



Supporting Military Kids During Deployment

When military parents are mobilized, their kids are in need of and deserve special support from local communities. During the emotional cycle of deployment, their lives are literally turned upside down! A significant portion of stability in their family system has temporarily been disrupted resulting in increased levels of stress and potential separation anxiety.

Stages of Deployment

You may recognize these emotions in youth you work with. Understanding the source of the emotions will help you offer support. The timelines listed below are general, but should be helpful as a guide.

Stage 1: Pre Deployment

Begins with the warning order to service member for deployment from home through their actual departure.

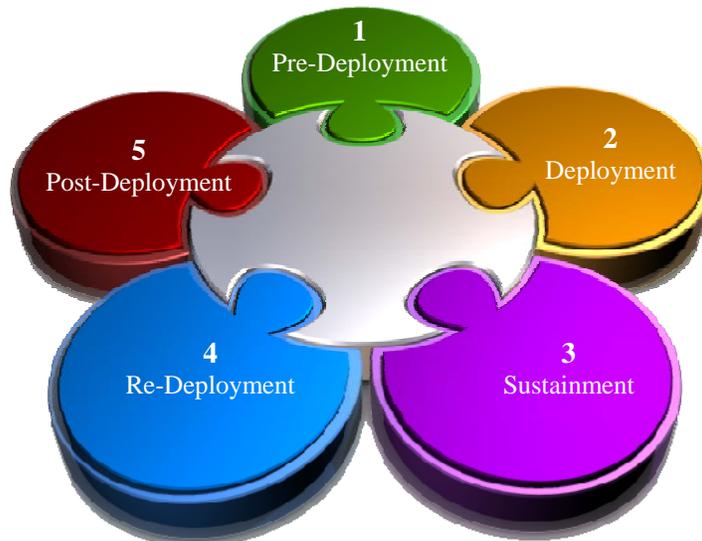
Anticipation of loss vs. denial
 Train up and long hours away
 Getting affairs in order

Mental/physical distance
 Tension builds

Stage 5: Post-Deployment-

Begins with the arrival of the service member back home and typically lasts 3-6 months (or more) after return.

Service member re-integrating into family
 Family “honeymoon” period
 Independence developed in sustainment stage redefined-
 Need for “own” space
 Renegotiating routines



Stage 2: Deployment

Period immediately following service member’s departure from home through first month of deployment.

Mixed emotions/relief
 Disoriented/overwhelmed
 Family numb, sad, alone
 Sleep difficulties
 Security and safety issues

Stage 4: Re-Deployment

Defined as the month before the service member is scheduled to return home.

Anticipation of homecoming
 Excitement
 Apprehension
 Burst of energy/”nesting”
 Difficulty making decisions

Stage 3: Sustainment

Lasts from first month through the end of deployment.

New family routines established
 New sources of support developed
 Feel more in control of day to day life
 Sense of independence
 Family confidence- “We can do this”

Symptoms of Deployment Related Stress

- ⇒ Difficulty concentrating
- ⇒ Unable to resume normal interests and activities
- ⇒ Continued high levels of emotional response such as crying and intense sadness
- ⇒ Appearing depressed, withdrawn and non-communicative
- ⇒ Expressing sad or violent feelings in conversation, writings or drawings
- ⇒ Intentionally hurting self or at risk for hurting others
- ⇒ Gain or lose a significant amount of weight in a short period of time
- ⇒ Discontinue taking care of personal appearance
- ⇒ Exhibit possible drug or alcohol use/abuse

Caring Adult Intervention Strategies

Focus on youth and the learning environment- Retain routines and emphasis on the importance of learning while always leaving room to tend to youth needs.

Provide structure- Maintain predictable schedule with clear behavioral guidelines and consequences. If youth is distressed about circumstances of deployment, find appropriate time for them to share feelings, needs and fears.

Maintain objectivity- Respond in a calm and caring manner, answer questions in simple, direct terms. Regardless of political beliefs, refrain from expressing personal opinions.

Reinforce safety and security- When having discussions with youth, end with a focus on their safety and the safety measures being taken on behalf of their loved one and others.

Be patient and reduce workload as needed- Expect temporary slowdowns or disruptions when a deployment occurs.

Listen- Be approachable, attentive and sensitive to the unique needs of youth coping with deployment and family separations. Take time to acknowledge the deployment and answer youth questions in a factual manner.

Be sensitive to language and cultural needs- Be aware of, knowledgeable about, and sensitive to the language, values and beliefs of other cultures. Inquire about school, community and military resources available to assist.

Acknowledge and validate feelings- Help youth develop a realistic understanding of deployment. Provide reassurance that the feelings of loss, anger, frustration and grief are normal and all individuals adjust at a different pace.

Strengths resulting from deployment

- ⇒ Fosters maturity
- ⇒ Emotional growth and insight
- ⇒ Encourages independence, flexibility and adapting to change
- ⇒ Builds skills for adjusting to separations and losses faced later in life
- ⇒ Strengthens family bonds
- ⇒ Promotes awareness and understanding of importance of civic duty