

Discussion Notes

We Serve Too!

A guide for adults to help children with issues of deployment

My Daddy joined the army he's away from me and Mommy, and I don't like it, not one bit! Sometimes I even pitch a fit, and sometimes I regret it!

As the child hears the text and looks at the pictures, ask about the little girl: What is she feeling? Why? Have you ever felt that way? What does it mean to "pitch a fit"? What do you do when you feel sad and angry? Have you ever stomped your feet? What else is she doing? (crying) How does crying help us? Crying helps by washing out the mad and hurt, it cleans out our feelings. Do you think it is fair that she has to sit in the time out chair? She has a reason to be angry...how could she show that, and not have to sit in the time out chair? (brainstorm some ideas of appropriate ways to express anger and sadness, such as hitting a pillow, talking to an adult that they trust...)

Daddy's unit was deployed his work is far away, and though we are not overjoyed a soldier must obey. The army said we couldn't go and Dad said wait right here and wait for me till I get back in just about a year.

What does it mean that a soldier must obey? A soldier takes an oath, a special promise that he will go wherever the military sends him to protect our country. This is an important promise that every soldier makes. How long is a year? Use the picture to explain that a year is the time from one birthday to the next (a child's birthday is an important date for them) Use the seasons to go through it, e.g. the birthday is September you could say that is in the fall, what things do you like to do in the fall? Winter? Spring? Summer? What do you think the people in the story are feeling? How did you feel when you were told how long your parent would be gone? What things will the family miss doing together? How can they make it easier to make Dad a part of the things they are doing?

Sometimes when Dad is far away, he's in a danger zone, and that is why he wants us here, safe and sound at home.

This is one of the most important concepts that you will face in the story. What is a danger zone? This may seem scary, but your child already knows that a parent going to war is in danger. A child may think this even if a parent is deployed in a relatively safe area of the world, due to what he or she hears about soldiers. Even if you have never told them this, they know from overheard conversations, television, other children, things heard on base, even conversations you may have at the grocery store. This is why it is important to ask them what they think it means. You may find out that they believe the parent is in combat even if they are doing something completely different. If so, you can reassure them that even though some soldiers go to fight, their parent does a different job, this can relieve a lot of anxiety. If the parent is in a combat situation, the child picks up the tension from adults around them. (children are the barometer of the family)

Explain to your child that the military parent is highly trained. They have been taught the best ways to stay safe, and our military is the best in the world. Tell them that it would be a dangerous place for *them* to be because they would not know what to do, but the parent does know, and that you are very proud of the important job the military parent provides for our country. Let them feel the pride in a parent doing a job that brings honor, let them know that this country could not survive without them. Let them also know that because they are safe at home, the parent who is deployed feels good and can do their job better too. Talk about how the parent made sure things were taken care of before they left so that they could be safe while they wait.

Still, I wonder what he does all day when he's so very far away, I think of him when I get up, I think of him at play.

Ask your child if he thinks about Dad. What do you imagine he is doing? Do you ever wish you could just run home and tell him something but he is not here? What can you do when that happens? (Ideas, I could write a note, draw a picture, get my camera and take a photo and tell him what is happening. record what happened and send him a tape. write some ideas to tell him when he calls...) If a child says he does not think of Dad, he may feel some guilt about that. Reassure him that we all go on with life; but that it is OK to miss someone you love. This could mean the child is hurt enough to block the pain by deciding it does not matter. If this is the case, be diligent in bringing the absent parent into all aspects of life. Make efforts to send frequent packages that the child is included in making, ask them for pictures they draw of the parent, keep photos in the child's room. Express your own feelings of loneliness by letting them know you miss the absent parent, and even though you may feel sad you know that love stays strong by remembering. The other side of this is that a child may fear being forgotten, that the absent parent will not be thinking of them. It is important for the deployed parent to make comments about the packages sent, the drawing mailed, the report card or program he is sorry he missed. The child needs to know that no matter how far away, the parent does think of them often.

Digging holes, on the fly, truckin', tankin', private eye...on the run, left right march, I'm a statue stiff as starch. And now when its time to eat, I wonder does he get a treat? Does he say may I and please? Does he have to eat his peas?

Enjoy the pictures and talk about things they may be doing (you may want to explain that starch was something that made things stiff...not used much now!) Young children may have fun thinking of other things they do that the absent parent will do, (taking a shower, sleeping, eating...what do they like to eat?) Let them know that the soldiers do get treats and they eat their peas to get stronger!!! Talk about that Dad eats in a mess hall with other men and women serving their country too. Children thrive on routine, this is part of a soldiers life too. Children may worry about Dad being hungry or cold, let them know that they are taken care of even though they are doing a hard job.

I rest my head each afternoon and wish that Dad would get home soon, He said deployment would be rough, but we'll be fine our family's tough!

What is the hardest thing about having your parent deployed? What does it mean to be tough? Can you be tough and still cry? (yes) Being tough does not mean that you pretend things are fine, it means that you face the hard things about deployment and keep on loving even if it hurts sometimes. It is OK to feel angry and frustrated that your parent is not there. Being tough means you do the best you can to be positive and to make good choices. Being tough means taking care of each other while you wait to be together again. Being tough means pulling together when you feel like flinging apart.

Most other Dads come home at night, but mine's too far away. He's fighting hard in freedoms fight, he loves our U.S.A. My soldier dad is far away, our sacrifice is true. America the Beautiful we're doing it for you.

This section gives kids the opportunity to think about why the parent chooses to be in the military. A love of country and a sacrifice of the things they would like to have and do, is honorable and difficult. Children see other kids getting to see their parent come home at night, while they wait for their turn. One of the best ways to help a child, is to instill in them a love of country as well, that they themselves are also making a sacrifice...we wrote a piece that had to be edited out of the book that said "A sacrifice is giving up the thing you love the best, it's thinking about others first and of yourself the last." Children (all of us) find it easier to cope in situations where we understand our purpose and that the purpose is bigger than we are.

It's night time now...I feel so sad, At bedtime I most miss my dad. I say my prayers before I sleep and ask that God will hold and keep him safe from harm, and make him strong and give him faith to fight the wrong. And Daddy says he does the same He prays for us each night that we'll be safe and brave and strong and always do what's right.

After an active day of play it is night that brings the emotions to the surface. No longer are the distractions loud enough to drown out the lonely feelings and the missing heart. Be sensitive to this time. Talk about the absent parent. Strong faith does make life easier, the knowledge that One who truly holds us and can hear our prayers, connects the parent and child no matter how far away they are. A spiritual life is a beautiful gift for any human being.

If you do not have such a faith, perhaps seeking one will bring deeper peace than you now think is possible. If you are opposed to, or question the reality of Jesus Christ, we encourage you to try asking in prayer for Him to reveal Himself to you. Our prayer is for you to find what you seek (He does promise that ..."If you seek Me you will find Me.")

My Mama needs a hug tonight; she'd like one from my Dad. I'll give her one from both of us so she won't feel so sad. And now I snuggle down to sleep, Oh Mama, tuck me tight. Snug me up like Daddy's hug, we'll all sleep tight tonight.

Remember that children are sensitive to the emotions of the parent. Be real. You do not have to burden a child with all that you are feeling to be real. Acknowledge that you also need hugs sometimes, and that they can help you by giving them! Everyone, even the smallest child needs to know they are needed; that they can do something that helps. Reassure them of your love, of the love of the absent parent. Cling together, you are a family. God bless you and keep you safe and sound as you await the homecoming of your soldier. Thank you for the sacrifices you make on our behalf all of you, military service members, spouse's and children, are in our prayers and we appreciate the calling you live out!

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