



DON'T SPARE ME!

Help Your Child Understand that You Want to Be There When They Need You, Even if You are Busy or Stressed

Children know when their parents are stressed. They often believe that they are responsible for that stress, and the thought of being a source of worry or unhappiness can become overwhelming for them. They sometimes believe their parents would be happier if only they were “good little boys and girls.” Sometimes they work so hard to be “perfect” that they keep their feelings inside. Rather than admit to an already stretched parent that they are worried, they may choose not to get guidance precisely when they really need it.

Being a parent is tough and it becomes even tougher if you are deployed or if you are acting as a single parent while your partner is deployed. Despite how busy you are and how stressful things can get, it is critical that you communicate to your child that she is your TOP priority, no matter what else is going on in your life. Stay involved in your child's everyday life and remind her that you are always there to listen and talk about her feelings.



- **MAKE SURE YOUR CHILD DOESN'T BLAME HERSELF FOR YOUR STRESS**

- > Help your child understand that you alone are responsible for how you feel or cope with stress.
- > During deployment teens notice and often feel responsible for the well-being of the at-home parent.

- **HELP YOUR CHILD UNDERSTAND THAT SHE IS A SOURCE OF JOY**

- > Catch her being good.
- > Give lots of positive attention.
- > Laugh with her.
- > Let her know that when you help her through a challenge, it actually makes you feel better. It reminds you of how important she is in your life.

- **THERE IS ALWAYS TIME FOR YOUR CHILD**

- > Even when you are busy, try to find a few minutes to talk, like during your drive to school or while you are having dinner together.

- **TELL YOUR CHILD THAT SHE IS YOUR NUMBER ONE PRIORITY**

- > Let your child know that you care about her, even though you may be going through a tough time.
 - You might say, *“I know you want to protect me from more worries and I appreciate how much you care about me. But the one thing I want to do right now more than anything is to be your Mom/Dad. Please let me to do that, I want to always be there for you.”*
- > Constantly remind your child that she can always come to you to talk about anything, even during deployment or other times of stress.
- > Try to stay involved in your child's everyday life.

- **TELL YOUR CHILD THAT SHE DOES NOT SPARE YOU WHEN SHE KEEPS HER FEELINGS INSIDE**
 - > **Consider saying,** *“I can tell that you are trying to protect me. I love you so much and really appreciate how much you care about me. You are right that I have a lot going on right now, but always know that being your mother is the most important thing to me. And, I think I can still do it well. When you hold your feelings inside or choose not to tell me what is going on in your life, you actually don’t spare me. Please let me do my job by being a good parent to you. I want to guide you and to protect you. That is what will make me happy.”*
- **REMEMBER THAT ONE OF THE BEST THINGS YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR CHILD’S WELL BEING IS TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF! SHE WILL FEEL BETTER WHEN SHE KNOWS THAT YOU ARE OKAY.***
 - > Make time for exercise, eat healthy, and get sleep.
 - > Allow yourself to take a break.
 - > Find ways to help yourself relax, like taking a long walk or hot shower, meditating, or practicing deep breathing.
 - > Get some support! Talk or email friends and family members. Join a support group or reach out for professional guidance. When your child sees that you are getting support, she might feel less responsible to be the one to protect you.

Take the time to explain to your child that, although you have a lot on your plate, your most important job will always be to parent her.

SOURCES:

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Time to Talk (www.Timetotalk.org)

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