Military Culture: The Effects of Deployment on Military Kids

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Activity
“Walk This Way”
Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO)
Impact of Overseas Contingency Operations

• Has changed the face of military service, especially for those in the National Guard and Reserves
• Mobilization and deployment at record high levels for all components of the military
• Guard & Reserve families have different needs than traditional military Families
Impact of Overseas Contingency Operations

- For the National Guard and Reserve, the primary occupation is not one of “Service Member” and some Families might not consider themselves “military Families”
- Geographically dispersed from others in the same circumstances (not necessarily located near a military installation)
- Family identity changes from “civilian” to “military” with one letter or phone call
How Has OCO Effected the Lives of Military Kids
Speak Out Military Kids Video
“Ryan & Noah”
Unique Issues for Children & Youth in Military Families

- Lack of community awareness of and support for Family needs
- Lack of Educator preparedness to recognize and meet needs of Children/Youth of deployed members
- Possible transition from one school to another
Unique Issues for Children & Youth in Military Families

- Accessibility and affordability of childcare
- Availability and affordability of after-school programs and youth activities; children home alone
- Frequently unaware of resources to help parents and children cope
- Difficulty understanding and dealing with media
Unique Issues for Children & Youth in Military Families

• Deployment cycle—disrupts Family before, during, and after...and is repeated

• Social/emotional/behavioral reactions may impact youths’ future
Identified Issues for Children & Youth in Military Families

- Geographically dispersed Families and lack of connection with other Youth and Families in similar situation
- Child separation/anxiety issues regarding safety of deployed parent
- Deployed Parent absent for significant events
Identified Issues for Children & Youth in Military Families

- Less parental involvement from Parent at home
- Limited opportunities for Youth to attend extracurricular activities
- Teens having increased care of home and younger siblings
- Behavioral changes, peer pressure, lower self-esteem
Identified Issues for Children & Youth in Military Families

• Need to live with extended Family
• Changes in financial resources
• Communication with deployed Parent
Deployment and the Community

Blanket Activity
The Emotional Cycle of Deployment
The “New” Emotional Cycle of Deployment

- Each stage is characterized by time frame and specific emotional challenges
- Failure to negotiate successfully can lead to strife
- Seven distinct stages:
  - Stage One: Anticipation of Departure
  - Stage Two: Detachment & Withdrawal
  - Stage Three: Emotional Disorganization
  - Stage Four: Recovery & Stabilization
  - Stage Five: Anticipation of Return
  - Stage Six: Return Adjustment & Renegotiation
  - Stage Seven: Reintegration & Stabilization
Stage One: Anticipation of Departure

- **Timeframe:** When family members receive orders
- Increased feeling of stress in home
- Reality of change ahead is “sinking in”
- Denial & anticipation of loss
- Focus is on completing family pre-deployment activity checklist
- Members may feel more emotional
- In case of multiple deployments . . . new cycle may begin before family has had time to renegotiate shared vision from last deployment
Stage Two: Detachment & Withdrawal

- **Timeframe:** Last week before Service Member leaves
- Service Member is focused on preparing for mission and may distance self from family
- Anger, arguments may occur as family prepares to protect themselves from “hurt” of separation
- Communication may be difficult
- In preparation for loss, family may begin to act like Service Member is already gone
- Multiple deployments can result in need to repeatedly create distance; to feel “numb” and avoid emotional connection
Stage Three: Emotional Disorganization

- **Timeframe:** 1-6 weeks into deployment
- Life without Service Member may initially feel overwhelming
- Routines change, responsibilities added
- Kids may feel . . .
  - Numb and not interested in doing much
  - More irritable than usual
  - Have difficulty concentrating — particularly at school
  - Wish things would go back to “normal”
  - Surprised because things seem to be moving more smoothly now that Service Member is gone
Stage Four: Recovery & Stabilization

- **Timeframe**: Usually between weeks 3 and 5 after deployment
- Family finally starts to settle into routine of life without Service Member
- Coping with changes can be **positive** for kids
  - May enjoy new found responsibilities
  - Sense of independence
  - Relief that family is functioning well
- Coping with changes can be **challenging** for kids
  - Difficult time accepting changes
  - Stressed, depressed, and having difficulty getting things done
  - Feel unsupported and worried how will make it through
- Most of the time there is a mixture of both responses!
Stage Five: Anticipation of Return

- **Timeframe**: About 6 weeks before the Service Member Returns
- Homecoming is coming!
- Family is happy, excited, and feeling boost of energy
- Trying to make everything “perfect” for return
- Sense of relief that Service Member will be home combined with worries about whether or not they will be the same
- If Service Member came home on leave at some point during deployment, that experience may be what family members expect:
  - Positive Leave Experience = Positive Homecoming
  - Challenging Leave Experience = Challenging Homecoming
Stage Six: Return Adjustment and Renegotiation

- **Timeframe:** About 6 weeks after the Service Member returns
- During time of separation Service Member and all family members have changed
- Changes may hold pleasant surprises or may cause conflict
- Family members may feel overwhelmed by Service Member attempts to get to know everyone again
- Everyone needs space and time to readjust
- Entire family must begin to renegotiate how household will look now that everyone is together again
Stage Seven: Reintegration & Stabilization

- **Timeframe:** Up to 6 month (and beyond) after the Service Member returns
- Family continues to adjust to having Service Member home
- A “new normal” is established regarding routines and expectations
- Members may begin to feel secure, relaxed, and comfortable with one another again
- If readjustment challenges resurface, support is important. . . It’s okay to ask for help if you need it!
Stages of Homecoming

- Stage One: Anticipation (weeks and days before homecoming)
- Stage Two: Honeymoon and Readjustment
  - Honeymoon (lasts until first serious disagreement)
  - Feelings of euphoria, relief, excitement; catching-up, sharing experiences; reestablishing intimacy
  - Readjustment (approximately 6–8 weeks)
  - Intensified pressures; sensitive to each other’s presence; increased tension as idealized relationship confronts reality
- Stage Three: Stabilization (8 weeks & beyond)
How are Military Kids Impacted by Stress Caused by Deployment?

- Behaviors
- Reactions
- Communication
- Interactions
How are Military Kids Impacted by Stress Caused by Deployment?

Activity/Demonstration “BOUNCE BACK”
Infant to 5 Years: Signs of Stress

- Behaviors
  - Fussiness, uncharacteristic crying, neediness
  - Generalized fear
  - Heightened arousal and confusion
- Reactions
  - Helplessness and passivity
  - Avoidance of trauma-related reminders
  - Exaggerated startle response
  - Regressive symptoms
  - Somatic symptoms
  - Sleep disturbances, nightmares
Infant to 5 Years: Signs of Stress

• Communication
  • Cognitive confusion
  • Difficulty talking about event; lack of verbalization
  • Trouble identifying feelings
  • Unable to understand event as permanent
  • Anxieties about death

• Interactions
  • Separation fears and clinging to caregivers
  • Grief related to abandonment by caregiver
6 to 11 Years: Signs of Stress

- Behaviors
  - Spacey or distracted
  - Changes in behavior, mood, personality
  - Regression to behavior of young child
  - Aggressive behavior, angry outbursts

- Reactions
  - Reminders trigger disturbing feelings
  - Responsibility and guilt
  - Safety concerns, preoccupation with danger
  - Obvious anxiety and general fearfulness
  - Somatic symptoms
  - Sleep disturbances, nightmares
6 to 11 Years: Signs of Stress

- Communication
  - Confusion and inadequate understanding of events
  - Magical explanations to fill in gaps of understanding
  - Withdrawn and quiet
- Interactions
  - Worry and concern for others
  - Separation anxiety
  - Repetitious traumatic play and retelling
  - Loss of ability to concentrate
  - School avoidance
  - Loss of interest in activities
12 to 18 Years: Signs of Stress

- Behaviors
  - Self-consciousness
  - Depression
  - Trauma-driven acting out; sexual acting out or recklessness; risk-taking; substance use/abuse
  - Accident proneness

- Reactions
  - Efforts to distance from feelings
  - Wish for revenge and action-oriented responses
  - Life-threatening re-enactment
  - Decline in school performance
  - Sleep and eating disturbances
12 to 18 Years: Signs of Stress

- Communication
  - Increased self-focusing
  - Social withdrawal
- Interactions
  - Flight into driven activity/involvement with others OR retreat from others in order to manage inner turmoil
  - Rebellion at home and school
  - Abrupt shift in relationships
Before Adults can Help

Effective helpers need a combination of:

• Knowledge about the constellation of stressors and coping strategies of the child/youth
• Appreciation of the child/youth’s point of view and their reasons for unconscious choices of coping modes
• Skills in working effectively with children and youth; communicating easily and warmly, gaining trust, and helping them talk openly and completely
• Self-Awareness of own biases and belief systems in regard to each kind of stressor and coping strategies
General Coping Strategies

Create a safe environment . . .

• Provide reassurance and support
• Be honest about what has happened
• Explain what government officials are doing (state, federal, police, firefighters, hospital, etc.)
• Manage your own anxiety
• Help put the event in perspective
Specific Coping Techniques: Infant to 2 ½ Years

- Maintain calm atmosphere
- Keep familiar routines
- Avoid unnecessary separations from caregivers
- Minimize exposure to reminders of trauma—don’t keep TV news on
- Expect children to temporarily regress; don’t panic
- Help children give simple names to big feelings
- Talk about event in simple terms during brief chats
- Provide simple props (doctor’s kit, toy ambulance) if trying to play out frightening situation
- Provide soothing activities
Specific Coping Techniques: 2 1/2 to 5 Years

- Maintain familiar routines
- Don’t introduce new and challenging experiences
- Avoid nonessential separations from important caregivers
- Listen to and tolerate retelling of events
- Accept and help them name strong feelings during brief conversations
- Respect fears and give time to cope

- Expect regressive and uncharacteristic behaviors—maintain rules
- Protect from re-exposure and reminders through media
- Provide opportunities and props for play
- If kids have nightmares, explain that bad dreams aren’t real and they’ll happen less and less
Specific Coping Techniques: 6-11 Years

- Listen to and tolerate retelling of events
- Respect fears; give them time to cope
- Increase awareness and monitoring of play they may secretly reenact events with peers
- Set limits on scary or hurtful play
- Permit children to try out new ideas to deal with fearfulness at nap or bedtime to feel safe (i.e., nightlight, radio, extra reading time)
- Reassure that feelings of fear, or behaviors that feel out of control, are normal after a frightening experience
Specific Coping Techniques: 12-18 Years

• Encourage discussions about stress with each other and adults they trust
• Reassure that strong feelings—guilt, shame, embarrassment, desire for revenge—are normal
• Provide opportunities to spend time with supportive friends and peers
• Help find activities that offer opportunities to experience mastery, control, self-esteem, and pleasure (i.e., sports, art, acting, etc.)
Resources for Military Kids Going Through a Deployment of a Loved One
Operation: Military Kids

A collaborative effort with America’s communities to support “suddenly military kids” impacted by the Overseas Contingency Operations

• OMK State Teams operate in 49 States and the District of Columbia

• Networks of people, organizations, and other resources support “military families in our own backyard”

• Core Program Elements include:
  ✓ Ready, Set, Go! Training for OMK State Teams
  ✓ Mobile Technology Labs
  ✓ Hero Packs
  ✓ Speak Out for Military Kids

WWW.OPERATIONMILITARYKIDS.ORG
Tough Topics Series
Supporting Military Kids During Deployment

When military parents are mobilized, their kids are in need of and deserve special support from local schools and communities. During the emotional cycle of deployment, their lives are literally turned upside down! A significant portion of stability in their family system has temporarily been disrupted resulting in increased levels of stress and potential separation anxiety.

As a result, these military kids are in need of heightened understanding and support from professionals in local school buildings where they spend a large portion of their day. To help educators more thoroughly understand their experience, the 5 stages of deployment are described below:

**Stage 1:**
**Pre-Deployment** – Begins with the warning order to soldier for deployment from home through their actual departure.
- Anticipation of loss vs. denial
- Train up and long hours away
- Getting affairs in order
- Mental/physical dissonance
- Tension builds

**Stage 5:**
**Post-Deployment** – Begins with the arrival of the soldier back home and typically lasts 3-6 months (or more) after return.
- Soldier re-integrating into family
- Family “honeymoon” period
- Independence developed in sustainment stage redefined
- Need for “own” space
- Renegotiating routines

**Stage 3:**
**Sustainment** – Lasts from first month through the end of deployment.
- New family routines established
- New sources of support developed
- Feel more in control of day to day life
- Sense of independence
- Family Confidence—“We can do this”

**Stage 4:**
**Re-Deployment** – Defined as the month before the soldier is scheduled to return home.
- Anticipation of homecoming
- Excitement
- Apprehension
- Burst of energy/“nesting”
- Difficulty making decisions

**Stage 2:**
**Deployment** – Period immediately following soldier’s departure from home through first month of deployment.
- Mixed emotions/relief
- Disoriented/overwhelmed
- Family numb, sad, alone
- Sleep difficulties
- Security and safety issues
Tough Topics – Homecoming & Reunion

Military Kids, Homecoming & Reunion

Homecomings and reunions are the last stage in the deployment process and is a time of celebration as well as change. Military family members, particularly kids, experience a wide variety of feelings before, during, and after being reunited. All of these feelings are perfectly healthy and normal given the fact they have been separated for several months and have adapted to life without one another. In fact, there are three stages military families experience as a result of the reunion experience and these are as follows: anticipation, readjustment, and stabilization.

Anticipation:
The weeks and days before homecoming and reunion are filled with excitement, nervousness, tension, and relief. During deployment family members have learned to adjust to the absence of the soldier/loved one in day-to-day activities. Reuniting again simultaneously brings both joy and anxiety because daily life as a military family is about to change again.

Readjustment:
As anticipation of the homecoming and reunion fades, and the family is reunited once again, daily roles, responsibilities, and rules are renegotiated. Experts have identified two time periods specific to this sometimes challenging stage:

- Honeymoon (Usually until the first serious disagreement)
  - Feelings of euphoria, relief
  - Blurr of excitement
  - Catching up and sharing experiences
  - Beginning to readjust to intimacy

- Readjustment (Approximately 6-8 weeks)
  - Pressures of daily life intensify
  - Sensitivity to soldiers/loved ones presence
  - Increased tension as daily relationships confront reality

Stabilization:
The amount of time it takes families to stabilize during homecoming and reunion varies. Many of them encounter only minor difficulties in adjusting to new routines. For others, however, readjustment may be a longer process that requires additional support. Seeking assistance, if needed, is critical to helping all families navigate homecoming and reunion in a healthy and positive manner.
Helping Kids Cope with Stress

While some stress in life is normal and even healthy, kids today seem to be confronted with a myriad of experiences that can create tension and make coping with life a challenge. Common examples of these stressors include: lack of basic needs (food, clothing, and shelter), divorce, death, illness, incarceration, foster care placement, family substance abuse, domestic violence, extended separation from a parent or loved one, or physical, sexual, emotional abuse.

**Signs of Stress**

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<thead>
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<th>Infants to 5 years</th>
<th>6-11 Years</th>
<th>12-18 Years</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Behaviors</strong></td>
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<td>disturbances; nightmares</td>
<td>change/loss</td>
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**Helping Kids Cope with Stress**

- At the ordinary end of the spectrum are events which occur to most children in our society and for whom there are fairly well-defined coping patterns.
- A short distance along the spectrum are the stresses which occur when children have only one parent in the home or when they live in multiple-parent, multiple dwelling households.
- Toward the severe end of the spectrum are stresses caused by extended separation of children from their parents or siblings.
- At the severe end of the spectrum are those stresses that are long lasting and require kids to make major behavioral, emotional, and/or personality adaptations in order to survive.

**Signs of Stress**

1. **Fears**
   - Fearfulness; uncharacteristic crying; neediness; generalized fear; heightened arousal and confusion

2. **Reactions**
   - Helplessness; passivity; avoidance of stress related reminders; exaggerated startle response; regressive symptoms; somatic symptoms; sleep disturbances; nightmares

3. **Communications**
   - Cognitive confusion; difficulty talking about stressors; lack of verbalization; trouble identifying feelings; unable to understand events; anxieties about change/loss

**Helping Kids Cope with Stress**

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Military OneSource

Military OneSource is provided by the Department of Defense at no cost to active duty, Guard and Reserve (regardless of activation status) and their families. It is a virtual extension of installation services. Visit Military OneSource today at www.militaryonesource.com or call 1-800-342-9647

Available 24/7
Child, Adolescent & Family Behavioral Health Proponency (CAF-BHP)

• Promote coordination and integration of Child and Family programs at the Army and installation levels
• Develop and provide behavioral health models for schools and civilian communities that promote prevention, early detection, and delivery of care (School Behavioral Health Programs, Child & Family Assistance Centers)
• Serve as a repository of knowledge and clearinghouse for state-of-the-art and evidence-based behavioral health care for Army Children and Families
• Centralize and standardize data collection for needs identification, outcome measurement, and performance improvement
• For more information call (253) 986-4745
Speak Out Military Kids
Video
“Leonard Family”
Questions?

Thank you! 😊