

When Daddy or Mommy is in the Military

Children may experience a number of feelings when a parent is called to active duty. They express their feelings in different ways, and their outward behavior is not always a good reflection of what they are experiencing inside.

Here's how the parent remaining at home can provide support and assistance to children when the other parent is called to active duty:

- Talk with your children openly, honestly and directly about where the reservist is going and why as well as what the parent is likely to be doing. Prepare the child for the soldier's absence at events such as soccer games that the parent would otherwise have attended.
- Make it safe to express feelings. Talk about the negative emotions as well as the positive ones.
- Give lots of hugs, and remind your children of how much you love them – and how much the missing parent cares for them as well.
- Place photos of the missing parent at the child's eye level. Be sure that each child has a special picture that was taken with the parent who is on active duty.
- Routine is important. Keep to the same family rules and schedule as you had when both parents were home.
- Organize special outings that will be fun for the children, particularly on weekends and holidays.
- Encourage writing letters to the missing parent. Include school work or drawings with the letters.
- Ask each child to select a chore to do that the missing parent would ordinarily perform. The child will feel like a contributor to the household, and the regular chore will help develop responsibility.
- Keep in touch with the child's teachers. Work together to provide healthy channels for negative behaviors and "acting out."

There may be some emotional ups and downs when a parent is called to active duty, but by communicating clearly, providing consistent structure and giving lots of hugs, the parent who stays at home can help the child cope with the pain of separation.