

Talking About the News When a Parent is Deployed



News can be worrisome.

All children are exposed to news via newspapers, radio, the internet, and television. They often turn to their parents with questions about what they see and hear. For a child whose parent is deployed, news about the war can raise concerns about a parent's safety. This poses a special challenge for the parent at home who needs to listen, understand, and answer their children's questions in a manner that is both honest and reassuring. This will strengthen your child's inner strength, sense of security, and trust in you.

Remember, you know your child best.

Your family has likely been through good times and stressful times before. How did your child react during those times? This is often a good predictor for how he or she will cope with new challenges. Use these successful strategies from the past to help now.

Normal routines and expectations are important.

Most children benefit from having regular routines and expectations. Children will take their emotional cues from the adults in their world. If the adults are calm, usually they will feel secure. However, it is important to talk to your child about his or her specific worries.

Talk and check in with your child.

What has your child been hearing, seeing and thinking about an event? Check to see if it has even come to his or her attention. Ask: "Are kids at school talking about ___?" or, "What have you heard about ___?" If your child is younger and is not aware of the news, you may choose to go no further with this conversation. If your child has heard about the event, encourage him or her to tell you what he or she has heard. Ask if they have any specific worries. It is important to understand what your child is struggling with before you move to answer or reassure him.

TV images can be upsetting.

Turn off the TV around young children or those who have been upset by TV news in the past. Be mindful that coverage of the same violent event over and over again can be misinterpreted as something that is happening repeatedly. Watch television with older children so you can answer questions and be aware of their feelings. Remind older children that TV images can be overwhelming and that it's OK not to watch. Many adults feel better listening to radio reports or reading newspaper coverage rather than watching disturbing TV images.

Make the most of family time.

Spend extra time with your children. Turn off the telephone and the TV during meals so you can talk together. Sometimes, it is best to talk while driving in the car or when a child sits with a parent who is working in the kitchen.



Have Questions? Home Base Can Help.

www.homebaseprogram.org or call 617.724.5202

Remind children all that we do to stay safe.

When a child feels the world is less safe, it is important to name the active things we do to remain safe. These include: wearing seat belts or bike helmets, eating healthy foods, and looking both ways before crossing the street.

Support the child's connection to a deployed parent

When a child is feeling worried specifically about the safety of the parent overseas, support the child's connection to the parent using available communication. Remain confident yourself. Remind your child of the security that comes from the deployed parent's skills preparation, and training. This can go a long way to re-establish a child's sense of safety.

How to help children at different ages and stages

Infants:

Infants pick up on the anxieties of those around them. They may be fussy. Remain calm when interacting with your infant. Keep routines and their environment consistent.

Toddlers:

Keep routines consistent. Avoid TV and radio news exposure. Offer videos to watch, read books and play with your child. If a toddler asks questions about what is going on, answer in simple terms. Make sure your child knows that you are there to keep him or her safe.

Preschoolers:

Keep routines consistent. Avoid TV and radio news exposure. If your preschooler asks questions about what is going on, answer in simple terms. Tell your child that you are there to keep him or her safe. Spend extra time hugging your child. Play with your child.

School Age Children:

TV and radio news exposure should be with an adult. Give children plenty of opportunities to talk about what they think is going on. Clear up misconceptions. Encourage children to share their feelings and concerns with you. Let them know it's all right to be afraid and that you will do everything you can to keep them safe. School age children may be more interested than younger children in the events, but less capable than older children at coping and communicating.

Adolescents:

Listen. Watch TV news with them. Engage your adolescent in conversation. "What do you think about the events that took place today?" "How did you feel when you first heard about this?" Share your feelings with them honestly. Encourage them to express feelings of anger. Brainstorm with them about how they can deal with those feelings.

During stressful times, it is normal for children to: ♦Regress (act younger) ♦Seek attention ♦Be clingy ♦Have trouble sleeping ♦Be temperamental ♦Make angry comments ♦Talk about violence ♦Play or act more aggressive. All of these reactions are normal. It is important to keep talking to your children and allow them to express all of their feelings.

