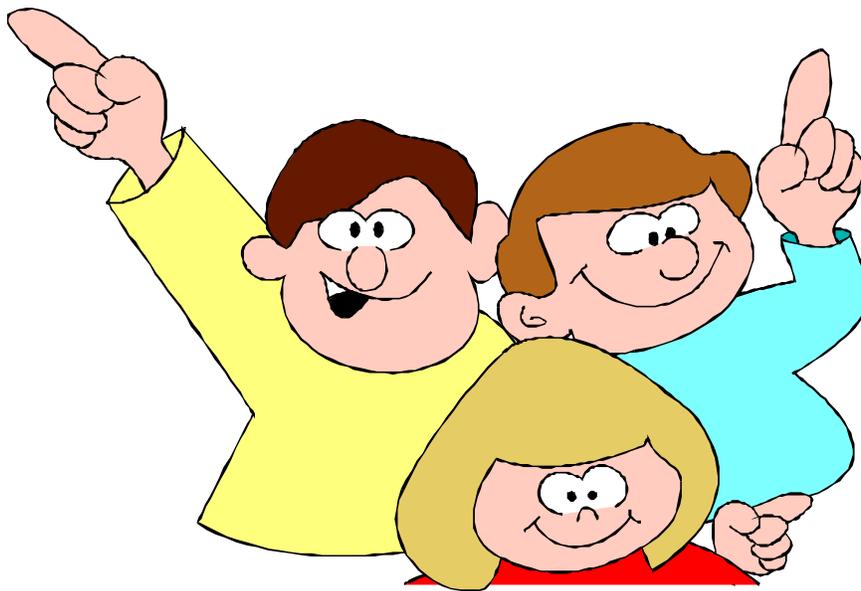


# **FAMILY READINESS**

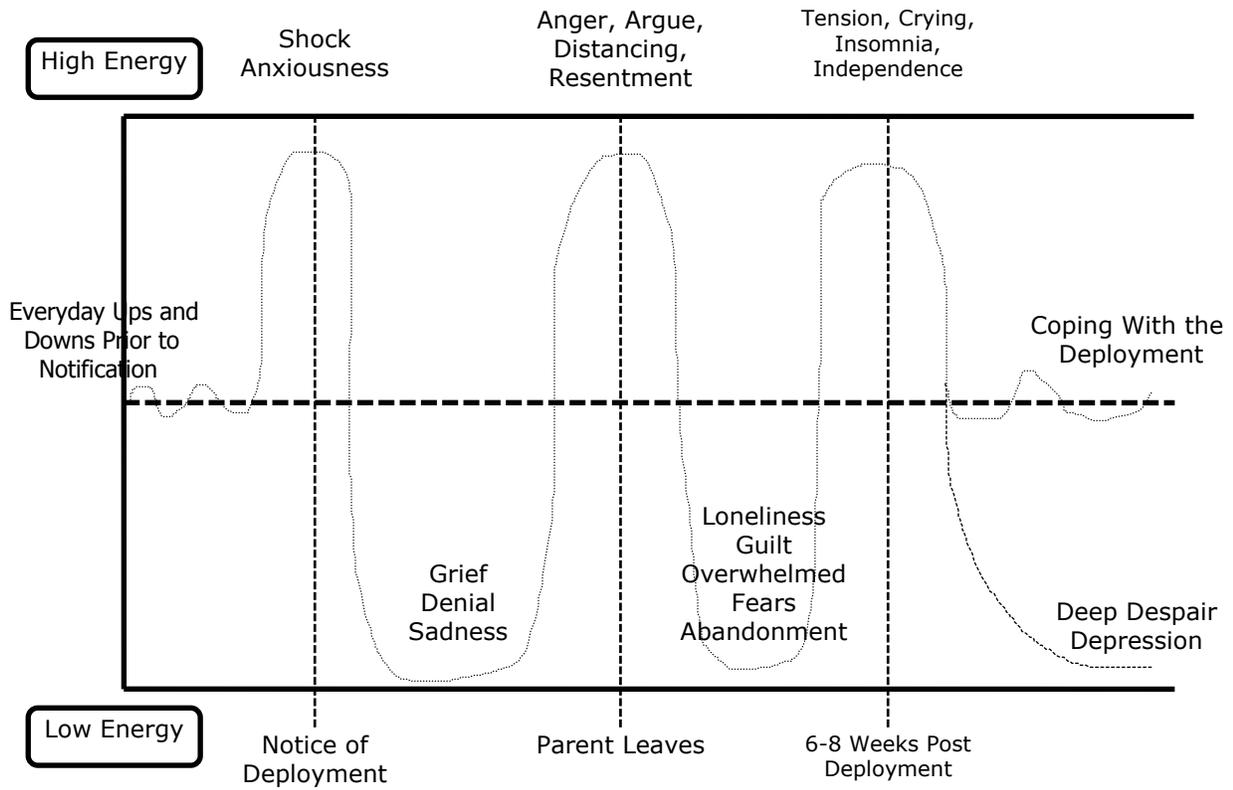


## **CHILDREN AND A DEPLOYING PARENT**

**VERMONT AIR NATIONAL GUARD  
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# THE EMOTIONAL CYCLE OF DEPLOYMENT



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## DAD'S GREATEST JOB

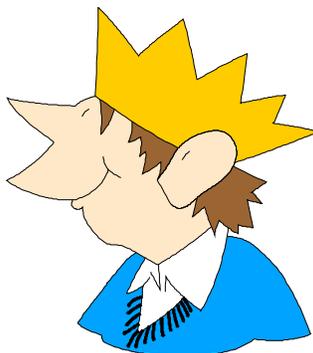
I may never be as clever as my neighbor down the street,  
I may never be as wealthy as some other men I meet;  
I may never have the glory that some other men have had,  
But I've got to be successful as a little person's dad.

There are certain dreams I cherish that I'd like to see come true,  
There are things I would accomplish when my working time is through;  
But the task my heart is set on is to guide a little lad,  
And to make myself successful as that little person's dad.

It is that one job I dream of, it's the task I think of most;  
If I'd fail that growing youngster, I'd have nothing else to boast;  
For though wealth and fame, I'd gather all my future would be sad,  
If I'd failed as that little person's dad.

I may never get earth's glory, I may never gather gold;  
Men may count me as a failure when by business life is told;  
But if he who follows after is a fine adult, I'll be glad—  
For I'll know I've been successful as a little person's dad.

--Anonymous



# **PART 1**



# **PREPARING FOR A PARENT'S DEPLOYMENT**



## HELPING CHILDREN THROUGH A TDY, DEPLOYMENT, OR REMOTE TOUR

The military lifestyle brings many challenges to families. One of the most difficult demands is a separation due to the military mission. Nearly every person associated with the military, uniformed and civilian, will perform some type of Temporary Duty (TDY) requiring separation from one's family for between two days to six months. Most fulltime or activated National Guardsman will also complete a remote tour assignment, which takes one away from home for 12 to 15 months. Whether married or single, with or without children, the separations cause hardships on those who deploy as well as the loved ones, friends, and co-workers who stay behind. The most difficult aspect for parents is helping children through this period while surviving it yourself.

This handbook is intended to provide parents (and guardians!) a general guideline for helping their children survive the other parent's absence. Also offered is material on the challenges of single parenting, and ways for the absent parent to help out. A military separation is difficult to get through for anyone, and those of you with children know how tough things can be for children when Mom or Dad isn't available. This pamphlet won't have all the answers for you, but it may provide you with some ways to make things easier for you and your children.



## CHILDREN AND A DEPLOYING PARENT

The following paragraphs are from Betsy Callahan's book *Separation & Divorce*. She provides a general overview of children and deployment.

"A common concern separating parents have is: 'How will this affect my child?' Studies have shown that children are amazingly resilient and usually bounce back to normal much sooner than adults. Children do not need a two-parent home to feel secure and loved by both parents.

Children's reactions to separation will be influenced heavily by how the parents handle separation. Parents need to overcome their hostility and focus on how to make the separation less traumatic for the children. This begins with telling the children honestly and in language they can understand that this will be painful and that they may feel sad, angry, hurt, and so on. A simple explanation...is helpful. Hiding things or lying will only confuse the children and lead them to conclude the worst. Your children's questions will give you some idea about the separation.

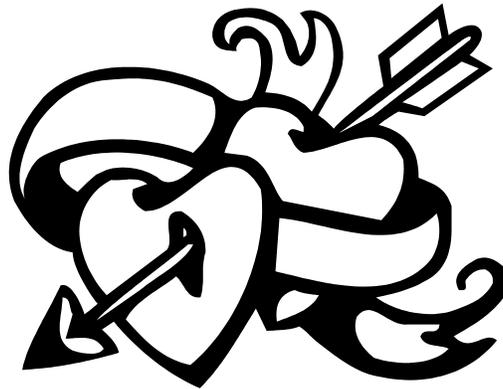
Initially, upon hearing the news of the separation, most children are very distressed and anxious. A few older children protect their egos by remaining aloof, but if a younger child is very detached and withdrawn, that is an abnormal reaction. Many studies have shown that the (deployed) parent's continued involvement with the children is most important.



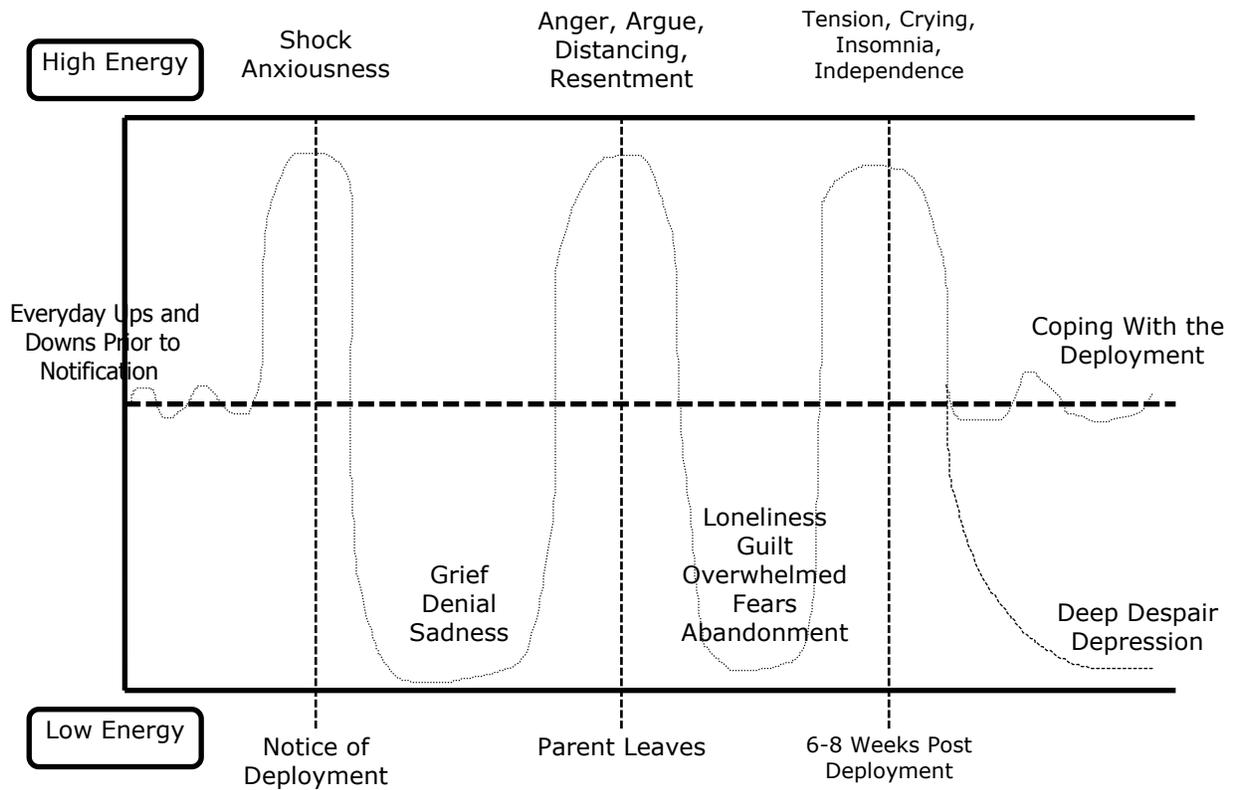
Once the separation is initiated, the children's adjustment is influenced positively if both parents are confident in their capacity to manage, are available to the children, and if the situation is as conflict free as possible. Anger is a normal reaction most children feel about separation. The

young child may become aggressive in play, be belligerent, and so on. Older children may be more verbal about expressing angry feelings by talking back, being negative, (or through disobedience).

Many children express their feelings about separation other ways (see Parts 2, 4, and 5 for more information). Some behaviors that usually indicate a problem are withdrawal and silence, loss of interest in friends, delinquency, refusal to go to school, problems in learning, sexual perversions, and obsessive-compulsive rituals. If your children exhibit these symptoms consistently, you probably should seek professional guidance on how to help them resume normal development.”



## THE EMOTIONAL CYCLE OF DEPLOYMENT



The above chart (Department of the Air Force, no date, a) shows the emotional roller-coaster that people go through because of a military separation. Military research shows that it takes people about 6-8 weeks to return to a stable coping level after the military member leaves (Department of the Air Force, no date, a). Many local families who already survived a

deployment agree that the first month of separation is spent in a whirlwind of changes and then the 6-8 week period of adjustment begins.

Civilian research into families affected by separations concludes that children take at least 1 year to fully adjust and adults take 3-5 years (see Barnes and Coplon, 1980; Callahan, 1979; Peck and Manocherian, 1989; and Ricci, 1997). That's one reason why a military separation carries such unique challenges.

Research indicates it take 3-5 years for families to adjust to a separation (Brown, 1989), yet a military separation lasts from a 1 week temporary duty (TDY) assignment, to a 4 month deployment into unknown or hostile conditions, to a 12 month remote tour. After the 6-8 week readjustment following a military separation, family members continue on a less intense emotional roller coaster throughout the separation (Department of the Air Force, no date, a). Military families don't experience 3-5 years of separation (**thankfully**), so family members don't fully adjust to the separation. We use our coping skills to survive it until reunification.

The Air National Guard, in recognition of the burdens of separation, offers you various programs to help survive the TDY, deployment, and remote tour. The next page is an outline of some of the programs we have here, though we're constantly looking for new and better ways (so we have even more).

The rest of this pamphlet identifies ways for parents to help themselves and their children endure the separation. Of course, sometimes we need additional support or even intervention. If you or any member of your family experiences sever difficulties, contact the 158 Fighter Wing Family Readiness Center (802-652-8035) or Unit Chaplain.

# Family Readiness & Support Services

## CALLING CARDS

Free \$20 value Calling Cards, sponsored by the Air Force Aid Society and Family Readiness & Support Services, are offered to all personnel going on contingency TDYs for 30 days or longer. These must be issued to the military member.

## CAR CARE BECAUSE WE CARE

Sponsored by the Air Force Aid Society, the program provides a one-time preventive maintenance and safety inspection for one family vehicle if the military member is TDY 30 days or longer or on a remote assignment. Eligible members must get a voucher from the Dover Air Force Base Family Support Center. Call 302-677-6947 to set up an appointment with the base Service Station.

## E-MAIL FOR SPOUSES

If you do not have E-mail capability from home and your spouse is on a TDY or remote assignment...don't fret. Just give us a call and we'll make an appointment to set up a free Hotmail account for you at the Family Readiness Office.

## GIVE PARENTS A BREAK

This program provides free programs for children 6 months to 12 years for families whose sponsor is TDY for more than 30 days or on a remote tour. Please contact your unit commander or family readiness coordinator to schedule a program. We can look at different options for location and time. Reservations are required and immunizations must be current.

## FAMILY READINESS GROUPS (FRG)

Family Readiness Groups are an outreach effort of the Family Readiness Center that uses volunteer spouses in each unit to help address concerns of the families of deployed members. Most units have one or more Key Spouses and they coordinate things such as monthly newsletters, activities, care package preparation, information and referral services, and much more! To find out who your Unit Point of Contact is, check with your unit commander, first sergeant, or call the family readiness center at 302-323-3327.

## HEARTS APART SUPPORT GROUPS

### DEPLOYED SPOUSE FORUM

The Hearts Apart Support Group provides a forum for the spouses and family members whose sponsor is TDY for more than 30 days, deployed or remote tour members (and members on remote tours) to get together and enjoy common activities or to just meet and talk. Guest speakers will be scheduled to upon request.

## LENDING LIBRARY

The Lending Library provides information and materials surrounding all aspects of family readiness which include financial planning, parenting, health and fitness, stress management, topics surrounding teens and children during separation, deployment, reunion. Books, videos, and websites, and many other resources are available to assist you with your search for information.

## LETTER WRITING KITS

If you are separated from a family member due to deployment, feel free to come by and get one of our letter writing kits that include stationary, post cards, greeting cards, stamps, and parent/child note exchanges.

## MORALE CALL PROGRAM

In this program, families of deployed and remote tour members can call from the Family Readiness & Support Service Office to the deployed/remote location...free of charge! Eligible members are allowed 6 calls per month for 15 minutes each call.

## PRE-DEPLOYMENT BRIEFINGS

This briefing describes what changes a family goes through during a TDY, deployment, or remote tour; outlines the Family Readiness programs; and addresses any particular concerns the family has. This is when you sign up for the Family Readiness programs.

## VIDEO PHONE

Do you have a spouse that is TDY/on a remote assignment and would like to see them before they get back? We have video-telephone capability to many installations around the world. Please call us to make an appointment...your time is our time.

## CREATIVE CONNECTION

**During times of deployment and separation, we may find ourselves and our children affected by intense emotions. Although this is a common experience, it is still difficult to handle. The Creative Connection offers an opportunity to explore these intense or painful thoughts and feelings in a supportive environment. Creative Connection involves the use of various art materials and specially designed art directives. No artistic talent is necessary to benefit from this program. Activities may include: drawing, painting, collage, clay work, assemblage, creative journaling, mask making, and more!**

The mission of the Creative Connection is to promote effective communication, healthy expression of emotions, and methods of coping with stress.

### **KIDS' CIRCLE**

For children ages 3-12 facing the deployment of a family member. This group is designed to help children use art to express their feelings in healthy way, adjust to the changes brought on by deployment, and feel less isolated through interacting with their peers. Art tasks and discussion are age appropriate for each group. Groups may be scheduled for children ages 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12.

### **FAMILY FOCUS**

A good adjunctive group for parents and children who have participated in other Creative Connection groups. This is a chance for you to work together to further enrich your family life. Art, games, and discussion are used to promote the sharing of ideas and feelings, effective communication, and family cohesiveness. This group is recommended for children 6 and up.

### **PARENT CONFERENCE**

Aimed to increase understanding of children's adjustment to change and separation and what parents and educators can do to help them. Topics may also include using rewards and consequences to increase desired behaviors, effective parenting strategies, and stress management for parents. This group will also provide an opportunity for caregivers to share ideas, learn from others, and establish a network of support.

### **TEEN TIME**

For young adults ages 13-18 facing the deployment of a family member. This group focuses on issues specific to teenagers and involves the creation and manipulation of images to increase communication, self-awareness, and self-esteem. The group setting encourages the participants to support and connect with each other.

**For further information contact the Family Readiness Center at (802)652-8035.**

The following information comes from Barnes and Coplon's *The Single-Parent Experience*; Gardner's *The Parent's Book About Divorce*; Barnett, Gaudio, and Sumner's *Parenting Children of Divorce*; and Ilg, Ames, and Baker's *Child Behavior: Specific Advice on Problems of Child Behavior*.

**WHEN**—When definite notice is given that the military member will deploy, go TDY, or go on a remote tour is the time to tell your children. Advance preparation is far more important than no warning. Sometimes we catch ourselves in denial with self-statements like, “The Air Force might cancel the orders.” Unfortunately, instead of protecting them by shielding them from the truth, we end up making the adjustment more difficult. Children have an uncanny ability to know something is going on—they pick up on our subtle clues. They then begin to use their imagination to fill in the blanks of what they don't know or understand, and children almost always blame themselves.

Telling your children up front provides them with the unique and very helpful opportunity to become involved in preparing for the separation. They will have many questions, which is positive—it means they're trying to make sense of what's happening and gain control over their environment. It allows them to begin expressing themselves, their worries, concerns, confusion, frustration, and so on. Withholding the information denies them this opportunity and can make the adjustment much more difficult.

**How**—Both parents, if possible, together tell the children. This begins the reinforcement of the family unity despite separation, that mom or dad will be back, and that it's not the child's fault. This also reinforces the parents' availability for questions and comfort. You, too, now have an opportunity to express how you feel about the separation. Telling your children how you feel (within limits of common sense) can help them understand and verbalize their own reactions. Remember that the most common first reaction is shock, so there may be some delay before they're ready to discuss how they're feeling.

**WHAT**—Keep it honest, straightforward, and factual. Discuss the reasons for the assignment and keep it in terms they understand. For instance, draw parallels to school. “Just like you have rules and responsibilities in school to follow, adults have rules and responsibilities to

follow, too. I chose to join the Air Force and part of that decision means I agree to go away if the Air Force needs me to.” Help them recognize the importance of what you do, such as providing for your family’s food and shelter, and for the nation’s defense. Explain that it’s not their fault, reinforce that you love them no matter what, and reassure them that you’ll be back. Discuss what changes may take place, like a tighter budget (but you’ll still have food, your home, and clothes) or maybe less time with the remaining parent (but you can schedule special activities for weekends), and ways to prepare for and even lessen those changes. Get their ideas!

# PART 2



# HELPING CHILDREN COPE

*THE PROPHET*

They come through you  
but not from you,  
And though they are with you  
yet they belong not to you.

You may house their bodies  
but not their souls,  
For their souls dwell  
in the house of tomorrow,  
Which you cannot visit,  
Not even in your dreams.

Khalil Gibran (cited in Wise, 1998)

Gibran was writing about how we parents don't own our children. They are their own spirits. Our job is to guide, nurture, and discipline them so that when they move on to their "house of tomorrow," they will succeed.

Your child will test your patience and limits—count on it. The key to your success is your parental preparedness.

The following pages identify what children experience when a parent goes on a deployment or remote tour. Included are ideas on how to guide them over the difficult days, weeks, and months. You, the remaining parent, will probably be the most significant factor in how your child adjusts.

As Dr. Popkin (1996, p. 7) puts it, "Remember, **you** are the parent. You will decide how to guide your child. Listen to your heart and your mind. As you think about parenting, do not worry about your mistakes. The best thing you can do is learn from them. Do not blame yourself when you make a mistake. Think about what you can do better the next time. This will make you a better parent for your child."

## CHILDREN'S REACTIONS TO A MILITARY SEPARATION

According to Drs. Barnett, Guadio, and Sumner, authors of *Parenting Children of Divorce*, expect a child's reactions to be strong. They will express grief, and frequently reject the separation by use of fantasy. Children may begin asking multiple questions to try to sort out their own understanding, and remember, what they don't understand, they complete with fantasies, typically blaming themselves as causing the circumstances.

### FEELINGS YOUR CHILDREN MAY EXPERIENCE

Children may react in many ways to a parent's departure. The Emotional Cycle of Deployment gives you an idea of how people react in general, but every individual goes through it in their own way. No two people will react in the same way, depending on a variety of factors such as age, maturity, sex, relationship with each parent, and how the remaining parent copes with the military separation.

The following is a list of feelings your child may experience before, during, and after a military separation.

SADNESS	PROTECTIVENESS	RESPONSIBILITY
ANGER	INDIFFERENCE	IRRITABILITY
ABANDONMENT	DISMAY	TENSION
REJECTION	HELPLESSNESS	ANXIETY
GUILT	LONELINESS	EMPTINESS
ISOLATION	RELIEF	HOSTILITY
HURT	AWKWARDNESS	FEAR OF THE FUTURE
DEPRESSION	EMBARRASSMENT	SHOCK
ENVY	DISAPPOINTMENT	SELF-PITY
RESENTMENT	FRUSTRATION	CONFUSION
SHAME		

Go through this list with your children. Discuss each of the emotions and maybe describe briefly what you too have experienced. Accept your child's feelings—don't tell them what they feel or don't feel ("You're not really mad at Dad"). Instead, confirm what they say and offer them the chance to expand on it. ("I can understand how you would feel angry, and

that's OK. What are you angry at?") Tell your children that it's common to have contradictory feelings, like guilt and relief.

## THE FOLLOWING IS A LIST OF COMMON REACTIONS CHILDREN EXPERIENCE

- Concern about whether they are still loved and protected
- Concern about where they'll live
- Anger at parents (the remaining parent is a safer target, but the absent parent "left" the child)
- Aggression in play, behavior, or communication
  - Being negative, disobedient, talking back, or disrespectful
  - Refusing to have contact with the absent parent
  - Wish for revenge for the insecurity and embarrassment the parent caused
- Crying is a normal way of releasing pain, anxiety, anger, and guilt
- Physical symptoms such as loss of appetite, stomachaches, trouble sleeping, headaches, nightmares, restlessness, nausea
- Regression—going back to earlier developmental behaviors, such as bedwetting, thumb-sucking, baby talk, clinging to mom or dad, whining, or tantrums
- Attempts to be helpless and to be taken care of
- Over-activity
- Denial of the parent deploying, lying to others about it

Children use the above behaviors and reactions to protect themselves from pain, to gain reassurance that they are still loved, and to ensure themselves that the remaining parent won't "abandon" them. Lot and lots of reassurance from you will help reduce the amount and severity of these reactions.

Research indicates it takes up to 5 years to readjust following a separation. As you know, military separations last up to 1 year so the entire time is an adjustment period. Children's reactions and behaviors will fluctuate, but you may find that your child needs outside intervention. According to Barnes and Coplon (1980, pp. 125-126), "If the symptoms are prolonged, remain severe and intense, and do not respond to any type of parental intervention, then parents need to consider outside help. Before symptoms become entrenched, and new problems begin, it is important to get help, even if briefly. It is better for parents to err on the side of being too cautious and to be told by a therapist that 'all is well' than to deny or ignore the problems until it becomes too late to remedy them.

"The following list of behaviors are signals telling you when you may need to worry:

- Detachment, withdrawal, and silence
- Loss of interest in friends
- Sleep disturbance
- Loss of appetite
- Refusal to go to school

- Delinquency (ex. stealing, cheating, lying)
- Learning problems
- Sexual perversions
- Obsessive-compulsive rituals
- Hyperactivity
- Rigid need to be perfect"

## **WAYS CHILDREN MAY EXPRESS THEMSELVES BEHAVIORALLY**

**Refusing to Eat:** Expresses hostility and a need for control.

**Depriving Self:** Especially of food, pleasure, and play.

**Poor Sleeping Habits**

**Doing Poorly in School**

**Playing Out Fantasies:** Primarily in storytelling, games, or make-believe play.

**Bed-Wetting or Regression to Earlier Behavior**

**Acting Out:** Unusual behavior at home or in school (may be in only 1 place/situation). Commonly shown as aggressive, hyperactive, or impulsive behavior.

**Withdrawal:** Quiet when normally outgoing.

**Any Behavior, Which Differs:** A change in behavior (without intervention) usually means a problem exists.

**Grief:** Such a change will naturally initiate the grief cycle which children experience much the same as adults, but at their own pace.

## CHILDREN IN GRIEF

The grief cycle for children is much the same as the grief cycle for adults. Children do, however, express themselves differently. Many factors go into how children experience and express grief, such as their developmental level, communication skills, and emotional maturity.

Denial

Anger/Guilt/Blame

Bargaining

Depression

Acceptance

**Denial:** Avoid the topic (such as divorce, death, or other loss), pretending nothing has changed

**Anger, Guilt, and Blame:** Children are often angry at their parents, but instead of directly expressing it (because they fear abandonment), they act out by being aggressive toward friends, pets, siblings, etc or it may come out in self destructive behavior. It's not unusual for children to blame themselves for a loss (for example, "It's my fault, because I wished Dad would leave me alone"), and with that comes guilt, and a fear of further loss/abandonment. They begin to stay by your side, asking where you are or where you're going. They may need frequent reassurance that you won't leave them. Consider it their way of getting a "recharge." They often regress, too. For instance, a child recently toilet trained may begin bedwetting.

**Bargaining:** To reverse the loss, children may bargain, such as "I'll be good from now on, do my homework, listen..."

**Depression:** This too is a normal reaction to a loss. Children again may express their depression through acting out (sometimes irritability) or withdrawal, a drop in school grades,

change in eating habits, easy to tears, change in sleep patterns, and more. If the depression is prolonged (over 2 weeks), without any periods of lighter moods, seek professional help. This may mean the child feels overly responsible for the loss.

Like adults, a child may go through the stages in any order, change back and forth, skip one, etc. Also, when a child experiences a loss, so do the parents, so parents are going through the same grief process. Remember, your child may not be experiencing the feelings you are, because grief is an individual process. It can feel like an emotional roller coaster. A natural response is for parents to want to protect their children from their pain. It's a normal response. Try not to avoid talking about the loss or to over explain it. Ask children what they think and feel, and then listen. **Listening to children is the best way to help them deal with their grief.**

## GRIEF BY DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE

**INFANTS.** They develop a rudimentary knowledge of loss. They learn about the permanence of objects. Peek-a-boo starts them on the road to recognizing that objects can come and go without ceasing to exist. The repetitive games of dropping an object from a seat and having mom or dad retrieve it over and over develops this knowledge. Eventually, they look for a toy that rolls under the couch, because they know it still exists.

He or she develops the ability to recognize mom or dad fairly quickly. Infants develop the ability to understand that when mom or dad leaves for work each day, mom or dad also returns some time later. It turns into an expectancy. The infant's memory becomes stronger and stronger. When mom or dad deploys, they quickly recognize that someone's missing, something has changed, and their adjustment depends on the remaining parent's reaction to the separation.

**PRESCHOOLERS.** At this age they recognize loss and separation, but don't comprehend the concept of time. Fear of separation begins building around age 1, and a common reaction among preschoolers is fear of abandonment. They know one parent has left, so a natural progression is to fear something happening to make the remaining parent also leave. They will need lots and lots of reassurance. Be honest, tell your child when you'll return if you take him or her to a babysitter, and try to understand their constant need for reassurance.

**SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN.** Their knowledge and understanding of the separation is better developed. At this age, practical concerns begin to appear. Like preschoolers, they need reassurance. Not only that mom or dad will return, but that their lives won't get turned upside-down. They'll want to know if a move is coming, how food will be bought, who will take care of things that the departing parent did, and so on. Maintaining routines as much as possible is important for all children, but especially so at this age.

**ADOLESCENTS.** Teens are developing abstract thinking. As a result, separations can raise philosophical questions in this age group. They may try to learn why it's important, question the reasoning, and argue against the merits of the separation. Moodiness is not unusual. Finally, research indicates that separation from the same-sex parent is more difficult at this age.



## COPING STRATEGIES BY DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE

The following information describes strategies to help children cope with a military separation from a parent. The first section describes some general ideas on helping children adjust. The other sections provide information targeted for specific developmental levels. Though the material is divided into the childhood stages of development, some of the ideas for one stage may also help children at other levels.

### ***General Strategies.***

*The parent must become more comfortable with his or her grief in response to the separation.*

Children base their reaction on how we react. They mirror our behavior. If we're having a bad day, kids know it. They also learn through trial and error how to behave themselves in response to our reactions. The more we are able to come to terms with the separation, adjust to and cope with the changes, and return to normal routines, the easier the transition will be for our children.

Communication is also a vital part of helping children of all ages cope with a loss. As Dr. Sprague put it, "If children can get in touch with and express their feelings about their parents' separation, they have a better chance of avoiding problems later in life." The

simplest way is to openly discuss with children what is happening, include them in the decision and planning processes leading up to the deployment, and ask them what they think and how they feel about the separation. This helps alleviate their fears and misunderstandings. Children will recognize from the parents' subtle clues that something is happening, and unless they are told what is going on, they will fill in the blanks with their own fantasies. Their reactions, such as hiding under a bed, offers parents opportunities to open dialogues. Another way to initiate discussions is to state how you feel about the separation and ask your child how he or she feels.

## **ACCORDING TO DR. DEITS**

Dr. Deits offers the following suggestions to help children adjust to a military separation:

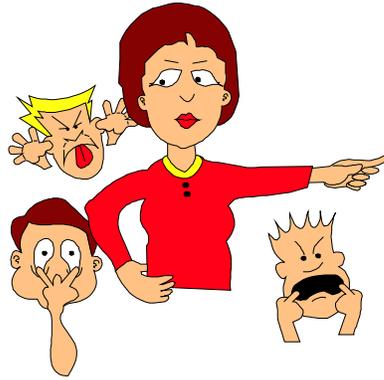
- Offer your acceptance of their feelings and behavior.
- Listen carefully without being judgmental.
- Assure them of their security in terms they can understand.
- Make sure they understand they are not to blame.
- Express your love and care for them in unmistakable ways.
- Act in ways that elicit trust.
- Answer all questions with as much honesty as you can.
- Help them understand that circumstances will not always be the same and they will not always feel as they do now.
- Provide an atmosphere of stability in the midst of any changes.



## **ACCORDING TO DR. BELL OF THE US ARMY RESEARCH INSTITUTE**

The following actions help reduce the difficulties caused by military deployments:

- Develop individual and family goals. Use them to develop/maintain family routines.
- Accept the lack of control over deployment events.
- Concentrate on what you can control: Yourself, your family, your job, etc.
- Become or remain active: Get a job, volunteer, or take up a hobby.
- Seek relevant information about the mission, the [Air Force], and helping agencies.
- Seek social support from friends, relatives, Family Support Centers (FSC), and the families of other deployed [airmen].
- Communicate with other [airmen] and open channels of communication within your own family.
- Check out rumors, and don't believe everything you hear.



## **ACCORDING TO DRs. ILG, AMES, AND BAKER**

The following suggestions also help children cope with the loss:

- Do your very best to put your children first.
- Try to keep their daily lives as normal as possible.
- Make efforts not to take out your hostility toward your [deploying] spouse on the children.
- If at all possible or practical, both of you, together, should tell your child or children about the coming separation.
- Make it quite clear that their father (or mother, as the case may be) will still be their parent even though not present in the home.
- Make it clear to your children that good provisions will be made for them no matter what happens. If one parent leaves, children quite naturally fear that “everybody” will leave and then they will be left with nobody to take care of them. Assure them that this will not be the case.



**Infants and Toddlers.** Growth and change occurs on a daily schedule. However, it's difficult for children from birth to age three to understand a military deployment. Their ability to recall people and understand time is limited. It is impossible to know exactly when they will begin to understand. In response to this situation, Dr. Blau suggests that parents tell their infants and toddlers what is happening regardless of their age: "Younger, more dependent children will sense, and be affected by, a parent's emotional state. They are highly susceptible to anger, sadness, and anxiety. Additionally, the younger child will be more upset by changes in routine. Thus parents can best protect these little ones by making sure that they--the parents--are on an even keel emotionally and by minimizing disruptions in the child's life. As consistently as possible, stick to the usual schedule and avoid unfamiliar caretakers."

Regression to earlier behavior patterns is a common phenomenon. The parent's awareness of the child's appropriate behavior is key, and then respond with appropriate parenting methods (such as ignore undesired behavior and reward desired behavior). You may also find them becoming frustrated with Mom or dad's absence. For example, if Mom gets home at 5 p.m. every day, your little one will continue to expect Mom's 5 p.m. return. Provide positive interaction if your infant reacts this way. If you become frustrated with his or her behavior, your baby's frustration will increase. Instead, redirect your child's attention at 5 p.m. toward some kind of activity, such as read to him or her, go to a park, or play with a favorite toy together.

Infants and toddlers don't have the same maturity of long-range memory as their older siblings have. A problem for departed parents of a child in this age range is that the child's memories of Mom or Dad will probably fade. Use their senses to maintain their memories of

Mom or Dad. Cassette recordings keep the sound of mom or Dad fresh in memory. Photos or videotapes will help with visual memory. Research indicates that the sense of smell is very important for infants, so try using one of Mom or Dad's t-shirts as a car seat prop, pillowcase, or security blanket. Their memories of Mom or Dad won't remain as fresh as they would if Mom or Dad didn't leave, but these ideas can help ease your young children through the reunification transition.

***Preschoolers.*** Age three to five is a period of continuing rapid development both cognitively and physically. The concept of time is still limited and their concrete and self-centered thinking may lead them to believe they will be abandoned and to blame themselves for the separation. Additionally, their inability to express their emotions, fears, and beliefs can create further frustration for them. Abandonment is a common fear for children three, four, and five even without a parent in the military. Reassurance that the absent parent will return will hold little value, because of the months of time before reunion (the concept of time is still limited). Parents need other methods to help reduce these fears.



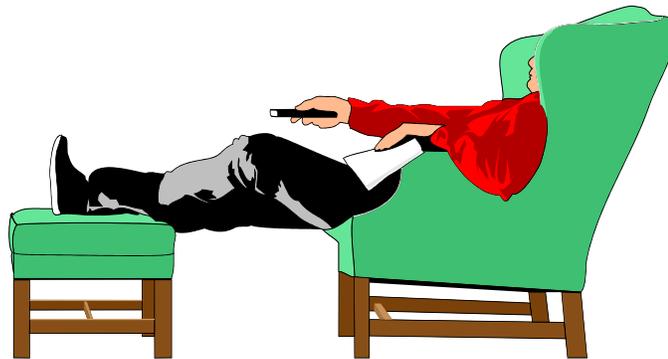
Swapping a token possession between the deploying parent and child helps them believe the parent will return; keep in touch through phone conversations, mail, photos, and art work; or have the deploying parent tape record reading the child's favorite books. Children at this age

express themselves wonderfully through drawings, coloring, and imaginative play. Encourage these activities. To help make the concept of time more concrete, children can use a paper chain to track the weeks of separation, use a calendar, or other similar means. Parents can also encourage children to draw to help them express their emotions, fears, and beliefs. One last point for parents to understand, and try to be patient with, is that children at this age may need daily (sometimes multiple times on any given day) reassurance and explanation of the deployment.



***School-aged.*** Children begin developing abstract thinking skills around age twelve, so children ages six to twelve need specific, concrete, and factual information. This is a period when the child may suppress his or her emotions, only to later cause problems in adulthood. Simultaneously, they are better equipped to express their fears and emotions, so parents can have meaningful, “heart-to-heart” talks. As with the younger children, reading and drawing helps them express themselves. In this age range, peer relationships begin to influence them, so parents need to monitor school progress and behavior. Dr. Blau points out that preteens will also begin testing limits. Parents who maintain realistic limits and provide their children freedom within those limits will find success. Another thing to keep in mind with this

age group is that, like the preschoolers, they often don't have the vocabulary to verbally express themselves. So, like the preschoolers, keep plenty of crayons, paper, and other art supplies on hand for them. That's the best tool they have to communicate their reactions to Mom or Dad's absence.



**Teens/Adolescents.** Teens may resist talking. Rebellion, moodiness, anger, wanting to be with friends, wanting privacy, and testing adult limits and values are normal teenage behavior. Even without the added stress of a military separation, According to Drs. Dinkmeyer and McKay, authors of the Systematic Training for Effective Parenting program (STEP), "parenting teenagers is one of the most challenging tasks of raising children today." Research is mixed on the affect of a separation. Some research finds teens are unaffected, because they will soon launch from the nest, while other research finds the separation inhibits the launching. This underlines how teens are developing into young adults, preparing for independence.

Acting out, even destructive, behavior may take place, such as lying, stealing, substance abuse, sexual activity, or violence. Again, communication is the key. Teens are also capable of handling more responsibility, such as helping with errands. Dr. Blau notes, however, that "the pitfall with adolescents is that some parents rely on them too much and, at worst,

'parentify' them, asking the child to meet adult needs....[This] usually occurs in one of three ways: when parents rely on children for a sense of security (the child takes care of the parent), for emotional needs (they're best friends), or for practical needs (the child runs the household and takes care of younger siblings). Children often enjoy the role; it makes them feel special. But...this role reversal--which can also happen with younger children--is always harmful." Adolescence is a challenging stage for parents. Parents faced with a military separation would benefit greatly from a parenting of teens class.



## PART 3

**FAST**



*Late Breaking News*

**THE  
WRITE  
STUFF**

## LONG DISTANCE PARENTING

Parenting while away from home is not easy. Some separated parents find it so emotionally difficult they withdraw and become significantly less involved in the lives of their children while they are apart. This, of course, is not good either for the parent or the children, not to mention the difficulty it causes the parent/caregiver who is at home alone. The most important aspect of parenting from a distance is making those small efforts to stay in touch. Doing some things that say the parent is thinking about and missing the child is what is most important. Here are some practical suggestions to help keep the absentee parent involved with their children.

Letters and cards from mom or dad are important. The length and contents are not nearly as important as the presence of something in the mail from the absent parent. When sending picture post cards, make little notes about the place or write that you stood right here "x" in the picture. Any small thing that makes the card personal will have tremendous meaning to children at home.

Cut out and send things from the local paper or magazines, whether the language is English or not. This is a tangible way to help them feel connected and give them an idea of what life is like there. For older children, a subscription to a favorite magazine is a gift that keeps on giving.

When using a tape recorder, remember to be creative: sing "Happy Birthday," tell a story, make up a story, read scriptures, take it with you to work or when visiting with some friends. Don't try to fill it all in one sitting. Make sure you describe the surroundings, the time of day and what you're doing, etc.

Try not to forget birthdays and special holidays that would be important to a child, particularly Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, Halloween, or Valentine's Day.

Try to schedule phone calls when children are likely to be at home. Keep a mental list or written list of things you want to talk about with each child such as their friends, school, ball games, etc. Ask each child to send you something from the activities they are involved in at school, home or outside activities like dance lessons, youth groups or scouts.

If your child has a pet, make sure to ask about it.

Send an age appropriate gift for each child. It should be something special just for them. Some interesting and creative gifts include a special notebook for school, a book for coloring or reading, or something unique from where you are stationed. (for additional ideas see web site sgtmoms)



## ***A KIDS KITS PRIMER***

In the next section is a sample first letter home. The letter itself is not as important as the issues it covers. Note that the author discusses those concerns that would worry a child including writing and calling information, safety, health, food, clothing, sleeping, visits, work, and friends.

Children have varying degrees of knowledge about the military, your job/mission, and where you are. They need a more realistic picture to ease their worries. Parents need to reduce their fears, to be honest and yet not to make it sound "Too good."

Every letter home should include 4 messages:

1. I love you.
2. I miss you.
3. I will be back.
4. It's not your (the child's) fault.

Letters home are most effective when they deal with everyday situations that children can relate to, such as comments about the sunshine, the trees, what happened at lunch, etc. Parents with young children can draw pictures (i.e. a happy face with the comment "This is how I feel when I think of you!"). Children also enjoy make believe stories or poems written especially for them by mom or dad.

The goal of communication is to reassure the child that his/her parent is safe and well, so the child can relax and not feel as anxious about the separation.



## FIRST LETTER HOME

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I love you and miss you. I know you may not understand why I am not with you. You have nothing to do with my leaving you—it's not your fault. Part of being in the military means making these short sacrifices. I know it's not great going through it, but it pays off in the long run.

There are lots of other military people here. We live together in (dorms, tents, apartments, etc.). Mine is (description). We each have our own bed. I also have my own (computer, TV, VCR, stereo, etc.). I have (lots, minimal, some) privacy and time to myself. I have \_\_\_\_\_ friends and they are \_\_\_\_\_. I participate in \_\_\_\_\_ for my own activities.

I really miss you at mealtime, too. Here we take turns eating. Sometimes it seems like the whole base goes to eat at the same time. We line up at the cafeteria. There are lots of people here, and it takes a lot of time for everyone to eat. The food is OK, but not like we have it at home. I get plenty to eat and I am not hungry.

I go to work everyday. I work at \_\_\_\_\_ and on \_\_\_\_\_. Everyone has a job, some people cook, some fly, some fix things, some work on computers, and lots more. The people I work with are \_\_\_\_\_.

I will call as much as possible. I will try to call every \_\_\_\_\_, at about \_\_\_\_\_ (a.m., p.m.). Sometimes the phones are too busy, sometimes the phone lines aren't working right, and sometimes our job keeps us from being able to make the call, so try to understand that I'm doing the best I can.

I would love to see you. I will get to see you \_\_\_\_\_.

If I get sick, we have (facilities, care, etc.).

I love you and I miss you. I wish I could be with you. I know this is hard for you. I am not happy being so far from you. I really don't want to be away from you. I think of you often. I'll write again soon!!! You can write me at \_\_\_\_\_. Tell me about your friends, school, and what you're doing. Besides you, the things I miss most are (fast foods, privacy, freedom, driving, TV, commercials, not shopping, sun, etc.).



## POINTS TO REMEMBER WHEN WRITING

1. Don't make any promises you won't keep—relationships are built on trust—be honest, even if it hurts.
2. Be sure not to scare children about where you are.
3. The purpose of the letter is to open honest communication. Let the child know you are safe and well so they can return to school without too much worry.
4. You may not want to deal with all the issues in one letter.
5. It is important for children to know that you are safe. At the same time they need to know that what you're doing is important. For instance, being in the military carries a certain amount of commitment and responsibilities to the military, support of your country, support of your family, freedom and ideals, and so on.

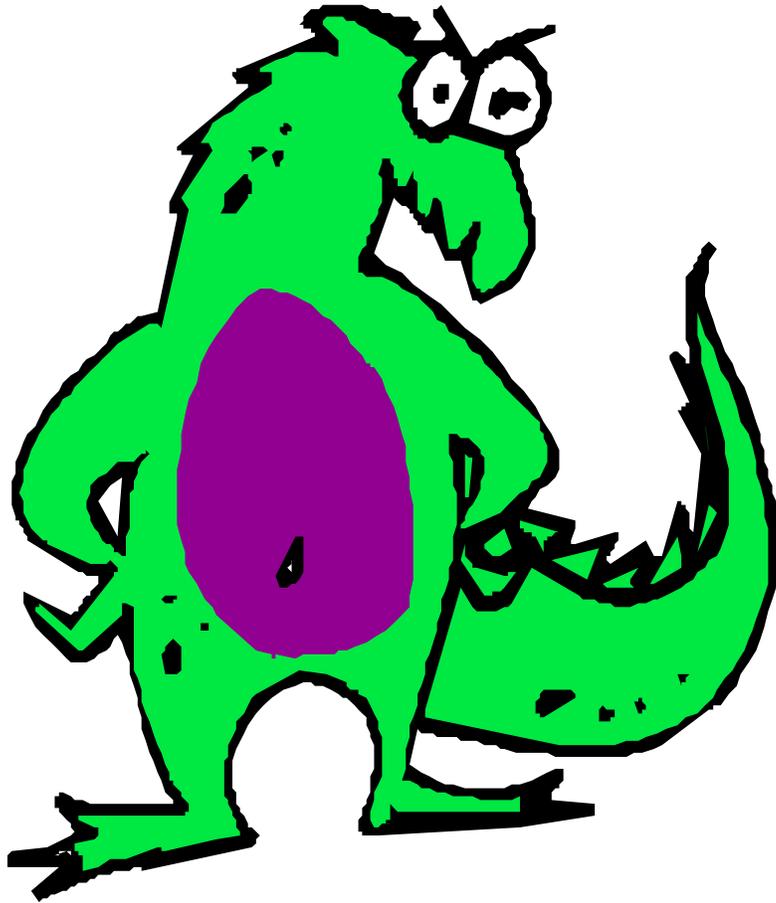
## ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS LETTERS

1. Have the child make a map of the safest route between home and school and mail it back. You do the same for your home to work.
2. Ask your child to draw you a picture and send it to you. You do the same. A variation is for your child to start a picture, mail it to you, and you complete it and mail it back.
3. Write about favorite books, TV shows, etc.

### OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

1. If you had \$10.00 and could buy anything, what would it be?
2. If you went on a long trip, where would you go? How would you get there?
3. If you were on an island, what food would you take, what game, what book?
4. My teacher's name is \_\_\_\_\_. What's your teacher's name?
5. Today I ate lunch with my friend \_\_\_\_\_. Who did you have lunch with?
6. What games do you like to play? What games do you like to watch? Is it important to win?
7. If you had to leave for a long journey and could only take 3 things, what would you take? (All the people you love are going, too.)
8. In school my favorite subject was \_\_\_\_\_. What is yours?
9. What's the best thing that happened this week?
10. Do you have any new friends? Who?
11. Have you and (mom, dad) been anywhere or done anything this week?
12. Who do you walk to school with? Eat lunch with? Play at recess with?
13. I know this is hard for you. What is the hardest part of me being here? (Then no matter what your child says, you say "Oh, OK. I hear you telling me that this is difficult.")

## PART 4



## FEARFUL INSIGHTS



## CHILDHOOD FEARS ARE NORMAL

Going through a separation from a parent can aggravate, instigate, or initiate fears. The next few pages discuss childhood fears and what you can do to help your children work through their fears.

The list below identifies some of the more common childhood fears and the approximate ages at which they first appear.

### **UNDER 5 MONTHS:**

During infancy, most newborns will cry after any **sudden intense stimulus**, such as a loud noise (like a sonic boom!) or the loss of bodily support.

### **6 TO 23 MONTHS:**

Equally common are the fears of **separation from parents** and the approach of **strangers**. They typically start at 6 to 9 months, peak at about 18 months, and are usually gone by 24 months. Toddlers are also afraid of **masks**, especially one worn by a stranger in a strange place, and some toddlers tend to become afraid of the **toilet**.

### **2 TO 5 YEARS:**

**Animals**—snakes, rats, mice, insects, frogs, lizard. **Natural disaster**—fires, earthquakes, lightning, floods, thunderstorms. **Physical harm**—being wounded or seeing some wounded, receiving shots, family member dying, having an operation, doctors, nurses,

dentists. **Threatening situations**—being seen naked, being in the **dark**, the devil, **monsters**, being confined or locked up, seeing faces at the window, being kidnapped, **ghosts**, making **mistakes**.

During the preschool years, fears are quite common and normal. By one estimate, preschool children have an average of three fears. Typically, fear of dogs or other animals is most common at age 3, fear of the dark at 4 and 5, and apprehension about imaginary creatures a bit later.

**6 TO 12 YEARS:**

**Dark, being away from home (overnight), peer ridicule, earthquakes, lightning, blood, personal safety.**

After approximately six years, fears become less frequent and intense. One study reported that 60 percent of school children had no particular fears, but a few children had as many as seven. In particular, parents say their children are commonly afraid of certain animals, natural disasters, physical harm and specific threatening or social events.

**13 TO 18 YEARS:**

Some of the childhood fears listed previously plus **social alienation** and the **macabre**. Adolescents have fewer fears than children have. Their fears include some of the same fears as in childhood, but also fears of social alienation and **other social circumstances**.

**IN GENERAL:**

Most such fears disappear in a short time (within 2 to 3 years) without any special treatment. Fears that begin at older ages can be more persistent. Also, fears are typically not signs of future emotional problems, especially if the fear is not accompanied by other emotional or behavioral symptoms.

Studies show parents report that their girls are more fearful than their boys are. In either case, parents usually regard these childhood fears as normal, not excessive, and not of particular or immediate concern.

Sometimes, however, these common fears are quite intense. Parents of extremely fearful school age girls said the fear was most likely of snakes, rats, mice, the dark, war being kidnapped, and being seen naked. In fearful boys, it was the fear of being criticized, receiving a shot, and deep water.

## **FACTS ABOUT CHILDHOOD FEARS**

1. Fears are real for those with them. Saying "Don't be afraid" isn't a help.
2. To put down a child's fears with comments like "Don't be a baby" or "That's silly" only makes it worse.
3. The best response is to let the child know you're listening. Comments such as "I see you're really scared" or "That really frightens you" tells your child you care. Let him/her know you understand and you know how it feels.
4. HUGS HELP!
5. It's normal for children to have fears! Many are even predictable, for example babies 6 to 23 months often fear separation from their parents, 2 to 5 years old fear the dark or animals, ages 6 to 12 can fear snakes, lightning, and being seen naked—just to mention a few.
6. Fears can be learned from others. Many parents pass on a fear of snakes, heights, dogs, and others. Be careful before you say "I hate..." or "I'm afraid of..." Little ears will pick it up and repeat it. If it's good enough for you, your child thinks it's good enough for him/her, too.
7. Joking about scary things doesn't help and be careful when and who hears "Scary Stories."

8. Encourage the child to talk about the fears. Talking often leads to understanding and reduces the fear.
9. Don't push a child into a situation that is fearful. The child may become more afraid instead of less.



10. Try telling children they are magic. The magic gives them a feeling of control.
11. Logic helps sometimes (i.e. a flashlight to check out a dark closet each night before bed).
12. Keep talking and listening—time helps!
13. Pushing kids to “forget it” and making fun can prolong the fears.

## THE PURPOSE OF FEARS

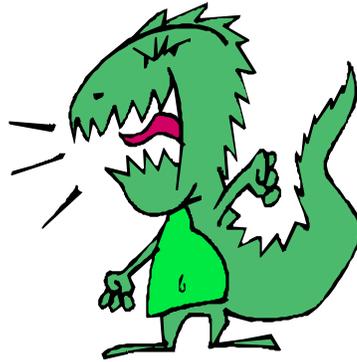
The fears we're most familiar with begin around age 2. It may baffle you when your 2 year old, who seemed confident, rushing headlong from one situation to another, suddenly develops fears. It can be particularly puzzling when you cannot think of any particular experience that could have triggered his or her anxieties.

**SUCH THOUGHTS ARE FREQUENT AMONG PARENTS OF 2 YEAR OLDS.** It is perplexing to see the rapid shift to fears, often strong and terrifying, that occurs in children of this age. And in trying to determine the reasons behind their child's behavior, parents sometimes tend to blame themselves and seek some cause in their own behavior.

**ONE RESULT IS GROWING UP.** The onset of fears is actually a result of your child's growing abilities and understanding. He or she is increasingly aware of being responsible for what may happen, and

though growing up is exciting, it is also frightening. The 2 year old is still a highly vulnerably child, very dependent on you, and his or her constant struggle between needing you and wanting to let go of you can be fearsome indeed.

**REASONS FOR "UNREASONABLE."** There is no predicting what the fears may latch on to, though the pages titled *Childhood Fears Are Normal* offer some insight. Your child may suddenly cry with pain at the sight of a bug on the sidewalk that he or she would have followed with great curiosity a few



weeks earlier. He or she may hold on to you desperately as a dog approaches, the same dog he or she previously ran ahead to play with. The fears may make no sense to you at all and have often been called the "unreasonable fears."

**FROM THE CHILD'S PERSPECTIVE, THE FEARS HAVE REASON.** Fears are a way to express anxiety, especially for children who have a limited ability to make sense of the world around them. Listen to the language of any 2 year old and you'll realize how very much he or she is learning. You'll have a better understanding of how overwhelming and confusing things can be. **Compound that with Mom or Dad gone to some unknown place for some unknown reason for some unfathomable amount of time and you're left with a potent recipe for fears.**

**FEARS ARE ALSO A SIGN OF THE CHILD'S ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL HIS OR HER IMPULSES.** Having been told many times that he or she must not hit or strike out at anyone, your child may give the power to do so to some fierce imaginary animal which hides behind the curtains. Since this is an age when there are no clear cut distinctions between what is real and what is not, the child who imagines a lion is in the room is certain that the lion is actually there.

**PROVIDING REASSURANCE AND COMFORT.** Children rely on us, as adults, to help them manage their feelings, interpret what they see and feel, and reassure them that we are in charge and will not, under any circumstances, allow them to be hurt by anything real or imagined. It is often difficult to know how to give the reassurance they need, since children are also unable to explain just what it is about the creature or experience that is so scary. We are left to guess about why they may be afraid and often we never really find out. Besides physically comforting until the fear subsides and reassuring that it is safe, it's helpful to validate your child's perceptions by saying, "Let's pull back the curtain and see what's there."

**FEARS ARE A NATURAL PART OF GROWING UP.** Though you may smile as you recall your childhood fears, you are probably also aware of the fears that still persist. Even as an adult, when your ability to reason makes the fears seem silly, you may still feel fear, and that is a real feeling. Knowing how real it must be for your child, who is surrounded by so many things he or she does not yet know about or understand, helps you to handle the child's fears. You can use your own knowledge and experience of fear to keep yourself from pushing him or her into situations he or she is worried about, to not pretend the fears don't exist, and to avoid making him or her feel unworthy because he or she is afraid of something. Patience and gentle encouragement go a long way toward helping a child overcome his or her fears and eventually experience the pride and confidence of having mastered them.

## STRATEGIES TO CONQUER FEARS

Fears show up in many ways. Some are easily seen. Others are hard to detect. It is normal for a child to become frightened at times, but if his or her fears are too intense or too prolonged, they can be harmful and cause permanent damage to development.

### Some Causes of Fears

Children "Catch" or "Copy" many fears from adults, such as fears of the dentist, dark, horses, water, snakes, dogs, cats, earthquakes, etc.

Loud Noises or a scary Halloween mask.

Fear of authority may develop from a parent who is too stern; fear of soiling from too rigid toilet training; fear of dirt from getting dirty during play. Whatever seems to make you withdraw your love will worry your child.

Lack of self-confidence, afraid of being alone in the dark at bedtime or fear of bedwetting is common.

### How to Overcome Them

First try to overcome your own fears. Reassure a frightened child and avoid ridicule. Show him or her you are not afraid, but appreciate his feelings the way he does.

These fears are usually brief and immediately forgotten. However, it is important that parents take his or her fears and worries seriously and make every effort to relieve them.

Avoid the growth of such fears in your child by being tolerant and friendly about his progress or lack of it, in his or her eating, playing, or keeping dry. Praise him or her for efforts even if they are clumsy.

Ridicule or stern measures only make it harder for him or her. Your child needs comfort, love, and reassurance. Ease up on scolding. Praise your child's little successes to build up his/her inner security.

### Some Causes of Fears

Afraid of the dark

Afraid of bedwetting

Insecurity may cause your child to imagine frightening things

Parents may set too high a standard for their child thus producing a fear of failure or may develop some "nervous" habits.

Constant criticism, and harsh and frequent punishment.

Family problems such as money, a parent losing a job, etc.

Family quarrels.

Death

### How to Overcome Them

Leave the door open partly or leave a small light in the room. A small flashlight sometimes works wonders. If monsters live in the dark, try using "**Monster Spray**"—a can of air freshener with the outside of the can covered with paper and labeled "Monster Spray."

The child whose bladder control is not yet perfect should be told his or her parents love him or her wet or dry.

Your child needs affection, reassurance, and acceptance, not ridicule. If your child is sure of him or herself and not being punished or crossly scolded, he or she won't be much worried by imagined fear.

Accept and love your child for him or herself. Don't expect your child to accomplish things beyond his or her capabilities.

Enjoy and appreciate your child. He or she will come along faster if you now and then tell your child what a wonderful person he or she is. Remember that human beings are mistake makers.

Discuss such troubles out of the child's hearing. If your child has heard, answer any questions honestly, but minimize the effects if possible.

Reassure your child of love of both parents.

Reassure him or her by telling your child people usually don't die until they are old and (with a cheerful hug) we will all be happy together for a long time. Children are very realistic about death, so answer all questions honestly.

## SEPARATION ANXIETY

According to the American Psychiatric Association, “the essential feature of Separation Anxiety is excessive anxiety concerning separation from the home or from those to whom the person is attached.”

A parent’s military deployment, TDY, or Remote Tour can trigger this.

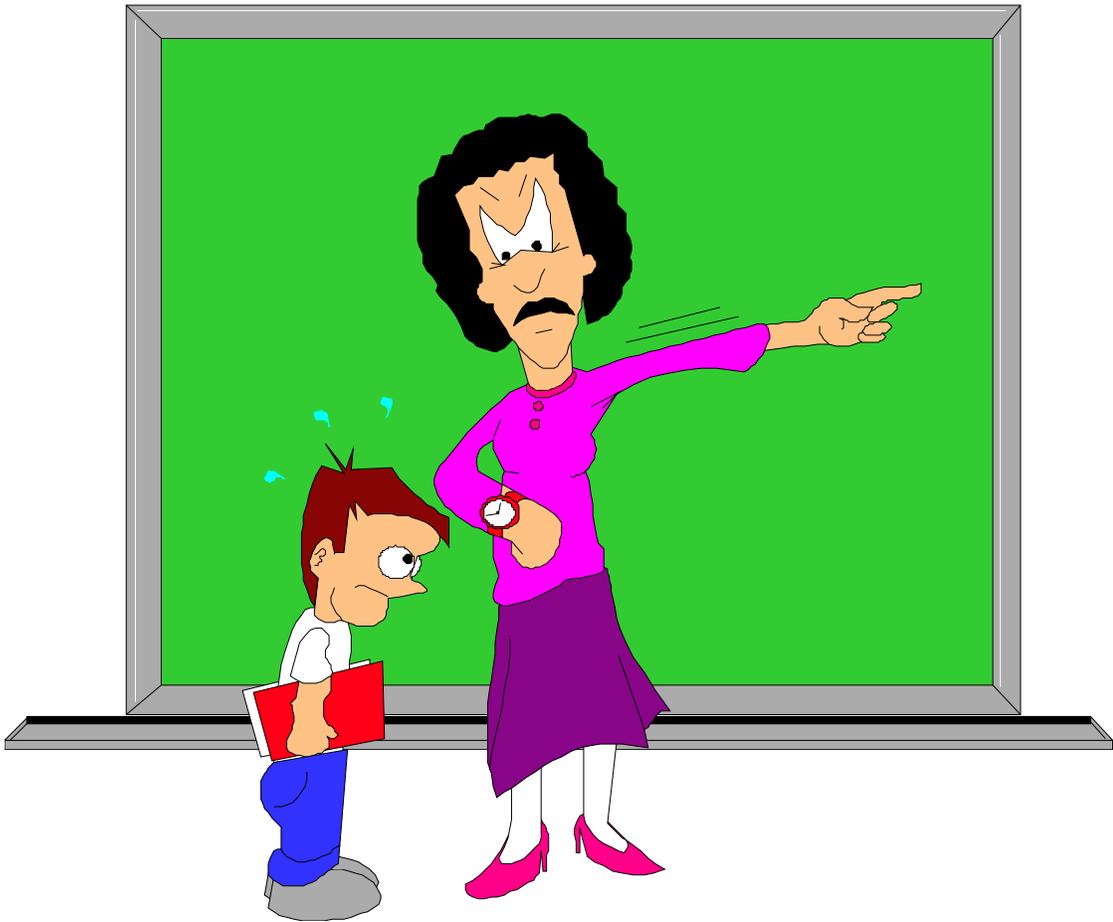
Separation anxiety includes certain common features. For instance, the child may have excessive fears of separation. Persistent worry about a separation or loss may also exist, as could worries about something-catastrophic happening to an absent parent. Other anxieties may center on the child’s health and welfare. For instance, the child may fear kidnapping, getting lost from his or parents or have frequent nightmares about separation from parents. Physical complaints are common. The child may complain of headaches, nausea, or other illnesses in an attempt to avoid separation from a parent. The child may suddenly complain of feeling sick after arriving at the baby-sitter’s house or at the schoolyard. The child may also fear and refuse to be alone, sleep away from home, or even leave home.

Mild, transient, short lived separation anxiety is normal for people going through a military separation—even for adults! Think about it—Are you unaffected by your spouse’s absence? Did you have no difficulty with sleep or your appetite? Did you have no days when you just felt like staying in bed and forgetting about the outside world? Of course not! We’re all affected the absence of our spouse, and children most definitely will also be affected by the absence of a parent.

You may already have noticed that this can cause problems for a child. For instance, if the child refuses to attend school, it can take a toll on the child’s academic progress. Social inhibitions can develop. Peers can be cruel to youngsters when they learn about such anxieties.

It’s a problem that may require professional attention when the anxieties interfere with your child’s functioning, especially in school or among friends. If the anxieties last longer than four weeks or if the intensity is severe, you may want to seek professional counseling.

## PART 5



**AIN'T  
MISBEHAVIN'**

## CHILD DISCIPLINE

Today's world offers many exciting opportunities for our children. But with that comes a down side—behavioral problems and concerns are not what they used to be. Our children are exposed to ever expanding information, problems, and challenges. To hear society remark about how our children must grow up faster is true.

One need only look at changes in school systems for key examples. For instance, when we parents were in Kindergarten, it was a time for play. Today, Kindergartners must know their letters by sight and sound, spell, and have about 1 hour of homework each night. And that's just Kindergarten!

Another example comes from the volume of information we are exposed to everyday. One Sunday edition of the *New York Times* contains an equal amount of information a person was exposed to in a lifetime 200 years ago! The information explosion is increasing on a daily basis, and tools like the Internet propel it. No wonder life's stresses seem greater than ever—they *are* greater than ever in history.

So an outgrowth of our rapidly changing society is greater pressure on our children. The following information comes from *Congressional Quarterly*, as cited by Stephen Covey in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families* (1997, p. 17):

### Top Disciplinary Problems According to Public School Teachers

1940	1990
Talking out of Turn	Drug Abuse
Chewing Gum	Alcohol Abuse
Making Noise	Pregnancy
Running in the Halls	Suicide
Cutting in Line	Rape
Dress Code Infractions	Robbery
Littering	Assault

Examining the above list can make one wonder how our children can survive. That's where we parents must exert ourselves in providing our children the appropriate guidance and discipline. With our intervention we help them navigate the minefields.

This section provides you with tools and techniques to help you with your children. However, this is just an overview. If you want more information, the Family Support Center offers parenting classes throughout the year. Parenting classes can be beneficial to you and your children.

## TECHNIQUES OF DISCIPLINE

Discipline is not punishment! The root of the word is disciple, which means follower of another's teachings. To discipline our children means to teach them.

### THE GOALS OF BEHAVIOR

The following information comes from Dr. Popkin's books *Active Parenting Today* and *Active Parenting of Teens*.

Children have 5 goals of behavior:

- Contact
- Power
- Protection
- Withdrawal
- Challenge

**CONTACT.** This includes the need to belong. We want contact, both physically and emotionally.

**POWER.** We desire the power to influence our environment and to exert some kind of control.

**PROTECTION.** Safety and survival is a basic instinct and need.

WITHDRAWAL. We all need a break from activities, friends, and family to rejuvenate ourselves. We improve our functioning by taking periodic breaks.

CHALLENGE. To take risk against our environment.

### **Child's Goal**

### **Positive Approach**

### **Negative Approach**

Contact

Contribution

Undue Attention Seeking

- So if you feel annoyed, this is what's happening. Start by using a forced choice, ACT, and then a consequence to redirect the behavior (described later). Follow-up with positive attention, otherwise the acting out will continue.

Power

Independence

Rebellion

- So if you feel angry, this is what's happening. This is the most common. An Authoritarian parent pushes his or her children toward rebellion, because they are being taught that "the only way to achieve power is to control others" (Popkin, 1993, p. 63). To change it, simply step aside from the power struggle—neither fight nor give in. Tell your rebel that you'll discuss it when he or she is ready. Use the broken record technique (described later) to get your point across.

Protection

Assertiveness

Revenge

Forgiveness

- So if you feel hurt, you're child is taking out revenge against you. This usually happens when the child tries rebellion and it doesn't work. Often the parent hurts the child if the parent tries to win, so the child retaliates. The way to stop it is to stop saying or doing things that are hurtful.

Withdrawal

Centering

Undue avoidance

- So if you feel helpless, your child is feeling discouraged, and may have very low-self-esteem. This child may say things like “I can’t; I don’t know how; I’ll fail” are showing signs of withdrawal. This often results from our own perfectionism. We need to tell our children that we love them no matter how well they succeed at things. We can also find tasks for them to succeed at to rebuild their confidence, and to recall past successes.

Challenge

Skill Building

Thrill Seeking

Reasonable Risk Taking

- So if you feel fearful, this is what’s going on. Teens especially exhibit this behavior, such as drinking and driving, experimenting with drugs, and sexual behavior. “I’m bored; There’s nothing to do” are what you’ll hear. The key is to redirect their thrill seeking behavior into more positive behavior, such as learning new skills. For instance, learning to sail, flying model planes, participating in sports, and so on. Teens especially need to challenge themselves so they can work toward developing and defining their identity. They need to push their self-imposed limits to begin preparing themselves to survive on their own.

## PARENTING STYLES

Parenting can be broken into 3 basic styles—**Permissive, Authoritarian, and Democratic.**

**PERMISSIVE.** The Permissive Style parent has weak rules and not enough control for the children. The children have no limits to what they can and cannot do. They end up missing out on learning what behaviors are acceptable and not acceptable, because with the permissive parent they do whatever they want. They learn to manipulate others and to get their way by acting out. You can probably imagine what kind of child this produces—a spoiled brat who’s used to getting his or her way all the time no matter what the expense to others.

**AUTHORITARIAN.** The Authoritarian Style parent has extremely difficult and controlling rules. These parents blame their children for problems, use a lot of yelling, and break the spirit of their children. This parent wins battles at all costs, but this is at the expense of the children. The children have no freedom to make decisions, or make mistakes. What authoritarian parents don't realize is that with animals we break their spirits to domesticate them, but to break a child's spirit causes lifelong problems. These children are submissive, non assertive, and often follow their parents behavior as adults—they too become controlling, aggressive parents.

**DEMOCRATIC.** The Democratic Style parent uses what Dr. Popkin (1993, p. 15) calls freedom within limits. With this style, the parent is still clearly in charge, but uses discipline to help the children develop their own independence and responsibility. Like the permissive parent, the democratic parent gives the children freedom to choose many things. Unlike the permissive parent, the children don't get anything they want at all costs. The democratic parent limits the children's freedom. Like the authoritarian parent, the democratic parent sets strict limits. Unlike the authoritarian parent though, the children are allowed to choose their own destiny within those limits. Also, the limits are not as rigid with democratic parents. They use flexibility and change the rules and limits as children develop. Instead of breaking their spirits, these parents **ENCOURAGE** growth.

Typically, parents don't fit precisely into any of the above categories, but rather somewhere between. The following parenting techniques are based on the above democratic style of parenting. You may already be familiar with some, and probably recognize that you use them without even realizing it.

An important point to keep in mind is that there is no such thing as the perfect parent.

### **ALL PARENTS MAKE MISTAKES.**

If your goal is perfection, change it. There's no such thing as perfection, so you're just setting yourself up for failure. That goal is often at the root of the permissive and authoritarian style. The authoritarian is striving for perfection at all costs—this parent will teach the child who's boss. "If I can control my children, I won't feel so insecure about myself." The permissive parent often has become that way because he or she has given up trying to achieve perfection.

Perfection is impossible, so rather than modifying his or her parenting techniques, he or she give up and lets the children do whatever they want. “I can’t succeed, so why bother trying.”

The following ideas are ways to change things around. If you choose to try them, don’t expect instant miracles. Change takes time, especially with children. They have expectancies of their parents based on past experiences. So if you try to change, you have to build a whole new history of experiences for them to draw on. **Another suggestion is to take a parenting class, because the information here is just a snapshot.**

### Get Them to Come When Called

A Common problem parents have is children not coming when called. This includes children being reluctant to leave a playground or similar environment. This is often due to their involvement in the activity, not necessarily disobedience. Children can become engulfed in something that swallows their attention—and that’s positive!!! However, it can be frustrating for parents when it’s time for dinner and the children don’t show. Here’s how to change that:

- Before it’s time to leave, time for dinner, or time to change environments, tell your children they have “X” time more for the activity (for instance, 10 more minutes at the park, 5 more times down the slide, or 2 more minutes of the video game)
- When “X” time is over, take your children and leave, have them arrive at the dinner table, leave the environment, or stop the activity
- **Be Firm and Consistent**—If they try manipulating you with things like 1 more time, “I promise,” and so on, **NO**. You already told them the limit.
- If their pleading continues, try the *broken record* technique. If they refuse to change their activity, try *When, Then*

Remember if your children are used to ignoring you when called without consequence, this will take time to change. They will resist your efforts, so it’s up to you to make the change.

## The Broken Record

If your children start trying to manipulate you into giving in to their desires, use this idea.

Children can be masterful at manipulating their parents by:

- Changing the Subject
- Using Emotional Pleas
- Joking or Making Fun of Your Request
- Trying to Make you Feel Guilty About your Request
- Criticizing or Questioning Your Request
- Asking You Why You Want What You Asked For

This is very effective and very simple. All you do is state what you want in a clear, calm manner, with the persistence of a broken record. Don't change what you say or how you say it. Just continue stating what you want until your children do what you say. (This works on spouses, co-workers, and store clerks, too!!!)

## Just Say No

Often as parents, we try so hard to do what's right for our children, and to be fair, that we forget we can say "NO." Follow these steps to make it more acceptable for your child, but regardless, you are the parent and "no means no." In the long run, it's vitally important for your children to learn to respect when others say no.

- Acknowledge the other person's request by repeating it
- Explain your reason for declining
- Say "NO"
- If appropriate, suggest an alternative where both your needs and your child's needs will be met (only if it's reasonable)

## Forced Choice

This idea has benefits for both you and your children. It gives them the responsibility to choose what they want. It helps them develop their own decision making skills and relieves you the pressure of having to make all decisions for them. If they're unhappy with their choice, it's their responsibility, not yours.

- Give a small number of choices (with toddlers, try 2, and older children maybe up to 3 or 4).
- For teens give them a limited range to make a choice within. For instance, if you take a teen shopping for pants, identify the acceptable styles and let your teen make the final choice. Or you could have your teen make several selections, you limit to what's acceptable to you, and then your teen makes the final decision.
- You have to be able to live with the choices you give. (For instance, it does no good if you tell your toddler "You can pick up your toys now or after the show's over." Your toddler chooses after the show and you say "No, do it now.")
- Don't make everything a choice. Sometimes children, even teenagers, want to be told "NO." They probably won't admit it, but if you think back to your own childhood, you'll recognize this is true.

## The When-Then Rule

Use this idea to get your children to do things they really don't want to do. This too is very simple and very effective. You simply state "When you..., Then..." This rule also takes pressure off you and places the responsibility on your children. It's their choice as to whether or not they get what you offer.

- Don't give special rewards for doing what's expected, because then your children will come to expect the special rewards
- Be firm and use eye contact
- If they don't perform the task, they don't get the "Then" part. If they still receive what they want, the value of the When-Then Rule is lost

### **The ACT Rule**

Use this idea when you need your children to stop some kind of misbehavior. ACT stands for the steps to take. Accept your child's feelings or desires. Communicate the rule your child's misbehavior is in conflict with. Target your child's attention to an alternate, positive, and acceptable activity.

### **Establish Routines**

Consistency, stability, predictability, and control are important to children. They need environments that include these characteristics. Often, misbehavior indicates an environment that lacks these qualities. Establishing routines helps restore things to a more controlled atmosphere. This helps children feel safe and secure.

They reinforce the rules and your expectancies. If you make the routines fun, they can be special family times. Another advantage of establishing routines is they make your life more simple, less stressful, more predictable, and more enjoyable. Some ideas for routines include morning routines, mealtime routines, and bedtime routines.

### **Consequences**

Children need consequences for their actions. This only makes sense. Imagine if we as adults had no consequences to our actions. Robbery, assault, and even murder would have no consequences. Just like adults have rules and consequences for breaking the rules, so do children.

If using the above techniques don't change your child's behavior, try a consequence. For instance, let's say your child was playing with her dolls. After she finished, she left the dolls on the floor in the living room. You tried a forced choice, and she didn't follow through. You can now offer a consequence. Try something like "I asked you pick up you toys, and you chose to do it during a commercial. You didn't do it. So either put them away right now or I will take them from you. It's your choice."

The example uses first a forced choice and then a logical consequence. Then if the child still doesn't pick up her dolls, the parent must confiscate them.

Sometimes things have natural consequences that work just as well. For instance, if the dolls were left outside and you have a dog that chews on toys, you could tell your child pick them up so the dog doesn't destroy them. Then if the child leaves the toys outside and the dog chews them up, your child has suffered the natural consequence of his or her decision. Under these circumstances ***IT IS CRITICAL THAT YOU DON'T RESCUE YOUR CHILD*** by replacing the toys. If you do so, the lesson is lost.

- Consequences must be fair
- You have to be willing to follow through with the consequence, so make it realistic
- Give only one consequence, and if it's not natural, keep it logical
- Logical consequences "Fit the Crime"

## TANTRUMS

The following information comes from Dr. Popkin in his book *Parenting Your 1- to 4-year Old*.

### TIPS FOR AVOIDING TANTRUMS

1. Make sure your child gets plenty of sleep.
2. Make sure your child eats healthy food.
3. Let your child do things with you.
4. Find things your child can do in the house.
5. When your child goes out with you, bring along something fun.
6. Use the ACT rule to help find other good things to do.
7. Tell your child to take some deep breaths.

When your child gets angry he may yell and cry. He may even fall on the floor and kick. This is called a tantrum. Many children have tantrums. They get angry when they do not get what they want. Your job is to teach your child how to manage his anger. Here are some tips that will help you:

1. **Stay calm.** If you get angry, your child will learn to do the same thing. Stay calm and think about what is happening.
2. **Step back from her.** When you are not there she has no one to watch her yell and scream. You can say, "I cannot talk to you when you are crying and screaming. When you are finished, we will talk about it."
3. **Talk gently.** If you do not want to leave her alone, be gentle with her. Use a gentle voice. You can say, "It's OK. I know. You will be all right. I am here."
4. **Hold her gently.** Hold her with gentle arms until she is quiet. **Important:** This will work only if you hug and hold your child when she is happy, too. Do you hold her only when she has a tantrum? Then she will have a tantrum when she wants your love or hugs.
5. **Do not give your child what he wants to get him to stop yelling and screaming.** He will learn to have a tantrum to get his way. Wait until he has finished. Remember Step 3 of the ACT rule? You can help target a positive choice. You can say, "You cannot have a cookie now. It is almost time for dinner. You can have a cracker or some cheese."
6. **Give a choice.** Let your child have his tantrum where he is. Walk away from the area. But sometimes you cannot walk away. Your child may have a tantrum in front of other people. Say to your child, "Take some deep breaths and calm down, or you can scream in your room." You can gently carry him to his room. If you are in a store, take him outside until he is calm. If you have a car, put him in the car seat and sit quietly in your seat. Wait a few minutes. Then ask him, "Are you ready to be calm and go back inside?" Most children will be calm now. If he is not calm, wait a few minutes. Then ask him again.

# COMMUNICATION & PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS

From Dr. Gordon's *P.E.T. in Action*.

## PROBLEM OWNERSHIP

- Unacceptable behavior is that which interferes with another person's right (as in one's right to hear a conversation while on the phone), or prevents someone from getting his/her needs met
- If the another's behavior is unacceptable, you own the problem. Examples include children leaving toys out, drawing on walls, interrupting conversations, etc.
- If the another's needs are not being met, is unhappy, frustrated, or in trouble, that person owns the problem. Examples include no one to play with, hungry, tired, bored, not completing assignments, etc.
- When you own the problem, it's up to you to modify the behavior that causes the problem. (ex. dad uses I-messages and explains how he feels when the child is loud while dad is on the phone, starting with something like "I have a problem, and I need your help")
- When someone else owns the problem, it's up to that person to solve it, and your role is to use the listening skills and problem solving steps to guide that person toward solution. We do others a disservice by solving their problems (paradoxically, no help is the best help).

## LISTENING SKILLS

### THE 4 BASIC LISTENING SKILLS--

- **Passive Listening**

Try keeping silent when communicating with someone who own the problem. This helps others learn to solve their own problems.

The message given is "I want to hear what you're saying; I accept your feelings; I trust you to decide what you want to share with me; and you're in charge here because it's your problem."

- **Acknowledgment Responses**

These are simple head nods, "OK," "Uh-huh," etc.  
The message given is "I'm listening, attending, and interested."

- **Door Openers or Invitations**

Simple, direct, open-ended questions/statements to stimulate dialogue

Examples are:

Would like to talk about it?

I'm interested in knowing what you think about that.

Sounds like you have some feelings about that.

- **Active Listening**

You feed back what the other person says--Reflecting. You don't send a new message in your own words, but state what you interpret as the other's feelings. Example--a child is crying. The parent, instead of trying to guess why the child is crying, starts with a **Door Opener** ("*Do you want to talk about it?*", "*My toy's broken*") use **Active Listening** ("*You're really sad about your toy*").

## 2. THE 12 ROADBLOCKS

- Example--A child hits his younger sibling for taking away his toy.

Roadblock	Example
Ordering, directing, demanding	<i>Don't you ever hit him again.</i>
Warning, threatening	<i>If you hit him again, you get no dinner.</i>
Moralizing, preaching	<i>You have no right to hit people.</i>
Advising, giving solutions	<i>Why don't you talk instead of hit.</i>
Lecturing, teaching, giving facts	<i>You're not verbalizing your anger.</i>
Judging, blaming, criticizing	<i>You shouldn't have hit him.</i>
Praising, buttering up	<i>You're always kind, why did you hit him?</i>
Name-calling, ridiculing	<i>You're nothing but a bully.</i>
Interpreting, analyzing	<i>You hit him because you were mad at me.</i>
Reassuring, sympathizing	<i>I know you're angry, but it will be all right.</i>
Probing, questioning, interrogating	<i>Why did you hit him?</i>
Withdrawing, diverting, distracting	<i>Who cares--just go play.</i>

- Roadblocks aren't inevitably barriers to communication. It's essentially impossible for people to eliminate all Roadblocks from everyday conversation. It's also unnecessary. **It's when the someone else owns a problem that the 12 Roadblocks can become barriers.**
- Hints to improve listening skills
  - Use active listening to communicate empathy and acceptance
  - Don't use active listening when you own the problem
  - Learning the skills takes practice
  - Expect the listening skills to feel uncomfortable at first
  - Use all 4 skills, not just 1 of them
    - When someone else owns the problem, let that person select the solution, even if you don't think it's the right choice.
- **Don't ask "Why?" like "Why did you hit you brother?"** This automatically puts others on the defensive

**YOU-MESSAGES VERSUS I-MESSAGES**—"You-messages" evaluate others, while

"I-Messages" are a statement of fact.

### 1. EFFECTS OF YOU-MESSAGES

- Others resist change
- Others won't listen or become defensive
- Others feel untrustworthy
- Others feel guilty after being insulted or evaluated
- Others self-esteem is threatened or injured by critical or blaming roadblocks
- The person may feel rejected, unloved, stupid, bad, or selfish
- You-messages can escalate the severity of a problem

### 2. I-MESSAGES

- Sample format--"When you \_\_\_\_\_, I feel \_\_\_\_\_, because \_\_\_\_\_."  
 "When you \_\_\_\_\_" identifies the unacceptable behavior  
 "I feel \_\_\_\_\_" identifies the feeling

“because \_\_\_\_\_” identifies the consequences of the unacceptable behavior

- Complete I-Messages contain all 3 parts. An appropriate I-Message might be: “When you hit your brother, I feel scared, because your brother might get hurt.”

**No-LOSE PROBLEM SOLVING**—Three methods of problem solving exist. The first two methods present a competitive style, where one wins and the other loses, through an autocratic/power struggle type scenario. The third method is the No-Lose method, which uses a more democratic style to find a consensus/agreement.

1. METHOD 1--The person in charge selects a solution, and if others don't accept it, the authority figure forces it through threats, power, authority, or coercion (one wins, other loses).
2. METHOD 2--Again, the authority figure usually selects the solution, but when the other person resists, the authority figure gives in to the other's demands (other person wins, authority figure loses).
3. METHOD 3--The problem solving steps are followed by the people working together. They define the problem, identify alternatives, evaluate the alternatives, select a possible solution, and develop a course of action. No coercion or power is necessary (no-lose).

#### 4. PROBLEM SOLVING STEPS

- **Define the Problem**

The presenting problem is typically not the true problem

**Active Listening** helps people communicate the real problem, so a lot of active listening is required in this step

*If the following steps aren't moving smoothly, suspect the real problem is not yet defined*

- **Identify Alternative Solutions**--Do so in a brainstorming type manner, getting as many alternatives as possible, without judgment until all ideas are exhausted
- **Evaluate the Alternatives**--Evaluate each alternative identified above for the consequences and potential for solving the real problem
- **Select a Solution**

- **Take Action**--This includes developing a plan of action (who, what, when, where, how) and a commitment by the people involved to stick to it
- **Evaluate the Results**--This means checking to see if the action solved the problem and/or created new problems. The problem solving steps continue as necessary in an unending cycle.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF BAD COMMUNICATION

**TRUTH**—Insisting you are "*right*" and the other's "*wrong*"

**BLAME**—you say that the problem is the other person's fault

**MARTYRDOM**—You claim that you're an innocent victim

**PUT-DOWN**—you imply that the other person is a loser because he or she "always" or "never" does certain things

**HOPELESSNESS**—You give up and insist there's no point in trying

**DEMANDINGNESS**—you say you're entitled to better treatment but you refuse to ask for what you want in a direct manner

**DENIAL**—you insist that you don't feel angry, hurt, or sad when you really do

**PASSIVE AGGRESSION**—You pout or withdraw or say nothing. You may storm out of the room or slam doors

**SELF-BLAME**—Instead of dealing with the problem, you act as if you're an awful, terrible person

**HELPING**—Instead of hearing how depressed, hurt or angry the other person feels, you try to "*solve the problem*" or "*help out*"

**SARCASM**—your words or tone of voice convey tension or hostility which you aren't openly acknowledging

**SCAPEGOATING**—You suggest that the other person has "*a problem*" and that you're sane, happy and uninvolved in the conflict

**DEFENSIVENESS**—You refuse to admit any wrong-doing or imperfections

**COUNTERATTACK**—Instead of acknowledging how the other

person feels, you respond to their criticism by criticizing them

**DIVERSION**—Instead of dealing with how you both feel in the here-and-now, you list grievances about past injustice

## FIVE SECRETS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

1. **THE DISARMING TECHNIQUE**—you find some truth in what the other person is saying, even if you feel convinced that what they're saying is totally wrong, unreasonable, irrational, or unfair
2. **EMPATHY**—You put yourself in the other person's shoes and try to see the world through his or her eyes
  - **THOUGHT EMPATHY**—You paraphrase the other person's words
  - **FEELING EMPATHY**—You acknowledge how they're probably feeling, given what they are saying to you
3. **INQUIRY**—You ask gentle, probing questions to learn more about what the other person is thinking and feeling
4. **"I" STATEMENTS**—You express your feeling with "I feel" statements (such as "I feel upset") rather than with "you" statements (such as "You're an idiot!" or "You're making me furious!")
5. **STROKING**—You find something genuinely positive to say to the other person, even in the heat of battle. This indicates that you respect the other person, even though you may be angry with each other

## LISTENING TO CHILDREN

Use "I" statements

No "U" statements, they can make the other person feel attacked, and become defensive, and that's when listening stops

Own your feelings-- "I feel..."

Tell "why" to explain things, but don't ask "why" about misbehavior ("Why did you do that?")

Ask for what you want

Don't bring up past issues and don't compare one child with another

Stick to 1 issue at a time

No sarcasm

No putdowns

No killer statements

No swearing

No yelling

No blaming

## PART 6



# THE SINGLE PARENT'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

## THE ROLE OF A SINGLE PARENT

One of the most challenging parts of a military separation is enduring the demands placed on a single parent. It's true that most parents affected by a deployment aren't truly single parents, but the challenges, difficulties, and dilemmas you'll face are much the same as those faced by single parents. The next few pages describe common problems you may face and skills that may help you adjust to the separation.

### COMMON OBJECTIVES

According to Drs. Barnes and Coplon, authors of *The Single-Parent Experience*, the following list is a sample of objectives commonly cited by single parents:

- ❖ Share experiences with others in the same circumstances
- ❖ Cope with the stresses of parenting alone
- ❖ Learn to adjust to being a single parent and to deal with the reactions
- ❖ Improve communication with the children
- ❖ Become a more understanding parent
- ❖ Learn how to talk to teenagers
- ❖ Provide male/female (opposite sex adult) models for my children
- ❖ Consider personal needs
- ❖ Learn how to effectively deal with outside influences (parents, neighbors, etc)
- ❖ Learn to better handle "male-oriented" or "female-orientated" tasks
- ❖ Become more independent, confident, and assertive
- ❖ Determine how much personal information to share with my children
- ❖ Learn to see my child as a person, not an extension of me

## POSITIVE ASPECTS OF THE MILITARY SEPARATION

Also from Drs. Barnes and Coplon, though you may not agree, and right now you may not believe anything positive could come from a separation, defining what good comes from any situation can help anyone cope:

- ❖ An opportunity for personal growth
- ❖ It's a transitional stage and a learning opportunity
- ❖ Being alone with each child, more closeness, and making my own decisions
- ❖ Enjoying making those decisions
- ❖ Becoming more confident, independent, and assertive
- ❖ Not having someone identifying my negatives
- ❖ Appreciate the simpler things in life
- ❖ Having freedom of choice
- ❖ Enjoying the things my child does
- ❖ Doing what I want when I want
- ❖ Having total responsibility and decision making regarding myself, my children, and my household
- ❖ Following through on decisions
- ❖ Making choices in the decision process
- ❖ Taking an objective look at myself
- ❖ Evaluating myself more often
- ❖ Patting myself on my back
- ❖ Becoming resourceful
- ❖ Being myself
- ❖ Being self-sufficient
- ❖ Developing self-confidence
- ❖ Having a clearer sense of identity as an individual, a man or woman, and a parent
- ❖ Developing relationships with others going through a military separation
- ❖ Finding role models in my extended family
- ❖ Feeling personal joy in watching my children grow
- ❖ Balancing work and parenting
- ❖ Expanding my horizons, greater flexibility, and ability to do what I want

- ❖ Discovering role models from outside my family
- ❖ Having good times with children when together
- ❖ Being realistic with children and relating better with them
- ❖ Becoming more sensitive to each other
- ❖ Developing greater closeness with my children
- ❖ Less conflict in my home
- ❖ More time with my children
- ❖ Not having to meet another adult's needs
- ❖ Becoming a stronger person
- ❖ Self-reliance
- ❖ Keeping my own hours
- ❖ Watching what I like on TV

## **NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF THE MILITARY SEPARATION**

Again from Drs. Barnes and Coplon, the following is a list of negatives that result from a military separation:

- ❖ Never having enough time for myself or my children
- ❖ Financial problems
- ❖ Enduring other's judgments, misunderstandings, and intrusiveness
- ❖ Feeling resentful for having my children, jealous of other couples, and angry at people who don't understand what I'm going through
- ❖ Feeling loneliness and boredom
- ❖ Not wanting to go out and meet others
- ❖ Feeling guilt for having all these negative feelings
- ❖ Discovering that single parents are often treated with arrogance, scorn, and stereotypes
- ❖ Losing a steady diet of sex and intimacy
- ❖ Problems of consistency when it comes to child-rearing
- ❖ Disliking having to make all the decisions
- ❖ Finding it harder to discover myself and my role as a single parent and as an individual

- ❖ Feeling guilt, anger, and loneliness because my partner is not here

## MYTHS

The following myths and counter-statements come primarily from Barnes & Coplon's book *The Single Parent Experience*.

### **1. People must provide a 2-parent home to be successful parents.**

- ◇ Both parents share responsibility, but even in families with both parents present, differences exist, and problems exist. Both structures have similar problems, such as financial difficulties, decision making, parenting choices, family stresses, and communication.

### **2. Parents who have never been married are viewed negatively by our society.**

- ◇ This depends on the life-style values and support systems available in your community. In military communities, friends and neighbors have a better understanding of the military life-style. Some parents choose to move away from their home base and in with relatives. Though this may sound like a good idea, it often creates more problems (such as interference from relatives). Relatives don't always live near a military installation so families needs for military type support (i.e. Air Force Aid Society, TRICARE/medical assistance, legal issues, or ID cards) may be impossible or very inconvenient. Also, if you move away from a military base, your new friends and neighbors seldom understand the unique challenges faced by military families. Most families who made this decision regretted it before the military member returned.

### **3. To be a good parent, you must devote most of your time and attention to your children.**

- ◇ Part of being a good parent is being good to yourself! If you're miserable, your children will pick up on this. If you're sad, stressed, anxious, withdrawn, or irritable, your children may also begin feeling that way. They are great mirrors of how we behave. Taking care of yourself gives you more energy, enthusiasm, and creativity in your parenting style, and both you and your children benefit.

### **4. Having no father figure for male children old can impair their identification with men.**

- ◇ It's important for the development of all children to have *POSITIVE* men and women role models. They can be aunts, uncles, grandparents, close friends, neighbors, friend's parents, coaches, teachers, etc.

**5. A good mother stays home with her children, especially her pre-schoolers.**

- ◇ Consistent nurturing and a stable home environment are what's important. Daycare, at home, or someone else's home can all provide this.

**6. Single parents should only say nice things about deployed parents.**

- ◇ Children do better when parents communicate with children honestly and realistically. That doesn't mean degrade the absent parent at every opportunity, but rather realize that if you do so by accident, you're human and not scarring your children for life. Also, children learn how to resolve conflicts by observing parents in disagreement, so you don't have to hide every detail from them.

**7. The oldest son is now "The man of the house."**

- ◇ Don't use your children as adult/parent substitutes. A common pitfall parents get caught in is parentifying an older child. This means using the child to tell your problems to, to overburden with responsibilities that belong to adults, and to give them undo authority over younger siblings. That can and usually does cause problem for the child. Problems may appear as poor school performance, disobedient behavior, excessive anger, withdrawal, and so on. Sometimes these children take it upon themselves to parentify who they are. If you find this happening, tell your child who's the adult, who's responsible for what, and that he/she is responsible for him/herself.

**8. It's better to not tell your children that mom or dad is deploying until he or she leaves.**

- ◇ This makes the child's adjustment more difficult for him or her, because the child doesn't have the opportunity to ask questions, talk about expectancies, and play a role in preparing the family for the deployment.

**9. Most problems in women-headed households are related to the absence of the father.**

- ◇ Problems are more related to poverty, bad neighborhoods, exposure to drugs, and poor schools than to whom is in the household.

**10. Only single parent households are "fatherless" or "motherless."**

- ◇ Fathers and mothers in 2-parent families are often physically or emotionally unavailable, involved in many outside activities, hiding behind newspapers, etc.

## THE WINNER'S BILL OF RIGHTS

The following comes from Dr. Elkins *Workbook for Human Relations Training Workshops*.

1. You have the right to be you—the way you are, the way you want to be.
2. You have the right to grow, to change, to become, to strive, to reach out for any goal, to be limited only by your degree of talent and amount of effort.
3. You have the right to privacy—in marriage, family, or any relationship or group—the right to keep part of your life secret, no matter how trivial or important, merely because you want it to be that way. You have the right to be alone part of each day, each week, and each year, to spend time with and on yourself.
4. You have the right to be loved and to love, to be accepted, cared for, and adored, and you have the right to fulfill that right.
5. You have the right to ask questions of anyone at any time about any matter that affects your life, so long as it is your business to do so; and to be listened to and taken seriously.
6. You have the right to self-respect and to do everything you need to do to increase your self-esteem, so long as you hurt no one in doing so.
7. You have the right to be happy, to find something in the world that is meaningful and rewarding to you and that gives you a sense of completeness.
8. You have the right to be trusted and to trust and to be taken at your word. If you are wrong, you have the right to be given a chance to make good, if possible.
9. You have the right to be free as long as you act responsibly and are mindful of the rights of others and of those obligations that you entered into freely.
10. You have the right to win, to succeed, to make plans, to see those plans fulfilled, to become the best person that you can possibly become.

# FAMILIES PROVIDE

Love

Nurturing

Social skills

A sense of personal identity

Self-esteem

Values

Morals

Discipline & Boundaries

Structure

## FACTS ABOUT FAMILIES

The average child gets 12-26 minutes per week of 1 on 1 attention with a parent so...

Give your children more 1 on 1 attention

Never deal with children out of anger. We can't always control how hard we hit a child when giving a spanking, so...

Don't do it. Instead, take a time-out until you cool off and then discuss the problem with your children

The average child receives over 147,000 negative comments in a lifetime, and only 3000 positive comments, so...

Each night, count what you did that day, and try to make the next day even better

## ACTIVITIES TO SHARE WITH YOUR CHILDREN

The bamboo tree, like other plants, starts as a simple, tiny seed. For 4 years, after planted, it shows no more than a small stem above ground. Below the surface, though, it's building a massive, intricate root system. In the 5<sup>th</sup> year, the bamboo tree grows up to 80 feet tall.

Families do much the same for individuals—it's called nurturing. One of the most simple, yet overlooked ways we can help build their roots is through family activities. Often, in today's hectic world, we divert time reserved for our family to other outlets, especially work. The following ideas are ways to reconnect with our families and begin rejuvenating those root systems.

# KISMIF

## KEEP IT SIMPLE, MAKE IT FUN

If it doesn't fit that rule, stop and try something else. If it isn't fun, and worse, if it causes frustration, the value is lost.

- **"Do Not Disturb" sign**—Make a sign on a piece of cardboard with "Do Not Disturb" written on it. Set up rules like any person can use the sign 1 time each day, for up to 20 minutes and the rest of us respect that person's desire to be left alone.
- **Helping Hand**—Outline your hand on a piece of paper, with your name on it, and it's a coupon for someone to use to get your help with anything they choose.
- **Family Fun Fund**—Together, as a family decide on an activity to do on weekend and start putting money aside to pay for the activity.

- **Sharing Interests**—If you have a hobby, you can teach it to your children. If your family has some traditions that go back generations, keep them going by passing them on to your children.
- **Family Meeting**—Children crave attention, and family meetings are a way to give them more of it. The meetings can be formal or informal, but find one that works and stick to it.
- **Kids Night**—Set aside one night a week especially for the children. Have plans, such as activities, games, or videos, and make sure they are the ones who plan the evening (if old enough).
- **Family Slumber Party/Camp Out in the Backyard**
- **Family Project**—family museum, photo collage, a garden, and more. Your imagination can really give you some great ideas here.
- **Share a Hobby**
- **Family Buffet**—Each family member picks out a dish to serve, without being told what to choose and within cost restraints, at the selected meal and prepares it (or at least helps).
- **Kids Breakfast in Bed**
- **Have a Theme Party for the Kids**
- **Build Something From Cardboard**—Stores throw boxes away daily. The Family Support Center recycles several boxes every week. Let your imagination build a fort, a plane, a submarine, or a dream house.
- **Pick a Value**—Select a value, such as your opinion of a current political topic, and discuss it as a family. Accept every person's input, no matter how young or uninformed.

- **Take a Blindfolded Walk**—Blindfold a family member, the other family members lead the person on a walk, and the blindfolded person must describe where they went.
- **Compliments**—Give another family member a compliment. Sit in a circle and take turns. After everyone has at least 1 turn, go around again and each person gives him or herself a compliment.
- **Treasure Hunt**—Have a small treasure hunt. Buy a few small, inexpensive “treasures,” hide them in or out of your home, and have a treasure hunt.
- **The Palate Plate**—Gather several items of differing tastes, such as sweet, sour, salty, and so on. Everyone wears a blindfold and sits at the table. The plate of flavors starts with one person and he or she picks an item. Then that person tastes it, describes it, and when everyone agrees what it is, the plate gets passed on and that person does the same. Continue until everyone has had 1 turn, remove the blindfolds, and see how well you did.
- **Movie Review**—Watch a movie together then discuss it.
- **Family Tradition**—Families have traditions. Start a new one for your family.
- **Go For a Family Walk**
- **Community Work**—Do some kind of community project together.
- **Clean out the Garage**—Clean out the garage, toy boxes, etc, and donate what you can.
- **Family Calendar**—Build a Family Calendar each month, and use it to schedule family activities.
- **No TV Day**—Turn off the TV for a day. For a variation, make it turn off the electricity.

- **Get Out of Time Out**—Reward good behavior by making and rewarding a special behavior with a “Get Out of Time Out” token.
- **The Silence Game**—Make a contest out of who can remain silent the longest. You can even have some kind of simple reward for the winner.
- **The Open Story**—Sit in a circle. One person starts a story, but leaves the main character in some kind of predicament. The next person continues the story and leaves the main character in another predicament.
- **The Card Story**—The same as the Open Story, but you use a deck of cards. Each person’s addition to the story must include reference to the number on the card (or a word that begins with “J” if a jack, “Q” if a queen, “K” if a king, and “A” if an ace).
- **Pick-Up-Sticks**—Play pick-up-sticks, but have the different colors represent a different emotion. Blue means sad, green envy, red anger, yellow happy, and black means the player chooses the emotion. Each person takes a turn to pick up 1 stick. If successful, that person describes an incident when he or she felt that way.
- **Letter of Encouragement**—Write a Letter of Encouragement to your child. Place it in a location where he or she will find it, or mail it. Don’t be disappointed if your child doesn’t mention it, because it’s so powerful, it may be too emotional for him or her to talk about it.
- **Dodge Ball**—Sometimes we need to take out our aggressions in a healthy manner. Playing a game of family dodge ball can be a fun, safe, and healthy way to take out our anger. Using Styrofoam balls makes it even safer.



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