clearly understand the meaning of "leaving" and will be more aware of time frames.
- Sad, worried and sometimes angry with parent for leaving; child may believe that they are at fault in some way for parent leaving.
- Understands the concept of "the mission" and will take pride in parent's service and sacrifice.

Parenting Ideas

- Talk to your child about the upcoming deployment and discuss any concerns or worries they may have.
- Reassure children about their own safety and well-being.
- Help identify those adults child may contact when looking for additional support.
- Create 'comfort' objects or mementoes together.
- Inform the school or care givers about the upcoming deployment.

- Devise a plan to stay in touch.
- Create a family rules or discipline plan; emphasize that school will be child's first priority.
- Say "goodbye" — don't just disappear.

During Deployment

Typical School-Age Children Behaviors

- Child will feel sad or 'empty' due to parent's absence; will express much worry or anxiety.
- May be whine or act out for attention more; mood changes with anger followed by clingy, sad behavior.
- Very aware of the events and milestones parent is missing.
- Want to take on new jobs or responsibilities in order to "fill in" for the absent parent.
- Some fluctuation in grades or interest in school activities.

Parenting Ideas

- Maintain family routines and traditions as much as possible.
- Monitor exposure to media coverage, especially if parent is deployed to a war zone.
- Encourage children to be involved with extra-curricular activities.
- Make sure children are receiving enough 'down' time; plan special days where you spend quality one-on-one time together.
- Follow the discipline plan; be consistent with discipline.
- Provide opportunities for your child to stay connected with the deployed parent.
- As the deployed parent, focus on positively supporting your child and let the at-home caregiver be the primary disciplinarian.

After Deployment

Typical School-Age Children Behaviors

- Child will be both anxious and excited with your return.
- May continue to express much worry about a variety of issues.
- May be reluctant to reconnect for fear of another deployment and the prospect of 'losing you' again.
- Some confusion, anger and limit-testing with all the strong emotions around your return and reintegration to the family.

Parenting Ideas

- Discuss positive aspects of your deployment with your child.
- Look at pictures, videos, scrapbooks, etc. collected while you were absent and express pride in your child's accomplishments; spend relaxing, fun time together.
- Reintegrate into your child's life by involving yourself in their new daily routine, helping with homework or working on chores together; go slow in making changes.
- Get involved in your child's school; ask for a parent-teacher conference.
- Reassure your child that it's 'not them' when taking down time for yourself; explain that you need to take care of yourself in order to be there for them.
- If you think that there will be future deployments, reassure your child that you will tell them if you have to leave again.

Red Flags for Possible Concern

School-Age Children Behaviors of Concern

- High levels of aggression or violence.
- Significant changes in appetite or sleep patterns.
- Difficulty coping or remaining calm when encountering typical daily problems.
- Refusing to participate in typical activities or attend school.
- Major changes in school grades or friendships.

Parenting Ideas

- Speak to your child about any challenges they are facing that could be affecting their behavior and express your concern.
- Devise a plan together that reassures everyone about safety issues.
- Seek help from a trusted friend, family member or the school.
- Consult with your doctor.
- Schedule a behavioral health appointment for your child.
- Seek help immediately (call 911) with any life-threatening concerns.