



STAYING CONNECTED

...during the Toddler Years

Your infant or toddler does not understand the idea of time, but does experience loss during separation. Concrete and consistent reminders of the deployed parent and maintenance of daily routines can reassure your child and help him feel secure and connected to the deployed parent.

● BEFORE DEPLOYMENT

- > **Create audio or video recordings** of the soon-to-be deployed parent to be used during everyday routines, like reading a bedtime story.
- > **Take photos of the soon-to-be deployed parent with his children** and post them in places visible to each child.
- > **Create a “hug-me” pillow or blanket** with an old t-shirt that has the deployed parent’s scent on it.
- > **Create a shared daily event** like saying goodnight to the moon at the same time each night.



● DURING DEPLOYMENT

- > **The home-based parent should talk about the deployed parent every day but be careful about when the child might want to hear about Daddy.** Missing someone is a sad feeling, and not all kids want to be reminded to miss their parent and think happy thoughts on your cue.
 - Be sensitive to when your child might want to sing Daddy’s favorite lullaby/song or say Daddy over and over.
- > **Now that you have that shared daily event, remember to use it.**
 - “Daddy is not with us here, but he is saying goodnight to the moon (or saying his evening prayers) just like you are!”
- > **Play some of those recordings.** Even young toddlers will love having a book read to them both by their parent who is home and the parent “who wishes they could be home with you.”
- > **A child can never hear “Your Mommy/Daddy loves you and misses you” too often.**
- > **Create a “Flat Daddy or Mommy” and take photos with it at events.** Send these to the deployed parent to show how his presence remains in home family life.
- > **The deployed parent can send photos of his quarters** to provide the child with an understanding of where Daddy sleeps, eats or exercises. You might even make it into a storybook.

- > **Prepare scrapbooks and fill them with photos and drawings to share with the deployed parent when she returns.**
- > **Babies change every week.** Consider making one of those photo albums where you take a picture of your infant or toddler in the same place every week. It will allow the deployed parent to see all of those wonderful changes step-by-step.
- > **Participate in “shared activities” like tracing hands or sending a drawing for the child to color in.**
- > **Technology such as Skype is a wonderful way to stay connected,** but it can also expose an infant or toddler to scary sights and sounds.
 - Try to make calls from a quiet place and keep weapons out of view. Also be careful that photos don't have anything in them that an infant or toddler might consider scary.

Always remember that even the youngest children draw their sense of security from their parents. They sense whether or not their parents are okay. So never forget that the greatest gift you can give your child is to take care of yourself.

Young children often need to be reminded that their deployed parent loves them and is thinking about them while they are away. To help relieve the loss that separation can bring, take the time before deployment to create reminders like recordings, letters or photos that can be used every day. Remember to also send continuous reminders to the deployed parent to help him feel present, connected and loved!



● **FREE RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO HELP ENHANCE CONNECTION**

- > For free templates of cards and postcards: www.deploymentkids.com
 - > For more information on creating care packages: www.operationmilitarypride.com or www.ansoldier.com
 - > To set up a community support group for your soldier's unit: www.adoptaplatoon.com
 - > Create a read-aloud videotape for your child: www.unitedthroughreading.org/military
 - > For colorable greeting cards for children of all ages: <http://www.showtroopsupport.org>
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- > Share experiences, post pictures and videos, write blogs, and create discussion boards in a secure online community for military families: <https://apps.mhf.dod.mil/homefrontconnections/hfc.html>
 - > For a training on communication: <http://www.focusproject.org/resources>
 - > For information on creating “Flat Daddies/Mommies”: <http://flatdaddies.com>

Thank YOU

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SOURCES:

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