

AUGUST 5, 2017 @ 10:07 PM

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15 Tips for Helping Your Teenager Deal With Deployment

Patience, communication and extra care can go a long way in comforting a teenager who is dealing with deployment. Knowing how to respond as a parent to the feelings associated with deployment will ensure a successful transition for everyone.

Your teen tips

Deployment can be a valuable teaching moment for your teen. Use these 15 tips to help:

- **Have a family discussion.** Talk to your teen about how the deployment will affect each family member. Discuss any changes to their routine, responsibilities, communication, fears and concerns about something happening to you.
- **Plan alone time** with your teenager before you deploy. Allow your teen to plan special activities, or just spend time relaxing together before you go.
- **Swap keepsakes.** Trade sentimental items, and explain the significance of the items you choose. Consider keepsakes such as pictures, notes, recordings or other special mementos.
- **Encourage teens** to share feelings with you. Let teens know that you want to hear their concerns. Know, too, that teens may not want to share their feelings. It's OK if they need space.
- **Maintain a stable routine** at home. Encourage your teens to continue participating in their usual activities. Like younger children, teenagers find comfort in routines.
- **Develop a relationship** with your teenager's school counselors and teachers. Tell them about your deployment and ask them to watch for signs that your teen may be struggling.
- **Make it easy** to communicate after you deploy. Stay in touch with your teen by email, text, phone or video chat. Consider playing online games together as a fun and low-key way to stay connected.
- **Approach conversations** from your teenager's perspective. Keep communication open by letting teens bring up topics that interest them.
- **Share information** about military actions as appropriate. Respond delicately to your teen's questions about military actions and current affairs, and avoid dwelling on negative media coverage to help lessen your teen's anxiety.
- **Help teens recognize** that their emotions are normal. Acknowledge that deployments and reunions can cause a variety of intense emotions in teens, especially if your return is unexpectedly delayed. Help teens process what they're feeling by sharing some of what you're feeling.
- **Suggest ways** for teens to deal with stress. Recommend that your teen keep a journal, write stories,

create artwork, exercise or listen to music to help manage stress.

- **Remind teens** that they are not alone. Show teens that talking with others can help them feel less alone. Encourage yours to participate in military youth programs or [Military Kids Connect](#)®.
- **Make a list of resources** available to your teen. Keep a list of hotline numbers and ways to connect with a counselor.
- **Give your teenager** time and space to readjust. Discuss what's been going on in your teenager's life when you return from deployment. Try to listen in an open and nonjudgmental way.
- **Take advantage** of military support programs for your family. Use the resources that each service branch offers to make homecoming transitions smoother. These include counseling through the Military and Family Support Center, Military OneSource, the installation chaplain, family support groups and online support groups.

When to get help

If your teenager continues to have trouble adjusting during the deployment cycle, don't hesitate to contact your physician or a mental health professional. Make the call if any of the following behavior continues for more than two weeks:

- Inability to resume normal classroom assignments and activities
- High levels of emotional response, such as continued crying and intense sadness
- Depression or appearing withdrawn and non-communicative
- Expression of violent or depressed feelings in "dark" drawings or writings
- Significant weight loss or gain
- Lack of attention to personal appearance
- Drug or alcohol abuse

Get help immediately if your teenager intentionally self-harms, expresses suicidal thoughts or appears at risk of hurting others. You can contact the [Military Crisis Line](#) 24 hours a day (800-273-8255 and Press 1). You can also start a conversation via [online chat](#) or text (838255).

Deployment can be an opportunity for you and your teen to better understand each other. By keeping an open dialogue and helping your teen learn to manage stress, you can ensure your deployment transition is successful.