

Social Narrative For Family Separation

Cause of Separation



"My mom is being deployed."

Mom is Being Deployed: Learning Coping Strategies for a Lengthy Absence



The deployment. This honorable career separates families for extended periods of time. Unless you have personally experienced this type of separation, it may require the teacher, therapist, or even the parent “left behind”, to provide support, comfort, and a special understanding.

The child may feel lonely, even though they are not alone. **As the teacher,** be aware of how your student is feeling. Make sure he/she knows that they are always welcome to come talk to you. Sometimes, sharing their feelings right at that moment, can ease any anxiety or sadness your student may be feeling. School is their “safe place”, where the routines and interactions with friends and adults, most often remain the same. The routine of a daily schedule is helpful in relieving a student experiencing a stressful situation.

Be sensitive to any behaviors (stimming, outbursts, pronounced sensitivity to sounds or touch) that may be out of the ordinary, or behaviors that had decreased, to reappear. If the child acts out, seek advice from the counselor in your school. If counseling is not already a service on the student’s IEP, then speak with the parent

and meet as a group to decide if speaking to a school-based therapist might help the student. Many times, therapists are trained in strategies to help a child cope with families who have had a parent deployed.

When a child is unable to express who he feels due to developing communication skills, as with all areas of this child's life, the lack of being able to communicate becomes a barrier to "talk out" feelings. Make sure that communication devices are set up to include pictures and symbols to make it easier for the child to let you know what he or she is feeling, or what may be needed to make them feel better.

Family members may notice an increase in behaviors, sadness, or noncompliance at home, too. Keeping routine and structure at home is just as important as it is in school. Try and stick to the same schedule and do things nearly the same as before the parent was deployed. The sense of "sameness" for the child provides comfort when he or she may need it the most.

If you live near other military families, then your child may have friends who are going through the same emotions. This friendship can provide more than just a fun afternoon, rather an in-depth understanding that children experience.

Talk about the parent who has been deployed. Of course, the parent has not been forgotten, but talking about happy family outings and fun experiences can reassure the child that the parent is still there, still part of the family. The more the adult laughs and expresses pride, the more it helps the child.

There is an end in sight. The child should be told that Dad will not be away forever and that he will return home. This gives the child a positive approach to the process. Keeping a calendar may give the child a visual guide and can "X" out the days. Do not share news stories or topics about the location of deployment if the parent has gone to a location associated with risk.

Love, honor, and cherish. Wedding vows, yes, but also a good rule to remember for all of the men and women who serve in the United States military.

My Mom Is Being Deployed: Suggestions To Ease Adjusting To The Absence

When a Parent is Deployed for Military Assignment

Let's be honest – deployment is hard. For children, the idea that their parent is going to be gone can be difficult for them to understand. Despite the pride that our men and women in the armed forces feel serving their country, military families can't help but worry about how their children will manage in their absence.

How kids handle separation – and what they need from the adults who care for them while a parent is away – will vary depending on the situation. There is no easy way to tell a child that a parent has to go away. Parents however, can help smooth the transition before and after deployment which will help foster the resiliency their children need to cope.

Here are some tips to consider:

BEFORE DEPLOYMENT

Be Honest. First and foremost, be honest with your children about what is going to happen. You will need to tailor the words you use depending on the age and maturity level of your child, so give them the truth in terms that they can understand. Your child may have a lot of questions about what things will look like while you're away and they may wonder where you are going or what you will be doing. It's natural for children to worry, so reassure them and give them permission to ask questions. It also helps to be honest about your own feelings. Communicating to your child that you feel sad, worried, disappointed, or even mad lets your child know that his or her feelings are normal and that it's safe to discuss them with you. It also opens the door to a conversation about ways to cope with those tough feelings when they come up.

Explain the Plan. Who will be picking them up from school? Who will be taking them to their sporting event? Kids need to feel safe and protected and it will be important to let them know who will be helping to take care of them. Your child may ask the same questions over and over again when you have already given

them the answer. It's easy to get frustrated, but if your child seems stuck, it might be their way of showing worry about the upcoming changes.

Staying Connected. Explain to your child how you will be able to stay connected while you are away. Depending on where you will be going, it might not be easy to know ahead of time when you will be able to talk to your child. Spend time writing letters or making videos for your child to read and watch while you are away. If your child is older, you can encourage them to journal their feelings, accomplishments, and how they are doing so that you can read it when you return.

DURING DEPLOYMENT

Keep a Routine. While your old routine might not work when a parent is away, go over what the new routine will look like. Change can be scary but it's important to come up with a plan prior to deployment.

Talk to Each Other. Deployment can sometimes feel isolating. Set aside time to talk to your child and ask questions about how they are feeling. Let them know that it's okay to feel worried sometimes. Schedule "dates" with your children, where you can spend quality time with them. Let them know that you are proud of them and how well they are doing.

Talk About the Absent Parent. Whether it's looking at pictures and videos, counting down days on a calendar, making a scrapbook, or saying a prayer, encourage your child to find a way to stay connected to the parent that is away. Sometimes talking about the deployed parent might make your child – and you – sad. Let them know those feelings normal and that you miss them too. You can even talk about things you'd like to do when their parent has returned home.

AFTER DEPLOYMENT

Returning home from deployment is an exciting time. You can expect the hugs, excitement, and happy tears, but the period of adjustment that often follows returning home can catch many families by surprise. It's okay if it takes some time for families to find their balance and return to life pre-deployment.

Continue to Talk. A lot of things can change when a parent has been away – new routines, hobbies, schedules, friends. With all of the change, it's no wonder it can

take the returning parent some time to figure out how they fit into this new life. Spend time reconnecting with one another.

Be Patient. There are no expectations for life will look like when a parent has returned home. Be patient with one another as you get to know one another again.

WHAT'S NEXT...

No two kids will react to a parent's deployment in the same way. You can come up with the best plan, but that doesn't mean that things will always go smoothly. In the first few days and weeks of being apart (and then together again), things might not go as planned – but try not to get discouraged. Putting pressure on yourself or your family to act or feel a certain way will only make things harder. Having open communication, reassurance, consistency, and patience, will help your family continue to thrive despite the changes.

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This student-illustrated social story narrative (social story) about how a child may feel when a parent is being deployed on a military assignment, was created for children with autism. While it does not cover specific branches of the military, it provide the child with an outlet to talk about their parent and a method of coping.

MEET JESSICA JONES, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist on our Facebook page and let her know what topics you are interested in learning about!

This Social Narrative geared for addressing emotions and feelings about the long term absence of a parent who has been deployed to serve our country. It is intended to benefit students with autism and related learning needs as an additional coping resource. We will be bringing you NEW social narratives based upon YOUR requests! PLEASE GO TO OUR FACEBOOK PAGE AND VIEW JESSICA'S VIDEO. You may list as many topics and ideas that you feel can help you provide a smooth transition to any life changes, behavior needs in the classroom or at home, or really **any** topic that helps YOU as the teacher, or YOU as the parent.

What's included with this "My Mom Is Being Deployed" social narrative?

- A social narrative for your students, or your own child to read with you and illustrate. This helps the child relate their own feelings and experiences. Dependent upon the child's age and abilities, you may work one-on-one (which is my preference), or read as a whole group. This social narrative does contain some illustrations to help guide the child.
- Suggestions and ideas from Jessica Jones, our Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist on how to help your child/student cope with a long term absence of a parent who has been deployed.

Is this social narrative easy to put together?

- YES! Just print the "My Mom Is Being Deployed" social narrative and staple. The child will need crayons, colored pencils, or markers to draw the pictures on each page. A pencil is needed for the fill-in-the-blank page.

I know that all of your activities include IEP goals. Do you have an IEP goal for this free social narrative?

The answer is YES! Here is a suggested IEP goals for you to use:

- * Given a social narrative related to feelings or emotions STUDENT may feel when a family member/parent is absent for a military deployment, STUDENT will read/listen to the social narrative, draw/color illustrations which represent what the child is feeling towards him or herself, or the parent who has left, discussed within weekly increments, by MONTH, YEAR.

THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR BRAVE MILITARY PERSONNEL FOR ALL THAT YOU DO!

Remember...you'll find Jessica Jones' videos on our Facebook page!

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Jessica Jones, LMFT, offers suggestions and ideas based upon a series of topics related to strategies to help enhance a child's behavior or well-being. She volunteers her time and services to Autism Educators, Inc.

Suggested IEP Goal Alignment

Goals which aid in leading to creating solutions and coping strategies to accept a situation beyond their control which requires a parent to be absent for an extended period of time.

* Given a social narrative related to feelings or emotions STUDENT may feel when a family member/parent is absent for a military deployment, STUDENT will read/listen to the social narrative, draw/color illustrations which represent what the child is feeling towards him or herself, or the parent who has left, discussed within weekly increments, by MONTH, YEAR.

* Given a stressful situation which is out of STUDENT'S control, STUDENT will use pretaught coping strategies in order to express how he/she is feeling and what he/she can do to alleviate the stress, within one of 4 occurrences, by MONTH, YEAR.

Thank you to all who have served our country
and continue to keep us safe. You have sacrificed
so much for us.

This is a picture of me and my mom.

When my mom goes to work, it may be far away. I may not be able to see her every day. I will miss her and she will miss me, too.

2

This is my mom keeping families safe.

When my mom goes to work, she may help keep families safe. She will help keep them safe, just like she does for our family. This makes me feel proud of her.

3

This is something fun that Mom and I do when she is home.

I will stay at home with my dad. He said that we can talk about fun things that my mom does when she is home with us.

4

This is the place where my mom is deployed.

I know that my mom has to go far away to help other families. When you are in the military, this is called being deployed. This is what I think the place looks like.

5

This is Mom eating breakfast with her friends.

My mom will not be alone. She will be deployed with other kid's moms. She will have friends to talk to and eat meals with. Mom will tell them all about me.

6

This is what I will tell my mom in an email.

I may be able to send my mom an email, or she may even be able to call us on special days. I will miss my mom, but I am very proud of her. I will tell her so.

7

This is one thing I like to do.

While my mom is away, I will still do most of the same things each day. I will go to school. I will play with my friends. I will _____.

8

This is one person I can talk to about how I feel.

When I feel like talking about how I feel, I can talk to my family, my teacher, a therapist, or an adult that I know well. This will help me feel okay.

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