



Advocating for Military Children

A Resource Guide for Educators and Community Partners

Child & Youth Program

2013

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General Information

National Guard Bureau

Child & Youth Program

111 S. George Mason Drive, AHS2

Arlington, VA 22204

The National Guard Bureau Child & Youth Program exists to advocate on behalf of all National Guard children and youth. All states, territories (Guam, Puerto Rico, and United States Virgin Islands) and the District of Columbia have information available at their headquarters. They also have a Family Program staff ready to provide specific information to our communities, whether it is individuals, faith-based congregations, businesses, or civic organizations. Our goal is to foster a supportive and resilient climate for our children and youth with the help of our community partners!

Each branch of the Service also has an organization/position that provides Family support services:

- Army: Army Community Services Center (ACS)
- Navy: Family Services Center (FSC)
- Air Force: Family Support Center (FSC)
- Marine Corps: Family Services Center (FSC)
- Coast Guard: Work-Life Center (located in each district office)

School personnel should be familiar with the organization that supports military Families at each local installation and within those communities that do not have a military installation. They are first line resources in supporting military children and their Families.

Introduction

Purpose

This information is intended to help educators build coping skills in their students during and after a military deployment. **The goal is to bring needed support and understanding to the process and to maintain an optimal learning environment in the classroom and the school.** Specific and practical guidelines for administrators, counselors, teachers, and other school employees are presented in order to identify age-related reactions and focus on appropriate intervention strategies.

By using the provided information and techniques and adding your own unique perspective and expertise, you will become more knowledgeable and better prepared to assist the military child during the deployment and transition of his or her parent.

The demands on military members and their Families are not only increasing, but are becoming more complex. Military Families sacrifice their personal comfort and experience tremendous upheaval when Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Reservists and National Guard members are called to serve our country here or abroad. Children are especially vulnerable when separated from parents due to deployments. Their unique developmental perspective and limited life experience put them at a heightened risk for emotional distress during the separation period.

Military Families, and especially military children, do not want to be singled out for special attention. However, it is helpful for teachers, counselors, child care providers, tutors, coaches, and after-school activity providers to have a basic understanding of situations that impact the lives of military Families living in their local community. Whether it is a small, rural community that is home to a National Guardsman or Reservist, or a large military installation, military Families can be found in every state, territory and the District of Columbia.

Schools are one of the most important places for a child to establish stability and a normal routine, which can provide an anchor during the challenges of deployment and the resulting disruptions to daily life. The predictability of the classroom helps to cushion the impact of deployment that often includes changes in psychological equilibrium and disruption of individual behavior and coping skills. Alternatively, the stresses that may result from separation from a parent have the potential to affect an entire school community and may interfere with the ability of students and staff to focus on learningⁱ.

Background

The National Guard and Reserve Families differ from active component Families in that they don't usually consider themselves "military Families". They are proud to be part of the National Guard or the Reserves community. The Guardsman has a dual mission: the Federal mission requires deployment in defense of our country, and the state mission utilizes the Guard to provide support during times of crises, e.g. hurricanes, blizzards, floods, etc. Each Guardsman is specifically trained for their position. Regardless of which type of mission they are called to support, this places stressors on the Families. The Guardsman is away from his/her full-time job and Family during these times.

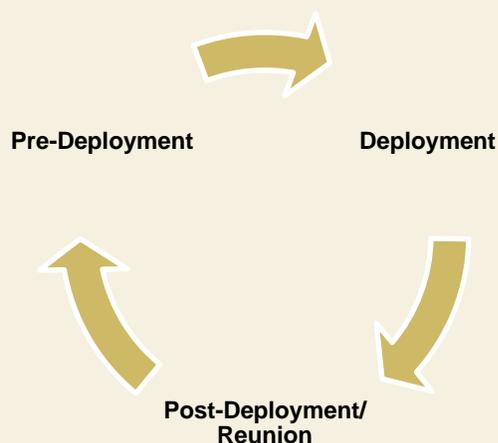
The traditional Guardsman can be found as educators, professional white collar workers, small business owners; or serving in any professional capacity in your community that you can possibly imagine. Their absence from the workplace is also a potential stressor for their place of business. There are full-time Guardsmen as well, who daily put on their uniforms and are responsible for running the Guard at your state level. Due to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Guard Families understand the military mission and frequent deployments. However, the reintegration process back into the Family, as well as the workplace as they return to their civilian jobs, makes the Guard Family, and specifically the children, vulnerable.

The support available to the active component military members and their Families on a full-time basis is not available to the Guardsmen and their Families. For this reason, support and understanding of how to work effectively with National Guard and Reserves children is of the utmost importance.

Deployment

Deployment is the name given to the movement of an individual or military unit within the United States or to an overseas location to accomplish a task or mission. The mission may be as routine as providing training or as dangerous as a war.

Deployments have three phases: **pre-deployment, deployment, and post-deployment** (which include *reunion* and *reintegration*). Each phase has unique challenges that require the proper interventions. Although the emotional impact of each phase of the deployment cycle has been carefully documented and studied, it is important to remember that no two students will react the same way. Individual responses depend on a variety of factors such as age, maturity, gender, parent-child relationships, and coping skills of the caregiver during separation.



Pre-Deployment Phase

Receiving notice that the Family member will be deployed to another location in the U.S. or abroad is often followed by feelings of general shock and disbelief.

Students will ponder questions such as “How could this happen to me?” The order, security and safety of their lives and the lives of their Family members can feel temporarily shattered.

Deployment Phase

When the deployment day arrives, there is usually Family, unit, and community support in the form of Yellow Ribbon events and/or informal farewells. Military personnel are honored as dedicated, self-sacrificing and courageous. In wartime, there is an enormous mobilization during which Family and community members provide a range of outward forms of support.

As the military member leaves and the emotional impact of that separation continues with the passage of time, the involvement of the community and those less affected by the event fades. The students and their Families are left with feelings of loss and grief to manage on their own. The remaining spouse or guardians of children (including aunts, uncles, grandparents or family friends) may struggle with new and increased roles and responsibilities. Conflicts may surface. During this phase, children and Families of deployed military members can reach different levels of adjustment. Some have developed or improved coping skills and are ready to resume their lives with renewed resiliency and hope. Some struggle with past problems and new conflicts. Others may suffer from feelings of depression. Actively reaching out to children and Families who are experiencing deployment difficulties during this phase can be helpful, especially if support includes the teaching of new coping skills in relation to specific problems. The majority of Families reach a “new normal” in daily life activities without the deployed spouse or parent.

Post-Deployment / Reunion Phase

Reunion is a special “event” typically experienced with euphoria and joy when the military parent or spouse returns, but is just the beginning of the “reintegration” process. The expectation of a “honeymoon” period is understandable from the viewpoint of returning military member, spouse, child, and youth. It is a time for the Family to get reacquainted and, in many cases, a vacation.

Reintegration is an ongoing process in contrast to the “event” of reunion. There is a big difference!

Reunion identifies the celebration or ceremony of the arrival of returning Service members to their homes. It gives the impression that all is now okay. Reunion is over in a short period of time as everyone gets back to “normal”.

Reintegration is the establishment or the rebuilding of relationships, roles, and responsibilities; and this process is encumbered with multiple dynamics both good and bad. Reintegration has no set timeline.

Most issues for Families stem from the reintegration process. This is what may show up in school with the children. Hidden beneath the surface are normal issues that must be readdressed and resolved as the Family works to reincorporate the returned Family member. The joyous return from the Family’s perspective may bring challenges to the new equilibrium established while the Service member was gone. Spouses and children may have operated with a new independence that is not easily surrendered. Old and new conflicts may arise over roles and responsibilities. Family counseling, support and assistance may be needed to reconstruct Family interaction. The expectation that the Family will be just as it was before the deployment must be addressed. This phase brings different risks and challenges and the opportunity to negotiate stronger and improved Family relations.

Strengths that often develop and become apparent during the deployment and reintegration process can lead to a positive sense of self-worth. These processes can, and often do, foster maturity in our military youth as they have broader and

more varied experiences than non-military children. They learn more about their world and how to function in a community at a younger age. They develop new skills and hidden interests while assuming age-appropriate responsibilities in the absence of the military member. They tend to become more independent and flexible. Skills for adjusting to separations and losses later in life are a result of the “hellos” and “good-byes” experienced during deployment and reintegration.

Common Reactions During and After Reunion

Preschool and Kindergarten (ages 3 to 5 years)

- Feels guilty for making parent go away
- Needs some warm-up time
- Demonstrates intense anger at home or school
- Needs “proof” that the parent is real – pokes, hits, tests limits
- Acts out to get parent’s or teacher’s attention
- Is emotionally needy and demanding

Elementary School (ages 5 to 12 years)

- Runs to greet returning parent at homecoming
- Feels guilty that they didn’t do enough or weren’t “good enough”
- Dreads the parent’s return if they believe parent will discipline them for all the wrongs committed during the separation
- Boasts about the Service and parent

Middle and High School/Teens (ages 13 to 18 years)

- Exhibits excitement if parent/child relationship was strong
- Feels guilty for not living up to standards
- Is concerned about rules and responsibilities
- Feels too old or is unwilling to change plans to meet the ship/plane when parent returns

The Impact of Deployment

The duration of a deployment ranges from 6 to 24 months, depending on the mission and the Service component of the military member. Many military members have experienced multiple deployments. Therefore, their Families have experienced multiple deployments. Children, in general, are resilient. The majority of children do not experience stress at levels that require significant clinical intervention. Children react differently to these deployments. A deployment represents change, and change can be confusing. A child may be angry, afraid, moody, or distant. School counselors, teachers and school administrators can help tremendously by being sensitive to these behavior changes realizing that the student may be reacting to a recent deployment.

Deployments cause stress due to change for both the Service member and the Family that is left behind. Regardless of the length of the deployment, the Family will have to redistribute roles (e.g., finances, the maintenance of the house and car, and the care and discipline of children). Among young Families, there is a strong tendency to return to the location of their Families of origin. These moves are made to reduce costs and to add to the psychological and physical support needed to keep the Family unit going.

Many factors influence Family adaptation to deployment. Each individual in the Family of a deployed Service member must adjust to new roles and responsibilities in addition to the “loss” through separation of their loved one(s).

All Families benefit from assistance and support in one or more areas but disorganized Families with multiple pre-existing problems and/or troubled Family members tend to be at higher risk for poor adjustments during deployments and separations.

Most students and their Families will be able to adjust to a “new normal” after the departure of a spouse or parent. However, some students who are fragile or who have had previous social or emotional problems may continue to have serious symptoms of stress and their ability to function in the school remains compromised.

The primary difference between a normal and serious reaction is one of degree and duration of change rather than in kind. The withdrawn student who may go unnoticed in a classroom may also need a referral for evaluation. This student may, in fact, need more immediate intervention than the agitated child who is acting out. If any of the “normal” reactions to the stress of deployment persist over six weeks, after the majority of their classmates no longer show any symptoms of stress, then the parent needs to be notified and a referral made to appropriate school, community or military services.

Indicators and Signs for Concern

Some concerns may be indicators of problems that can be easily corrected if treated quickly and appropriately. Prompt referral for intensive individualized assessment and therapy will be appropriate for students who, after six to eight weeks:

- Have not been able to resume normal classroom assignments and activities
- Continue to have high levels of emotional response such as continued crying and intense sadness
- Continue to appear depressed, withdrawn and non-communicative
- Continue to have difficulty concentrating in school

- Express violent or depressed feelings in “dark” drawings or writings
- Intentionally hurt or cut themselves or are at risk for hurting others
- Gain or lose a significant amount of weight in a period of weeks
- Discontinue taking care of their personal appearance
- Exhibit a possible drug or alcohol abuse problem

The National Guard Child & Youth Program, through their state liaisons, encourage Guard and military parents to notify their children’s teachers, principals, and school counselors if there is a Family member who is presently deployed, about to be deployed, or who has recently returned from a deployment.

Serious Stress Reactions

Deployments cause a number of changes in children’s lives. Change is puzzling to children, and as a result they may show signs of separation anxiety. Listed below are some of the reactions parents and teachers may observe in children when a parent is deployed. It is very helpful when teachers and counselors contact parents of military students experiencing separation anxiety. These students may be showing similar signs at home.

In preschool or kindergarten age children you may see:

- Clinging to people or favorite toy, blanket, etc.
- Unexplained crying or tearfulness
- Change in relationship with same-age friends
- Choosing adults over same-age friends
- Increased acts of aggression toward people or things
- Shrinking away from people or things
- Sleep difficulties (nightmares, frequent waking)
- Regressing such as toileting accidents, thumb-sucking, etc.
- Eating difficulties

In elementary school age children you may see: preschool or kindergarten signs PLUS:

- A rise in complaints about stomach aches, headaches, or other illnesses when nothing seems to be wrong
- More irritability or crabbiness
- Increase in school problems such as a drop in grades, an unwillingness to attend school, or odd complaints about school and/or teachers
- Behavior changes

Need for Immediate Evaluation

A student may show signs of serious stress during and immediately after a parent's deployment. The following signs indicate that the student is in acute distress and will need to be referred for immediate evaluation:

- Unfocused agitation or hysteria
- Disconnection from peers and adults
- Serious depression or withdrawal
- Auditory or visual hallucinations
- Any prolonged major change from normal functioning that continues six weeks after the parent returns from the deployment

Teacher Interventions in the Classroom

As an educator, you play a critical role in the life of each student. Teachers are a significant and valuable resource and support for children who are affected by deployment as they learn to cope and grow during this time of change.

Listed below are a few recommended suggestions and strategies you can use in your classroom. Remember to rely on your own experiences and knowledge of

childhood development in order to help each child; as well as assessing their individual needs and the needs of the other children in your classroom.

Elementary School Students – May benefit from these activities:

- Engage in therapeutic play
- Paint or draw pictures reflecting feelings and thoughts about how to make things better
- Write in a journal
- Read and discuss stories about children in conflict and children as problem solvers
- Write cards or letters to the deployed Family member
- Make a memory book or calendar reflecting positive thoughts and actions
- Take part in individual and group counseling when problems arise

Middle School and High School Students – May benefit from these activities:

- Keep a journal
- Engage in art activities
- Write poetry
- Write stories
- Write cards or letters to the deployed Family member
- Relax by doing deep breathing and muscles relaxation exercises
- Learn problem-solving strategies
- Participate in small group discussions
- Participate in support groups
- Exercise
- Listen to music
- Participate in extracurricular activities (sports teams, drama, choir, etc.)
- Take part in individual and group counseling when problems arise

How Educators Can Help

- Rely on your experience and knowledge of childhood development
- Maintain a predictable, structured class schedule with specific rules and consequences. This helps students feel a sense of security and belonging in class, and that school is a safe, caring place
- Plan for shorter lessons and proceed at a slower pace
- Be approachable and sensitive; limit frightening or hurtful communication
- Children may express themselves inappropriately in an effort to cope with overwhelming emotions. They may become overactive and disruptive, or quiet and withdrawn
- Acknowledge that feeling sad, angry, and hurt is normal when someone we care about leaves
- Reinforce ways to express negative emotions without hurting self or others
- Reassure students that everyone adjusts to change at a different pace
- Be sensitive to needs of students whose parents or caregivers speak a different primary language

School counselors, teachers, coaches, child care providers, tutors, after-school activity providers, and school administrators can also assist military children and their parents in the following ways:

- Refer to military Family support organizations for information on deployment workshops, free educational materials, or counseling services
- Invite representatives from your local military Family support organization to PTA meeting to talk about separations and children
- Encourage military Families to attend deployment focused programs
- At the start of each school year, encourage military parents to provide the school with the name of the unit they are assigned to and when the unit deploys. This allows the school to keep a confidential master list of students who have/will have parents deployed. This information helps teachers and counselors to be attuned to any emotional, behavioral, or academic

changes that may occur with a student as a result of a parent being deployed

- Work on craft or science projects that illustrate the change in seasons - pumpkins, snowflakes, leaves, and planting seeds. This helps young children identify the passage of time and relate this to parent's return
- Encourage younger children to bring in some of the deployed parent's worn clothing and uniform items to use for dress-up play
- Encourage students to communicate regularly with their deployed parents. Letters and tapes are always appreciated, but some other ways children can keep in touch include sending the Service member:
 - A gift certificate to be cashed in when the deployed parent gets home
 - A book written/illustrated about the absent parent
 - A new recipe they tried and plan to make when the deployed parents returns
 - A drawing with a hidden picture for the deployed parent to find
 - A crossword puzzle or secret message with a code for the deployed parent to figure out

Frequently Asked Questions

How often do deployments occur, and how many of my students will be affected?

Although it is impossible to predict the number of deployments that will occur during a time of war, it is almost certain that there may be students from military Families that may experience a military deployment of a Family member. The deployment of a parent, grandparent, sibling, or other Family member can directly impact the psychological and physical well-being of the child. Even if the child is too young to understand the meaning of and implications associated with a military deployment, they sense the stress of their primary caregivers and are affected by this stress without understanding the cause.

How can military deployments affect a class?

A deployment that affects one child may affect other classmates vicariously, much as experiences of individual Family members will affect the rest of the Family. Classroom climate and student behavior and performance may be affected. Interference in the ability of students to focus on learning can result. Administrators may need to set the standard for school climate. Thoughtful classroom discussions may be appropriate for older students during studies of current events but sensitivity and support are required for all students whose loved ones have been deployed.

How do students generally react to a family member's deployment?

Emotional reactions vary in nature and severity from student to student. A lack of previous experience with a parent deploying, or a child's individual personality, temperament, or perception of danger to their Family member can greatly influence their reaction to their parent's deployment.

Nonetheless, some commonalities exist when lives are disrupted by sudden separations and dramatic Family changes.

Loss of Stability: Deployments change and disrupt the normal order and routine of the child's daily life. Lack of stability can feel very threatening. Deployments may upset Family equilibrium for extended periods of time, and in the mind of the student, the sudden changes occurring may set off fears of other potentially unpredictable events coming to pass.

Loss of Control: By their very nature, deployments represent events over which the child has no control. Lack of control can produce overwhelming feelings and confusion in children.

Individual Reactions: A child's immediate reaction to deployment often includes a fear for their own safety. They may be intensely worried about what will happen to them and their Family members, to a degree that may be judged by adults as unreasonable. However, young children have difficulty putting the needs of

others before their own. Children need repeated reassurance regarding their own safety, and the outcome of the deployment as it relates to them and their daily lives.

Conversely, for a variety of reasons, some children may express relief that the Family member has left the Family unit.

The deployment may put an end to pre-existing Family tension or dysfunction; or it may represent the finality of an action that resolves the child's anxiety, fear, and uncertainty about when the separation will occur.

However shocked or dismayed adults may be by a child's reactions to a parent's deployment, valuable opportunities can be provided to them in order to work with the child to understand their respective thoughts and feelings. Then they can work to find solutions and make the needed adjustments in the Family.

What are common stress reactions?

Acute reactions to deployment separation generally appear within the first 24 to 48 hours. In the first two weeks into the separation, the reactions may change. Behaviors will vary depending upon the age and developmental maturity of the child. It is also important to note that it is possible for weeks or months to pass before a delayed reaction will become apparent and cause problems. (See "**Normal Reactions to Stress**" section).

The most common causes of stress are, in most cases, obvious. Separation from a loved one is almost always stressful, but having a loved one in harm's way, on a daily basis, is one of the most common stressors reported. Children may experience intense feelings of anxiety and fear that their loved one may be injured, or killed, or captured as a POW. Television, internet, and even print media can exacerbate this uncertainty with a deluge of reports and commentaries that are unsettling and frightening.

For children of Guardsmen or Reservists, other stressors include the possible interruption in financial support, where the paycheck for the military Service

member during the time of deployment is less than the paycheck for their civilian full-time job. Some parents also fear the loss of promotions/pay raises and, in some instances, the loss of their job upon their return. Unfortunately, these topics are sometimes discussed in front of the child or teen.

The child of an unmarried military member may have to relocate to live with another Family member and lose their circle of support, to include friends, neighbors, and school staff.

Child care issues may arise and the working spouse often does not have time to tend to personal needs and/or goals. Children and teens are sometimes asked to shoulder home responsibilities that they are not mature or resilient enough to handle. In some cases, a child or teen may actually assume a parenting role for younger siblings, or even the remaining parent.

When should a referral be made to a school counselor, psychologist, or social worker?

A parent should be contacted by the teacher, and with assistance from the school counselor, if symptoms persist over several weeks, or become extreme. It should also be noted that sometimes the remaining parent may also be struggling with issues related to the deployment, and that compounds the stress on the student.

The teacher should consult with the school site administrator and support staff to ensure that the appropriate mental health referrals are recommended within the school or community. Support staff members may include: the school nurse, school psychologist, school social worker and crisis intervention team member. The duration and intensity of stress reactions vary greatly depending on the level of impact on the child and Family. These emotional surges may pass more quickly with the support of loved ones, friends, social contacts and military affiliations.

If the separation is extremely traumatic, the need for counseling is considered a normal course of action which is necessary in order for healing and adjustment to take place. Counseling does not indicate that a person is mentally ill. It shows

that a person is strong enough to accept help with the goal of learning how to manage changes in a constructive way.

Why must the teacher become involved?

It is important for the teacher to become involved for two reasons. First, studies have shown that the way in which an adult responds to individuals and groups after a crisis can significantly affect the outcome of the student's experience. Once the immediate physical and safety needs of the child are met, consideration must be given to the psychological needs of all those affected.

Through supportive interventions, delayed or prolonged stress responses can be minimized and learning can resume. Second, the process of effective intervening with individuals or groups of children can create a sense of class cohesiveness and help to re-establish the student's sense of security and belonging in class.

Can deployment and subsequent adjustment period following the deployment affect learning?

The period between a parent's deployment and post-deployment can affect learning by creating instability in the lives of individual students, as well as the classroom.

Stressed students may have difficulty concentrating, learning new concepts, and controlling emotional expression. Some students may become very quiet and withdrawn, while other may become disruptive and overly active. Their academic functioning may be impaired. Studies have shown that prolonged stress alters brain chemistry and function, which may cause students to have difficulty with concentration, memory, behavior and control of emotions.

How can my school counselor, nurse, psychologist, or social worker help?

These school-based health and mental health professionals can assist in identifying potential problems, and determine the degree of impact on students and the school. They should be trained to assess the student's situation and

provide supportive interventions that will assist in the student's adjustment and solution goals.

School-based health and mental health professionals can determine if additional services may be needed from district, community or military sources and can make those referrals.

What types of training would be beneficial for school staff members?

- School site deployment awareness training
- Guard and Reserve Institute – Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC)
- Consultation with school liaisons from the military Services

Many of these services and training are available to schools through the Family Service Centers on nearby installations.

The Guard and Reserve Institute (GRI) provided by MCEC, is highly recommended by educators who have taken the training.

Helpful Websites

Blue Star Families (BSF): www.bluestarfam.org

Department of Defense Education Activity: www.dodea.edu

Department of Defense Educational Opportunities: www.militarystudent.org

Department of Veterans Affairs for Kids: www.va.gov/kids

Educator's Guide to the Military Child during Deployment: www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c14555.htm

Educator's for Social Responsibility Site: www.esrnational.org

Joint Services Support: www.jointservicesupport.org

Marine Corps: www.usmc-mccs.org (Click on Deployment Information)

Military Child Education Coalition: www.militarychild.org

Military Family Books: www.militaryfamilybooks.com

Military One Source: www.militaryonesource.com

National Children, Youth and Families at Risk Initiative: www.cyfernet.org

National Child Traumatic Stress Network: www.NCTSN.org

National Fatherhood Initiative: www.fatherhood.org

National Guard Family Programs Site: www.jointservicesupport.org

National Military Family Association: www.nmfa.org

Operation Military Kids (OMK)/4H: www.operationmilitarykids.org

Sittercity: www.sittercity.com

Tutor.com: www.tutor.com

Zero to Three: www.zerotothree.org

Suggested Reading for Children and Youth

For Elementary School Children:

A Very Long Time by Geri Timperley and Nikki Arro

This book very simply discusses the passage of time, and how difficult it can be for a young child to wait patiently for a BIG event to finally arrive! It also discusses being away from the military parent.

Website: www.averylongtime.com

Night Catch by Brenda Ehrmantraut

As stated by Ms. Ehrmantraut, when a Soldier's work takes him half-way around the world, he enlists the help of The North Star for a nightly game of catch with his son. **Night Catch** is a timeless story that connects Families while they are apart and offers comforting hope for their reunion.

Website: www.bubblegumpress.net

For Middle School Children:

Make me a Memory by Tamra Norton (email: tamra@tamranorton.com)

This is the story of Allie Claybrook, whose life changes drastically when her father deploys to Iraq, and she and her family must move to Idaho to live with grandparents. Allie comes to understand that memories and loved ones are both precious and fragile. Ms. Norton writes about these changes with a great sense of humor!

Website: www.tamranorton.com

For High School and Teens:

Finding My Way - a Teen's Guide to Living with a Parent Who Has Experienced Trauma by Michelle D. Sherman, Ph.d. & DeAnne M. Sherman

This is a sensitive book that addresses the confusion and distress experienced by teenagers whose parents have been exposed to trauma.

Resources for Educators

Resources for educators may be found by registering on the Joint Services Support (JSS) portal at www.jointservicesupport.org.

Educators are encouraged to register on the JSS in order to receive updates and information on initiatives as they occur within their state. Once registered, educators will have access, under "My Training/Guard Youth Team Building," to several presentations. These resources are free and available for download. Also available is "Contacts and Resources," a searchable database of national and State organizations, websites, and documents. Students are also encouraged to register!

Creative Ways to Recognize Military Children

- One idea that can be used to create awareness in the classroom is to have a “Patriotic Day” where students can wear red, white, and blue; sing patriotic songs; learn about the flag and have a history lesson on a particular individual who fought for freedom in our country. This activity can encourage student who have a military parent to share thoughts with the class and give them a sense of pride in their family
- Create a bulletin board in the entrance of the classroom with the heading- “Proud to be part of a military family.” Encourage students to place a photo of a military Family member on the board. This activity will open discussion about what it feels like to have a parent in the military
- Display a poster of Armed Forces insignia on a school counselor’s door or outside of the office. This will encourage a discussion with a military child. He or she may be more at ease approaching the counselor who seems to have an understanding of the military
- Teach students about military time. 1500...what time is it? Have a clock in the classroom that shows military time. The child of a Service member might want to help the class learn how to tell military time

Activities

- Encourage the military child’s parent to leave a few stamped, self-addressed envelopes with the teacher. The school or PTA newsletter can be sent to the deployed parent, as well as samples of their child’s work, with a short comment regarding his/her progress
- Become a pen pal to their child’s class. Instead of feeling different for having a parent so far away, their child will be proud of the important work they do. Everyday items from other cultures can be very educational. One of the military child’s parents could provide postcards, maps, stamps, coins, menus, or information and articles that describe the foreign duty station, port, etc. A picture, patch, bumper sticker, or button will enhance a child’s sense of pride in the parent’s Service to the nation

- Track the deployed parent’s journey on a map, allowing the class to learn about the world, and have the child bring in postcards, stamps, shells, and other items sent from different places. Each child can write the military parent letters. This can provide students with a positive, educational experience during a difficult time, and make the child feel closer to the deployed parent with the entire class as a system of support
- Facilitate deployment support groups for students whose parents or relatives are involved in a deployment. Deployment support groups can continue to be offered on a regular basis
- Invite a guest speaker to address their deployment support group. A Service member in uniform, a military spouse, or staff member from a local Family support organization can be used
- Arrange a field trip to a nearby military installation
- Students can make a time capsule at the beginning of the deployment. A shoe box or plastic bag can be filled with items like a piece of string as long as the child’s height, a tracing of the child’s hand or foot, a list of the child’s favorites (song, candy bar, television show, toy, etc.), and any other items. Students choose a hiding place for their time capsules at the start of the deployment and open them when the deployed parent returns. It’s an entertaining way to measure the changes that have occurred during the deployment
- Peer counseling is an effective technique to implement during deployment. More experienced military students can assist those students who have little or no experience with deployments, particularly children of Reservists who were not prepared for their parent’s rapid deployment
- Have a “NO HOMEWORK PASS,” which entitles a student to a night off from homework so that he can spend more time with the returning parent
- A class, school, or child could adopt a Soldier, Airman, or unit. The students could write letters and/or send craft projects or certain items to the Soldier or Airman

- *Sesame Workshop*, the nonprofit educational organization behind Sesame Street, and Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., have partnered with additional support from The New York Office of Mental Health (NYSOMH) and Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) TM, to develop “Talk, Listen, Connect,” an outreach initiative to help the young children of members of the United States Armed Services, National Guard and Reserves cope with the feelings, challenges, and concerns they experience during various phases of deployment: pre-deployment, deployment and homecoming
- Featuring the Sesame Street Muppets, “*TALK, LISTEN, CONNECT: Helping Families Cope with Military Deployments*,” is designed for military Families with children between the ages of three and five. The kits will be available at no cost to schools
- Contact *Military One Source* at 1-800-342-9647 for a Sesame Street DVD (at no cost to the school) www.militaryonesource.com

Acknowledgements

The National Guard Child & Youth Program would like to acknowledge the “Educator’s Guide to the Military Child during Deployment”, from which this guide derives much information.

The “Educator’s Guide” is sponsored by the Educational Opportunities Directorate of the Department of Defense, and is the result of collaboration between representatives from each branch of the United States military as well as: the School Intervention Unit, National Center for Child Traumatic Stress; UCLA and Duke University; and Director of Crisis Counseling and Intervention Services, Los Angeles Unified School District, part of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN), www.nctsn.org. The NCTSN is funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) <http://www.hhs.gov/>.

