

When Parents Work Away

Supporting,
children,
young people,
families
and school staff
During Deployment

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A Unique but Similar Context

- Not so much a 'masterclass' – rather sharing our experiences!
- Working in British Forces Germany – but really it is dealing with families in their context...



DEPLOYMENT

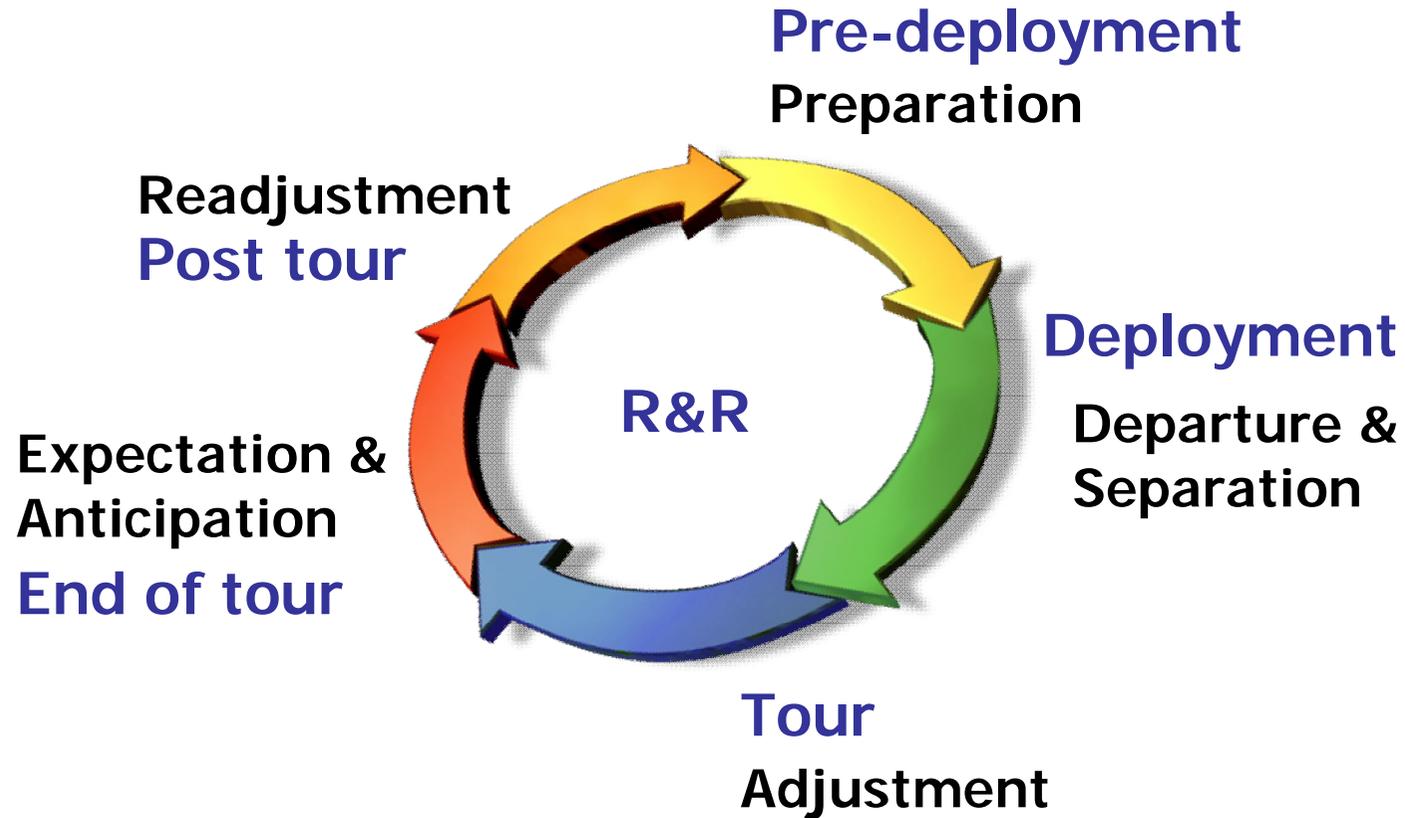


**All families face challenges.
Deployment requires service families to face these apart.**

**Most manage well
many become stronger.**



DEPLOYMENT CYCLE



PRE- DEPLOYMENT

Involves preparation for departure and separation...



those deploying focus on training and the military tasks ahead;

the practicalities of managing the family alone focuses the mind of those remaining at home.



Most children /young people sense the change.



QUESTIONS

Where are you going?
What is it like there ?
When will you be going ?
How long are you going for ?
Why are you going ?
What will you be doing ?
Who else is going ?



Will the family rules change ?
Will I have to do extra jobs?
Will I still be able to...?
Who will look after me if... ?

CHANGE CAN WORRY CHILDREN

...it is important to help them as they seek to make sense of what is happening...

... create a climate where they can talk openly and honestly with:

- you ... their family
 - friends
 - teachers
- and other trusted adults.



Encourage them to talk about their feelings and share yours with them.



THEY MAY HAVE MORE QUESTIONS

- ❑ listen carefully;
- ❑ do not overwhelm them with details keep your answers simple;
- ❑ if you do not know the answer – say so – try to find out the answer;
- ❑ share your conversation with your partner – mixed messages can confuse and can distress.

Be truthful

it helps build trust

Children/young people often sense when they are being lied to. Use the natural conversation times – meal times – bath or bedtime to talk and check that you answered their question and that they are not anxious about it.



INVOLVE YOUR CHILD

- Let them help you prepare
roll your socks in balls, count tee-shirts
...nothing too crucial!
- Make sure they see you find a special place for their pictures.
- Exchange 'comfort items' (a stuffed animal or a keepsake).
- Try to spend individual time with each child before you leave.
- Give each child an IOU with a special activity (to go swimming or a trip to a Theme Park) that you will do with them on your return.
- Make sure the children each have a family photo to keep with them.



PLAN AHEAD

- ❑ Buy and write in birthday and other cards for events that occur during the time you are apart – if for some reason the mail lets you down – they will know you thought of them.



- ❑ Write a few notes – give them to your partner to hide them in lunch boxes – under pillows – etc as a surprise.
- ❑ Tape your children's favourite stories for them to listen to at bedtime. Hearing your voice can be very reassuring – take part in 'Storybook soldier.'



DEPARTURE

Prepare

Yourself

Your children

Re-assure

Saying good-bye...
there is no easy way to do it...



although it may be upsetting

it is less upsetting that not having done it.

Share your pride

Keep it short ..

Don't duck it!



SCHOOL CAN...

provide a link with the deployed parent and unit.

provide a routine

provide social contacts

provide a support network

keep the mind focussed

be a source of trusted information

provide consistency



be a 'haven of normality'

BEHAVIOUR CHANGES

A minor or brief change is not a cause for concern - where there is a persistent and obvious change some action may be needed.

Possible reactions include:-

**behaving like they did when they were younger,
easily upset by everyday events,
angry or irritable for no reason,
clinging or fearful,
unwilling to go to school,
withdrawn and lacking interest,
unable to sleep,
fearful of being alone,
“busy” and over-active,
jumpy or over-sensitive,
challenging and argumentative,
disinterested in things generally,
finding it hard to concentrate at school,
unusually forgetful.**



NORMAL REACTIONS TO EXTRAORDINARY EVENTS

Emotional and social development is a better indicator than age to judge how a child may react – although regression to an earlier stage of development is a common occurrence.

helpful
clinging or fearful,
aggressive
easily upset by everyday events,
unwilling to go to school

Loss

tearful
responsible
angry or irritable for no reason
jumpy or over-sensitive
finding it hard to concentrate at school
disinterested in things generally
unable to sleep

Reflection

Supportive
Proud
withdrawn and lacking interest,
challenging and argumentative,
angry
rebellious
unusually forgetful
“busy” and over-active

Denial

REGRESSION



BE CONFIDENT

As a parent you will already have successfully dealt with many of these things in the past by ...



**Taking their minds off things for a while.
Being a sympathetic listener.
Being patience – calm – tolerant.
Being honesty about the facts.
Trying not to be over-protective.
Forgiving....**

**...when children are distressed or upset they may say very hurtful things they don't really mean.....
try not to react in the heat of the moment...
when they are calm explain how you feel and that you understand that sometimes things are said without thinking.**

TALKING

Encourage your child to talk with you ... friends... teachers... trusted adults.

Some children talk freely others may need coaxing - but don't force them.

- ❑ Older children often just require time and space... a lot of time and space... sometimes it can be hard to find a way in... try to use the opportunity to open up the conversation...why?
- ❑ Avoid being dismissive - "cheer up" or "never mind."
- ❑ Younger children – may be more responsive to 'silent friends' ... "Teddy's looking a bit sad/fed up...." What do you think happened?"



KEEPING IN TOUCH



Contact with the parent who has deployed is very important ... there are a number of ways that this can be maintained...

Letters

- The best letters are 'daily blogs' – *Hi Dad ..Mum's cooking dinner ... I'm fine – too much homework ...Love you...*
- Include young children's hand and prints, drawings, newspaper cuttings and photographs.
- Write your letter with theirs in front of you.
- Numbering letters can be useful.
- Share what you have written with your children – it helps them know what to say...it also helps you know what they have said.

Some children like to have a 'treasure box' to keep letters they have received in - to be read again when there is a need to feel close.



PREPARE

Be prepared for excitement similar to those prior to a birthday.

Try to maintain routines and sleep patterns.

Prepare the children

- possible of differences
- share photographs – video clips
- probable tiredness

Prepare to celebrate the homecoming.

Remind the returning parent of the possible reactions on first meeting...



POSSIBLE REACTIONS



Excited but not cool to let it show - uncertain - rebellious - independent - mature

Runs to - dominates conversation - might worry - boastful

Attention seeking - pushes the boundaries - needs reassurance

Shy - runs away - clings to those they know - may have tantrums

Treats parent as a stranger - may become distressed



ADJUST

The returning parent needs to

- Go slowly.
- Adapt to the rules and routines already in place.
- Let the child set the pace for getting to know you again.
- Learn from how the partner managed the children.
- Be available to the child, both with time and emotions.
- Make individual time for each child and partner.
- Support good things the family has done.

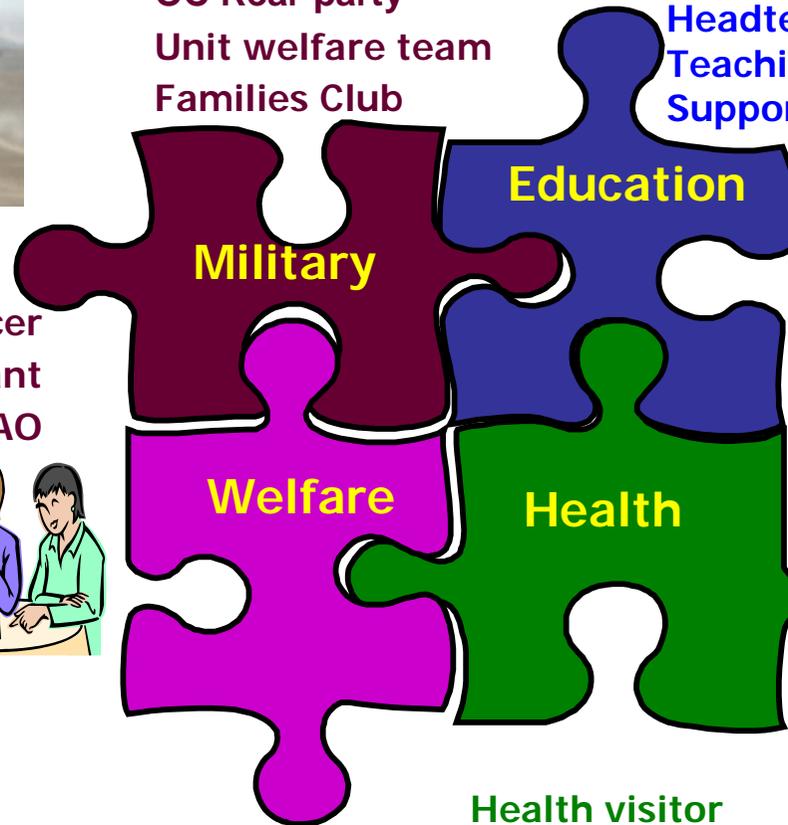


WORKING TOGETHER



Unit Welfare Officer
 OC Rear party
 Unit welfare team
 Families Club

Teacher
 Headteacher
 Teaching Assistant
 Support staff



Commanding Officer
 Adjutant
 RAO

Hive
 Homestart
 Relate
 WRVS



Pupil and Family Services
 Education Psychology
 Education Social work
 Inclusion team

Doctor
 Practice Nurse



Social worker
 SSAFA
 Youth workers
 Padre

Health visitor
 School nurse
 Midwife
 Medical centre staff



- Video of our experiences. 'Building Resilience'
- All resources available via sce.com 'deployment website'

