



Staying in touch with your child when you're a deployed mum

Defence Community Organisation

Experienced ADF mothers have shared that keeping their needs and their children's needs in mind results in more positive communications during a deployment.

Open and frequent communication with your child can keep your connection strong during deployment. Conversations can also be difficult reminders of how far away you are from one another.

BEFORE YOU DEPLOY

Find out what communication options will be available to you while you are away.

Your Commanding Officer may be able to tell you if you will have internet access and if you do you may be able to email your child or use a webcam to have a video conversation.

Find out whether you'll be able to use your mobile for calling or texting and whether you will be able to send and receive letters and packages regularly.

Think about bringing a tablet device, digital camera or video camera. This will allow you to email personal photos and videos back home. Ask your child and other family members to email photos and videos to you too.

If your child is young, record yourself reading favourite storybooks, talking or singing. Your partner or your child's caregiver can play these audio or video recordings at bedtime or whenever your child wants to hear your voice or see your face.

Write down important dates and take them with you when you go. Include birthdays, the first day of school, concerts, school plays,

sports carnivals and-so on. This will give you an opportunity to contact child before or on the day of the occasion. You might even arrange to be there via webcam or phone during the event.

Discuss with your partner or caregiver how emergencies at home will be handled. Talk about whether you want to know about emergencies and, if so, when it is appropriate to convey that information.

DURING DEPLOYMENT

Children of deployed parents sometimes worry that their parents no longer love them. Your child will be reassured if you stay in frequent contact, whether by phone, email, letters, or other means. Some ideas to include in your conversations are:

- Give your child a sense of your daily routine. Describe your deployment as much as you're permitted. Talk about everyday topics, such as what you had for breakfast, or a funny story that you heard. Keep it light.
- Let your child know how you miss them. Say you wish you were together and you're looking forward to coming home. Do your best to stay positive and upbeat to avoid your child feeling at all responsible for your general mood or happiness.



- Listen without judging. Children, especially pre-teens and teenagers, often need to vent their feelings. Try to be supportive and be aware of any frustrations you may experience around not being able to be there. Don't let those frustrations colour your reaction to what your child is sharing with you.
- Answer your child's questions. If your child asks questions on the phone, or even in letters or emails, address each one, and answer as best as you can. Asking and answering questions is a good way to keep the conversation going with your child and will help you both feel connected.
- Ask your child to send you special items from home. One mother had her daughters send her a favourite brand of coffee. Her daughters felt good about doing something special for their mother, and their mother was happy to have these reminders of home. Visit www.defence.gov.au and search for 'care packages' to find out the regulations for parcels.
- Send care packages to your child. Send home little souvenirs and gifts to your child. It doesn't have to be anything elaborate – just something your child can hold and that will remind them of you.
- Sometimes conversations can become emotional. If speaking with you seems to make it harder for your child to adjust to your absence, or if it's too painful for you to hear about everything you're missing, write letters instead.

IF THERE ARE PROBLEMS AT HOME

Life at home may not go smoothly when you're away. However, it's important to realise your own limitations. There's only so much you can do when you're far away. Being wrapped up in issues at home can distract you from your mission.

Encourage your child to work out the problem. If the issue is minor – say a poor test result at school or a dispute with a friend – let your child know that you have confidence their ability to find a way of managing it.

Trust your child's caregiver to deal appropriately with the problem. If you talked through potential emergencies and other issues before you deployed, you should feel assured that your partner or child's caregiver is handling the situation the way that you would if you were at home yourself.

Contact the adult in charge at home for more serious problems. If there's a serious problem that you feel is not being addressed, talk to your partner, your child's caregiver, or another trusted adult and ask that person to intervene on your behalf.

For more information on this factsheet and other Defence Community Organisation support services visit

www.defence.gov.au/dco or call the all-hours Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608.

Defence Community Organisation offers a wide range of support services for the families of ADF members.

The best way to access these services is to call 1800 624 608. The Defence Family Helpline is staffed by qualified human services professionals including social workers and psychologists.

Other deployment support handouts from Defence Community Organisation

List

Related

Handouts

Here

www.defence.gov.au/dco

This handout's content was sourced with permission from Military OneSource, www.militaryonesource.mil, and reproduced and adapted by Defence Community Organisation.

The information in this handout is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment.

