

Child Reactions to Parental Deployment

Teenagers (13-18 years)

It's hard to predict how children will react to a parent's deployment. Learning more about how children of various ages may react can help parents better support their children. Here are some possible reactions you can expect to see in teenagers.



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Teens typically have greater awareness about risk and danger associated with parental combat duties. They may worry about the possibility of parental injury or loss.

Teenagers are sensitive to the reactions of their peers. They may feel confused or isolated if people express negative opinions about the war or the parent's military duties.

It is common for teenagers to demonstrate irritability, rebelliousness, or other challenging behaviors. These actions may be heightened during times of family change.

Reintegration with teens can be more difficult than with younger kids as teens may have a hard time readjusting to shifts in family roles, responsibilities, and rules.

What you can do:

- Listen, be honest, and maintain open communication with your teens. They understand the real consequences of war, but can also understand the importance of using practical coping skills.
- Model healthy behaviors and expression of emotions. It is useful for teens to see how you handle sadness, worry, and concern in helpful ways.
- Set clear and realistic expectations regarding functioning at school and home.
- Look for any signs of high-risk behavior, including sexual acting out or alcohol/ substance use. Talk to your teens about other strategies for expressing themselves or calming themselves down.
- Help teenagers identify and access their extended support systems, such as friends or other caring adults. Sometimes, teens will not share information with a parent for fear of causing more worry. Having another adult to talk to can provide the teen with a safe place to more openly share his concerns.
- If changes to routines occur, try to involve your teens in the discussion, preparation, and planning.
- Whether facing a parent's deployment or celebrating a return, teens may need to find a new balance between family time and their usual activities. At times, teens may need to be excused from activities to accommodate family reunions while at others, it may help them to spend time with friends, in school, or social activities.



For additional resources, please visit:

www.operationmilitarykids.org and www.aap.org/sections/unifserv/deployment/index.html
(American Academy of Pediatrics)

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