



Signs of Distress and Positives Aspects of Separation / Deployment

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Even with the best laid plans and a cheerful demeanor, parents cannot always prevent their children from experiencing stress when the Reserve / Guard Member is called to duty. They may not fully understand why Dad or Mom is gone and they may worry about their safety. They will also be very perceptive to what the parent at home is feeling. These fears may consciously or subconsciously trouble children. The following are signs of separation and anxiety that children may exhibit when their parent is away.

Preschool or Kindergarten Age Children

- Clinging to people or favorite toy or blanket
- Unexplained crying or tearfulness
- Choosing adults over same – age play mates
- Increased acts of violence toward people or things
- Shrinking away from people or becoming very quiet
- Sleep difficulties or disturbances (waking, bad dreams)
- Eating difficulties or change in eating patterns
- Fear of new people or situations
- Keeps primary care giver in view



School-Age Children

- Any of the signs listed above, and:
- A rise in complaints about stomachaches, headaches, or other illnesses
- More irritable and crabby
- Problems at school (drop in grades, does not want to go, or general complaining)
- Anger toward at-home parent

Adolescents

- Any of the signs listed above, and:
- Acting out behaviors (trouble at school, home, law)
- Low self-esteem and self-criticism
- Misdirected anger (lots of anger of small things; directed at siblings / parent)
- Sudden unusual school problems
- Loss of interest in usual interests and hobbies

Positive Aspects of Separation

Many parents worry about the negative impact of deployments on children. However, deployments offer many positive growth opportunities. Several psychological studies show that despite the distress during separation significant development gains are made by many children. Some positive aspects of separation include:

Fosters maturity. Military children encounter more situations and have broader and more varied experiences than children from non-military families. Induces growth. Military children learn more about the world and how to function within a community at an earlier age. Taking on additional responsibilities in a parent's absence provides a chance to develop new skills and develop hidden interests and abilities.



Strengthens family bonds. Military families make emotional adjustments during a separation which often lead them to discover new sources of strength and support among themselves. A major function of family readiness is assuring that the family is aware of all support service available to them and how to access these services. It is imperative that the Reserve family realize that they are not alone and, chances are, whatever problem or situation they encounter has been addressed before.