

When I ...	I may be saying ...	How you can support me ...
Hit or bite you— or another child	I can get overwhelmed by all of the strong feelings inside that I can't tell you about yet with words. I will need lots of help and time to learn self-control.	Stop me gently but firmly. Tell me that it's not okay to hit or bite. Never bite me back. Name my feelings and show me what I <i>can</i> do when I get angry or frustrated.
Go back to earlier behaviors like crying for my bottle, sucking my thumb, or wetting my pants	These changes in our family are hard for me. I need extra support and attention to feel safe and secure.	Be patient with me. With your understanding and nurturing, I will start to feel better. If my behavior starts to worry you, talk it over with a professional you trust.
Insist on listening to the tape we made of Mommy reading me a story, then don't want to the next day	Sometimes I don't want to think about the parent I'm missing because it hurts too much. Sometimes I just have other things to think about and do!	Read my signals and follow my lead. That's the best way to make me feel secure.
Giggle, laugh, play like always	There's so much for me to see and do and learn and enjoy.	Spend time with me. Play with me. Enjoy our time together.

Everyday Ways You Support Your Child

The chart below can help you see how you are sensitive to and nurture your child as you go about your daily routines together.

When you ...	You help me ...
Maintain a regular routine	Feel safe and secure.
Stay patient and calm when I am upset and clingy	Regain control and feel safe.
Give me some extra hugs and cuddles	Feel reassured that I am loved and safe. We'll both feel better.
Tell me what is happening in simple words	Understand the big changes in our life.
Play peek-a-boo with me	Learn that people disappear and then come back again.
Express your feelings in positive ways (e.g., "I'm feeling sad about Mommy leaving soon. How are you feeling? What do you think you and I can do to make ourselves feel better?")	Know it is okay to feel sad, upset, angry, or all of these.

When you ...	You help me ...
Give me dolls, puppets, and dress-ups, and play pretend with me Give me play dough to roll and pound, and crayons and markers to draw with	Express my feelings through my play.
Give me words for what I am feeling and set clear limits (e.g., "I know you are angry that Daddy is leaving. It's okay to feel mad and sad, but it's not okay to throw your toy at me. Let's take a break and take a walk together.")	Feel understood. Know my feelings are okay. Learn to manage my feelings. Know I can depend on you when I am feeling out of control.
Ask family and friends not to discuss scary events around me	To not be overwhelmed and upset by things I cannot understand.
Turn off the TV news	Be protected from information and pictures of things I don't understand that can be very scary. And when the TV is off, you have more time to pay attention to me. Let's play! (You can always watch when I go to bed if it helps you feel better.)

Local Resources

Florida BrAlve Helpline

877-BRAIVE-8 is a statewide support network with trained specialists available 24/7 to connect military families to community agencies.

National Resources

MilitaryHOMEFRONT

www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil is the official Department of Defense website for reliable quality-of-life information designed to help troops and their families, leaders, and service providers.

Military OneSource

www.militaryonesource.com is available 24/7 to connect families with services including free counseling services in person, by phone, and online. Or call 800-342-9647.

ZERO TO THREE

ZERO TO THREE's mission is to promote the health and development of infants and toddlers. The military webpage supports military professionals and parents with postings of monthly articles, information, and events at www.zerotothree.org/military

Sources

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Writer: Claire Lerner

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National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families

Taking care of yourself and your baby



Coping With Separation and Deployment: Taking Care of Yourself and Your Baby

Deployment can be a very stressful experience, both for you and your child. You have to take care of your little one and all of his physical and emotional needs while you are going through a time of significant change and loss. It is important that you take care of yourself, too, throughout your family's deployment experience.

Although babies and toddlers cannot tell us how they feel in words, they are deeply affected by their experiences, especially changes in relationships with those closest to them. Deployment means that a very important person in your child's life is gone, perhaps for a long time. Although children will respond in their own way, depending on age and temperament, they experience the loss and do mourn. Their feelings are expressed through their common behavior:

Behaviors You Might See in Your Baby or Toddler During Pre-Deployment and Deployment

- Increased clinginess, crying, whining
- Greater fear of separation from you
- Withdrawal and difficulty engaging in activities she usually finds pleasurable
- Changes in sleeping and eating patterns
- More irritable and difficulty in being comforted
- A return to earlier behaviors, such as middle-of-the-night awakening

Babies Are Watching

Keep in mind that babies pick up on and react to the feelings and actions of their caregivers. They know

when a parent is sad, afraid, or mad. They feel the loss of playful interaction; they sense when caregivers are less responsive to their needs for love and comfort; and they hear the anxiety in a stressed parent's voice and see the tension and sadness in their facial expressions. It's okay for your child to know when you're upset. But how you manage your feelings can make a big difference in how your child reacts. In order to take good care of your baby, you need to take good care of yourself by being aware of and attending to your own feelings and needs. This will make you better able to tune in to your baby's signals and needs, and to provide the love and sense of security he needs at this time.

What You Can Do to Take Care of Yourself and Your Baby

For You:

- **Be aware of, accept, and talk about your feelings with trusted friends and family.** It's normal to have mixed feelings. You might be anxious and sad, but also angry. It is easier to separate from a loved one when angry versus feeling the pain of loss.
- **Ask for help.** Getting support from someone allows you to do things that nurture you (perhaps taking a walk, meeting a friend for coffee, or reading a good book). Counseling services, playgroups, spiritual organizations, parenting education services, and child care agencies are often readily available to military families, both on and off the installation. Contact your installation Family Center or Military OneSource at 800-342-9647 for support and referral.

For Your Little One:

- **Offer your baby extra hugs, kisses, and cuddles.** These demonstrations of love will help you both feel better!
- **Stick to your daily routines as much as possible.** Knowing what to expect helps young children feel in control and safe.
- **Expect changes in eating and sleeping patterns.** Once your baby sees that her world is still safe and secure even though Mom or Dad is away, her sleeping and eating will likely become more regular again.
- **Create a hello and good-bye ritual for when you have to separate from your child.** You might give her a kiss on both of her cheeks, chin, and forehead. These kinds of rituals can help ease separations. When you return, remind your baby, "Mommy (or Daddy) came back."
- **Hang photos of the deployed parent on the wall**

or refrigerator—at a level your child can see.

Laminate a photo she can carry around, kiss, or talk to every day. Your child might even get a "kiss" from her deployed parent every night by grabbing a chocolate kiss out of a big bowl. These kinds of experiences can become their own comforting routines and rituals.

- **Keep other important adults, such as child care providers and pediatricians, informed of the deployment.** These outside resources can be a tremendous source of support for you and your child. For example, a child care provider might hang a



photo of the deployed parent in the center for your child to see throughout the day. Or, the provider might be more sensitive to changes in your child's mood and provide greater support.

For the Family:

- **Include a special blanket or stuffed animal (a "lovey") in all of your baby's interactions with the active duty parent prior to deployment—**during cuddle time, reading, singing, and playing together. This lovey then becomes associated with the deployed parent and is a source of love and comfort in his parent's absence. You can also give your child a T-shirt or cap that the Service member regularly wears and that carries his or her smell.
- **Have the active duty parent make an audio- or videotape of him- or herself reading books and/or singing songs.** The tape can be played daily, even becoming a part of the bedtime routine.
- **Keep reminders of the deployed parent around.** Keep Mom's jacket hanging on the hook by the door. Keep family photos out. Sing the same lullaby that Daddy sang.
- **Create a daily ritual to celebrate the deployed parent.** You might say good night and kiss a photo of your Service member at bedtime.
- **Take photos of family members doing everyday things together.** Hang these photos at child height on the wall in the kitchen, bedroom—even in the bathroom.
- **Make a message box.** Before deployment, have the parent who is being deployed fill it with short messages to your child. A toddler can choose one out of the box when he is missing his Mom or Dad.

Behavior Has Meaning

The chart below can help you "decode" and respond sensitively to your child's behavior.

Before Deployment

When I . . .	I may be saying . . .	How you can support me . . .
Look sad, withdraw, become more clingy than usual, or revert to old behaviors such as waking up in the middle of the night	I feel tension. Something is going on.	Offer me simple, clear words for what is happening: "We are getting Daddy ready to go to Afghanistan." Make sure we spend lots of family time together.
Watch you pack or ask where Mommy is going	I'm trying to understand what's going on and to feel a little in control of my life.	Invite me to help like putting Mommy's toothbrush in her bag or drawing a picture for her to take.

During Deployment

When I . . .	I may be saying . . .	How you can support me . . .
Look sad or withdraw	I miss Mommy. It's hard dealing with all of these changes.	Offer me simple, clear words for what I may be feeling: "You look sad. Are you missing Mommy?" Turn off the TV news. Ask people not to talk about the war and other scary things around me. If you are concerned about my behavior, talk to my doctor or another professional you trust.
Do things that you don't understand, such as pushing you away and then crying for you	I miss my parent who is away, and I worry that you will leave me, too.	Be patient with me. Even when I push you away, I really need your love. Tell me stories of things I used to do with my deployed parent. Show me photos of us together.
Cling, kick, or scream when you [the at-home parent] say good-bye—even if it's only for an hour and I'm with someone I like and trust	I need you. I depend on you. I'm afraid you are going to disappear too.	Tell me when you are going away. I may cry, but if you leave without saying good-bye, then I worry that you may disappear at any time and lose the trust in you that I need so badly. Give me a reminder of you to hold—a photo of us, your T-shirt or cap, a note.