



Deployment tips to help children - families share their ideas

Many thanks to all those who have been in touch via our internet forums to tell us about how they or their schools have dealt with the issue of deployment for their children. We will keep adding to this document, so please share your tips - nothing is too small to mention, and anything can make a difference.

At home

Using a world map so that children can see where Mum or Dad is, perhaps marking this with stickers and sharing it with others.

Making up pocket-sized photo albums for children and the deploying parent - this can always be kept handy to flick through.

A collage of photos of the deployed parent, kept close to where a child can regularly see it. Recommended for babies!

Get the deploying parent to record a few video clips that can be run on the computer at any time - special messages, songs to keep the loved one feeling close.

Instead of counting down the days until R&R/end of tour on a calendar, fill a jar with sweets - one a day until they come home, only 2 sweets to go!

"We always do a memory box before dad goes away, he puts things in for them and they put things in themselves, we then make him up a little box and sneak it into his bergen before he leaves. We put things like photos, shells that we've collected at the beach, aftershave/perfume samples, a CD with a song that reminds them of him...normally something we all dance and sing to in the car on our endless journeys home! Then when they're having a day that they miss dad they have a moment to themselves with their box, always cheers them up."

"Take the children to build a bear and then get dad to record a little bedtime message. The bedtime message can be put in the bear so that the children can hear dad's voice every night before they go to sleep. My two have them, although my 13 year old would never admit to it, they sleep with them every night!"

Don't forget Storybook Soldiers. This is a scheme that allows soldiers to pre-record a bedtime story for their children. The reading is edited to remove background noise before adding sound effects and music. Contact your local HIVE or AEC for details or visit www.storybooksoldiers.co.uk

At school

Daily or weekly homework clubs and monthly Saturday activities to take the pressure off the lone parent.

Ebluey opportunities for kids at lunchtime - even the smallest kids can log on and get help typing a bluey.

" When the regiment had their homecoming parade the whole school came to line the streets too."

A smiley face board where children can put up a smiley face, a sad face or a 'not sure' face. The teacher/assistant could then talk to the child about what they were feeling.

Regular group get-togethers on dealing with children's emotions and behaviour would be good.

" Our current school is an international school and the Americans have a Hearts Apart programme where kids can go at lunch time to play, do craft and discuss how they feel if a parent is deployed. I'm told they can even go if they are missing extended family because they are posted overseas."

The opportunity to draw pictures and write to the deployed parent at school, which could then be sent on in a parcel.

" My daughter took her atlas and a photo into school for circle time to talk about what her Daddy did and where he was."

How to deal with media coverage - a circle time spent talking about what we see on the news and why they need to speak to the teacher if they have any questions.

Use the fax bluey forms for writing and drawing on, then send these via the welfare office fax bluey machine off to distant lands! This could even turn it into a class activity - ICT skills and purposeful writing - as many regiments have notice boards with messages of support pinned to them

"One teacher taught all the children in year 1 to email and they sent a class email to my husband."

Communication is essential - I have told my children's new school that we are facing a separation of 1 year in October and they have been sympathetic and have informed the new teacher for next year.

Schools can make a special effort to ensure that Fathers/Mothers Day cards and the like are made and sent home well in advance to ensure that they can be received in theatre by the day itself.

SCE now has a deployment resources site. This is aimed primarily at SCE schools or schools with service children who are experiencing the effects of deployment. If your school is looking for guidance, then direct them to www.sceschools.com