

Dealing with Separation

No matter if your loved one has left and returned or must be deployed again, dealing with the separation is touch on the family. The first stage in a separation occurs when the family receives notice of the pending departure. Emotions may range from feelings of loss to denial (asking...do you really have to go?). The person separating will begin to get their affairs in order for their departure. Everyone affected over the pending separation feels stress. Children may sense the stress and act out, have tantrums or regress to more child or infant-like behaviors (such as sucking a bottle, toileting accidents). As a family, how do you prepare? Here are some ideas:

- Have a family meeting to talk about the pending separation. Parents should be consistent with each other so children understand that normal expectations still apply.
- Discuss how the family will continue to communicate and be in touch with one another during the separation time.
- Set a goal to look forward to when the family reunites.

When the individual actually leaves, there will be mixed emotions ranging from anger to the relief of no more anticipation. Family members may feel a sense of being overwhelmed, numb, sad, or alone.

It is important to:

- Continue weekend or bedtime routines. Continue family traditions on holidays, birthdays.
- Use visuals like a calendar or a timeline to help children understand when visitation or communication will occur or when reunification will happen (such as when mommy or daddy will visit or return).
- Develop a support system of friends, family, and others who are experiencing the same transitions.

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