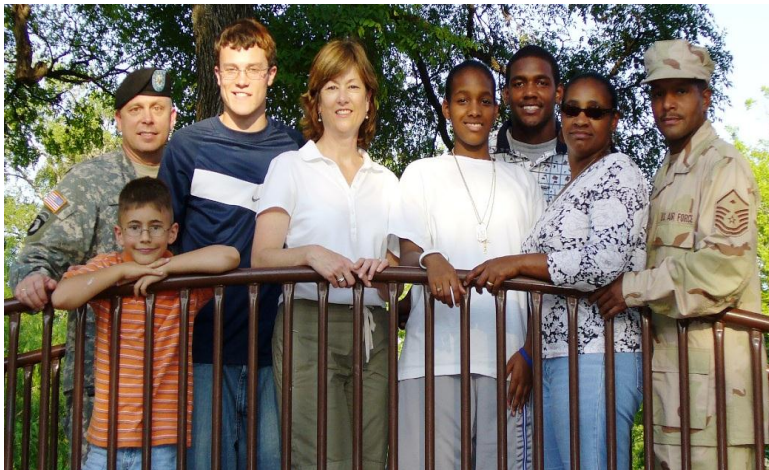


## FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

### Military Youth Coping with Separation: When Family Members Deploy



Congratulations. You have in your hands a video education and support program designed to help military youth cope with the stress that can be created by military family separations. This video was developed by a group of concerned military professionals and family members who want to help families get through the challenges of separation successfully. While there are many educational and support tools available for spouses and children, there are very few made specifically for teenagers and young adults. The goal of this program is to empower family members, family readiness coordinators, and concerned community members with a youth friendly tool to help young people understand and cope with the emotions and stresses related to family separations and reunions after deployments. The video program is made up of interviews with military youth and commentary by a seasoned teen who successfully navigated deployment separation with his family.

The interviewer's questions and narrator's script were carefully constructed to be sure the content addressed real youth issues commonly experienced while undergoing separation from close family members. Participants were drawn from a variety of locations and represent a diverse population of regular youth experiencing different stages of deployment. This video provides a look at how teens, their families, and community support personnel interact during the deployment cycle. Military youth speak out and share their worries, fears, and concerns surrounding impending or actual separation from loved ones (parents, grandparents, sisters, brothers, guardians, etc.). The video program can be used before, during, or after deployment to stimulate discussion and promote healthy coping behaviors.

Whether you are using this video in your home, or as part of a community deployment support program, we suggest that you follow these guidelines:

1. Review the video before using it. It was developed and funded with a grant from the American Academy of Pediatrics Friends of Children Fund and enhanced with funding from the Office of the Army Surgeon General. Some discussions include references to possible family member injury and responses to news events. Be prepared to further address your group's concerns for safety and wellbeing of their deployed family member. Important preparation for watching the video should include becoming familiar with your community support resources (community service providers, doctors, counselors, chaplains) if further support is needed in addition to the video resources.
2. Assess your group, their environment, and the phase of deployment they are currently in (see the "Deployment Cycle" handout). This may influence which section(s) of the video you decide to emphasize or discuss in more detail at this time.
3. The DVD can be viewed from beginning to end with follow-up discussion at a later date or by pausing as needed after each of the sections to allow for pertinent questions and discussion.
4. Example discussion questions have been provided for each of the sections to assist you in facilitating discussion.
5. Consider visiting the Military Youth Deployment Support Web Site at [www.aap.org/sections/unifserv/deployment/index.htm](http://www.aap.org/sections/unifserv/deployment/index.htm) for further information and materials that compliment this video program.

## **SECTION CONTENT/ CONCEPT& DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**INTRODUCTION :** The video opens with photographs of personnel from the various services hard at work in service to the nation. It has clips of young people making short comments about their deployment experience. There is also a brief introduction by Dr. Keith Lemmon – a military pediatrician and adolescent medicine specialist who has recently experienced deployment and its effects on family personally.

### **SECTION 1 – Deployment Concerns**

Family relationships can be strained by deployments. While adults may often be able to handle the changes and make necessary adaptations, youth may have a more challenging time dealing with the changes on their own. They are aware that things are different; that their world has changed (or is changing), but not always sure why, or if they are alone in feeling the way they do. Since the normal cycle of deployment finds loved ones pushing each other away to make the separation easier to handle, teens may harbor feelings that they were the cause of negative interactions just before the deployment which is usually not the case. The participants discuss how they feel about the separation from their family member. This section deals with the questioning phase and ways families can begin to anticipate their teenager’s response to separation.

### **SECTION 2 – Difficulties With Deployment**

Ask questions dealing with how the participants felt or are feeling about the deployment of their family member. How did they handle getting ready for the separation and how are they handling it now? This would be a good time to discuss the normal reactions of people going through the early phases of deployment separation.

#### **Example questions:**

1. Has your personal and family experience been the same as the teens in the video?  
How has your life (how have you) changed?
2. How has your experience been different from the youth in the video?
3. What emotions and feelings do you have related to deployment?  
Why do you think you feel the way you do?
4. What things did you do get ready for your family member to go away?  
What have you done since they left? How has your routine changed?
5. Did anyone in your family have fights or get angry with one another before your family member deployed?
6. Anyone have an experience like Tyler, with school work slipping?

### **SECTION 3 - Worry**

While many teens have been separated from their family member before for military duties, each time is different. Deployments including combat with inherent danger for real injury, or even death may cause particularly significant worry. People tend to avoid talking about these fears, but if injury is a real possibility, it is especially important to discuss this issue openly and honestly. Young people need to be reminded that it’s normal to worry, but also that the vast majority of their family members will return home safely. After all, their family is a part of the best military in the world and they take special care to diligently watch out for each other. It is

important to recognize the fears and to address them realistically, but not to obsess over them. One of the best way to decrease worry is to talk out the concerning feelings with someone the teen trusts.

**Example questions:**

1. Do you worry about the same things as the kids in the video? Does it make a difference where your family member is located?
2. How do you deal with your fears? Why do you think you feel the way you do?
3. Does your family member have a way to let you know they are safe?
4. Do you worry so much that it interferes with your daily activities?
5. How does your deployed family member handle their worry? How do your remaining family members handle their worry? How do you support them?
6. Is your worry a daily event? Do you have good and bad days?

**SECTION 4 – Watching the News**

Most young people find that watching news coverage of the war can worsen stress and worry. Many feel that only the negative parts seem to be shown. Positive stories rarely make the news. It is best to look for the positive in what’s being shown, and focus on what your deployed family member is relaying back home. It is important to realize that the media tend to report on catastrophic events over and over again throughout the day and even longer. Helping young people understand that most dangerous events that are reported are not as frequent or as severe as they appear in the news is very important. The remaining adult family member often takes on the role of monitoring news reports and passes on to the teenager the information that they feel is appropriate.

**Example questions:**

1. Do you watch the news on TV or listen to the radio?
2. Which media do you believe? Who can you believe?
3. How does your family handle the media information?

**SECTION 5 – Coping**

Coping is what people do to feel better when they are faced with stress, feel bad, or have confusing feelings that they don’t understand. There are many different ways to cope with challenges. Some coping mechanisms are healthy and helpful but others can worsen stress and lead to bad feelings. It’s important to learn healthy ways to cope. Being constantly angry is usually not helpful. Engaging in activities outside the home and taking up new hobbies can help relieve stress. Exercising frequently, eating well, and getting plenty of sleep are some of the most important coping mechanisms around. Just hanging out with friends can be a good coping method as well. Another very important coping mechanism is to talk to others about worrisome or stressful feelings, especially talking with others who have been through or know about similar challenges such as deployment. .

**Example questions:**

1. What are some healthy coping mechanisms you are using?
2. What are some unhealthy methods you have used or seen others use?
3. How are you coping?
4. Is communicating with your deployed family member a good thing to do?
5. Who do you talk to? How do you communicate with them?
6. Do you plan for the future or just live for today?

7. Is it good to keep just a few friends, or make new ones during deployment?

## **SECTION 6 – Support**

Young people need to remember that they are not alone during the deployment experience and that it's ok to let a trusted adult know when they're feeling bad. The military and their community is very concerned about them and their family during the trying times of deployment and separation. They have many ways to reach out to you and your family. Remember that asking for help is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of strength.

### **Example questions:**

1. Does your school know that you have a deployed family member?
2. How has your school helped you out?
3. Does your doctor or faith leader know that you have a deployed family member?
4. Have you found a chaplain helpful? A doctor?
5. Do you prefer to discuss your feelings as a family or individually?
6. How would you find someone to talk to? How often do you feel you should discuss your feelings related to deployment? Is it easy for you to talk about deployment, separation, and the things you worry about?
7. How can you support someone else? Is it possible to help someone too much?
8. What are some ways you can support your family members remaining at home?

## **SECTION 7– Personal Growth**

Routines are certain to change once family members leaves, but not all change is bad. When you're tested, it's often surprising how much you can learn and do on your own. Everyone handles less supervision differently. Some like it, while others don't. Sometimes young people must act almost like a second parent during family deployment. Extra responsibility handled well can lead to more independence, like getting the car keys, which can be a good thing.

### **Example questions:**

1. Who is usually the dominant or leading parent in your house when there is no deployment? How about during deployment? Who will be "in charge" when your deployed family member gets back?
2. Have you had to take care of a younger brother or sister during a deployment? Has your relationship with them changed– is it better or worse?
3. Have you had to move during deployment separation?
4. Have you been able to "get away with" things during this time you couldn't before? Will that stay the same, do you think?
5. Will things go back to the way they were before at your house when your family member returns?
6. Have you noticed any growth in your remaining family members during or after a deployment separation?

## **SECTION 8 – Warning Signs**

Teens, like adults, can experience extremes of stress at times. Having a family member gone for an extended time can definitely bring out that extreme stress. It is very important to learn to recognize the signs of stress and overload. It is also critical to begin to develop the skills to help minimize and cope with stress. And, most importantly, that there is someone you can turn to and count on when things seem to be getting out of control.

**Example questions:**

1. What are some of the warning signs you might show if stress gets to be too much for you?
2. Are you experiencing problems with school work?
3. Are you failing to attend school?
4. Are you tired or sick a lot?
5. Are you worrying so much about your deployed family member that it is impacting your ability to accomplish day to day functions?
6. Do you have someone you talk to that you trust? Who is it? Who else might you turn to if you felt like things were getting out of control?

**SECTION 9 – Wrap-Up**

Hopefully, you found a few young people in the video that you could relate to. All of these teens have experienced deployment separation in one way or another. Everyone handles the deployment experience differently. It may be a difficult experience, but most families will make it through successfully and see much growth in the family as a result. However, if the feelings you are having don't feel "normal," you should consider seeking guidance from your family, a counselor, your doctor, or a faith leader. You can also utilize the Interactive Military Youth Stress Management Plan included as one of the resources in this video program.

**Example wrap-up questions:**

1. So how is your family doing? How are you doing?
2. How do you know if someone has excessive stress or depression? Would you recognize if a friend was experiencing excessive stress? How about a returning family member?
3. What's the "honeymoon period?"
4. What are your expectations for how it'll be when your deployed family member gets back?
5. How will you balance time alone and/or together when your deployed family member returns?
6. How have things changed around your house? How have they remained the same? What things will go back to the way they were before? What things would you like to remain changed?
7. Were there any things causing problems before your family member left that you'll want to talk about when they get back?
8. What's the first thing you're going to do with them when they return?
9. How long do you think it'll be before things get "back to normal" for you? Will there be a re-shifting of responsibility and authority at your house?
10. How have you matured? Will you regress for a time and just "be a kid again" when your family member returns?