



Preparing for Deployment

Children of military parents are our nation's littlest heroes. Preparing for a parent's deployment can be particularly stressful and difficult. As in any transition, setting up your child for success means preparing ahead of time. Here are some tips to help guide you and your family to make this transition as smooth as possible.

Before You Talk To Your Child:

- **Process this with your spouse first.** Children can pick up on the nuances of stress and tension. Process your initial feelings together first in order to be able to help your children work through theirs.
- **Talk to other parents who have deployed.** To get an idea of some questions kids ask.

When and What To Say:

- **When depends on age and maturity:**
 - School aged- consider sharing soon after getting the news to allow time to process.
 - Younger children- a few weeks prior to deployment. Without a concept of time yet, too soon could cause unnecessary distress.
- **Keep it simple, direct, and honest:**
 1. I have an important job to do (*for example you may share you're helping the children of Afghanistan, or some other mission that applies to you*).
 2. Tell them they are just as important as their job. (*You love them, you will miss them, and will be thinking about them. Reassure that the parent or caregiver who will be with them will make sure that they are safe and their needs will be met.*)
- **Help them envision** where you are going, what it may look like there, and why you are going. Use the [My Parent's Deploying](#) sheet to help you discuss the details.

Help Them Process:

- **Know that all children will respond differently.** They may show anger, fear, sadness, or seem unfazed.
- **Hear out all their feelings and thoughts.** Children handle deployments healthier if they know their feelings will be met with compassion and understanding.
- **Validate their fears while remaining**

Make A Plan:

- **Paint a clear picture of how things will change at home.** Will children share more responsibilities? How will tasks be accomplished.
- **Household rules stay the same.** Share this while you are together so that they know the deployed parent shares this expectation.
- **How you will be in contact while gone.**

Have Fun:

- **Prioritize quality time as a family** before deployment creates memories for the child to reflect back on while the parent is gone.
- **One-on-one time with each family member** is important and helps strengthen the individual bonds with the deploying parent.
- **Create a thinking of you item** for the child to have that reminds them of the deployed parent and vice versa.