As we know, having a parent away for a lengthy time places extra stress on children and the at-home parent, siblings or other care givers. No matter how often a military parent is deployed, and no matter how well-prepared a child might be for a parent’s absence, children with disabilities may be particularly vulnerable to the effects of stress on their physical and emotional well-being.

To help improve support for the child and increased understanding and support from teachers and schools, **here are a few ways you and your center can help military families prepare their child’s school for deployment:**

**How your Parent Center can help:**

* Provide this information to individual military families you help using the [**accompanying parent handout**](https://branchta.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/School-Support-Plans-for-Deployment-Tips-for-Parents.docx)
* When working with a military family around their child’s IEP, the ideas below might be options to consider for their child’s IEP (or other education plan)
* Adding the parent handout to your center’s resources (e.g. on the website, at trainings, resource fairs, 1:1 individual TA, etc.), as well as the [**school resource from ed.gov listed below**](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/os/homefront/homefront.pdf)
* Incorporate this information into your parent trainings, IEP clinics, and other activities, as needed
* Share this resource via your center’s social media and just a reminder, military families are heavy users of social media
* Invite schools to print, post, and share the parent handout

The value of parents and schools partnering to support military-connected children with the stressors of deployment is significant. Given the large portion of time children spend at school, teachers and other school staff are often the first to notice changes or new behaviors. As we know, children often respond differently to stress in different environments- there may be no indication of the stress being experienced by the child when he or she is at home.

Parent Center support can be vital in helping parents work with teachers develop a plan of action to be used if their child appears to be stressed out or starts behaving differently in school.

**How can parents support their child at school during deployment?**

**Set-up a meeting**

Communication about an upcoming deployment is key and setting up a meeting will help prepare a school. Parents could, for instance, request a meeting with their child’s teacher shortly after they are informed of the upcoming deployment. If the separation is scheduled to start during summer vacation, parents may want to book that conference as soon as possible after school begins. For a child in middle or high school, meeting with every teacher might be a consideration as information may not reach each teacher who interacts with that child.

As you encourage military parents to share helpful information with their child's teachers and other school staff, it's useful to remember that operational security may be a concern. The family may be unable to give the school or your Parent Center staff information about mission-related specifics.  Natural questions such as "Where is your spouse going this time?" and "How long is this deployment?" may be avoided or side-stepped. (If you do happen to ask these types of questions, and the military parent responds with discomfort, it’s okay. Awareness is a process, and your awareness of [operational security concerns](https://branchta.org/opsec-and-ham-personal-information-and-your-work-with-military-families/) may help if you are interacting with school staff while helping the military family.)

**Information that can steer clear of mission-related military specifics includes:**

* Timeframe- a general idea of beginning and ending dates
* Past experiences- if a child has exhibited concerning behavior or excessive stress due to a previous deployment
* Coping mechanisms- exploring strategies with parents that have helped their child cope with stress and encouraging sharing with teachers who may be able to continue those practices at school. For example, if a child finds it comforting to look at a photo of their deployed parent, a teacher may be willing to allow them to keep a copy in their backpack or desk.

**Develop a plan**

Having a process in place to deal with situations that may arise allows parents and teachers to be proactive, whenever possible.

These plans are different for every child, but some options include:

* Access to a counselor or therapist – such as [**Military Family Life Counselors**](https://branchta.org/just-military-kids-teens-families-child-youth-behavioral-counseling/)
* Tutoring - [Tutor.com](https://military.tutor.com/home) provides free 24/7 homework assistance for military families.
* Staying active – such as participation in recess, physical education, and after-school sports
* Breaks at school-such as leaving a classroom for a while to go to a supervised safe space, like a library or resource room
* Sharing their feelings and experiences at school under the guidance of qualified professionals

**Additional resources:**

[**School Support Plans for Deployment-Tips for Parents**](https://branchta.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/School-Support-Plans-for-Deployment-Tips-for-Parents.docx) (handout)

[**Educators Guide to the Military Child During Deployment:**](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/os/homefront/homefront.pdf)

[**https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/os/homefront/homefront.pdf**](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/os/homefront/homefront.pdf)(teacher and school information and interventions)

[**School Liaison Officers**](https://branchta.org/role-school-liaison-officer-slo/) on military installations, or [**Family Assistance Coordinators for National Guard families**,](https://branchta.org/4-ways-parent-centers-can-help-national-guard-families/) can provide helpful information on helping children whose parents are deployed. Find contact information for these individuals on our [**MAPS**](https://branchta.org/maps/). (If a School Liaison Officer is not listed, contact either the EFMP number, or the Community Services number, to be connected).

**Related Articles & Handouts:**

[**Opsec & Ham: Personal Information and Your Work With Military Families**](https://branchta.org/opsec-and-ham-personal-information-and-your-work-with-military-families/) (more tips on ways to discuss issues around deployment and other sensitive military information)

[**16 Financial Resources for Military Families**](https://branchta.org/16-financial-resources-for-military-families-with-handout/)(military families can run into financial challenges during deployments)

[**Parent Handout: 16 Financial Resources for Military Families**](https://branchta.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Handout-16-Financial-Resources-for-Military-Families.docx)