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Strategies for Living with Multiple Deployments

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PERSONNEL AND READINESS



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.



OPTEMPO

MilitaryTimes

News Pay & Benefits Flashpoints Pentagon & Congress Off Duty Edu

America's Military

AMERICA'S MILITARY: The crushing deployment tempo

David B. Larter

Aviation readiness up as units operate at 'warp speed'

By Sean Kimmons, Army News Service April 23, 2019



Land

US Army Struggling To Keep Up With Needed Flying Hours

By: Jen Judson January 19, 2016



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OPTEMPO 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

Marital Satisfaction of Army Couples by Number of Combat Deployments

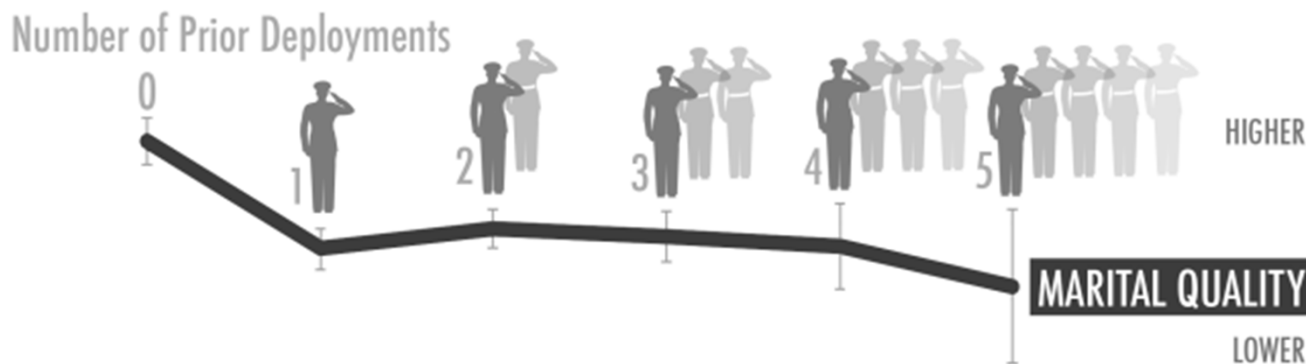


Image from RAND: <https://www.rand.org/blog/2016/09/the-impact-of-deployments-on-military-marriages.html>

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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+)



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

	Ages	Behaviors	Moods	Remedy
Infants	< 1 yr	Refuses to eat	Listless	Support for parent, pediatrician
Toddlers	1-3 yrs	Cries, tantrums	Irritable, sad	Increased attention, holding, hugs
Preschool	3-6 yrs	Potty accidents, clingy	Irritable, sad	Increased attention, holding, hugs
School Age	6-12 yrs	Whines, body aches	Irritable, sad	Spend time, keep routines, counseling
Teenagers	13-18 yrs	Isolates, uses drugs	Anger, apathy	Patience, limit-setting, counseling



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)



Impact of Deployment on Kids Toddlers 1-3 years

- 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

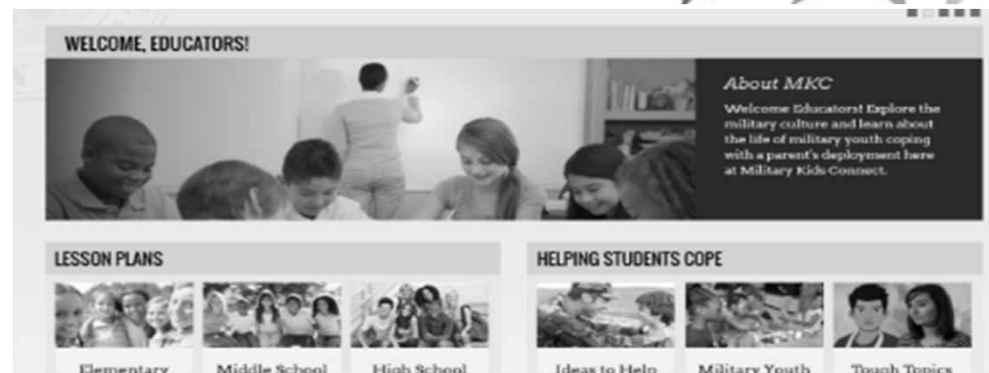


Military Family Support Portfolio

- 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



**TOGETHER,
EVERYWHERE.**



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inTransition

CONNECTING • COACHING • EMPOWERING

- 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>

REAL WARRIORS ★ REAL BATTLES
REAL STRENGTH

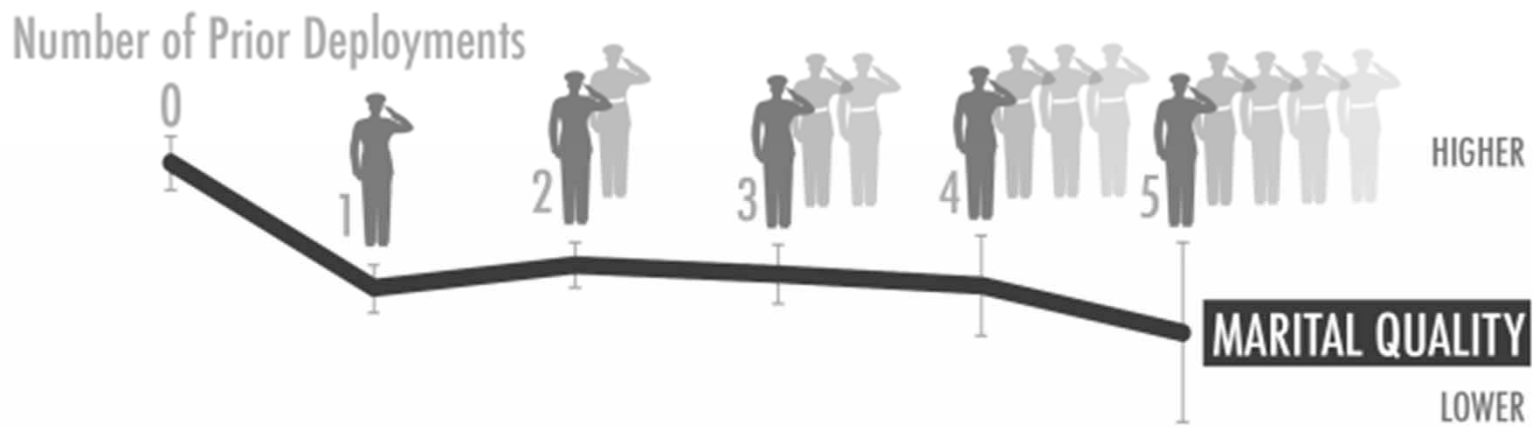
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Questions?

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