

Child Reactions to Parental Deployment

School-Aged Children (6-12 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 school aged children.



School-Aged Children • 6-12 Years

Often times, school-aged children worry about separations from important caregivers. They wonder who will be available to take care of them and may be concerned about both the deployed and caretaking parent.

Much like younger children, school-aged children may act out their feelings with moodiness, irritability, or whining.

Children ages 6 – 12 years old may express worry and concern in physical ways. This can include complaints of stomachaches and headaches with no apparent illness.

School-aged children understand some of the realities of the deployment and the potential risks of the deployed parent.



What you can do:

- Help your children feel safe and secure by keeping routines, schedules and expectations (at school and home) as consistent as possible. When kids know what to expect they do better.
- Listen to your children. Accept communication of worries and other feelings and use it to encourage communication within your family.
- Provide clear information regarding the deployed parent. Do your best to talk openly with your child so that he has the correct information.
- Ask open-ended questions to get a better sense of what children understand and are ready to learn more about. For example, you might ask, “What do you think about your mom/dad leaving? How do you feel about him/her being deployed? Tell me what you understand about war (or deployment).”
- Be honest when addressing your children’s concerns; but be sure that conversations are appropriate for their age and level of understanding.
- It’s okay to admit that you don’t know the answers to certain things or that you need time to think about how to answer tough questions. Be sure to get back to children later, once you’ve had time to think about how you want to address difficult challenges or concerns.
- Reassure your children that they are loved by those at home and by the deployed parent. It’s important for children to hear this on a regular basis.
- Talk to your children about their entire network of support, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, teachers, and other important people in their lives. Understanding that they have many forms of support can help kids feel more secure.

