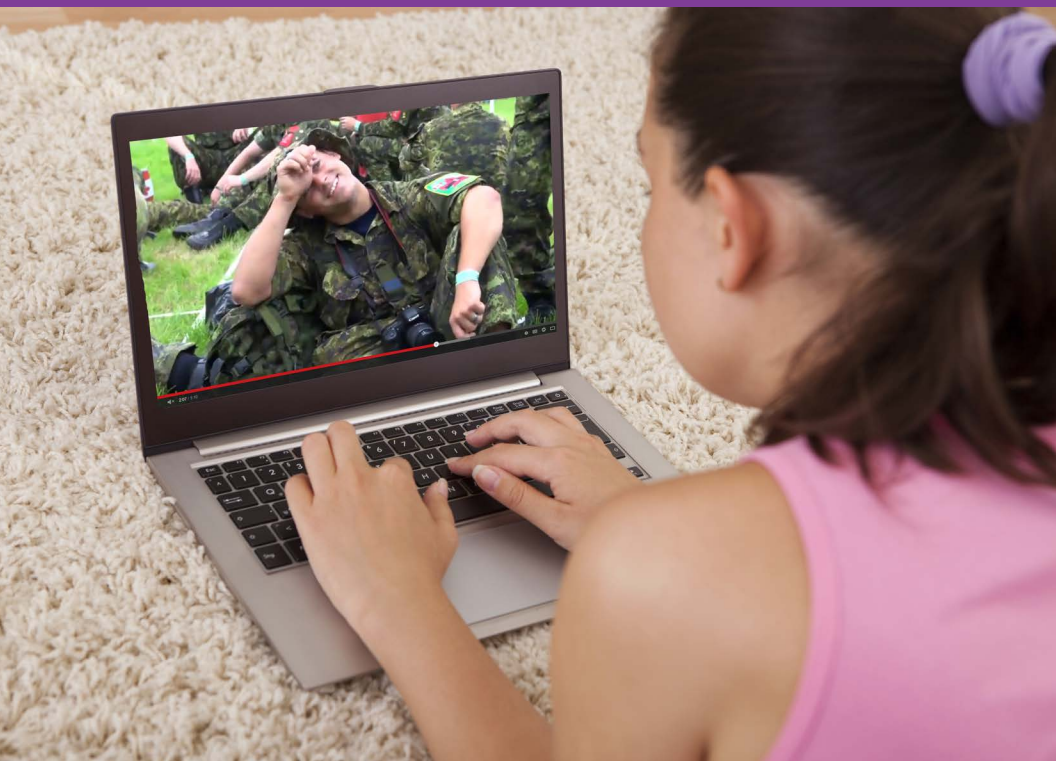


PARENTING FROM AFAR



MF
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QUICK TIPS TO
STAY CONNECTED



A Word about Military Families

Parenting Together While You Are Apart

This booklet is designed to help maintain the connection between the parent/caregiver at home and the parent who is away so that you can continue to raise your child together. The term “parenting” is used to include anyone who acts in a parenting role for the child while one parent is away. In the case of a single parent, it could be a grandparent; for a dual-service couple, it could be a trusted friend; and, for some, it could be an ex-partner in another part of the country. All of you share love and concern for your child.

A Message for the Parent Away

This booklet provides information to help you stay connected with your child throughout your time apart due to any work-related separation. You might be apart for a few days, a few weeks or a few months. This *Parenting from Afar* booklet provides tips that serve as a starting point for you in determining the best ways that you can stay connected with your child.

A Message for the Parent/Caregiver at Home

This booklet is written to help you support your child in understanding and coping with a military deployment or work-related separation. Separations can provide opportunities for family members to grow as individuals and to strengthen their connections with one another. These tips can help to build resilience, reduce stress and maintain a positive attitude when a child faces the absence of a beloved parent.

Welcome

Learn how to maintain an active and vital role in the life of your child from afar with this easy-to-read handbook. Discover strategies to help you and your loved ones communicate and support one another during deployment.



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Military Parenting

Military Families Are Unique

Parenting is a tough job, but a military parent faces quite a few additional challenges. Military families tackle hurdles such as separations, deployments, relocations and living long distances from family and friends. However, as a military family, you also have special opportunities for growth, learning about new cultures and access to resources just for you.

Resiliency During Deployment

The majority of Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) members and their families generally find that they adapt successfully to the military environment and related challenges. How do they do this? It requires resilience – the ability to thrive in the face of adversity. Resilience has also been defined as the ability to bounce back from difficult experiences and embrace challenge as an opportunity to learn.

Resiliency is not a personality trait that people have or do not have. It involves behaviours, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone.

How can you build resiliency? Keeping a positive belief in your parenting skills before, during and after deployment, embracing change, and taking care of yourself will help you build resilience during difficult times.

Words of Advice from Previously Deployed CAF Families:

“Know about the Military Family Resource Centre (MFRC) and the resources available before the deployment.”

“If you are new to the lifestyle or deployment, you really need to put yourself out there to meet others, to connect with like-minded people, as you will need just as much support. Don't be afraid to ask for help — we all need it from time to time.”

Special Circumstances

Single Parents and Dual Service

Deployment can be a stressful time for all families, but when you are a single parent or you and your partner are deploying, there are additional challenges for your child. Be sure that you have a Family Care Plan completed and have appointed a caregiver – such as a grandparent, relative or close friend – for your child while you are deployed. Ensure that you have discussed all financial, legal and medical needs with your child's caregiver.



Blended Families

Families consisting of a couple and their children from their current and previous relationships are considered a “blended family.” As with a single parent, you will want to ensure that your partner or spouse is able to take care of any financial, legal or medical needs of your child during your absence.

Children with Special Needs

Families who have a child with special needs have added considerations before a partner deploys. For the parent or caregiver at home, have a support system in place and arrange respite care. Be sure that you help your child understand your upcoming deployment, as well as preparing your child's teachers and therapists.

Long-Distance Caregiver

Your first choice of a caregiver may be a relative or close friend who lives far away. If so, you will need to prepare your child for a move as well as identify a new physician, dentist, school system or child care and any activities or sports that your child may be involved in.

Deployment Life in the Canadian Armed Forces

Deployment Terms

As a CAF member, you understand military terminology and acronyms. But to your family, it may seem like another language. Now may be a good time to sit together with your family and go over deployment terms.



- **Deployment.** Refers to the activities required to move military personnel and equipment from their home location to a specific destination in support of a mission or operation.

Though it varies depending on the command and its mission, deployments are typically four to eight months long, with others deploying more frequently on shorter missions.

- **Homecoming.** The tradition of welcoming back CAF members after a deployment.
- **Imposed restriction (IR).** When a CAF member is posted to a new geographic location and it is determined that a move will not be in the best interest of the family.
- **Short tasking.** Generally, it is understood that any deployment or work-related separation less than six months is considered to be short term, such as work-ups.
- **Work-related separation.** When a CAF member is separated from their loved ones for any length of time for work-related reasons, such as courses.

Managing Expectations During Deployment

Expectation management is the most vital tool you have to ensure your success in life, and it is one that is completely within your control. Setting reasonable expectations about parenting from a distance are no different.

How can you keep your expectations realistic? Consider these tips:

- **Build a network with experienced deployers.** If your support network does not contain any friends or family who have deployed, then they will have no idea how hard it can be or might not be able to give you advice when you need it. Build your support system with CAF members who have experienced a previous deployment, especially those who are parents.
- **Set goals.** These should be realistic, obtainable goals that you can reach during your deployment, such as sending a letter or card to your child at least once a month. Writing down a goal will motivate you to act, and it forces you to clarify what is really important to you.
- **Keep a positive attitude.** Keeping an upbeat attitude can lead to less stress, less disappointment and less anxiety. As a result, you will be better able to manage your expectations and handle any parenting challenges that may surface during deployment.



Parenting Cycle of Deployment

When you deploy, it is completely natural for you to experience a wide range of emotions. Understanding the Parenting Cycle of Deployment will help you understand the feelings that you and your family may experience before, during and after a deployment.

Phase 1

PREPARING FOR DEPLOYMENT

Anticipation of Loss

Reactions may include:

Child: Young children have difficulty understanding time; older children need time to adapt. May ask questions such as, "Do you really have to go?"

Deployed Parent:

Busy with preparation plans, wanting to spend time with family, feeling excitement about the mission, starting to disengage.

At-Home Parent:

Concerned about practical matters, has feelings of sadness or irritability, also needs to support partner and children.

Detachment and Withdrawal

Reactions may include:

Child: May sense stress and act out, have more tantrums, show regressive behaviours.

Deployed Parent: Might minimize their importance with young children.

At-Home Parent: Young children might cling to the parent at home, worried that they will also leave. May withdraw from deployed parent or feel numb.



DURING DEPLOYMENT

Phase

2

Disorientation

Reactions may include:

Child: Young children might not understand that the parent will be gone for a long time. Older children may experience mixed emotions of anger and relief from the tension of Phase 1.

Deployed Parent:

Parenting stress can affect the ability to work; possible disruption in attachment due to difficulties in communication; may compartmentalize home/work to cope.

At-Home Parent:

Disorientation or feeling overwhelmed as he or she sets up new family routines as a single parent.

Equilibrium

Reactions may include:

Child: Finds a "new normal" in daily routines and communication with deployed parent.

Deployed Parent:

Settles into a deployment routine. May communicate via telephone, email or video chat and participate in parenting decisions.

At-Home Parent:

Begins to feel more comfortable with the reorganization of roles and responsibilities.

Anticipation of Homecoming

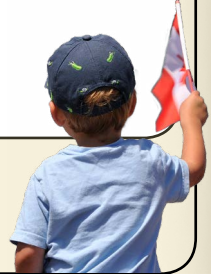
Reactions may include:

Child: May take cues from the at-home parent; reactions differ depending on the child's age (see "Children's Reactions to Homecoming" on page 32).

Deployed Parent: Feelings of excitement and anxiety, wondering whether they will be accepted or needed by their families or whether their children will remember them.

At-Home Parent:

Feelings of joy and excitement in anticipation of being reunited. Apprehensive about how their CAF member will feel about any changes they made during their absence.



AFTER DEPLOYMENT

Phase

3

Homecoming and Reintegration

Reactions may include:

Child: May react emotionally, have behavioural issues, experience separation anxiety or feel concerned that the parent will leave again.

Deployed Parent:

May be tired, may have difficulty adjusting to the change in environment.

At-Home Parent:

Need to renegotiate parenting roles, possible loss/gain of independence. Adjustment of returning parent is related to the ability of the parent at home to manage stress.

Stabilization

Reactions may include:

Child: Adapts to a new "normal" and enjoys the support of a stable household again.

Deployed and At-Home Parent:

Feeling more relaxed and comfortable with each other; new realities, acceptance that everyone is changed by the time apart; future-oriented, establishing equilibrium, new parenting routines together.



Pre-Deployment Checklist

CAF members and their families who have experienced deployments say that preparation is essential for a successful deployment. Before you leave, talk with your child about where you will be sent and the positives about the work you are doing. Use maps, books and the Internet to learn about where you will be going, the weather, the culture and more.

Consider completing several of these activities with your child before deploying:

- Spend quality time together well before deployment day.
- Make videos together to watch during deployment.
- Take your child down to your ship/unit.
- Have a discussion about expectations with your child.
- Discuss deployment — why you are leaving and, if possible, where you are going and when you will be home.
- Make a packing list, which may include postcards, stationery, or birthday cards and a calendar of family activities.
- Create a household chore list for each child; make a picture chart of chores for younger children.
- Discuss and sign a Family Contract (see page 9).
- Talk with your child about ways to stay positive; remind them that though a deployment seems long, it is only temporary.

Sample Family Contract

With the uncertainty of deployment, your child may find that a signed agreement between the two of you can help ease their fears and sooth worries. Place this Family Contract in a place you will see it every day as a reminder of your promises to each other.

Though it may seem simple, a Family Contract helps your child identify what is really vital — health and well-being — and focus on the important things in life during your deployment.

FAMILY CONTRACT

We will stay physically active, eat well and keep a positive attitude while _____ is away.

We will try to adjust to all of the changes and stay in contact with each other during the deployment.

Signed by:

Child: _____

Parent away: _____

Parent at home: _____



Infants and Toddlers (birth to 2 years)

Development

During the first two years of life, your child will go through rapid growth and developmental stages. The baby you said goodbye to before deployment may be a running, giggling toddler upon your return.

Development: Infants

- Infants recognize emotions and react to them — they will smile at a happy face.
- Infants can show a variety of emotions and even begin to show fear by 12 months.
- They grow attached to primary caregivers by 2 months old.
- Infants may show shyness toward strangers.

Development: Toddlers

- Toddlers are brimming with confidence and eager to learn.
- They are walking, talking and constantly learning new skills.
- This is a fun time — most of your interactions will be through play.
- Toddlers can be easily frustrated and resist changes to daily routines.

What to Expect During a Deployment

When there are changes in the environment, the tendency to seek security is natural. Infants and toddlers need to be surrounded by familiar people and objects and have secure routines. Even at this young age, infants and toddlers miss their parents, and it is important to find ways to communicate across the miles.

Signs of Stress During a Deployment



- Your infant may be fussier and may want to be held more.
- Toddlers may temporarily regress in walking, talking or toilet training.
- Your child may cry for no apparent reason, have eating or sleeping difficulties and you could see a few more tantrums.

Resiliency Building Blocks



A resilient child is better able to cope with, adapt to and overcome challenges. To help build your child's resiliency skills:

- Have predictable routines to help your child know what will happen next and provide a sense of safety and security.
- Give your child reminders before a change is going to happen. Knowing what will happen next helps your child cope with frustration.
- Engage your child in activities they enjoy; play, be silly and enjoy time together. Help your child understand their emotions by labeling their feelings and responding to their cues.
- Respond consistently to your child's attempts to communicate with you by mirroring their sounds, gestures and expressions.
- Continue to build strong family connections in day-to-day interactions by sharing stories, smiles, conversations and engaging in play. Children thrive when they experience relationships that are caring and supportive.
- Maintain good communication with your child's caregiver, letting them know what you do at home to comfort your child. This can help your child feel safe and secure.

Parenting from Afar



As the deployed parent, you can:

- Leave pictures and audio and video recordings that your infant can listen to and see (e.g., a teddy bear with your voice recorded).
- Create a small photo album or picture book of you and your child doing everyday things together (e.g., at a local playground, in the backyard, reading a story together, brushing your teeth). Be sure to give one to your child and to take one with you on deployment.
- Leave behind a special item, such as a T-shirt, that your child can have to remind them of you.



Parenting from Home



Before and after the deployment, follow these suggestions for parenting at home. Your spouse may benefit from these parenting tips as well:

- Find extra opportunities to hold and comfort your child.
- Be consistent and try to maintain a routine. Structure helps your child predict what will happen next and reduces feelings of uncertainty.
- Stay where your child can see you or let them know where you are going.
- Prepare your child by stating, in simple terms, what will happen next. For example, Mom or Dad is going away on a ship for work.
- Ignore attention-getting behaviours, but take time to attend to your child's needs.
- Make sure to find time for yourself.
- Try to stay calm and relaxed.

Frequently Asked Questions



Question: My baby seems fussier than usual. Can infants miss a parent who is away?

Answer: While your infant is not yet able to talk, she can pick up on changes to routines or how Mom or Dad is feeling. When there are changes to the environment, your baby may not only be fussier than usual but may also change her eating and sleeping patterns or want to be held more often.

What can you do? Don't stress too much about it — stay calm and your baby will take her cue from your own reactions. Be consistent and try to maintain a regular routine — she will find comfort in knowing what to expect each day. Attend to your baby's needs and give extra hugs and snuggles while your partner is away. Continue to talk with your partner about your baby so you will feel supported.



Question: Will my baby recognize me when I come home?

Answer: Don't worry, you are not alone in your fears. Many parents of infants worry that their child will not recognize them after being gone for an extended period of time. Know that it may not be smooth at first, but your child will always love you!

Before deploying, consider leaving a family photo where you child will see it daily. If you recorded a video of you reading a book before deployment, your partner could also include that in part of your baby's daily routine.

It may take some extra effort during deployment, but by keeping in touch through photos, phone calls and video chat, your little one will continue to grow with your presence in his life.



Preschoolers (3-5 years)

Development for Preschoolers

The preschool years are full of fun, motion and activity. As your child reaches this age, you will find that your child's development means more opportunities for interaction together through phone calls or letters.

During this age, you may expect:

- Tremendous gains in their physical abilities and language, cognitive and social development.
- A distinct personality to emerge based on experiences and inherited temperament.
- Children to be full of energy, have an active imagination and learn through play.
- Children to develop the ability to become absorbed in an activity, such as constructing an intricate block building.
- The beginning ability to recognize feelings of others and to accept sharing and taking turns.
- Preschoolers to be living in the “here and now” world.

What to Expect During a Deployment

Preschool children are gaining independence but still need parents when feeling insecure. They worry about being left behind or separated from their parents. Preschoolers may think their behaviour caused their parent to leave.

Signs of Stress During a Deployment



- Clings to family or to a favourite toy.
- Becomes easily upset, frustrated and cries without explanation.
- Has nightmares or sleeping difficulties.
- Fears new people or places.
- Regresses in toilet habits or other areas of development.

Resiliency Building Blocks



A resilient child is better able to cope with, adapt to and overcome challenges. To help build your child's resiliency skills:

- Set simple, clear rules and be consistent. Rules help children learn to make good choices.
- Be consistently present in your child's life as a positive role model; it will help your child feel more attached to you.
- Let your child teach you how to do something — preschoolers love to be in charge. This encourages independence and initiative.
- Help your child calm down when they are frustrated by practicing deep breathing or counting to 10.
- Encourage your child to ask for help when needed.
- Use your child's name frequently. This lets your child know you are paying attention.
- Find ways to connect with your child throughout the day. Smiles, hugs, high fives and thumbs up are all ways to express affection and bond with your child.

Parenting from Afar



As the deployed parent, you can:

- Make audio recordings of your child's favourite bedtime stories or songs from the country where you will be deployed.
- Ask your spouse to take pictures of you with your child doing everyday things together, such as reading, eating dinner or watching TV. The pictures will remind your child how much you enjoy spending time with them.
- Answer questions about the deployment. Answers should be brief, matter-of-fact and to the point.
- Reassure your child that you are going away for work and provide a photo of you at work.
- Let your child take the lead at homecoming. They will want to talk, share and play. But, do give them time to warm up to you, if needed.

Parenting from Home



Before and after the deployment, follow these suggestions for parenting at home. Your spouse may benefit from these parenting tips as well:

- Allow your child to express feelings and fears about the deployment.
- Include them in the pre-deployment and homecoming activities and plans.
- Invite them to help pack.
- Help them feel capable by assigning simple chores and thanking them for their contribution to the family.
- Avoid changing family routines.
- Reassure them with extra attention and physical closeness (hug, holding hands).
- Involve all family members in reunion planning (e.g., make banners together).

Frequently Asked Questions



Question: During my deployment, I try to call my child as often as I can. Lately, all he does is cry and seems to be upset by my calling. Should I stop calling?

Answer: This is very typical of children this age. He may cry or show no interest in talking to you while you are away. This should in no way deter you from trying to stay connected with your son. If you have access to a visual way to communicate with your child (i.e., video teleconference, Skype or FaceTime), this might help. If possible, plan the time of your call. Have your partner or caregiver at home prepare your child for the call. They should tell your son that you are on the phone and you would like to know about his day. Do not force your child to talk; make it an option.



Question: I keep trying to persuade my child to draw something for his dad while he is away, but he is just not interested. Does he even miss his dad?

Answer: Children this age don't always draw things on demand. Many of them love drawing or doing some sort of art at preschool or home. They love having their art displayed, like on the refrigerator. What you can do is start collecting them. Say, "I'll put this one on the fridge for us, and this one we'll put it in the shoebox to send to Daddy."



Question: When would be the best time to talk about my mission/deployment with my child?

Answer: You may be aware of an upcoming deployment months ahead of the departure date. Timing is important when it comes to discussing this with your preschooler. Give your preschooler no more than a week or two of notice. Children this age are very much in the moment, so discussing this too early may build unnecessary anxiety in your child. When it is time, don't think in terms of sitting a preschooler down for a talk; that's not how kids this age learn. Instead, while out shopping, you might say, "Daddy's going to be going away for a while, so we need to get things ready."



School-Age Children (6-8 years)

Development

The ages of 6 through 8 are commonly considered the middle years of childhood.

During this age, you may expect that your child:

- Will be curious and ask questions to try to make sense of things.
- Needs plenty of free play time.
- Seeks more independence and responsibility, yet needs structure and guidelines.
- Believes that following rules and fairness are important.
- Values the importance of friendships and peer groups and might have a best friend.
- Prefers being with just boys or girls.
- Supports and defends the family's values and traditions.

What to Expect During a Deployment

School-age children have a world outside of the family. Their lives focus on school and peers. They usually are concerned about how a deployment will affect the everyday routines of their lives (e.g., who will drive to soccer practice).

Signs of Stress During a Deployment



- Changes in school performance.
- Increased complaints of physical ailments.
- Feelings of irritability, moodiness, fear or anger (e.g., with siblings or parents).

Resiliency Building Blocks



A resilient child is better able to cope with, adapt to and overcome challenges. To help build your child's resiliency skills:

- Involve your child in activities and chores at home. This encourages responsibility and provides opportunities for your child to contribute to overall family well-being.
- Allow your child to make some of their own decisions. Provide choices as often as possible.
- Ask questions and be a good listener. Ask follow-up questions that show you are interested in what your child has to say.
- Encourage your child's sense of independence by building on their capabilities.
- Allow your child to make mistakes and help them learn from them. If your child is upset or disappointed, talk about their feelings and be supportive. Help your child understand that mistakes are a normal part of life.
- Model problem-solving by talking about your challenges, the steps taken and the outcomes or successes. It is important that your child sees that you also may struggle as you move toward solving problems.
- Make a family plan for emergencies and share this with your child so they are aware of whom to contact if they need help.

Parenting from Afar



As the deployed parent, you can:

- Take photos, before you deploy, doing everyday things with your child, such as playing sports, helping with homework or doing chores. The pictures will remind your child how much you enjoy spending time with them.
- Communicate regularly. Write letters, draw pictures, email, talk on the phone, or play online games together.
- Reassure your child that you have the safety training, drills and equipment to do your job.
- Send a photo of yourself in uniform, on the ship or in the field, so your child can better understand what you do and where you are going. If possible, take your child to visit the ship before you deploy.
- Take with you, or ask the parent at home to send you, schedules of sports or school events, so you can ask about them by email or phone.

Parenting from Home



Before and after the deployment, follow these suggestions for parenting at home. Your spouse may benefit from these parenting tips as well:

- Have a family discussion before deployment about expectations and rules. Sign a Family Contract to show your commitment.
- Involve teachers, neighbours and coaches so that they are aware of the situation and can provide needed support.
- Put a world map on the wall and connect your child's home to your deployment locations with a string.
- Monitor TV viewing of news broadcasts which might be disturbing to children.
- Encourage your child to share any concerns or fears with you. Help your child to gain a sense of competence and resilience.
- Create a memory box to store pictures, samples of schoolwork or ticket stubs from activities to share with you when you get home.
- Use a large calendar to show how days and months pass. Post on the calendar so there are activities to anticipate.

Frequently Asked Questions



Question: My child is disappointed because I am away during her soccer tournament. I feel awful about this. How can I make it up to her?

Answer: Ask your partner to take a short video of the game. This way you can let your child know that you were able to see the game and how exciting it was to watch her play. If you are able, try to get some soccer-related memorabilia for your child to show you were thinking of her.

The next time you talk with your daughter, ask her specific questions about the game. She will feel valued and appreciated with your attentive conversation about her activities and her growing sport abilities. It could be helpful for you to have a schedule of the games and practice to know when to talk to her about her game. Adding reminders to your phone or a calendar can help with this.



Question: With my child's involvement, we created a Family Contract to agree on what should be done while his dad is away. Now he is not interested in doing any of the agreed-upon chores. How should I address this?

Answer: Both of you can help reinforce the Family Contract. The next time his dad calls him, they can talk about the contract and what it means to the family. Ask the child's current thoughts or feelings about it. There may be an issue that you are not aware of unless you ask.

Your spouse at home should bring attention to the positive behaviour and praise your child when chores are done. When your child gets positive attention for something, the likelihood of repeating the action is increased.

If your child is not doing the chores to your standard, recognize and reinforce the effort and any small steps. What may help are visual cues, such as step by step photos of his chores.



Preteens (9-12 years)

Development

The ages 9 through 12 are commonly referred to as preteen years. The preteen years are a time of rapid growth, deepening friendships, new responsibilities and academic challenges.

During this age, you may expect that your child:

- Takes organized games and activities very seriously.
- Shows an increased appetite.
- Begins puberty.
- Establishes an identity, along with increased independence and responsibility.
- Wants to fit in with peers.
- Starts to defy adult authority by taking risks such as riding a bike without a helmet, shoplifting or trying cigarettes, alcohol or drugs.
- Begins to show interest in members of the opposite sex and becomes more aware of their appearance.
- Expresses anger and frustration verbally and in actions such as door slamming, sulking or being aggressive with siblings.

What to Expect During a Deployment

Even more than school-age children, preteens focus on school, activities and peers. They are concerned about their parents' safety and how having only one parent at home will affect their lives.

Signs of Stress During a Deployment



- May be irritable, moody, frightened or angry.
- May internalize emotions and could lash out at siblings or parents.
- May be concerned about their capabilities. Will they measure up while Mom or Dad is deployed?

Resiliency Building Blocks



A resilient child is better able to cope with, adapt to and overcome challenges. To help build your child's resiliency skills:

- Focus on your child's strengths and abilities.
- Talk with your child. Ask questions and be prepared to listen to their answers. Maintain connections by asking questions about their daily routines, friends, hobbies and interests.
- Openly discuss how you engage in self-care activities and talk with your child about what they are doing to take care of themselves (i.e., healthy food choices and sleep habits).
- Maintain family routines and rituals; these help provide a sense of safety and comfort.
- Have high (but reasonable) expectations of your child at home, school and when participating in outside activities.
- Encourage expression of emotion using creative mediums, such as journaling, art, music or photography.
- Be aware of the online games and websites your child visits.
- Set boundaries in your relationships — you are a parent, not a friend. Be a positive role model; it is important that you make healthy decisions for yourself.

Parenting from Afar



As the deployed parent, you can:

- Ask about hobbies, pets or school projects.
- Write down important dates such as games or school dances.
- Try to call ahead to arrange for your child to “be there” via webcam.
- Email photos back home of yourself in uniform, on the ship, or in the field so your child can better understand what you do and where you are working.
- Give your child a sense of your daily routine and describe your deployment as much as you are permitted.
- If possible, send postcards or care packages to your child. It does not have to be anything elaborate, just small tokens to let them know you are thinking of them. This is a great opportunity for your child to learn more about other communities or cultures and to gain an appreciation of diversity.

Parenting from Home



Before and after the deployment, follow these suggestions for parenting at home. Your spouse may benefit from these parenting tips as well:

- Respect your child's privacy, but invite them to share their thoughts and feelings.
- Suggest that they keep a daily journal.
- Establish direct communication between your child and the deployed parent and help them communicate often.
- Provide your child with pre-stamped envelopes or a private email account for communicating with their parent during the deployment.
- Maintain rules and routines to provide structure.
- Encourage your child to help out with chores to have a sense of competence.
- Encourage involvement in school activities, youth groups, sports, etc.

Frequently Asked Questions



Question: I frequently argue with my daughter about her messy room and cleaning up after herself. We signed a Family Contract, but how do I get my child to follow through?

Answer: It is important to maintain consistent expectations about family responsibilities and how each member has a role in contributing to the family's well-being. You should be clear about the consequences if she does not follow through.

As a family it is important to identify what is working well and discuss areas of challenge. Engage in conversation that focuses on your daughter's strengths and encourages creativity and imagination in problem-solving strategies. Continue to provide opportunities for her to be responsible. Your partner can send photos of the bunk space on a ship with everything stowed away, to show that everyone sticks with the Family Contract.



Question: What is the right approach to media management for an 11-year-old? My child is frequently asking for more time on the computer, but my partner is away and I do not have time to sit with him and monitor what he is viewing.

Answer: Technology is a key form of communication and connection for preteens. Online activity requires adequate supervision. When negotiating your Family Contract, screen time can be included as an earned privilege to be accessed after homework and family commitments have been met.

As far as Internet safety, the safest place for a computer is in a common room, such as a living room or kitchen. You will have a better chance at discreetly supervising online activities there than if it is in a bedroom. You may also want to consider installing firewalls, malware and parental filters to limit his Internet exposure to a standard that you and your partner agree on. Enlist your partner's support in reinforcing the reasons for safety.



Teenagers (13+ years)

Development

The teenage years are often the most challenging stage of development for parents and teenagers alike, but these years can also be the most rewarding, as parents begin to recognize and respect the adult their teen is becoming. The teen years are a time of growing independence and responsibility, as well as physical and emotional maturation.

During this age, you may expect that your teen:

- Is becoming more independent and taking on more responsibility.
- Is highly sensitive to criticism.
- Is trying to establish his or her own identity.
- Defies adult authority by taking risks such as shoplifting or experimenting with sex, drugs and alcohol.
- Sees peers as the primary affiliation and values peers' opinions highly, often more than parents'.
- Places a high value on privacy.
- Sees themselves as adults.

What to Expect During a Deployment

Teenagers are most concerned with working out their own identity and fitting in with their peers. A deployment may affect them less because of the peer group affiliation.

Signs of Stress During a Deployment



- Ambivalence — there can be positives in having a parent away.
- Rule testing.
- Changes in school performance, appearance or behaviour. The child may try out a new style, reflecting either a positive step toward independence or a challenging phase of development.
- Mood swings, including a loss of interest in friends and activities.
- Looking to peers for support.

Resiliency Building Blocks



A resilient child is better able to cope with, adapt to and overcome challenges. To help build your child's resiliency skills:

- Encourage your teenager to talk with you, their friends and other significant adults. Support their involvement in school and extra-curricular activities.
- Assist your teenager in problem solving by being a patient listener and avoiding judging, blaming and criticism.
- Share life stories about times you have struggled and how you have dealt with stressors and challenges. Provide reassurance.
- Help your teenager set reasonable and achievable goals (e.g., completing homework and projects on time).
- Maintain a consistent and positive presence in your teenager's life. Know where your teenager is and have a way to contact them. Let your teenager know where and how to contact you.
- Get to know your teenager's friends and include them in family activities.
- Encourage expression of emotion and self-care activities, including healthy eating, sleep habits and exercise.
- Maintain routines and rituals. During times of stress, familiar structure provides a sense of comfort and reassurance.

Parenting from Afar



As the deployed parent, you can:

- Communicate regularly.
- Keep in touch using your teenager's preferred methods of communication, such as texting or social media, if possible.
- Find out the dates of important events in your teenager's life, such as a driver's test or prom, and call a few days beforehand. Or arrange to "be there" via webcam.
- Respect their unique situation, validate their frustrations and encourage them to share their thoughts and feelings.
- When talking to your teenager, remember the following: Be respectful, speak precisely and concisely, try to see their point of view, actively listen, pay attention and ask questions.

Parenting from Home



Before and after the deployment, follow these suggestions for parenting at home. Your spouse may benefit from these parenting tips as well:

- Discuss the rules, responsibilities and expectations for all family members before you deploy.
- Encourage that structured routines at home be maintained as much as possible. Teenagers, like younger children, gain comfort from a stable routine at home.
- Do not expect your teenager to take on adult responsibilities during a parent's absence. The teenager may be given additional chores but should not take on a parental role.
- Suggest ways for your teenager to deal with their own emotional stress. This could include keeping a journal, engaging in artistic activities, or listening to music.
- Remember, they may think they are adults, but they still need guidance and support.

Frequently Asked Questions



Question: My teenager seems to be struggling with her emotions, especially since her mom went away. How can I help her learn to manage her stress in a healthy manner?

Answer: It is important to recognize that teenagers experience a range of emotions when their parent is away, and teenagers may be reluctant to talk about their concerns.

Encourage your teenager to talk with you, her mom, her friends and other important people in her life. Ask questions and be a patient listener. Support your teenager in developing social networks at school and in the community. Maintain consistent routines and expectations at home to provide a sense of predictability and security. Reassure your teenager that you and her mom are available to help her when she experiences stressful situations. Listen to her fears and answer her questions honestly. If you are concerned about your teenager's emotional health, it is always a good idea to contact local health professionals in your community.



Question: My teenager complains that I am too strict when my partner is away. He wants to hang out with his friends after school, go to movies, and comes home after dark. He thinks my rules are unreasonable, that I am trying to ruin his social life and limit his freedom. How can I help my teenage son be more accountable?

Answer: It is natural for teenagers to want to be with their peers. It is important to set clear expectations and limits and include your teenager in the decision-making process. Provide your teenager with opportunities to discuss his concerns. The away parent can also listen and negotiate responsibilities.

When teenagers are provided opportunities to actively engage in the problem-solving process, it increases their feelings of competency, confidence and sense of importance.



Homecoming and Reintegration

Anticipation of Homecoming and Parents' Common Reactions

Preparing for homecoming is filled with huge excitement and some apprehension. Both you and those at home will have hopes and expectations about homecoming. These thoughts can at times be idealistic, so the reality of the situation needs to be placed into perspective. Emotionally preparing for going home allows you to think about the challenges and discuss plans with loved ones and friends.

Before homecoming day:

- Share your feelings of apprehension as well as excitement and joy.
- Share your expectations and desires for homecoming.
- Reassure your family of your love and commitment.
- Include your child in planning for the homecoming celebration.
- Plan to have some family time as well as couples' time.

Helping Children of Any Age Adjust to Your Homecoming

You can help a child of any age prepare for homecoming by:

- Expecting positive and negative reactions from children and showing understanding of the negatives.
- Asking your spouse or caregiver about daily routines (e.g., meals, bedtime) and new family rituals that might have been established during your absence.
- Easing your way back into your parenting role. Remember that your family had to adjust to your absence and will need time to readjust to you being home again.
- Letting your children set the pace for getting reacquainted with you.
- Reaffirming your bond with your children by being attentive, listening to them and playing with them.



Age-Specific Reactions to Homecoming

Children are often unpredictable in their reactions. While you might expect children to welcome you back with open arms, it is not uncommon for them to act unexpectedly. How they reacted to your homecoming as a toddler might be completely different from how they react as a preschooler. Be patient while they take the time to know you and accept you as a parent again.

Age	Possible Reactions	Suggestion
Infant and toddler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crying • May not recognize or pull away from deployed parent • Cling to at-home parent or caregiver • Temper tantrums • Regressive behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm up slowly; don't force hugs or play • Sit or kneel at their level • Participate in daily routines • Provide basic physical needs – feeding, bathing, etc.
Preschooler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiet and reserved initially • Recognize returning parent but may need warm-up time • Feel angry that the deployed parent went away • Test limits or act out • Crave attention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide space so they can get reacquainted again • Play games together to encourage sharing and fun • Set aside special “play dates” for just parent/child bonding • Reinforce your love for your child, even when you don't love his/her behaviour
School-age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel guilty about what they did, or didn't do, during parent's absence • Talk non-stop to returning parent • Want to show off returning parent to peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge and appreciate what they've accomplished during the deployment • Reinforce the positive things that they have been doing during deployment • Spend time reviewing schoolwork, pictures, family scrapbooks, etc. • Express interest in their hobbies and extracurricular activities • Play together • Do chores together
Teenagers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excitement (if your relationship was strong before deployment) • Guilt for not living up to a perceived set of standards • Concern about rules and routines changing • Feel like they are “too old” to meet the you on homecoming day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use more mature methods in renewing your relationship with your teen • Listen with undivided attention • Respect their privacy and their friends • Encourage them to share what has happened in their personal life – be careful not to criticize or judge • Ask them for updates about current trends, music fashion, etc.

Electronic Resources

Are you looking for more information? Try the websites below or scan the code with a QR reader on your smartphone.

Esquimalt Military Family Resource Centre's (MFRC)
Parenting from Afar: www.esquimaltmfrc.com/parenting/afar.php



Family Navigator: Resources for adults and children at MFRCs across Canada. www.familynavigator.ca



Kids Have Stress, Too by Psychology Foundation: Resources for helping children cope with stress; booklet on managing Teenagers. www.psychologyfoundation.org



Reaching IN ... Reaching OUT (RIRO): Print the "Road of Life" Travel List to help on your journey: www.reachinginreachingout.com/resources-parents.htm



Military Families Near and Far: American military family Sesame Street resource; includes apps. <https://www.familiesnearandfar.org/login/>



Parenting from a Distance: Tips and activities for staying connected. Designed for families separated through divorce, but some of the ideas are helpful for all families. www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/publications/cs1115

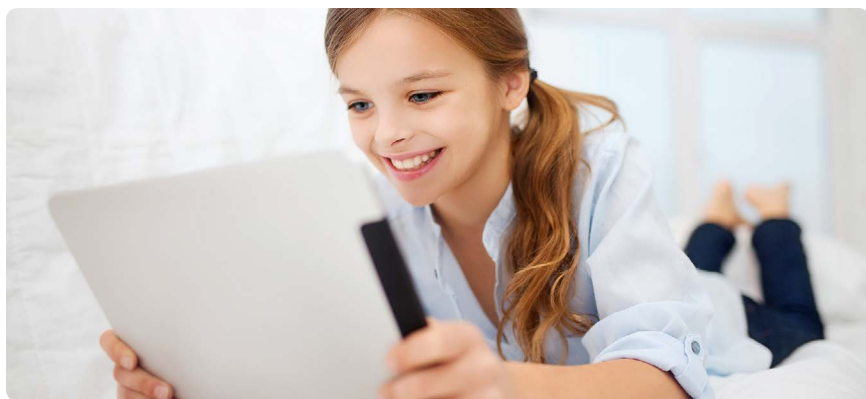


Family Force Canada. A site for and about Canadian military families. www.familyforce.ca or 1-800-268-7708.



Canadian Armed Forces Member Assistance Program (CAFMAP): Voluntary, confidential. Phone and talk with a person 24/7, referral to a counsellor: www.familyforce.ca/sites/shouldertoshoulder/EN/professionalsupport/Pages/CFMAP.aspx





Books and Publications

Bauer, C. (1981) *My Mom Travels a Lot*. NY: Puffin Books.

Cain, J. (2000) *The Way I Feel*. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press.

Dumler, E. (2006). *I'm Already Home ... Again – Keeping Your Family Close While on Assignment or Deployment*. Los Angeles, CA: Frankly Speaking Inc.

Gemelke, T. (2005) *Stay Close: 40 Clever Ways to Connect with Kids When You're Apart*. Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute.

McCormick, W. & Eachus, J. (1999) *Daddy, Will You Miss Me?* NY: Simon & Schuster.

Newman, G. (2011) *101 Ways to be a Long-Distance Super-Dad ... or Mom, too!* Robert D. Read Publishers.

Penn, A. (2006) *The Kissing Hand*. Terre Haute, IN: Tanglewood Press.

Spelman, C. (2004) *When I Miss You*. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman & Co.

Williams, D. (2006) *Over There* (Daddy Version and Mommy Version) Zero to Three. Washington, DC: Kaplan Early Learning.

To shop for children's books about deployment, visit [Amazon.ca](https://www.amazon.com) or scan this code with a QR reader on your smart phone:



Sea Stories

Deployments can be smooth...or they can be filled with twists and turns that test your limits as you handle whatever comes your way. They can be emotional and homecomings can be forever memorable. Whatever they end up being, they are a part of the military life — and forever part of your story.

Mail Call!

“When I was deployed, I found that email was great, but nothing could replace an old-fashioned letter or package from Dad. I’d send a pressed leaf from a place we had been, or a sandwich bag with a bit of sand in it. I think these tangible items gave them a sense that I was in a real place, which especially helped my younger kids.” - A.B.

Reading Over the Miles

“My husband was reading our two girls, 8 and 10, a chapter from a book series before bed each night while I was deployed. I got a copy of the series, too, and felt so connected with my girls when I could ask them questions about the book or what they thought of that last chapter. It really helped me, and if I could pass on one bit of advice to a deploying member, I’d say read with your kids — even over long distances.” - S.B.

Deployed Dads

“There’s lots of information out there on deployment and parenting - but don’t forget to get some support for yourself, too. I had buddies on my last deployment without kids, and I felt awkward talking about my kids when they didn’t have any. Once I found a few fellow fathers, it helped a lot just to talk. We would even share photos from home with each other. We all seemed to enjoy that a lot - seeing the smiling faces of our loved ones — over those long months.” - M.J.