Strategies for Living with Multiple Deployments

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Disclaimer

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Learning Objectives

• Demonstrate greater appreciation for the impact of military deployments on service members & their families.

• Describe five stages of the deployment cycle, their corresponding time frames and specific emotional challenges.

• Discuss coping strategies, pitfalls and special considerations regarding deployments.

• Review resources available to service members & families.
Aviation readiness up as units operate at 'warp speed'

By Sean Kimmons, Army News Service   April 23, 2019

America's Military

AMERICA'S MILITARY: The crushing deployment tempo

David B. Larter

US Army Struggling To Keep Up With Needed Flying Hours

By: Jen Judson   January 19, 2016
OPTEempo and the Family

- Quick deployment/mobilization cycles and uncertainty in family life
  - Difficult to plan for anything

- Insufficient time for rebalancing between missions and deployment cycles
  - Items that never get resolved

- Child care can be an increased financial burden when a parent is deployed
Impact of Multiple Deployments

- The biggest change in marital satisfaction is after the first deployment.
- Avoidant coping is the biggest predictor of relationship distress, PTSD, and depression.
  - “I’ve given up trying to deal with it” or Alcohol Abuse

Primary Strategies

• Sufficient time for rebalancing after return from deployment
• Set a schedule, including aspects that do not change with the deployment cycle
• Get on the same page, especially with finances and discipline of children
• Set up the communication expectations, and a regular check-in (both deployed and at home)
• Stay busy, but with downtime
• Don’t Isolate!
Kids and Adjustment

• The single best strategy is kid-directed time with the parent
  – Younger Kids: 15 minutes per day, let them pick the activity
  – Older Kids: Aggregate across the week (2 hours), let them pick the activity
  – NOT: Time to provide “feedback” or discipline

• Consistency will build trust and provide a safe space for kids to open up
The Emotional Cycle of Deployment

- Pre-deployment
- Deployment
- Sustainment
- Re-deployment
- Post-deployment
Stage 1: Pre-deployment
Impact on Service Members

- Desire for information, uncertainty
- Train-up / long hours
- Getting affairs in order
- Mixed, fluctuating emotions
- Confidence, bonding with unit
- Tension, arguments

- Timeframe: Alert to Deployment (varies)
Stage 1: Pre-deployment
Impact on Families

• Absence(s) of service member
• Making plans for separation
• Mental / physical distance
• Anticipation of loss
• Tension, arguments

• Timeframe: Alert to Deployment (varies)
Stage 2: Deployment
Impact on Service Members

- Confidence in unit, leaders
- Workload “op-tempo” extremes
- Emphasis on force protection
- Defining roles, interpersonal tension
- Communication with home, mixed
- Sleep difficulty

- Timeframe: First month of deployment
Stage 2: Deployment Impact on Families

- Disoriented
- Overwhelmed
- Numb, sad, alone
- Sleep difficulty
- Security issues

- Timeframe: First month of deployment
Stage 3: Sustainment Impact on Service Members

- Mission focus, staying safe
- Eat, sleep, work – life gets simple
- Develop routines/living space
- New friendships “battle buddy”
- Mission meaning (purpose)
- Nostalgia for home

- Timeframe: Month 2 through final month (11+)
Stage 3: Sustainment Impact on Families

- New routines established
- New sources of support
- Feel more in control
- Independence
- Confidence ("I can do this")

- Timeframe: Month 2 through final month (11+)

UNCLASSIFIED
Stage 4: Redeployment
Impact on Service Members

• Rapid evolution, situational changes
• Movement of personnel & equipment
• Workload “op-tempo” extremes
• Focus on return home vs. “short-timer”
• Anticipation versus apprehension

• Timeframe: Final month of deployment
Stage 4: Redeployment
Impact on Families

• Anticipation of homecoming
• Excitement
• Apprehension
• Burst of energy / “nesting”
• Difficulty making decisions

• Timeframe: Final month of deployment
Stage 5: Post-deployment Impact on Service Members

- Homecoming experience vs. expectations
- Adapting to a more complex life
- Missing camaraderie, excitement
- Physical intimacy vs. emotional distance
- Renegotiating routines, missed milestones
- Reenlistment, moving, schooling

- Timeframe: Typically equal to the length of the deployment (3-12 months)
Stage 5: Post-deployment Impact on Families

- Honeymoon period
- Loss of independence
- Renegotiating routines
- Need for “own” space
- Reintegrating spouse into family

- Timeframe: Typically equal to the length of the deployment (3-12 months)
## Impact of Deployment on Kids

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Behaviors</th>
<th>Moods</th>
<th>Remedy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infants</td>
<td>&lt; 1 yr</td>
<td>Refuses to eat</td>
<td>Listless</td>
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<td>Support for parent, pediatrician</td>
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<tr>
<td>Toddlers</td>
<td>1-3 yrs</td>
<td>Cries, tantrums</td>
<td>Irritable, sad</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Increased attention, holding, hugs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>3-6 yrs</td>
<td>Potty accidents, clingy</td>
<td>Irritable, sad</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased attention, holding, hugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Age</td>
<td>6-12 yrs</td>
<td>Whines, body aches</td>
<td>Irritable, sad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Spend time, keep routines, counseling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teenagers</td>
<td>13-18 yrs</td>
<td>Isolates, uses drugs</td>
<td>Anger, apathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Patience, limit-setting, counseling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Impact of Deployment on Kids
Infants < 1 year

• Must be held and nurtured
• Primary caregiver with significant depression
  – Risk for failure to thrive (apathy, refusal to eat, weight loss)
• Early interventions
  – Chart serial height/weight (Pediatrics, Family Medicine)
  – Parenting support (Social Work, New Parent Support)
  – Individual counseling and/or medications; rule out post-partum depression (Behavioral Health, Psychiatry)
• Take cue from primary caregiver
  – If coping well, in general so does child

• Caregiver with poor coping
  – Risk for sullen, tearful moods, temper tantrums, sleep issues

• Interventions
  – Encourage increased attention, hugs, holding hands
  – Share challenges with other caregivers
  – Seek to balance demands of children vs. care for self
Impact of Deployment on Kids
Preschool 3-6 years

• Risk for mood, sleep, regressive behaviors
  – Irritable, depressed and aggressive moods
  – Refusal to sleep alone
  – Potty accidents, baby talk, thumb sucking, somatic complaints

• Interventions
  – Encourage increased attention, hugs, holding hands
  – Avoid changing routines (i.e., sleeping in own bed, etc.)
  – Keep answers about deployment brief, factual, to-the-point (contain free-floating anxiety, overactive imagination)
Impact of Deployment on Kids
School Age 6-12 years

• Risk for mood, sleep symptoms, loss of interest
  – Whine, complain, become aggressive, “act out” feelings
  – Sleep disturbance
  – Loss interest in school, eating or playing with friends

• Interventions
  – Allow to talk about feelings, provide more physical attention
  – Expectations for school may be lower, maintain routines
  – Think of creative ways to keep deployed present
    (picture by bed, charting/celebrating key dates or milestones, etc.)
Impact of Deployment on Kids
Teenagers 13-18 years

• Risk for mood, loss interest, acting out
  – Act “as if” they don’t care, deny problems and worries
  – Loss of interest in school, peers, activities
  – Irritable, rebellious, fighting, promiscuity, drugs

• Interventions
  – Encourage caregivers to stay engaged (very important!!)
  – Lower academic expectations initially, then return to previous
  – Support sports, social, and other activities for structure
  – Additional responsibilities commensurate with maturity
Military Family Support Portfolio

- Coping with fears by learning from other military kids (and Muppets)
- Age-appropriate activities to reduce stress and anxiety related to transitions
- Military-specific resources
The *inTransition* program provides a warm handoff between providers and/or systems of care

Provides coaching until an appointment with a provider has been achieved

Any veteran or service member is eligible; no matter the era or the type of discharge

Can be used multiple times

Staffed by master’s level mental health providers

https://www.health.mil/inTransition
Real Warriors Campaign

- Multimedia public awareness campaign to reduce stigma, educate about psychological health, and encourage help-seeking behavior
- Website includes handouts, videos, and articles about a wide range of topics
- Campaign website is a good “first step” when thinking about seeking help

https://www.health.mil/RealWarriors
Review: The Impact of Multiple Deployments

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Marital Satisfaction of Army Couples by Number of Combat Deployments
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Questions?

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