**Teacher’s Reference Guide for Military Kids!**

### Supporting children emotionally

Here are some suggestions for creating a supportive, stress-free learning environment:

- **Maintain consistent schedules and routines.**
- Be more alert to children’s behaviors, feelings, and conversations during play, routines, and other activities, indoors and outdoors.
- Invite children to share with their classmates communications they have received from their deployed parents. Such communications may come via email, letters, care packages, or video teleconferences (VTC). This technology aids in communication (Be aware, however, that not all military members and families have access to the Internet).
- Respect diverse family structures and living arrangements, such as children living with grandparents. For example, address correspondence to “Dear Family” rather than “Dear Parent.”
- Recognize and validate feelings children may experience during a deployment, such as guilt, resentment, fear, anxiety, confusion, and anger. A teacher might say, “Carl, it’s hard to be away from your dad. Would you like to write him a letter?”
- Acknowledge children’s loss of time with an absent parent, and without judgment or criticism, encourage children to share their feelings and concerns (Waddell & Thomas 2004).
- Encourage children to express their feelings through writing, drawing, roleplaying, or performing puppet shows.
- Anticipate adjustment difficulties and carefully observe children in order to design effective interventions. Through observation, teachers can identify children who are experiencing adjustment difficulties and may need additional assistance, such as counseling.
- Be honest about or help interpret confusing information. Teachers should tell children the truth and help clear up misconceptions or stories from uninformed sources, including other children.
- Be willing to say, “I don’t know.” Be careful not to provide false hope by saying “Everything will be alright” or “I know how you feel.” The truth is whatever children are feeling, and the future is unknown (Waddell & Thomas 2004).
- The United Through Reading program of the Family Literacy Foundation can assist deployed service members in making a video of themselves reading a story (go to www.read2kids.org/united.htm for more information).
- Anticipate children’s inability to concentrate for long periods of time; plan for shorter activities. Reduce children’s workload as needed.
- Display photos of the deployed parent in uniform (Pavlicin 2003).

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### Children’s Books about Separation or Military Deployment

- **Soldier Mom**, by Alice Mead. 1999. Grade 3.
Supporting children through changes in the curriculum

Beyond assisting emotionally, teachers can help a child of a deployed parent academically by making changes or additions to the curriculum. “My teaching definitely has to change,” one second grade teacher in a public school says. “I need to research the country parents are deployed to so I can teach it in my room.” Slight adaptations to curriculum and classroom structure can help a child continue to make academic progress.

Supporting parents who are deployed

• Record a child reading his or her favorite book, poem, or story and send the audiotape to the deployed parent.
• Send samples of artwork, classwork, class books, and letters to deployed parents.
• Write and illustrate a class or school book as a gift for a deployed parent to share with a class or school abroad.
• Send a copy of the class newsletter to the deployed parent.
• Document school events, field trips, and activities through videotaping, photos, journal writing, and other means. Digital photos and journal entries can be sent electronically. Maintain small photo albums of children engaged in activities at school. Have the children decorate their albums.
• Allow the deployed parent to “watch” his/her child grow by maintaining an updated height, size, and weight chart decorated with drawings and current photographs.

Supporting a parent’s return

• Post a countdown calendar in the classroom or on the child’s desk, but remember, return dates may change.
• Prepare a class “Welcome Home” banner when the deployed parent returns.
• Invite the returned parent to a class lunch and to observe his or her child in the classroom.
• Remind families that all changes in routine or home life can be stressful for children, even if the changes are happy ones, like the return of a parent from deployment.

Web Resources Related to Military Deployment

For teachers ....

Military Child Education Coalition—Provides goals, best practice strategies, available teacher conferences, and teacher suggestions and support. A membership fee may be required. www.militarychild.org

Military Impacted Schools Association—Designed for schools populated with military children, it includes biographies of military children, information on the different military branches, and best practices for the classroom. www.militaryimpactedschoolsassociation.org

Military Student—Contains information, current issues, activities, and printable publications for children 6 to 13 years old, parents, families with a child who has special needs, and military leaders. www.militarystudent.org

To share with families ....

Deployment Link—Provides information to assist service members and their families dealing with deployments, including family support links, activities for children, information to locate service members, and deployment benefits. http://deploymentlink.osd.mil/deploy/family/family_support.shtml

Moms Over Miles—Provides helpful activities and inexpensive publications for mothers and fathers to strengthen their relationship with their children while they are away. www.momsovermiles.com

National Military Family Association—Assists families through research, education, legislation, and public information. www.nmfa.org

Talk, Listen, Connect: Helping Families During Military Deployment. Provides bilingual resources featuring Sesame Street characters. See especially the video about the deployment of Elmo’s father. www.sesameworkshop.org/tlc/index.php

References: