

# The Homecoming Box™ and Tear Bottle™

*The Homecoming Box and Tear Bottle are ideas developed by Kathleen Edick and Paula Johnson*

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*(The word "Daddy" is used here to avoid the cumbersome "Daddy or Mommy", or the clinical "parent". We trust you to exchange the words "Daddy" for "Mommy" to fit your situation.)*

## The Homecoming Box™

- **Get a good sized box**
  - Maybe a covered one you purchase, or
  - Maybe one you create with the kids (*why waste an opportunity to make a memory together?*)
  - But **be sure** it looks and is special.
- Over the time of deployment, say six months to a year, you will **collect tangible symbols** of important events, thoughts, or stories that you would like to share with the deployed parent.
  - Perhaps a ticket from a movie, concert, or game
  - Perhaps the wishbone from the Thanksgiving turkey (clean it up and dry it out first)
  - Perhaps a baby tooth, or a finally given-up binky,
  - Perhaps a lock of hair from a first haircut,
  - Perhaps a birthday candle or party hat...
  - A small cross for a baptism.
  - The hospital bracelet that was on your newborn's wrist.
  - The ribbon from field day, a photo of the prize winning artwork, or the paper with a good grade from school.
  - If your loved one is missing a graduation, a small mortarboard and invitation.
  - You get the idea
  - (*You can also place tokens of sad events if it is from a time when you really wished you could have shared it with Daddy.*)
  - Make sure you are making a point of remembering this thing before you put it in the box. You might want to attach a note with a few words to prompt your memory, because it may be a year later until you tell the story. Talking deliberately about the day or event will help you remember it. Ask questions like:
    - What can we put in the box to help Dad know what this day was like?
    - What shall we keep from today to let Daddy know we were thinking of him while we were here?
    - What memory do we want to share with Daddy?
- When the parent returns (thus the name The Homecoming Box™), plan a time everyday (this is a good excuse to be sure you sit down to dinner together every night) to reach into The Homecoming Box™ and randomly pull out one symbol and **tell the stories** that go with it. If tears flow, or a sad memory is chosen, then it's time for the **Tear Bottle™**. (*See below*)

**The purpose of The Homecoming Box™ is multiple.**

- First, the deployed parent knows you are collecting memories on their behalf; they will not miss out on everything.
  - For example when the child loses a tooth, you can do the tooth fairy thing, but ask the tooth fairy to leave the tooth. The tooth goes into The Homecoming Box™. Later when the tooth is brought forth, not only can the child express to the parent, that he has lost his tooth, but the parent can participate in this little milestone, by a repeat tooth fairy visit!
- Secondly, the spouse and children have an ongoing project that causes them to think about their loved one in every situation.
  - Say you are painting a child's room. Think of Daddy and put the paint chip in the box or even a dried foam paintbrush your child used to help.
- Another benefit is that when a child wants Dad there, and is not consoled by words, the search for the best possible symbol for the box allows the child to actively do something to preserve the memory.
  - During scary times, such as storms, dentist visits, injuries, etc., have the child draw what he is afraid of that made him want Daddy there. This is a way of bringing Daddy to the moment and saving it for him later.

## The Tear Bottle™

- **Make your own Tear Bottle™**
  - Find a jar, bottle or vase to use as a tear bottle. (Our demonstration bottle is a small clear glass vase with a "lid" made of a 3 inch "Diamond" we found at a hobby store.)
  - Find something to represent tears
    - Florists have clear glass drops
    - Sea glass would work
    - We found some plastic diamonds (used for decorating tables for wedding receptions) to be our representation of tears.
  - Find something small on which to write the tear-bringing tale:
    - Cut strips of vellum
    - White ribbon
    - Sparkly paper, etc.
    - If your token from the box fit, you can use that too.
- **How to use the Tear Bottle™**
  - Take one "tear", write or draw a representation of the event that brought the tears to the surface on your special strip of paper or ribbon. Drop the tear and the description into the bottle. These events are not put back into the Homecoming Box™, but find resolution in the Tear Bottle™. (That way you can revisit The Homecoming Box™ anytime and enjoy it!)
  - When a story arises out of The Homecoming Box™ that brings or has brought tears, this is the place to put them.
  - The inspiration for this idea comes from Psalm 56: 8 *"You, O Lord, keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in Your bottle."* If faith is a

part of your family life, or you would like it to be, you may want to open to this passage and read it out loud at the time when you put the tears away in the Tear Bottle™. You may also find prayer a welcome comfort at "tear time".



## Conclusion

So, in conclusion,

Use The Homecoming Box™ to collect tokens of memories, both happy and sad, for the deployed parent when he returns.

Use The Tear Bottle™ when a tearful memory comes out of The Homecoming Box™ and you don't want to forget it, but don't necessarily want to be reminded of it over and over.

When, over the course of many dinnertimes, memory stories of deployment have all come out of the box, all but the tearful memories can go back in the box as a Family keepsake to freely revisit anytime, like you do with your photo albums.

Keep The Tear Bottle™, too, but we recommend *parents* be the ones to decide if and when the tears are revisited. Tears are precious treasures—not for everyday use. Keep them where you'll know they are safe.