USAREUR

Deployment & Reunion Guide

for Children

3 to 6
year olds

FOREWORD

The word *family* elicits a strong emotional response from Soldiers. When deployed, they need to know that their families are safe and secure. Their morale and their ability to concentrate on the mission depend on it. Success on the battlefield is largely attributable to high morale. How well we care for the families that remain behind when Soldiers deploy is therefore critical to our success in the Global War on Terrorism.

Families remain an integral part of our great European community while Soldiers are deployed. Your efforts to take care of yourself and your family, often while working full-time outside the home, enable deployed Soldiers to concentrate on their missions, knowing that all is well on the home front. I remain dedicated to providing for your well-being to ensure your family continues to grow and prosper while your Soldier is deployed.

In our ongoing campaign to support you and your family during the deployment cycle, I directed that this guide be developed for our younger members of the USAREUR team. A dedicated and talented multidisciplinary team produced this age-specific guide to help children during deployment and reunion. This guide and the USAREUR Family Focused Deployment Information Web site are designed to support your continuing efforts on the home front.

As you use this guide, remember that your well-being is a source of strength to the deployed Soldier in your family. Also remember that you are not alone. Rear detachments, family readiness groups, and community agencies are here to help you.

In closing, I want to tell you how grateful I am for all you are doing to maintain the strength of your family during these challenging times. In doing so, you are not only helping the Soldier in your family, you are making a great contribution to the overall strength of our extended USAREUR family, thus enabling us to be ready for Any Mission, Anywhere.

B. B. BELL
General, USA
Commanding

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS, UNITED STATES ARMY, EUROPE, AND SEVENTH ARMY
UNIT 29351
APO AE 09014-9351

Deputy Chief of Staff, G1

April 16, 2004

SUBJECT: Open Letter to USAREUR Parents

Dear Parents:

Every child responds to a parent's deployment differently, experiencing a wide range of emotions. To address this issue, we offer these age-specific resources. A child's responses are dependent on a myriad of factors with a common element – age/maturity. A 3 year old may be crushed by the deployment assuming they did something to cause the parent to leave; a 10 year old may dive into the role of the deployed parent, essentially trying to assume the duties and responsibilities of providing comfort and support to the other parent and family members; while a teen may be torn between sadness that the parent deployed, anger that the parent would leave, and anxiety about the changes occurring upon the deployed parent's return.

The developmental stages across childhood make addressing this subject in a single overarching document impossible. The presentation method used to engage a 4 year old will not interest a teen. Keeping this in mind, the guide includes four unique age-specific sections. There is a section for parents and a coloring book section designed for the 3 to 6-year-olds; a comic book format highlights the 7 to 12 year old section; and the teen section reflects a graphic novel style with more mature content and art.

This guide contains material derived or borrowed directly from published materials on childhood, separation, and deployment. The Heidelberg Army Community Service (ACS) staff has been instrumental in providing historical and storyboard materials for deployment and children. The Air Force and Navy also contributed source materials to this guide. In particular, the Air Force Crossroads website provides an excellent source of concise information focused on enlightening the parent.

Child specialists from the Heidelberg MEDDAC Behavioral Health Clinic reviewed each section of the guide for age-appropriate content and accuracy. We will continue to update the guide to reflect experience and knowledge gained over time regarding the effects of deployment and reunion on children. We hope theses guides and the associated web links on the USAREUR Family Focused Deployment Information web page provide you and your family with information to ease the trials of deployment and the challenges of reunion.

Sincerely,

Russell L. Frutiger

Russell L. Frutiger
Brigadier General, GS
Deputy Chief of Staff, G1

Parent's Guide

to Children, Deployment & Reunion

The next few pages are a quick reference to the stages of deployment and reunion. They touch on the phases of deployment and the critical issues that should be addressed to successfully maneuver through each phase.

There are tips for you about engaging your children on the topics throughout this booklet.

For a more in-depth approach to the same material we suggest you link to the Parents Guide to the Military Child During Deployment and Reunion at: http://www.militarystudent.org/kthrough12/docs/Parent_Guide_Deployment.pdf.

This site is sponsored by DoD in collaboration with each of the military services and many other civilian and governmental agencies. This is indeed an excellent resource.

Pre-Deployment

Parents can help children understand and accept the deployment of a loved one and their feelings about it by planning ahead. Anticipate the problems and discuss them with the entire family.

Preparing The Home Front - Preparing The Family

The pre-separation period is stressful for parents and children. Confronted with an extended absence of a parent, family members sense a loss of continuity and security. Children may not fully understand why one of their parents must leave. Very often young children may become confused and fearful that Mommy or Daddy will desert them.

Children are not very good at expressing fears and feelings in words. Anger and a desire for revenge, as well as guilt for feeling that way, are often demonstrated in the child's behavior. Change is puzzling to children. They want everything to remain the same. When changes occur, children usually have no other way to release anxieties, and nowhere to go for help. At a time when the separated spouse's responsibility to the Army becomes more demanding of their time and energy, the remaining spouse may feel overwhelmed, as they prepare to solely support the children, and home.

What can be done about relieving the stress of the pre-family separation period? The following ideas have been helpful to others in similar situations:

Talk To Your Children About The Deployment Before It Happens

Communicate your thoughts and feelings about the separation. Be open and honest. Some parents worry that advance warning will only give the child more time to fret. However, children can sense when something is about to happen and worry more when they are left in the dark. Knowing about the deployment in advance helps in adjusting to the idea.

Reinforce Your Emotional Bond

The departing parent needs to spend some QUALITY time with each child before they leave. Younger children (under 8) will be willing to accept a half hour of face-to-face communication. Don't be afraid to hug your child. A display of affection is powerful

communication. Older children (8 and over) appreciate being consulted when deciding how long and where this "special" time together can occur.
Use this time to share pride in your work, unit, the Army, and the purpose for your deployment. Children of school age are beginning to understand that some events must happen for the good of everyone. It is a little easier to let go if Mom or Dad's job is seen as essential to the mission of the Army.

Don't Take "No" For An Answer

Often when asked if something is bothering them, a child will say "no." But there are ways to get through. Make some casual reference to your own worries or ambivalent feelings about the impending deployment or something that enables parent and child to share similar feelings. It also helps a child to realize their parent is a real person who can cry as well as laugh, and it models an appropriate way to release feelings--talk about them.

Visit Your Child's Teacher

Frequently children react to deployments by misbehaving in class or performing poorly in their studies. A teacher who is aware of the situation is in a better position to be sensitive and encouraging. Delivering a note to the teacher with the child reinforces the idea that the teacher is aware of the change in the child's life and may increase their value as a resource during times of stress.

Plan For Communicating

Express an expectation for the children to stay in touch with the departed spouse. A lively discussion needs to take place before departure. Encourage children to brainstorm the many ways communication can occur in addition to letter writing, such as cassette tape exchanges, photographs with their parents, encoded messages, "puzzle messages" (a written letter cut into puzzle parts that must be assembled in order to read), unusual papers for stationery, and pictures drawn by preschoolers.

Help Children To Plan For The Departure

While the spouse is packing their bags, allow your children to assist you in some way. Suggest a "swap" of some token, something of your child's that can be packed in a duffel bag in return for something that belongs to the departing spouse.
Discuss the household chores and let your children choose (as much as possible) the ones they would rather do. Mother and Father need to agree with each other that

that division of household chores is reasonable. The role of disciplinarian needs to be supported by the departing member.

Become familiar with some of these excellent children's books that deal in a sensitive manner with a variety of family-change situations:

"A Special Family Friend and a New Adventure"
by Hoffman and Sitler

"Will Dad Ever Move Back Home"
by Paula Hogan

"All Kinds of Families"
by Norma Simon

"If You Listen"
by Charlotte Zolotow

"The Goodbye Painting"
by Linda Berman

"The Giving Tree"
by Shel Silverstein

Reading them with your child can help clarify facts and identify feelings.

Deployment

The deployed parent can help children accept the separation of deployment and maintain strong family ties by remaining a tangible part of their child's life. As duty allows the opportunity to maintain that special touch across the miles needs to be taken.

Spanning The Miles - Being A Long Distance Parent

Parenting while away from home is not easy. Some separated parents find it so emotionally difficult they withdraw and become significantly less involved in the lives of their children while they are apart. This, of course, is not good either for the parent or the children, not to mention the difficulty it causes the parent/caregiver who is at home alone. The most important aspect of parenting from a distance is making those small efforts to stay in touch. Doing something to say the parent is thinking about and missing the child is what is most important.

Tried and True Methods

Here are some practical suggestions to help keep the absentee parent involved with their children:

- Letters and cards from Mom or Dad are important. The length and contents are not nearly as important as the presence of something in the mail from the absent parent with the child's name in the address line. When sending picture post cards, make little notes about the place or write that you stood right here "x" in the picture. Any small thing which makes the card personal will have tremendous meaning to children at home.

- Cut out and send things from the local paper or magazines. This is a tangible way to help them feel connected and give them an idea of what life is like there.

- For older children, a subscription to a favorite magazine is a gift that keeps on giving.

- When using a tape recorder, remember to be creative: sing "Happy Birthday," tell a story, read scripture, take it with you on your job or when visiting with other members of your unit. Don't try to fill a tape completely in one sitting. Make sure you describe the surroundings, the time of day, and what you are doing.

- Try not to forget birthdays and special holidays which would be important to a child, particularly Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, Halloween, or Valentine's Day.

- Try to schedule phone calls when children are likely to be at home. Keep a mental list of things you want to talk about with each child, such as their friends, school, ball games, etc. Ask each child to send you something from the activities they are involved in at school, home or outside activities like dance lessons, youth groups or scouts.

- If your child has a pet, make sure to ask about it.

- Send an age appropriate gift for each child. It should be something special just for them. Some interesting and creative gifts include a special notebook for school, a book for coloring or reading, or something unique from where you are stationed.

Turn On Your Sensors & Tune In To Your Child's Worries About The Assignment Or Deployment

Just because a child doesn't tell you about their concerns doesn't mean that they are not troubled. Children don't usually recognize the cause nor will they tell you they are concerned. This may occasionally be the source of the unexplained "bellyache." The spouse that is departing should communicate with each child individually. There is no substitute for a letter with your own name on the envelope. Send postcards, snapshots, and tape recordings of the sounds around you where you are deployed. Use unusual stamps, felt-tip pens, colored pencils, and different styles of alphabets and lettering.

Children Need To See The Parent's Workplace

Very young children need to see where Mom or Dad eats, sleeps, and spends some of their day when away from home. You can do this through pictures or TV videos. This provides them with a concrete image of where the parent is when they can't come home. Older children can learn a great deal from the parent about the function of his or her job, the sophisticated technology,interdependence of each division of the military with the other, and of course, career direction.

Keeping The Home Fires Burning
Tips For The Custodial Spouse

It is very possible you will admit feelings of sadness, self-doubt, fear, or loneliness to your spouse and children. Most parents will agree that these are acceptable risks, and the feelings revealed are much easier to deal with when they can be expressed within the comfort and security of the family.

Be honest about your feelings. Do not attempt to hide feelings--your own or the children's. Many times we try to spare our children from knowledge of our own concerns, self-doubts, and fears.

Give children a method of measuring the passage of time. Families use such techniques as a ceremonial crossing-off of each day on a calendar as it passes, or of tearing a link off a paper chain consisting of the number of days or weeks the departed spouse will be away. These and other activities can be found in the ACS Activities Books on the USAREUR Reintegration Web Site.

Be responsible for all disciplining. Do not fall into the trap of using, "Just wait until your Father or Mother gets home" as the ultimate threat. How can a child be expected to greet with joy and affections a parent that has been held over their head for months as the ULTIMATE PUNISHER?

Putting it back together

The Reunion

Homecomings should be very happy occasions as long as all family members make an effort to be as realistic as possible. If the tendency to not pick after oneself around the house occurred before the separation, that habit probably has not miraculously disappeared. If one of the children was experiencing problems at school, do not expect the problem to disappear at reunion time.

Talking to one another and working through the everyday challenges that family life presents is what is important. This does not all have to be accomplished on the day of the family reunion. Give yourselves some time to enjoy one another. Everyone needs to get reacquainted before problem solving begins.

Tips for the Deployed Parent

Ease yourself back into the family gradually. If you come on like an Abrams tank and try to bulldoze your way back into your family's life, feelings of resentment will surface. Don't be surprised if some family members are a bit resentful of your deployment. Others often think of the deployment as more fun and exciting than staying at home- even if you know otherwise. You need to consider yourself as a "Special Guest"
for a while.

Take some time to observe how the family has been running in your absence. You might be tempted to jump right in with "Now that I am home, there are going to be a few changes around here." You will see that some things will change naturally as a result of your presence in the family. If you disagree about the way other things have been handled, wait a few days and discuss it openly with your spouse. If your practice before the deployment was to hold an executive session with your spouse before taking issues to the "family meeting" don't change what worked.

Take it easy with the children in terms of discipline. For a while, stick with the rules your spouse has established during your absence. Take time to understand how your family may have changed during the separation. Immediately playing the "heavy" will not open up opportunities for you and the children to get to know one another again. It

is not difficult to understand why some children are afraid of the returning parent if all they have to look forward to is "a changing of the guard." Show interest and pleasure in how your family members have grown and mastered new skills in your absence and let them know you are proud of them. Comment on positive changes.

On the other hand, sometimes it is easy to spoil your children. If you have not seen them for a long period of time, or you are home for only short periods of time, you may find yourself not wanting to discipline them. You are probably eager to make up for the time you were unable to spend with them. This is certainly understandable. But do not put your spouse in the position of constantly playing the "heavy" while you have all the fun with the children.

Tips About Children

Some children will keep their distances from the returning parent for a while. They may still have unresolved feelings of anger toward that individual for leaving them, and are not ready to allow that parent to be part of their lives yet. They may have to be "courted" for a while until they feel comfortable again. Infants and small children may be shy or even fearful around you at first. Be patient and give them time to become reacquainted.

Other children will become "clingers." Each time the parent disappears from sight for a few moments, they think the adult has gone away from home again. As a result they tend to hold on for dear life and not let the parent out of their sight. Be patient. This will pass with time as they see you leave and return again.

At reunion time Dad could be meeting his new infant son or daughter for the first time. This can be quite an emotional experience for everyone, including the infant. Parents, do not feel that you have to thrust a crying infant into the arms of the returning members. Do not feel overwhelming rejection if your infant will not come to your at first. Give the child some time. Infants are people too, and they need time to develop trust before they feel comfortable with a new adult in their lives.

Plan to spend some time individually with each one of your children by doing some activity that is special to them. This allows the parent to get reacquainted with each child in a way that is most comfortable for that particular child. It also makes each child feel special and appreciated for their individuality. Also, plan on spending some time with the entire family doing family things, but be flexible if teens have other plans.

Expect your children to have changed, both physically and emotionally. Sometimes the changes are barely noticeable from day to day, but if you go away, you might discover upon your return that your toddler is walking, your fourth grader has learned the multiplication tables, and your teenage daughter has a new boyfriend.

Successful Homecoming

Tips for the Custodial Parent

Plan on some family togetherness time. Suggest a picnic or a special family meal. Time together helps the returning spouse to get back into the rhythm of family life.

Stay involved with your children's school activities and interests. Don't neglect the children's need for attention as you are becoming reacquainted with your spouse.

Don't be surprised if children test the limits of the family rules when your spouse returns. It's normal for children to want to find out how things may have changed by acting up a bit. Consistent enforcement of family rules and even-handed discipline are key to dealing with acting-out.

Reunion

Handouts

Reunion is often the most confusing period of the Deployment Cycle for the family.

In recognition of this we include three handouts that deal exclusively with children and reunion at different ages and a focus document for returning single parents. There is also a quick reference guide included for rapid referral.

If you are encountering more difficulty at home than you can comfortably handle don't hesitate to contact your local Medical Treatment Facility, Chaplain, or Army One Source at:
the OCONUS number is
00-800-464-81-077
(dial all 13 digits),
free of charge to all callers.
If you can't dial 1-800 number free,
calls can be made collect to 484-530-5889.

Reunion
Basics

Change is at least as stressful for children as it is for adults. The homecoming of the deployed parent is a major change for the children in the household. They have grown physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually during the deployment. Children are not skilled at coping with their stress in large part because they have little life experience. As a result, they may temporarily act out or regress to a less mature stage of behavior as a part of their reaction. In any event, there will be a readjustment period-- typically 4 to 6 weeks--for the entire family. You can greatly enhance your family's reunion by developing realistic expectations of how your child will respond to the military parent's return based upon the child's age. So let's discuss what you can generally expect of different age children, and how you can facilitate the reunion process with your children. As you know, children are not "miniature adults," but rather developing individuals who change rapidly in their thought and behavior patterns. So, a 1 year-old, a 5 year-old, and a 14 year old will all respond very differently to your returning.

Infants (Birth to 1 year)

An infant has not yet developed much of an ability to remember people and events. Accordingly, as painful as this might be for you to consider, do not expect baby to recognize the parent who has returned from a long deployment. Instead, expect him/her to initially react as if the military parent were a stranger. The infant will likely cry when held by the military parent, pull away, fuss, and cling to the person who was his/her primary caregiver during the deployment. Once again,
"go slow." The baby will "warm up" to the military parent at his/her own pace. The newly returned parent should gently get involved in holding, hugging, bathing, feeding, playing with, and otherwise caring for the baby. The key is to be patient and let your baby's reactions be your guide in terms of what pace to proceed in getting acquainted.

Toddlers (1 - 3 years)

A typical toddler response would be to hide from the newly returned parent, to cling to his/her primary caregiver, cry, and perhaps regress to soiling if he/she is potty trained. Again, give your child space and time to warm up to the military parent. It helps for the military parent to sit at eye level with your child (to look less intimidating) and talk with

him/her. The pictures you have seen with a returning parent sitting on the ground talking to a child showed a well-informed soldier. A gentle offer by the military parent to play with the toddler may be helpful, but do not force the issue. Doing so will only intensify your child's discomfort and resistance. Also, it may have helped the child to more clearly remember the deployed parent if the stay behind caregiver frequently showed him/her pictures of the military member and said "Daddy" or "Mommy," as the case may be. This is true because for children at this age, the old adage "out of sight, out of mind" aptly applies.

Preschoolers (3 - 5 years)

Children in this age range tend to think as though the world revolved around them (egocentric thinking). Keeping that in mind, it's not surprising that your preschooler may think he/she somehow made the military parent go away; or that the military parent left because he or she no longer cared about the child. If this is the case with your preschooler, he or she may feel guilty or abandoned. As a result, your child may express intense anger as a way of keeping the military parent at a distance, thereby "protecting" himself/herself from further disappointment. Your preschooler is also likely to do some limit testing (see if familiar rules still apply). To promote the reunion process, wise parents will accept the child's feelings, not act overly concerned, and focus on rewarding positive behaviors. It is good for the military parent to talk with the toddler about his or her areas of interest, be it storybooks, toys, or whatever and give the preschooler some undivided attention. Meanwhile, the military parent should support the other parent's enforcement of family rules but be careful about too quickly stepping into an authoritative role. The toddler needs time to adjust to the military parent once again being an active participant in his/her life.

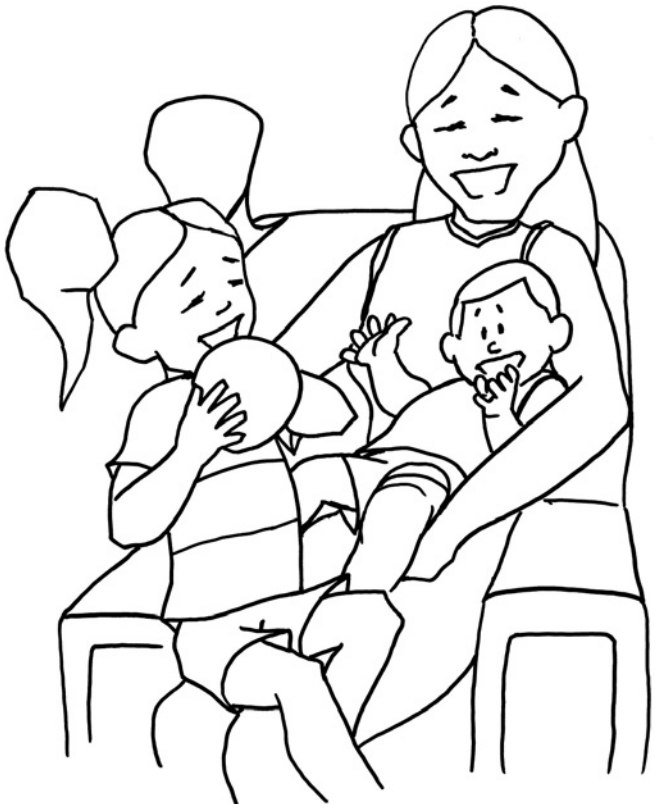
School Age (5 - 12 years)

Children in this age range are likely to give returning parents a very warm reception if the parent-child relationship was strong before the separation. The school age child may excitedly run to the military parent as soon as the parent gets off the plane. He/she will be inclined to try to monopolize the military parent's attention and "talk your ear off" during the drive home and then want to showoff scrapbooks, hobby items, or school projects when the military parent gets home. If, on the other hand, the military parent's relationship with the school age child was strained, the child may fear the military parent will punish him/her for all the child's misbehavior during the deployment. Such a thought process may lead the child

to at first be shy or withdrawn around the newly returned parent. At any rate, it is best for the military parent to have friendly interest in what the child has done during the time of deployment and praise him/her for his/her efforts and accomplishments.

Adolescent (13 - 18 years)

As you already know if you're the parent of an adolescent, they can have mood swings that go up and down like a roller coaster. One moment they are solving problems in a reasonable and logical way and the next may be reacting in a purely emotional and childlike fashion. So, your adolescent's reaction to your return may be characterized by mixed emotions. Like the school age child, your adolescent will likely be very excited to see the military parent again, if the relationship was amicable prior to the deployment. Sometimes, however, adolescents are reluctant to publicly express their emotions and may be more concerned about acting "cool" in front of their peers. Adolescents tend to be very sensitive about being unfavorably judged or criticized. With this in mind, be sure to make time to discuss with your adolescent what is going on in his/her life as well as what you've experienced. As with sons and daughters of any age, it's critical to give your adolescent some of each parent's undivided pleasant attention.



Reunion
& the Single Parent

If you're a single parent and in the military, you may be experiencing some unique concerns about reuniting with your children. More specifically, if you're a custodial parent, have you thought about how your children have bonded with their caregiver during your absence and how that will impact your relationship with your children as well as with the caregiver? If, on the other hand, someone else has primary custody of your child, you may wonder how your child will respond to you since you have likely missed "regular" visits with him/her.

Strategies for coping with these situations are very similar to those described in the Reunion section. There are however, a few additional issues to consider. If you're a custodial parent, then your children probably have been living with someone else for several months. Accordingly, to the extent this has been a fulfilling relationship, the bond between this caregiver and your children has strengthened. Your children's increased loyalty to their caregiver may be painful for you in that you may initially feel unneeded or even jealous. Again, go slow.

Focus on communicating both with the caregiver and your children, and recognize that you and your children will need to adapt to living with each other again. Your children have been living with someone else who probably had different rules and procedures compared to your own household. Give yourself and your children adequate time to "shift gears". The adjustment period, which may take several weeks, can at times be awkward. You can smooth the transition process by first of all actively involving the caregiver with the transition. To force young children to suddenly separate from the caregiver can be emotionally traumatic. Secondly, since your children have lived with different family rules and procedures, take time to compare with them the rules of your home. As you're doing this, seek your children's inputs regarding how they would prefer life at home to be. They need to feel included in the process of reestablishing the structure and "flavor" or your home environment.

If you are a non-custodial parent, your children's living conditions were probably not impacted by your deployment. Your visits with your children have, however, been curtailed. As you reestablish these visits, remember you and your children have grown and you will need to take time to get reacquainted.

10 Tips for Parents
for a Positive Reunion

Source: Dr. (Col.) Tom Hardaway, Chief of the Department of Behavioral Medicine, Brooke Army Medical Center, Fort Sam Houston, TX

1. Know the expectations of the returning warrior.

Knowing the expectations of the returning parent is important in every family. While you likely have expectations of what you and your returning spouse will do together again, as do the children, take a moment to step back and think where your returning spouse is coming from. He/she has been in a constant state of deprivation, hot and uncomfortable climate, strained sleeping conditions, sand everywhere, day after day without leave or weekend breaks. In addition, food has been monotonous, and your spouse has likely been exposed to the loss of or injury to fellow compatriots. There has been the constant threat of loss of life or injury to self. What has kept the warrior going is the feeling that the cause is just, concern about family back home, a very close connection with fellow soldiers, and thought after thought of regaining the things available at home.

2. Do not be surprised at expectations of entitlement.

Just as you may not have been quite aware of your spouse's expectations, do not be surprised or hurt that initially, your spouse may have spoken or unspoken expectations of entitlement. Returning spouses' feelings are that they have laid down everything for several sustained months in the conditions described above, and that those at home are just waiting to "make it up to them". They may seem to be oblivious to your expectations and desires at first. It is important not to take this personally, or as a sign that they have no concerns about the family's desires or expectations.

3. Be aware of your own expectations.

It is likely that you have had to bear an extremely large burden in the absence of your spouse, in caring as a single parent for children, attending to responsibilities in the home previously performed by your spouse, and may have had to endure many hardships and crises that you knew would not be helpful to share with your spouse in phone or e-mail conversations. You and your family may have "reconfigured" a little to remain stable, and may have established some newly found independence, perhaps with the finances. Perhaps there are now some new routines and rules in the home. Your expectation may be that your spouse would be pleased and congratulatory at your ability to do this.

4. Be aware that you and/or your children may have mixed feelings, which is normal. It is most usual for families to be very excited and happy about a returning soldier. But they also may have some anxiety or apprehension. There may have been pre-existing conflicts in the home, which most likely remained unsettled during the deployment. Children may feel that they have not been attentive enough in communicating with their deployed parent, or may have been acting up in their absence, or may have done poorly in school. They may be worried that the returning parent may be angry. Spouses may be concerned that they may lose some of their new independence, or that they may not have attended to the house or family well enough; or that their returning spouse may intrude and "change things all around".

5. Children may not act as expected or desired.
Upon the return of the deployed parent, children may behave in paradoxical fashion. At the first moments of reunion, they may jump forward and embrace their parent, or, on the other hand, may stand back and even be reticent at first. Very young children may not remember their parent well, and may even treat that parent as a stranger. It is important for both parents not to take this as a bad sign or to take it personally. Different children may need help warming back up, and it will only prolong that warming-up period if parents become indignant or angry about their behavior. Some "wooing" by the returning parent and coaching and encouragement by the other parent will help things to become positive and warm again.

6. Encourage your children to be aware of their expectations and worries, and assist them in sharing them with you without fear of your reactions. If they have concerns or worries, help them to understand these are normal, and help them engage in problem solving. Reassure them as to the love that their deployed parent has for them, and that if there are some problems to be sorted out, that everyone will work to solve them. Encourage them to suggest things they definitely want to do with their returning parent, and prioritize these activities so that there will not be an onslaught of expectations from the parent. Help the children to see ahead of time that things will have to happen in order, and that the returning parent may not be able to attend to all their desires right away.

7. Try to share your and your children's expectations and any concerns ahead of time in your phone conversations prior to the returning spouse's redeployment home. Ask your returning spouses what they have in mind for when they return home. Allow them to express the things they really desire and miss, and encourage them to prioritize the most important things. This will get them to be more consciously aware of their own expectations. Then, share with your spouse what you hope will happen, and help him/her to understand what some of your desires are and some of the hopes and worries of the children. Keep these interactions in a positive and anticipatory mode. An example might be: "Jeff can't wait for you to get home. He is a little worried that you might be upset with him about his schoolwork, and about his behavior before you left. I told him that you will be excited to see him no matter what, and if there are school issues to work out, that we both will help him to get back on the tracks. How do you feel about his worries?"

Or, "Rachel is just 16 months right now, and remember you've been gone for four months. She says "Daddy", but she may still not act the way you expect. Give her a little time, and I know she'll be excited you're home after awhile. Hopefully, she'll surprise us!"

8. Help your children understand that their returning parent may need some alone time and not to perceive this negatively. Redeployed soldiers have been living in a very intimate, close-knit unit, with little privacy. Coming back to the home environment can be somewhat overwhelming, especially with very excited children in the house. Help them anticipate that their returning parent might need some "down" time and not necessarily always respond to their desires for activities, etc.

9. Be prepared that your spouse may not appear as sensitive to your expectations as he/she should be. This is not necessarily a sign that he/she doesn't care, but understand that he/she may not behave exactly as you have been anticipating many times over. This is a time when it is even more important than usual to be explicit in what you are hoping for. Waiting for him/her to get "your clues" right off may make you resentful, and may make your spouse feel as if he/she is letting you down, leading to further resentment. Use humor and don't be afraid to talk directly. If he/she feels that he/she has already let you down, he/she may not feel that there is any way to correct the situation and may just become defensive. Give lots of chances for your spouse to hear you, and let him/her know how much you appreciate it when he/she exhibits the behavior you wanted. As with children, you want to "encourage good behavior"!

10. There are successful reunions, but no ideal ones.

"Ideal" is something that is only in fantasy. A mature and successful reunion is one where all concerned are aware of their own desires and concerns, and aware of those of their spouse and children. Along with the all the positive and excited moments, there are the very natural feelings and problems that require serious discussion and problem solving. The successful reunion includes excited smiles, embraces, laughter, and humor.

It also requires a mature understanding that in order for the separation to be have been a positive experience, we must give a lot of "slack" to each other, do a lot of talking, a lot of planning and problem solving, and some forgiving. Children should know when it is all said and done, that their parents both love them now more than ever.

10

Children's Reaction to Soldier's Return

Reactions — birth to 1 YEARS — Techniques

Cries Fusses Pulls away from you Clings to spouse or caregiver Has problems with elimination Changes their sleeping and eating habits Does not recognize you	Hold the baby, and hug him/her a lot Bathe and change your baby; feed and play with him/her Relax and be patient; he/she will warm up to you after a while

1 to 3 YEARS

Shyness Clinging Does not recognize you Cries Has temper tantrums Regresses-no longer toilet trained	Don't force holding, hugging, kissing Give them space Give them time to warm up Be gentle and fun Sit at their level

3 to 5 YEARS

Demonstrates anger Acts out to get your attention; needs proof that you're real Is demanding Feels guilty for making the parent go away Talks a lot to bring you up to date	Listen to them Accept their feelings Play with them Reinforce that you love them Find out the new things on TV, at preschool, books he/she will warm up to you after a while

5 to 12 YEARS

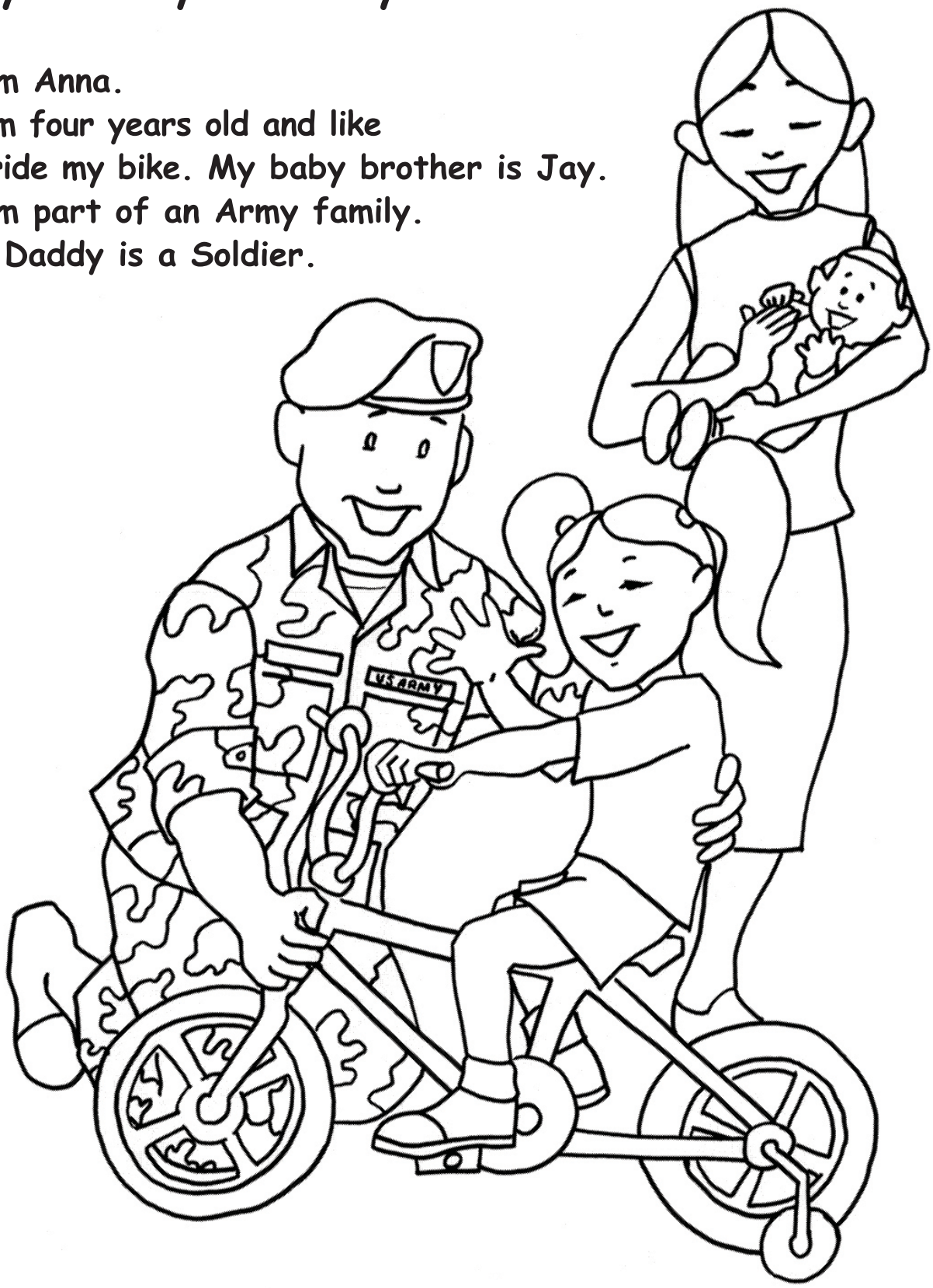
Isn't good enough Dreads your return because of discipline Boasts about Army and parent	Review pictures, schoolwork, activities, scrap books Praise what they have done Try not to criticize

13 to 18 YEARS

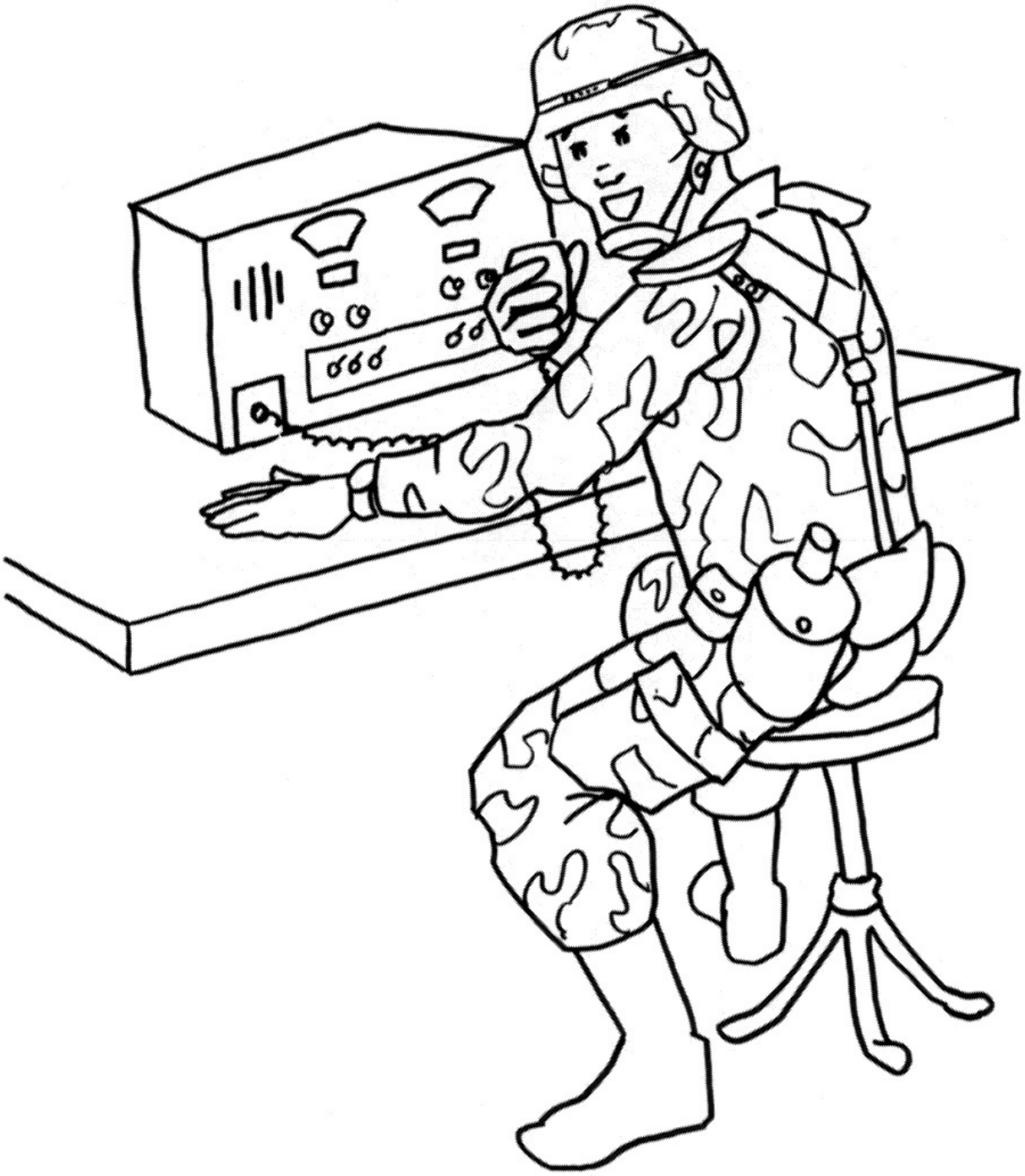
Is excited Feels guilty because they don't live up to standards Is concerned about rules & responsibilities Feels too old or is unwilling to change plans to a commodate parent Is rebellious	Share what has happened with you Listen with undivided attention Don't be judgmental Respect privacy and friends Don't tease about fashion, music

My Army Family

I am Anna.
I am four years old and like
to ride my bike. My baby brother is Jay.
I am part of an Army family.
My Daddy is a Soldier.



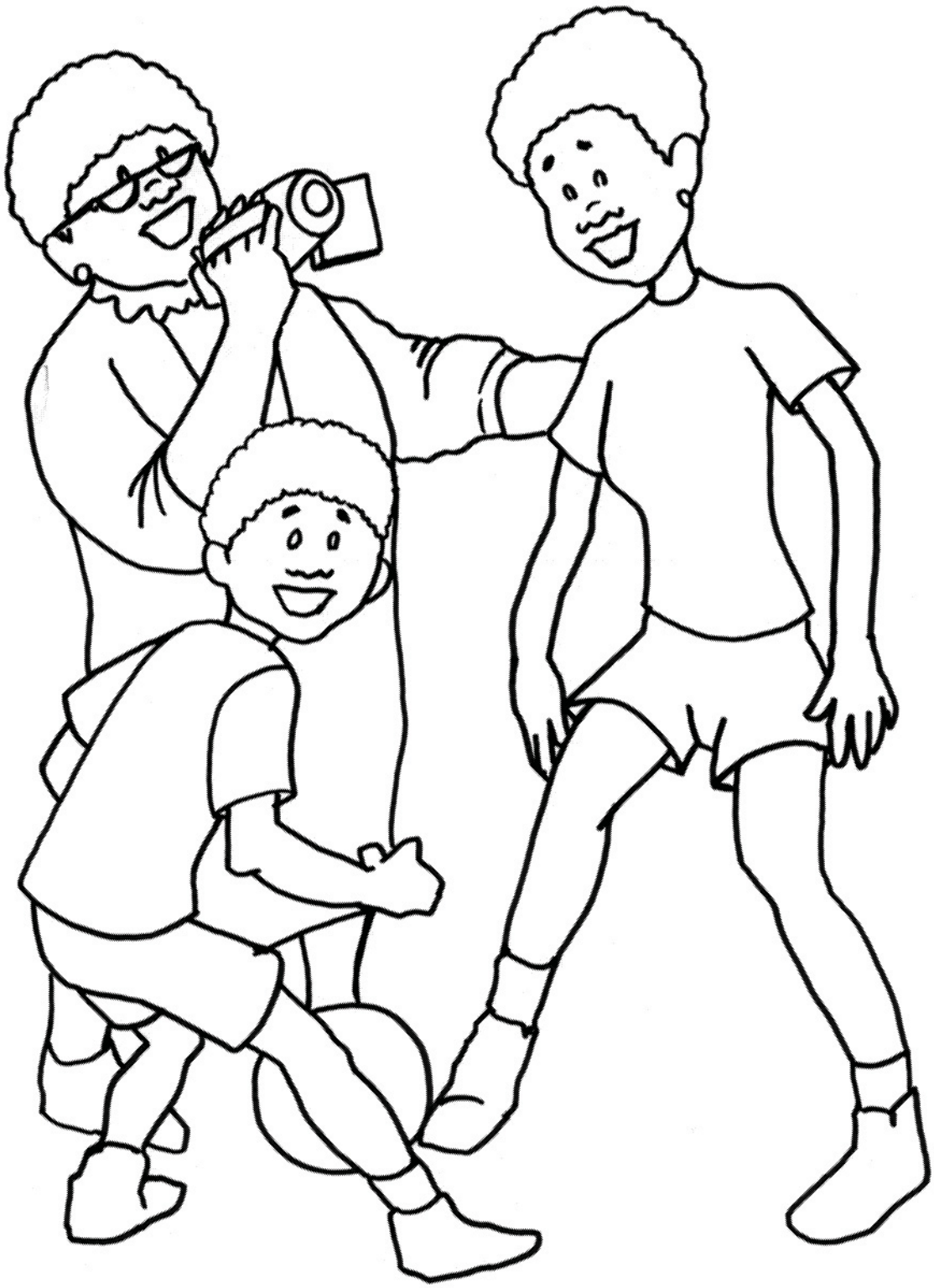
Jamal and Susan are my best friends.
We take care of each other.
Jamal's mommy is in the Army.
Both of Susan's parents
are in the Army.



Soldiers have special jobs.
My Daddy's job is talking to other Soldiers on the radio.

Sometimes Soldiers have to go away to do their jobs.
When Daddy is leaving we talk about where he is going.

Daddy and I spend special time together.
Daddy helps me make a treasure box.

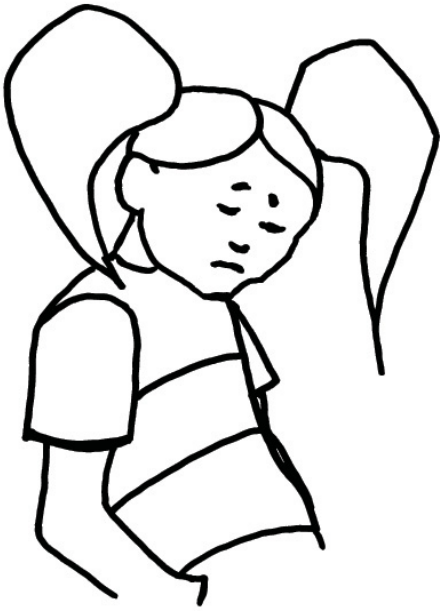


Jamal's grandma makes a movie of Jamal playing with his mommy. He will watch the movie after his mommy leaves.

Saying Goodbye

It's time to say goodbye to Daddy. We give each other hugs and kisses. Sometimes we cry.

Jamal's grandma stays with him when his mommy goes away. We all play together.

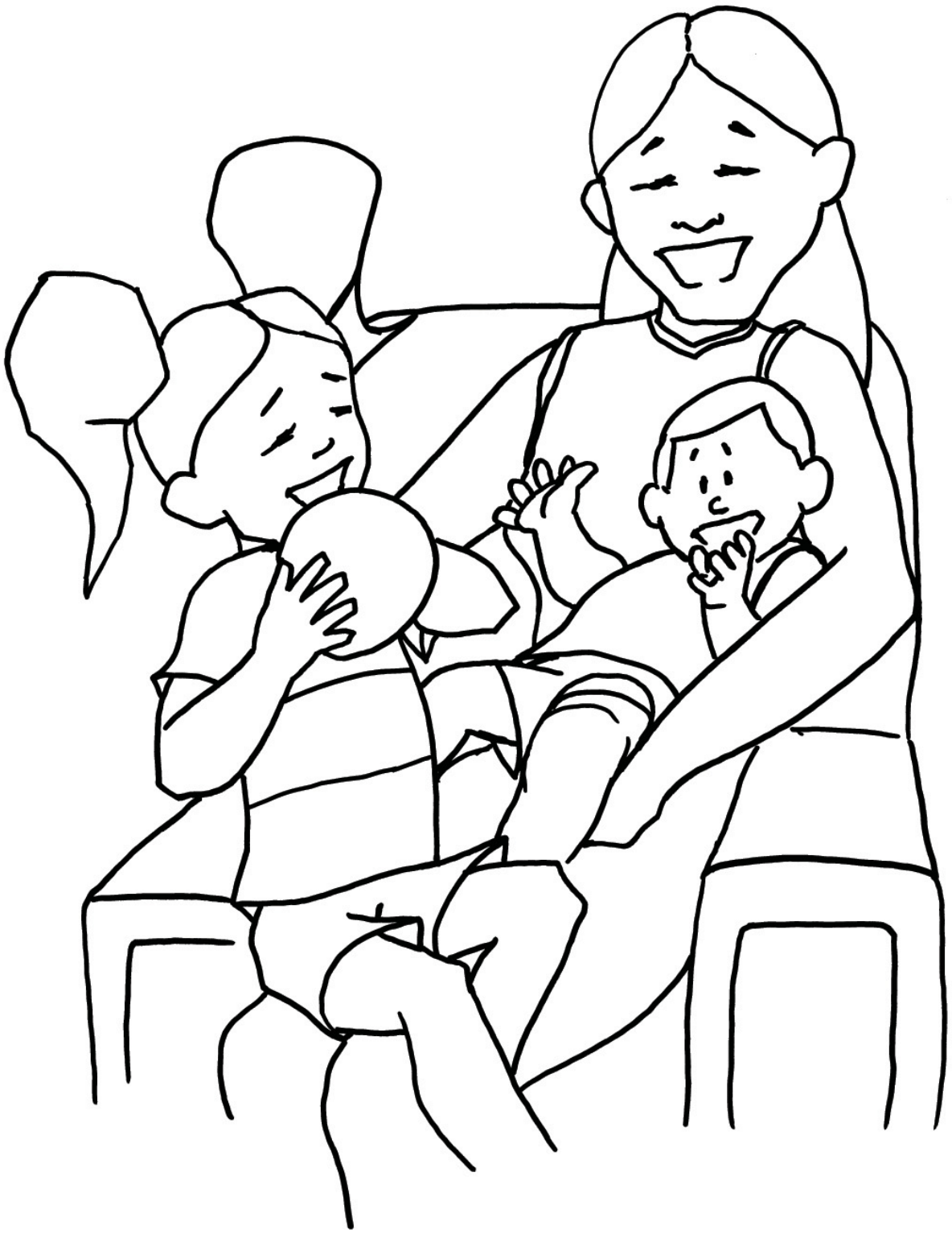


Feelings

When Daddy goes away sometimes I feel proud or sad.
Sometimes I get mad at daddy for leaving.
But mostly I'm happy to be part of my family.

We make surprises for our parents to decorate their room while they are deployed.

Sometimes I get a tummy ache. Mommy says it's because I'm sad. Mommy says it's OK to feel sad and even mad sometimes.



We talk about our feelings. Mommy says sometimes she feels sad too. We talk about how we miss Daddy. Then we have a hug.

At Daycare or School

Sometimes I feel sad at daycare. Mommy isn't there when I get sad or mad. Teacher helps me feel better.

Special Days

Sometimes Daddy is gone on some special days like my birthday so Mommy takes pictures of my birthday to send to Daddy.

Susan and I are going to watch Jamal's movie of his mother with him. We all feel better.

Audiotapes

I listened to the story tapes Daddy made. I like them at bedtime best. I feel closer to Daddy when I listen.

We send things to Daddy when he is away.
It makes him feel happy.
We send him cookies, pictures, and things we make.

We get things in the mail too.
Susan puts pictures from her
Mommy and Daddy
on a poster
on the
wall.

How Long?

I want to know, "When will Daddy be home?". Mommy counts M&M's© into a big jar. I eat one every night after dinner. When the M&M's© are gone, Daddy will come home.

Homecoming

Daddy is coming home soon. We get ready.

I feel funny when Daddy comes home. My little brother cries. Maybe he feels funny too.

Our Parents Are Home

After Daddy gets home sometimes he's tired and needs to rest.

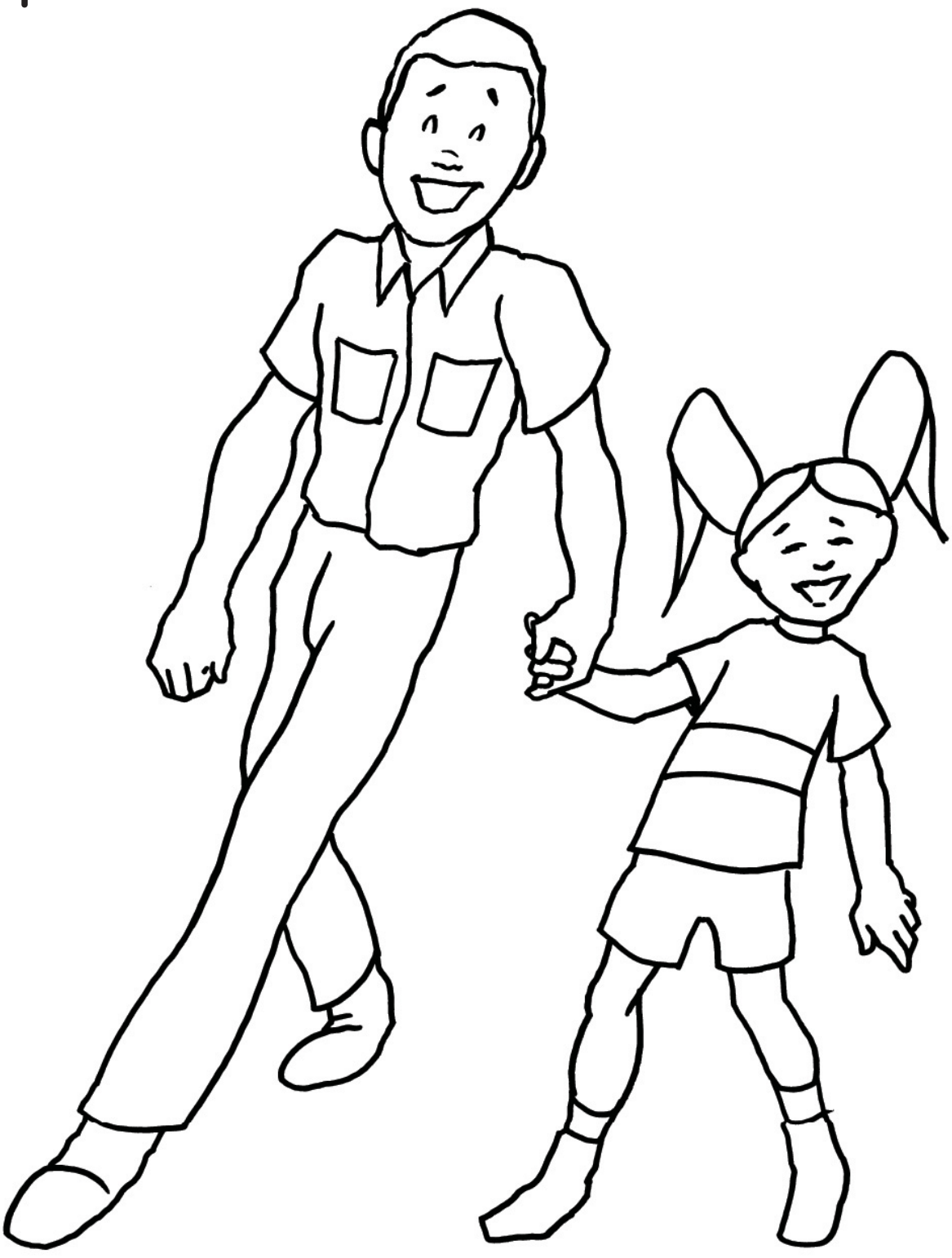
Special Times
When Our Parents Come Home

Sometimes our parents need time alone
when they first get home.

Special Time

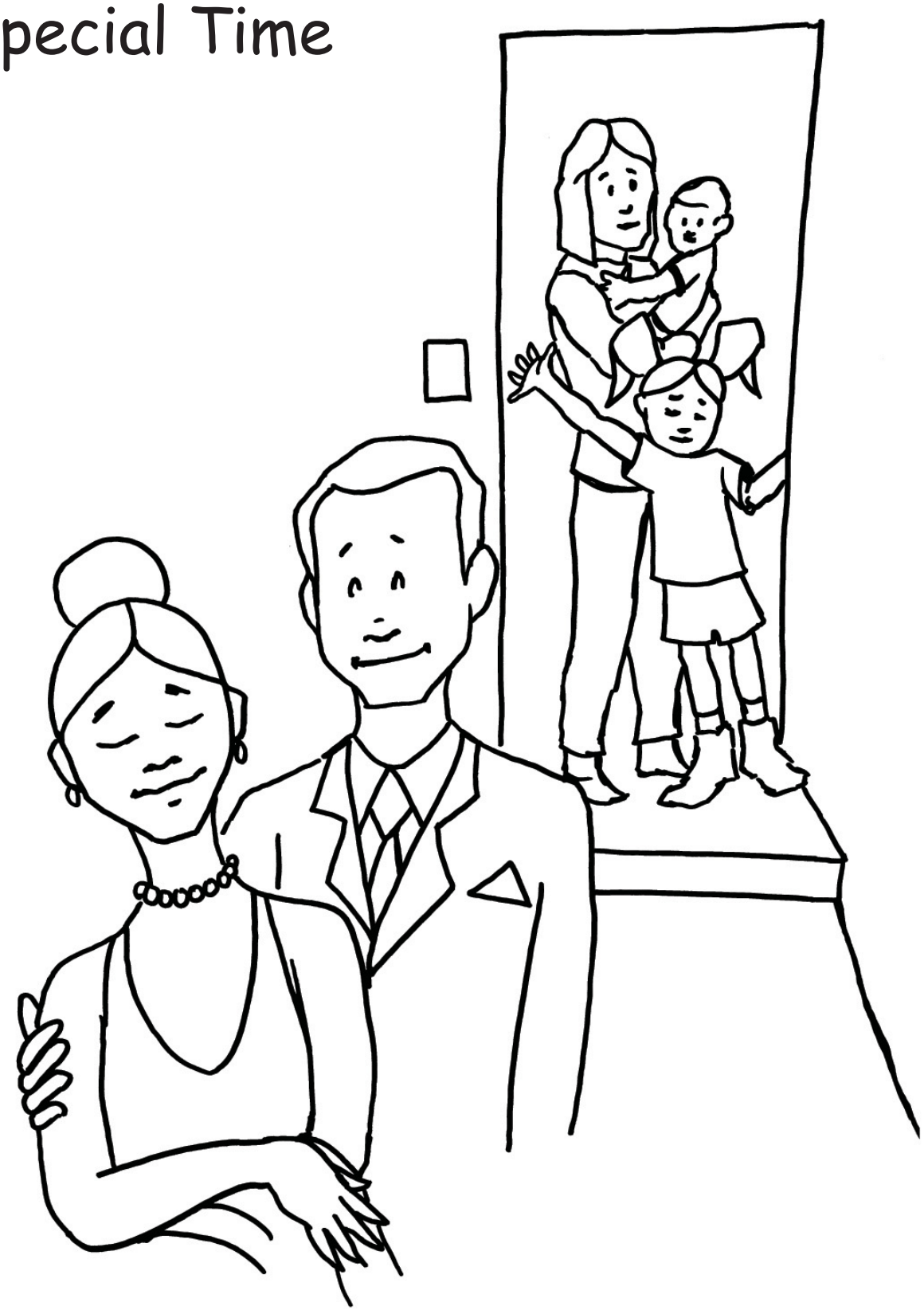
Sometimes Daddy needs to spend time alone with Mommy.

SpecialTime



Sometimes Daddy spends special time just with me.

Special Time



Mommy and Daddy go on a date together

My Family

Sometimes we spend time altogether as a family.

We Are Happy
Our Parents Are Home

Daddy goes back to his job this morning
and will be home tonight for supper.

Mom and Dad's Guide
to making the most of this book

This is the web address of an activity book produced by Army Community Service (ACS). The people at ACS helped with the storyboard that this book is based on, so the activities closely follow our book. The file you want is half way down the page. The Children's Activities - Pre-School, An activity book for pre-school aged children.
File Size: 1.4M
Download File:
http://www.armycommunityservice.org/vacs_deployment/user/res/res_user_display.asp?action=display_channel_objects&channelID=146903

Page 1

Each page of this section is a coloring activity for your child.
However, the area back here belongs to you as a parent or caregiver.
Here you will find one or more activities to help support the theme of the coloring activity. Also, there may be helpful tips and information on the theme of the picture from additional sources such as ACS and Operation Ready, experts in the field of families and deployment, child psychology, and even some suggestions from our sister services. The text in this guide has been approved for content by the Behavioral Health Services of the Heidelberg MEDDAC.

Page 2

Theme:

There is an incredible diversity among Army families. No two families are quite the same. With this difference come special concerns that are all our own. But, no matter how different we are we are all have some basics in common.

Activity:

Challenge your child to think of families they know where both parents are active military, or just the Mom or the Dad are the active duty member.

Page 3

Theme:

"Your Parent is special and needed so others can do their job."

Activity:

Explore with your child the importance to others of the military specialty of the parent or parents. Task your child to think of other military jobs. Ask them to draw a picture of a soldier doing that job. Ask them to think of a civilian job that has no military counterpart. There are not many.

Page 4

Theme:

Deployment involves everyone in the family and all members should be part of the preparation. Experts say don't shield your children. They should be notified once a SOLID date or window has been announced. Parents need to prepare child as much as possible.

Activity:

Obtain a world map and help your child mark on the map where their parent is going to be deployed.

Page 5

Theme:

Before deploying the deploying parent needs to make time for children individually. In particular be sure to discuss that you aren't leaving due to anything the child may have done. This is a real fear at this age. Be sure to talk out your child's concerns. It may take a while. Consider taping the conversation for later use by the custodial parent.

Activity:

Help your child make a "treasure box." Decorate the outside of the box anyway you like. Put a personalized picture in the box along with other special keepsakes. Additional keepsakes can be added as they are sent from the deployed theater; after all we are collecting treasure here.

Page 6

Theme :

Keeping memories fresh.

Activity:

Making a movie of you and your child together, as an activity is a gift that will keep your memory fresh in their heart, especially when your absence seems so long to them. Videotape several snippets of day-to-day activities of you and your child, not just some special activity, but events like having a meal, helping around the house, taking a walk, being put to bed at night, and getting up the morning.

Page 7

Theme:

The formal goodbye. The formal goodbye should be addressed in the days just prior to the event. You must prepare your child, and yourself, to say goodbye.

Activity:

Explain to your child how the formal goodbye will be done. Will you say goodbye to them at home, the airfield, or at the unit? However your family elects to do it be sure everyone understands.

Page 8

Theme:

This activity reinforces that children will hear about different custodial arrangements situations than their own when a deployment is underway.

The lesson is that not everything changes during separation. Lots of friends are still around despite the changes. There is some stability. There is always someone to care for us all. Jamal's situation is different, but he is still a playmate. The absent parent still loves them but the situation is different-it is just distance and distance doesn't affect love.

Activity:

Explain any differences between their situation and the situations within their circle of friends.

Page 9

Theme:

During the course of a deployment it is possible that your child will experience many different feelings about their situation. Chances are that some of their negative feeling may be directed to the absent parent at one time or another.

Activity:

Discuss these feelings with your child. Reassure them that they are normal and everyone has some feelings like that at one time or another. Be sure that they understand the normal nature of looking for a focus for negative feelings.

Page 10

Theme:

Staying in intimate touch.

Activity:

Making items to share long distance. Have your child prepare crayon drawings and other keepsakes to be "secretly hidden" in the deploying parents duffel bag or sent along in the mail.

Deployed Parent - *Send a photo back of your child's gift in your living area or office with you in the picture. This provides the tangible evidence that their gift is actually in your possession closing the loop.*

Page 11

Theme:

Some times a child may demonstrate physical complaints due to emotional upheaval. In an adult we would call it stress. The picture explains everything. A good healthy dose of Tender Loving Care in the best thing for this type of a complaint. If these complaints become frequent consult your pediatrician.

Activity :
It is up to you to explain that it is not uncommon for tummies to hurt when we are worried and that you are there for them when worries come.

Page 12

Theme- Be Honest with your own feelings as well. Children are highly attuned to their parents. They know when something is amiss.
Activity- Share your feelings, within reason, with your child. Let them know that they aren't the only one who misses the absent parent. This is best accomplished when your own feelings are in check and you notice the signs of your child missing their absent parent.

Page 13

Theme:
Day Care and School issues for the children of deployed parents.
Activity:
Prepare a note for your child's day-care provider or teacher. Let your child take the note explaining that one parent is deployed. This will ensure that the provider or teacher understands that your child may be upset at times. Be sure you take the time to explain any particular issues that your child may be having with the provider or teacher. If your child delivers the note and is aware of the contents they will be more comfortable talking with the provider.

Page 14

Theme:
Our deployed parent is still part of our special days. We can include them in family events if we make the effort.
Activity:
Videotape/photograph birthdays, and other special days and make a special production of sending the photographs/videotapes to the deployed parent. ***Deployed Parent -*** *Prerecord special day greetings and well wishes prior to leaving to be played on that special day. Be sure to make recordings for at least one event longer than the deployment is scheduled to last.*

Page 15

Theme:
Even though our deployed parent isn't here with us they are just as important in our lives as ever.
Activities:

Play videos and audiotapes on a regular basis. Take the opportunity to get children on the

phone when their deployed parent calls. Younger children may be reluctant to use a hand set on the phone. Make arrangements to get a speaker phone or attachment if you can.

Page 16

Theme:

No special theme this time. Children love bedtime stories. It is a touch of normal for them.

Activity:

Prior to deployment have the deploying parent tape favorite bedtime stories for their child.

Deployed Parent - *If you have forgotten to leave an audiotape in the midst of the activities of deployment take a minute to record one in the evening and send it home.*

Page 17

Theme:

During deployment such reinforcement of family is important. Doing things for the deployed parent maintains a good connection for your child.

Activity:

Prepare any small craft item that can be easily mailed. The intent is to make a child feel closer to their deployed parent. Baked goods, cards, letters, decorated socks, e-mails, even a string cut to the child's exact height are all good ideas. Include pictures of the production process!

Page 18

Theme:

Reinforce the importance the deployed parent places on the child. The materials on bulletin board are tangible items. Children at this age are very concrete in their thinking.

Activity:

Make a bulletin board that is at the child's height. Place letters and other items received from the deployed parent along with pictures of your child and their parents. Be sure the items are attached to the board in a manner that they can be taken off and put back repeatedly; Velcro, hooks, pockets, ribbons, etc.

Deployed Parent - *When sending items home remember that an envelope with your child's name on it means much more than inclusion in a family envelope.*

Page 19

Theme:

There is a tangible end to the separation.

Activity:

Take a picture of the bottle every month or so to show the progress. Use a tall thin bottle if you can find one. Children can appreciate the downward movement easier. Another project is to make a paper chain before the departure date and remove one link each day.

Page 20

Theme:

Preparation for the reunion is just as important as preparation for the separation. We all have a part it doesn't just happen.

Activity:

Start discussion about reunion emotions and fears. Prepare banners to take to the greeting area and to decorate your home. Have your child begin a welcome home card.

Special note *- Many parents agree that homecoming and Reunions are exceptionally difficult for young children. Once again schedules are disrupted, routines change, and emotions run high. Children may experience a range of emotional reactions from excitement to fear and depression. Children, and returning parents as well, may feel out of touch or shy. Remind the child that he or she may be happy and excited, but also feel funny or scared. Take this pre-return period to talk to your child about his or her feelings about the homecoming. Remind the child that any way he or she feels is okay. Particularly, involve the child in getting ready for the deployed parent's return, for example by helping prepare banners are making home decorations. Young children often don't know what to say to a parent who's been gone. Most children mature and gain new skills during the deployment. Remind the child about these accomplishments and encourage the child to share information about "how big I'm getting" and "what I learned" with their returning parent.*

Page 21

Theme:

Reunions can be stressful.

Activity:

Reinforce that all feelings are normal. Remind them of the talks you have had in the preceding weeks about having the family all in one place again.

Page 22

Theme:

This plate serves as an opportunity for you to discuss the reality of reunions. They aren't all cheering and party. They will be draining on everyone and we need to be just as nice to each other as we know how.

Activity:

Impress on your child that these will be a busy few days and everyone may need a little extra rest and consideration.

Page 23

Theme:

Additional opportunity to reinforce the previous page

Activity:

none

Page 24

Theme :

Special Time introduces that there will be time when the parents will want time with each other.

Activity:

When discussing the need for special time between all members of the family have your child make pictures of everyone in the family having their own special time with the deployed parent.

Page 25

Theme:

Special Time applies to everyone.
They will have their special time with their parent too.

Activity:

Prepare the deployed parent. Discuss the non-stop chatter that will continue until the child has the parent caught up on everything that has occurred during their absence. Have your child draw a picture of their special time with their deployed parent on their return. It may help you determine what their expectations are.

Page 26

Theme:

Reinforcement of sharing their returning parent.

Activity:

Have your child help you plan a special night out for their parents.

Page 27

Theme:

Things return to a baseline. The family will come back together. Perhaps not quite like before the deployment, but your family.

Activity :

Plan some typical (pre-deployment) family activity. Be sure to get input from the deployed parent.

Page 28

Theme:

The family will be back together again.

Activity:

Just color the picture.

Page 29

Theme :

Dad can go to work in his uniform and still return in the evening.

Activity :

Prepare young children for the deployed parents first day back to work.
They might assume that when the parent leaves they will be gone for extended deployment again without warning.