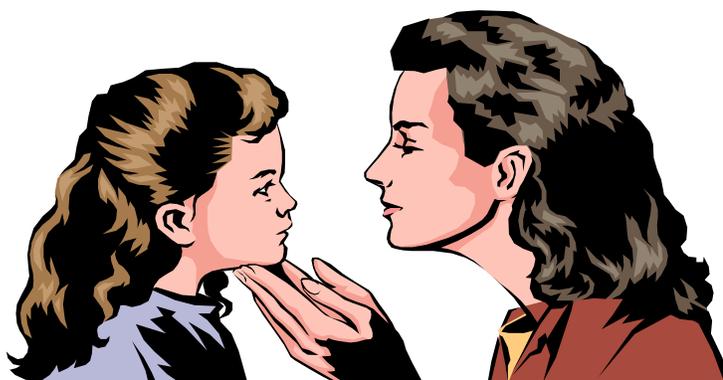




Helping Children Cope with Separation and Deployment

Many parents have concerns about how their children will cope with a prolonged separation from a parent. In the military, families have to cope with this possibility on a regular basis. This handout is designed to help parents identify normal reactions to a separation, offer strategies to help parents and children cope, and provide information on additional resources.

Normal reactions to separation



Pre-school or Kindergarten

- Clinging to people or a favorite toy or blanket
- Unexplained crying
- Choosing adults over same-age playmates
- Increased acts of aggression
- Sleeping or eating difficulties
- Fear of new people
- Repetition of the same questions
- Fear that separation is permanent
- Nightmares
- Wanting to sleep in parent's bed

School-Age Children

- Any behaviors at left
- Physical complaints (stomach ache, headache, etc)
- Increased irritability
- Problems at school - academic or behavioral
- Anger towards parent at home

Teens

- Any behaviors at left
- Acting out (trouble at home, school, with law)
- Low self-esteem
- Misdirected anger
- Sudden or unusual school problems
- Loss of interest in hobbies or past activities



Army Community Service
Family Advocacy Program
Darling Hall, Suite 367
www.gordon.army.mil/acs
791-3579/7557

Children face a challenge any time their routines are disrupted. Although most eventually adjust, the transition period can be difficult for parents. **The most influential factor affecting children is the remaining parent's attitude about the separation.** Parents should expect some regressive behaviors but not let children use this as an excuse to avoid household chores and schoolwork. Parents should teach children that feelings of sadness are OK, but also how to recover and move on. Although this handout describes normal reactions to separation, you may want to seek professional advice if these behaviors become too intense, persist, become worse, interfere with daily activities, or if the child's health begins to suffer. See the end of this handout for additional resources.

How parents can help:

- Inform children about a parent's departure before they leave. This way, they feel a part of things and can even participate in the preparation for departure.
- Have the departing parent make a tape of bedtime stories or a video tape for the child to listen to or watch while the parent is away.
- Be creative in finding strategies to maintain contact over distance. Letters, email, phone calls, and care packages all help a family stay connected.
- Listen to your children's concerns and fears. Acknowledge them and do not discount them. Address your child's concerns in a manner they can understand. You know a child is ready to talk when they begin asking questions. Tailor your answers to the child's age and developmental level.
- Find out more about your child's true concern by asking more questions. A child who asks "Who is Saddam Hussein?" may really be asking "Am I safe?"
- Educate children about talking about their feelings. Sometimes being able to put our feelings into words is a powerful tool. You can help your children express their feelings by encouraging them to draw or write about their feelings and then discuss the result.
- Reassure children when they are fearful. Remember that most children's fears boil down to "who will take care of me?" and answer accordingly. Although it's important to be honest, it's also important not to burden children with more than they can understand or cope with. Don't over explain. If children want or need more information, they will ask for it. Take your cues from your kids.
- Limit your children's exposure to the news. Younger children have difficulty differentiating what is happening on TV (be it the news or a fictional program) from what is real. Older children can cope with more, but since we never know what will show up on TV, it may be a better strategy to have them read newspapers for information.
- Maintain routines as much as possible.
- Keep photos of the absent parent at the child's eye level and talk often of the absent parent.
- Maintain discipline consistently. Don't say "Wait 'till your father gets home." This could make the child dread the parent's return.
- Keep a calendar to mark the passage of time. Young children do not understand the concept of time and will need parents to make it concrete for them. Try putting paper kisses or jelly beans in a jar or making a paper chain, adding one chain for each day the parent is gone. If you are confident in the amount of time the parent will be gone, you can take a jelly bean out of the jar or tear a link off the paper chain each day the soldier is gone with the expectation that once the jar is empty or the chain is gone, the parent will be home.
- Take care of yourself!! You will also have a need for support during this time, but it is important that you not look to your children to fulfill your emotional needs. Recharge your batteries so that you can be available for your children.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Army Community Service (706) 791-3579
Department of Social Work (706) 787-3656
Behavioral Health Clinic (706) 787-3780
Dr. Scurry (Developmental Pediatrician) (706) 787-2247
Fort Gordon School Liaison Officer – Staci Hill-Good (706) 791-7270

GREAT WEBSITES:

<http://mfrc.calib.com/healthyparenting>
www.militarychild.com
www.gordon.army.mil/acs
www.military.com/deployment
www.aacap.org/publications - for talking to children about terrorism and war
www.hooah4health.com/toolbox/stress/default.htm
www.soloops.com - help for the remaining parent
<http://www.pbs.org/parents/issuesadvice/war> - for talking to children about war

GREAT BOOKS

[The Giving Tree](#) – Shel Silverstein
[Chicken Soup with Rice](#) – Maurice Sendak
[You Go Away](#) – Dorothy Corey
[The Daddies Boat](#) – Lucia Nonfried
[A Father Like That](#) – Charlotte Zolotow
[The Goodbye Year](#) – Carole Bolton



Inside Story Headline

This story can fit 150-200 words.

One benefit of using your newsletter as a promotional tool is that you can reuse content from other marketing materials, such as press releases, market studies, and reports.



Caption describing picture or graphic.

While your main goal of distributing a newsletter might be to sell your product or service, the key to a successful newsletter is making it useful to your readers.

A great way to add useful content to your newsletter is to develop and write your own articles, or include a calendar of upcoming events or a special offer that promotes a new product.

You can also research articles or find "filler" articles by accessing the World Wide Web.

You can write about a variety of topics but try to keep your articles short.

Much of the content you put in your newsletter can also be used for your Web site. Microsoft Publisher offers a simple way to convert your newsletter to a Web publication. So, when you're finished writing your newsletter, convert it to a Web site and post it.

Inside Story Headline

This story can fit 100-150 words.

The subject matter that appears in newsletters is virtually endless. You can include stories that focus on current technologies or innovations in your field.

You may also want to note business or economic trends, or make predictions

for your customers or clients. If the newsletter is distributed internally, you might comment upon new procedures or improvements to the business. Sales figures or earnings will show how your business is growing.

Some newsletters include a column that is updated every issue, for instance, an advice

column, a book review, a letter from the president, or an editorial. You can also profile new employees or top customers or vendors.

"To catch the reader's attention, place an interesting sentence or quote from the story here."

Inside Story Headline

This story can fit 75-125 words.

Selecting pictures or graphics is an important part of adding content to your newsletter.

Think about your article and ask yourself if the picture supports or enhances the message you're trying to convey. Avoid selecting images that appear to be out of context.

Microsoft Publisher includes

thousands of clip art images from which you can choose and import into your newsletter. There are also several tools you can use to draw shapes and symbols.

Once you have chosen an image, place it close to the article. Be sure to place the caption of the image near the image.



Caption describing picture or graphic.

Primary Business Address
Your Address Line 2
Your Address Line 3
Your Address Line 4

Phone: 555-555-5555
Fax: 555-555-5555
Email: xyz@microsoft.com



Your business tag line here.

Great Books:

The Giving Tree – Shel Silverstein

Chicken Soup with Rice – Maurice Sendak

You Go Away – Dorothy Corey

The Daddies Boat – Lucia Nonfried

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www.militarychild.com

www.gordon.army.mil/acs

www.military.com/deployment

www.aacap.org/publications - for talking to children about terrorism and war

www.hooah4health.com/toolbox/stress/default.htm

www.soloops.com - help for the remaining parent

<http://www.pbs.org/parents/issuesadvice/war> - for talking to children about war