

Talking with children about a parent's return from deployment



Before starting a conversation, stop and think a minute!

- What did you tell your child about your return home? (Or your co-parent's return)?
- How have you talked about it since getting home?

Begin a Conversation with Appreciation. What are you grateful for?

- Thank each other. Be specific! Come up with at least two things to thank each of your children for doing related to the deployment time or this reintegration time.
- Let your children know how proud you are of them.

Ask open-ended questions and be prepared to listen.

(Listening can be hard!)

- What was easier about the time when I was away?
- What was the worst stuff about my time away?
- Is anything easier now that I am home?
- What surprised you about the time I was away?
- What is different about my return than you had imagined?

Communication Tips based on Ages and Stages

Infants and Toddlers

Talking with your baby happens mostly by caretaking that is calm, loving, sensitive to the baby's temperament, and consistent. Take your time to learn about your baby and what he/she is like and needs. Sleep and bedtime routines can often be hard. Be patient. It takes time for readjustment to happen.



Pre-School Years (3 to 6 year-olds)

Preschoolers tend to feel responsible for changes. Ask them to tell you their explanations for changes, and then re-educate. Think about your behavior as seen through your child's eyes. How do you want to explain it? For example, "Why do you think Daddy was yelling," or "Why do you think you and your sister are going to Grandma's this weekend?" Facilitate imaginative play. Ask your child to make you a picture and put it on display.



Have Questions? Home Base Can Help.



Latency Years (7 to 12 year-olds)

Children between 7 and 12 tend to be either “talker” or “non-talkers.” Take your cues from your child. Notice your child’s best times and situations for thinking and talking with you. Make spending these times with them a priority. When you answer questions, give simple what and why explanations. It helps to do some things that involve talking and some that encourage being together and focusing on one another. Encourage conversation by turning off the phone and the TV at meal times. Set a daily time for your child to share something he or she is proud of and to thank each other. Set up a weekly review time for your child to show you the accomplishments for the week. For example, use a shoebox to collect successes to share. Try a movie night at home with popcorn or make breakfast for dinner.

Adolescents

How well a teenager talks about understanding things and how well he or she behaves are usually not in synch. Notice your teenager’s best times and places for thinking and talking with you. Make spending these times with him or her a priority. Welcome all questions warmly. Ask your teen to guide you in how you can be helpful to him or her. Encourage talking about how rules changed during your deployment and what is changing again.” Encourage good “go-to” adults. Remind your teenager: Don’t Worry Alone.

Older Adolescents and Young Adults

Invite your older and adult children to talk about your return. It helps to keep listening as the focus (“Learning to Listen; Listening to Learn”). Welcome all questions warmly. Encourage elaboration of the question. Don’t defend yourself; just listen. Offer to think about their perspective. Be honest and hopeful about challenges.

Some other examples to start the conversation:

- A year is a long time, I want to hear how things have been for your while I was gone.
- What’s happened that is really important for me to know?
- Tell me about the ways that you have changed. How are you different?
- Do you think I’ve changed? How?
- Is there anything we should have done differently, or be doing differently now?
- What can I do to make this time easier for you?

www.homebaseprogram.org
or call 617.724.5202

