

Coping With Separation and Deployment: How Health Care Professionals Can Support Families With Young Children

Deployment can be a very stressful experience for military families. Parents of young children have to take care of their little ones and all of their physical and emotional needs while they too are going through a time of significant change and loss. Although babies and toddlers cannot tell us how they feel in words, they are deeply affected by their experiences, especially their interactions with those closest to them. Deployment means that a very important person in a child's life is gone, and maybe for a long time. Although each child will respond in his or her own way, depending on age, personality, and support received, young children do experience the loss and mourn.

Given the limited time you have to spend with families during routine encounters, we have developed a resource—*Coping With Separation and Deployment: Taking Care of Yourself and Your Baby*—to help you support families who are going through this difficult experience. This handout contains some very important information about how parents and young children may be affected and what they might be experiencing during this stressful time. It was designed not just as a resource to give parents at the end of a visit, but also as an interactive tool to use during your time together.

Strategies for Supporting Families During Everyday Encounters

The following algorithms provide an approach for addressing some important issues for parents as they arise during your visit. Clearly, it will not be possible to cover all of this information in any one session. Choose which areas to focus on, depending on how much time you have and which issues are most relevant to the family during that particular visit.

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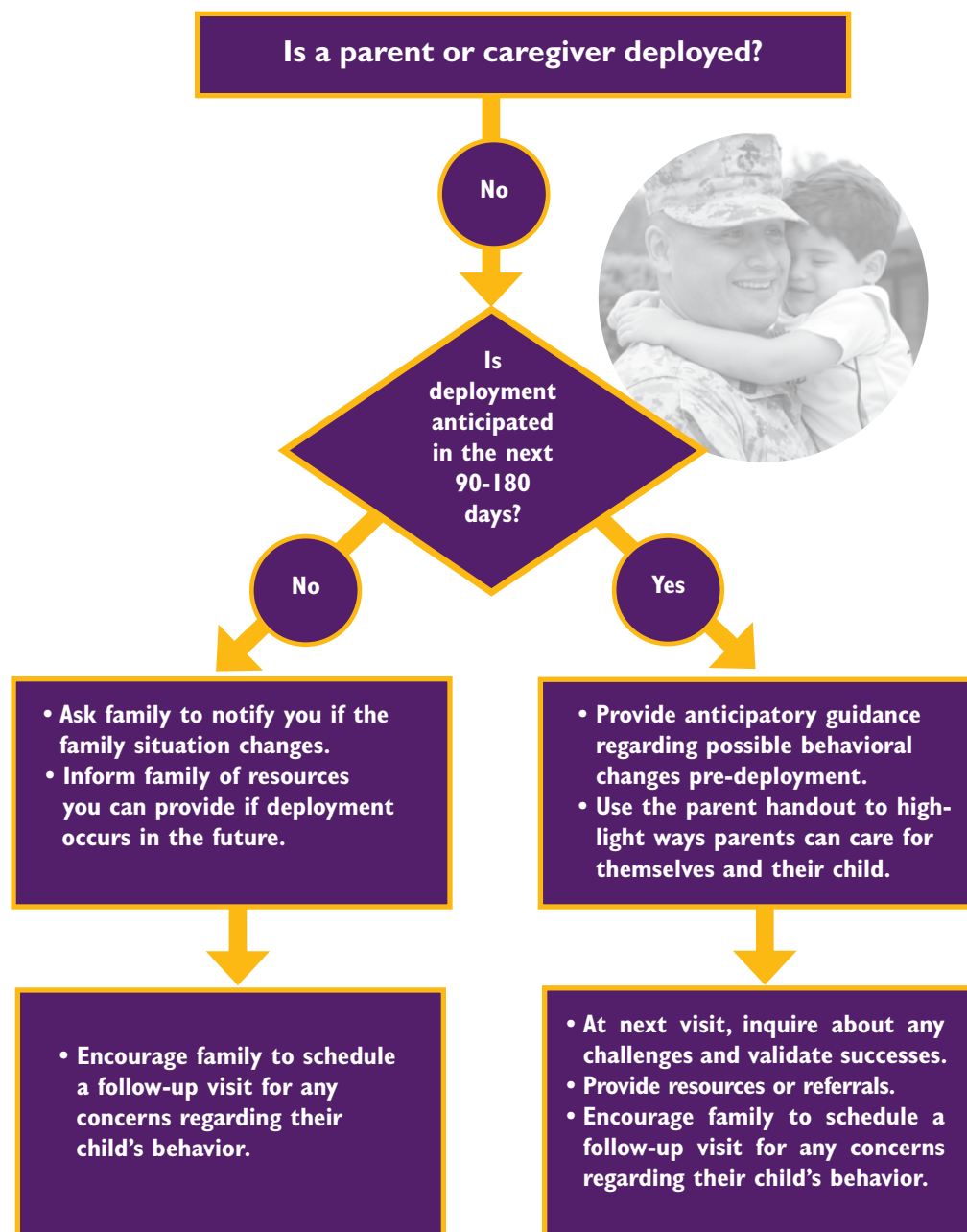
Writers: Claire Lerner, Michele Mitchell

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National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families



ASSESSING FAMILY SUPPORT NEEDS DURING DEPLOYMENT



Is a parent or caregiver deployed?

Yes

Does the family have a strong support network?

No

Make referral to installation or community organizations. (See Resource Section)

- Highlight the *Everyday Ways You Support Your Child* and Resources sections in the parent deployment handout.
- Convey the importance of parental self-care.
- Encourage family to notify their child's caregivers of the deployment.

Yes

Has the family noted changes in their child's behavior during this deployment?

No

- Encourage parents to engage in self-care activities.
- Highlight the *Everyday Ways You Support Your Child* and Resources sections in the parent deployment handout.
- Remind parents of the importance of routine health maintenance/immunizations and well-child visits.

At next visit, inquire about any challenges and validate successes. Provide resources or referrals.

Yes

Are there any associated developmental delays identified?

No

- Reassure parents that they are not alone and validate their concerns.
- Use the *Behavior Has Meaning* section in the parent materials to normalize the child's behavior and offer suggestions for ways to support the young child.
- Provide appropriate community resources.
- Convey the importance of parental self-care.
- Remind parents of the importance of routine health maintenance/immunizations and well-child visits.

Yes

- Proceed with appropriate workup of development concerns.
- Convey the importance of parental self-care.
- Remind parents of the importance of routine health maintenance/immunizations and well-child visits.