

The Impact of Deployment on Families

As Family Advocacy Program

March 2025 FAP/chat

Deployment is a reality for many military and civilian personnel who serve in roles that take them away from home for extended periods. While their commitment to duty is commendable, it often comes with emotional, psychological, and logistical challenges for their families. Spouses, children, and extended family members must adjust to life without their loved one physically present, which can impact family dynamics and well-being. Understanding these challenges and implementing coping strategies can help families build resilience and maintain strong connections during deployment.

Emotional and Psychological Effects on Families

Deployment can trigger a range of emotions for both the deployed individual and their family members. For spouses, feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and stress are common, especially when managing household responsibilities alone. Children may struggle with sadness, confusion, or behavioral changes as they adjust to a parent's absence. Extended family members, such as grandparents, may take on additional caregiving responsibilities, adding to their emotional burden. For the deployed, being away from family can lead to feelings of guilt, frustration, and worry, especially when missing milestones and special occasions.

2. Shifting Roles & Responsibilities

- Spouses and partners often take on additional responsibilities such as managing finances, handling household tasks, and making important decisions alone.
- Children may need to adjust to new routines, sometimes stepping up to help around the house.
- Extended family members or friends may step in for support, but this shift can still feel overwhelming.

3. Reintegration Challenges

- Adjusting after deployment can be just as challenging as the separation itself. Service members may struggle with reconnecting after months away, while families have adapted to new routines.
- Children may take time to warm up to a returning parent, especially if they are young and don't fully understand the absence.

Spouses may feel the need to re-establish their roles and balance responsibilities again.

Ways to Stay Connected During Deployment

1. Maintain Regular Communication

- **Technology Helps:** Video calls, emails, voice recordings, and messages help bridge the distance. Even a simple "good morning" or "good night" message can provide comfort.
- **Letters & Care Packages:** Sending handwritten letters, drawings from kids, or small care packages can make a big emotional impact.
- **Deployment Journal:** Keeping a journal for the deployed parent to read upon return can be a meaningful way to share daily life.

2. Establish Family Traditions

- **Watch the Same Movie or Read the Same Book:** This creates a shared experience, even from a distance.
- **Countdown Calendar:** Helps children visually understand when their parent will return.
- **Message Box for Kids:** A place where children can leave drawings, notes, or questions for their deployed parent.

3. Encourage Emotional Expression

- **Talk About Feelings:** Encourage children and spouses to openly discuss their emotions.
- **Creative Outlets:** Drawing, writing, or storytelling can help children express their feelings about deployment.

- **Validate Emotions:** Acknowledge that missing a loved one is normal and that all emotions—sadness, frustration, excitement—are okay.

Support Resources for Families

1. Military Support Programs

- **Family Advocacy Program:** Provides supportive services to family members.
- **Employee Assistance Program:** Provides supportive services to civilian employee family members.
- **Military OneSource:** Provides free counseling, resources, and assistance for military families.
- **Family Readiness Groups (FRGs):** Offer local support and connection with other families going through similar experiences.
- **Operation We Are Here:** A hub for deployment-related resources and assistance.

2. Community & Emotional Support

- **Spouse Support Groups:** Online and in-person groups offer guidance and friendship during deployment.
- **School Support for Children:** Many schools have counselors trained to support military children during deployment.
- **Faith-Based or Community Support:** Churches, family members, and local organizations often offer assistance.

3. Self-Care for Spouses & Caregivers

- **Prioritize Well-Being:** Exercise, social activities, and self-care routines help reduce stress.
- **Set Personal Goals:** Focusing on hobbies, education, or career growth can help maintain a sense of independence and fulfillment.

Ask for Help: Accepting help from friends, family, or community resources is a sign of strength. Deployment is a challenging time, but with open communication, strong support networks, and resilience, families can navigate the separation

successfully. Every family's journey is unique, but no one has to go through it alone. Support is always available, and by staying connected and prioritizing well-being, families can grow stronger together.

If you need assistance learning more about deployment supportive services, contact the Family Advocacy Program. Remember that the Employee Assistance Program and Military OneSource are valuable resources available to military personnel, their families, and civilian employees. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact the Family Advocacy Program at 717-770-7066.