

# Reactions to Deployment

## Teenagers (ages 13 to 17) Summary

The following is a summary of possible Teenager reactions to a caregiver's deployment followed by some helpful parenting ideas.

### Anytime During the Deployment Cycle

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#### Typical Teenage Behaviors

- Regression to previous, outgrown behaviors.
- Less able to control their emotional highs and lows.
- More frequent headaches and/or stomach aches.

#### Parenting Ideas

- Communicate with your teen and actively listen to their concerns.
- Encourage teen to keep a journal of activities, goals, feelings and challenges.
- Remain in control of your feelings.
- Encourage "media-free" time.
- Schedule time for yourself as the at-home caregiver.

### Before Deployment

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#### Typical Teenage Behaviors

- Teenagers are often calm and accepting of the deployment.
- May spend more time with peers and withdraw from the family.
- Sometimes demonstrates an "I don't care" attitude toward parent's departure.
- Argues more to avoid feelings of sadness.

#### Parenting Ideas

- Talk openly with your teen about the deployment.
  - Emphasize to your teenager that their first priority will be school work.
  - Create a plan to stay in touch with each other through email, phone calls or even snail mail.
  - Create a discipline plan with the at-home care giver and your teenager.
  - Help your teenager identify family and friends they may turn to for additional support.
  - Create mementos with teen (i.e. take pictures, film a video, etc.).
  - Discuss with teen which school staff to tell about the deployment.
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## During Deployment

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### Typical Teenage Behaviors

- Teenagers often willingly take on additional family responsibilities.
- Often are protective of the at-home caretaker.
- Becomes increasingly independent and confident.
- May become angry and apathetic, or act out.
- School grades may fluctuate.
- Will want to spend free time with friends.

### Parenting Ideas

- Maintain routines and family traditions.
- Be clear in your message that school is your teen's first priority.
- Follow the discipline plan at home and be consistent.
- Allow teen to have "down time" from school and family responsibilities.
- Schedule quality time with your teen i.e., make dinner together, go shopping.
- Encourage participation in extra-curricular activities.
- Help teen stay connected to deployed parent.
- As deployed parent, focus on positively supporting your teen and allow at-home parent to target discipline.

## After Deployment

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### Typical Teenager Behaviors

- Teenagers have become increasingly independent and mature during the deployment.
- May seem indifferent to deployed parent's return and be withdrawn initially.
- Reluctant to give up new found freedom and/or additional responsibilities.
- Concerned or worried that they failed to meet your expectations.
- Will test boundaries upon your return.
- Aware of changes in a returning parent's demeanor and emotional functioning.

### Parenting Ideas

- Give teen time to acclimate during reunion.
- If possible, talk about your deployment and the mission you accomplished.
- Discuss with your teen any changes in routines, rules, and responsibilities that occurred during the deployment.
- Slowly reintegrate into your teenagers life i.e., take them out to lunch, watch a sporting event together, meet teachers or coaches, etc.
- If you need alone time, communicate to your teen "it's not them" as you readjust.

## Red Flags for Possible Concern

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### Teenage Behaviors of Concern

- High levels of aggression or violence.
- Any mention of suicide or self-harm.
- Total withdrawal or running away from home.
- Significant change in school grades or interest in school.
- Considerable change in appetite, mood or sleep patterns.

### Parenting Ideas

- Talk frankly about any concerns you have directly with your teenager.
- Devise a plan (together) that will reassure you in regards to teen's safety.
- Seek out additional support or help from a trusted friend, family member, or community organizations.
- Talk to your doctor.
- Schedule a behavioral health appointment for your teen.
- Seek help immediately (call 911) with any life-threatening concerns.