**School Support Plans for Deployment-Tips for Parents**

**Why do schools need to know when a parent deploys?**

Your children spend a large portion of their day in school, so teachers often notice changes or new behaviors. The value of parents and schools partnering to support military-connected children with the stressors of deployment is significant. As you know, having a parent away for a lengthy time places extra stress on children and the at-home parent, siblings and/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.

**How can you support your child at school during deployment?**

1. **Set up a meeting**

Communication about an upcoming deployment is key and setting up a meeting will help prepare the school. For example, you can request a meeting with your child’s teacher shortly after you find out about the upcoming deployment. If the separation is scheduled to start during summer vacation, you may want to book that conference as soon as possible after school begins. If your child is in middle or high school, meeting with every teacher might be a consideration as information may not reach each teacher who interacts with your child.

When meeting with your child’s teachers, you can let them know that there are some areas of information you won’t be able to share with them, due to operational security concerns regarding mission-related details. Your Parent Center staff will be aware that you have these limits on what information can be shared and can support you in planning your meetings with school personnel.

Areas that can steer clear of mission-related operational security include:

* Timeframe- a general idea of beginning and ending dates
* Past experiences- if your child has excessive stress during a previous deployment or their behavior communicates their concern for the absence of the parent and/or changes in routine with deployment
* Coping mechanisms- sharing strategies that have helped your child cope with stress; teachers may be able to continue those practices at school. For example, if your 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.
1. **Develop a plan**

Working with your child's teachers, plan ahead to craft a process to deal with situations if they arise. All of us respond differently to stress in different environments, including our children. This means your child might appear to be perfectly fine at home and may be struggling and/or acting out at school. Working with your child’s teachers to develop a plan of action if he or she appears to be stressed out or starts behaving differently in school will help.

These plans will be individually designed for your child, but some options could be:

* 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. Identifying these options - who, where and when – will give your child and teacher options for their health and well-being.
* Sharing their feelings and experiences at school under the guidance of qualified professionals
1. **Connecting with the staff at your local Parent Center.**

To find your Parent Center, by state: <http://www.parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center/> no matter where you live or where you will be going to live. There are nearly 100 Parent Training and Information (PTIs) and Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRCs) in the US and its Territories. All exist to:

* **Work** with families of infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities, birth to 26
* **Help** parents participate effectively in their children’s education and development
* **Partner** with professionals and policy makers to improve outcomes for all children with disabilities

While the services at or how each Parent Center works with families varies, this network of trained staff helps at no charge. Staff are also family members, often parents, siblings or caregivers of a child with disabilities and/or special health care needs. You can connect with your local parent center for training, support and individual assistance. This might include adding all, or parts of the “deployment plan” to your child’s IEP or other education plan.

**If the school, or individual teachers, don’t have much experience with children and deployment, you can share this resource with them:**

[Educators’ Guide to the Military Child During Deployment](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/os/homefront/homefront.pdf) (from the US Department of Education)

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You can also get help in working with your child’s school and teachers from the School Liaison office at your installation, or from the Family Assistance Coordinator in your state if your service member is in the National Guard.

You can find the School Liaison office through your installation’s Family Services or Community Services Center; Family Assistance professionals can be located through the Joint Services Support website at [https://www.jointservicessupport.org](https://www.jointservicessupport.org/spn). Click on “Service Provider Network”.