Strengthening the Homefront

A Tactical Toolkit Targeting Key Factors During Deployment

Uniformed Services University
Center for Deployment Psychology
Disclaimer

The views expressed are those of the presenter and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.
Learning Objectives

• Evaluate the impact of deployment on family functioning
• Develop strategies to enhance familial relationships during the Deployment Cycle
• Integrate resources to support military family functioning into clinical practice with military families
Why now (again)?
Emotional Cycle of Deployment

How does deployment impact the Homefront?

Pincus, House, Christenson, & Adler, 2001
Ambiguous Loss Theory

• Two types of ambiguous loss
  1. Ambiguous absence
  2. Ambiguous presence

• Ambiguous loss issues can result in boundary confusion

Boss, 2016; Faber, 2008; Hollingsworth 2016
How might family readiness relate to mission readiness?
Mission Readiness and Family-Related Stressors

- Potential impact on mission readiness:
  - Lack of communication $\rightarrow$ concern for home life $\rightarrow$ difficulty concentrating
  - Declined focus impacts performance in job duties

- Possible cost to mission:
  - Quality of work during deployment

Le Menestrel & Kizer, 2019; Strong et al., 2021
Deployment Risk Factors

Individual

Family Factors

Parental Functioning

Deployment Characteristics

Functioning over time

Briggs et al., 2020
Deployment Impact on Youth

- Separation → disruption to routines, communication, and relational stability
- Combat exposure is uniquely contributory to decline in child psychosocial functioning
- Range of possible emotional and behavioral challenges in youth

Weins & Boss, 2006; Sheppard et al., 2010; Flake et al., 2009; Lester et al., 2010; Wilson et al., 2014; Briggs et al., 2020
Parent Functioning & Deployment

- Parenting stress → increase in psychosocial issues in children

- Parental functioning (physical, mental, social) correlates with child functioning
  - Ex: Higher parental social functioning is associated with fewer child problems (behavioral, emotional, hyperactivity/inattention symptoms)

Flake et al., 2009; Foran et al., 2017; Lester et al., 2010; Briggs et al., 2020
## (Some) Developed Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADAPT</td>
<td>Adaptive Deployment, Adaptive Parenting Tools</td>
<td>Gerwitz, DeGarmo, &amp; Zamir, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOCUS</td>
<td>Families OverComing Under Stress</td>
<td>Lester et al, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrive</td>
<td>Parenting practices to foster child development and resilience</td>
<td>Chesnut, Rudy, Welsh, &amp; Perkins, 2021; Materia et al., 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Families Strong Forces</td>
<td>Focused on young children impacted by OEF/OIF</td>
<td>Paris, Acker, Ross, &amp; DeVoe, 2011</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Strengths & Limitations

• **Strengths**: research-based, evaluated programs that have the potential to reach many families

• **Limitations**: ongoing challenges connecting military families with evidence-based programming
Research on What Works

- **Parent**-focused interventions
- Empowerment by taking healthy action
- Positive familial **interactions**
- Supporting parent *and* child **coping**, as well as resiliency as a whole
- Emphasis on healthy **communication**

Prinz 2016; Briggs et al., 2020
ABCD Tactical Toolkit

Take Action

Protect the Bond

Cope

Discuss
Key Psychosocial Features

Increased anxiety
Anticipation
Tension over decisions
Lots of opportunity for increased conflict

Pincus, House, Christenson, & Adler, 2001
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Take Action</th>
<th>Plan how to mark time towards deployment completion. Ex: puzzle piece/day, Lego piece/day, skill/craft mastery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Protect the Bond | Pre-record bedtime rituals and special wishes  
Pre-deployment emotional checklist |
| Cope | **Adults:** stress management and coping ahead plans, including resources  
**Kids:** Coping box or cozy corner |
| Discuss | Share details: where, how long, basic rationale  
**Kids:** create a social story using real pictures  
**All:** create a communication plan (how, when, which details to share) and family rules/expectations |
Key Psychosocial Features

Possible relief
Fear
Feeling overwhelmed
Increased responsibility

Pincus, House, Christenson, & Adler, 2001
| **Take Action** | Let kids help with packing and preparation  
Maintain basic routines and allow time for self-care; postpone big decisions |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Protect the Bond** | Intentional good-byes with **two parts**:  
1 – There is an important job to do  
2 – The child(ren)/spouse are just as important |
| **Cope** | Implement tools identified during Pre-Deployment  
Lean on others who understand |
| **Discuss** | Give room for big feelings (crying is a form of communicating, too)  
Schedule time for upset and monitor child exposure |
Key Psychosocial Features

- Increased confidence
- New rituals and norms
- Possible feelings of isolation from service member
- Different perspectives of family stressors

Pincus, House, Christenson, & Adler, 2001
Take Action
Daily/weekly accomplishment and challenge log
Ex: on paper, shared online document, creative means (flower bloom is accomplishment, stem is challenge)

Protect the Bond
New “love you” rituals that span time and distance (paper hugs, good night to the stars or moon)
Couples’ gratitude journal and virtual “date nights”

Cope
Teens: Center for Parent and Teen Communication self-guided “Build a Stress Management Plan”
All: WHO “Doing What Matters in Times of Stress”

Discuss
Talk...about anything
Encourage kids/teens to talk with military peers
Create small or silly reasons to celebrate
Increased anticipation
Excitement
Trepidation
Possible rush to finish tasks

Key Psychosocial Features

Pincus, House, Christenson, & Adler, 2001
| A | Take Action                  | Family countdown activities                                  |
|   |                              | Let kids share as a way of re-engaging                      |
| B | Protect the Bond            | Don’t panic or force engagement                             |
|   |                              | General mindset: time to establish the “new normal”        |
| C | Cope                        | Turn to comprehensive programs if/as significant challenges arise |
|   |                              | Refer for treatment if high conflict                       |
| D | Discuss                     | Prioritize:                                                |
|   |                              | 1 - big changes to the family                              |
|   |                              | 2 - communication to reconnect emotionally                 |
Key Psychosocial Features

Role confusion
Role re-balancing
Possible trauma or other war injury
Concerns “catch up”
Opportunity for tremendous growth

Meadows, Tanielian, & Karney, 2016; Pincus, House, Christenson, & Adler, 2001
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Take Action</th>
<th>GROW and extend!</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protect the Bond</td>
<td>Child-focused time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Redefine family: identify strengths, expand roles, attune to emotions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cope</td>
<td>Monitor level of detail shared about deployment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strengthen areas of challenge</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Discuss</td>
<td>Practice communicating with “I messaging” and problem-solving approach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create a family narrative about the deployment</td>
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Pearls

• Deployment is associated with risk for psychosocial challenges for military families
• There are key protective factors that can be addressed intentionally
• It is possible to promote resilience throughout deployment as a single behavioral health provider
Questions and Discussion
deploymentpsych.org

- Descriptions and schedules of upcoming training events
- Blog updated daily with a range of relevant content
  - Articles by subject matter experts related to deployment psychology, including PTSD, mTBI, depression, and insomnia
- Other resources and information for behavioral health providers
- Links to CDP’s Facebook page and Twitter feed
Other Learning Opportunities

- CDP Presents - Monthly Webinar Series
  - Live and archived
  - CEs free for live, small fee for on-demand CEs
  - View archived webinars free for no CEs

- On-demand Courses
  - Military Culture
  - Deployment Cycle
  - Intro to PE and CPT
  - ...and more!
Provider Support

CDP’s “Provider Portal” is exclusively for individuals trained by CDP in evidence-based psychotherapies (e.g., CPT, PE, and CBT-I)

- Consultation message boards
- Hosted consultation calls
- Printable fact sheets, manuals, handouts, and other materials
- FAQs and 1:1 interaction with answers from SMEs
- Videos, webinars, and other multimedia training aids

Participants in CDP’s evidence-based training will automatically receive an email instructing them how to activate their user name and access the “Provider Portal” section at Deploymentpsych.org.
Contact Us

Email: cdp-ggg@usuhs.edu
Website: deploymentpsych.org
Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/DeploymentPsych
Twitter: @DeploymentPsych