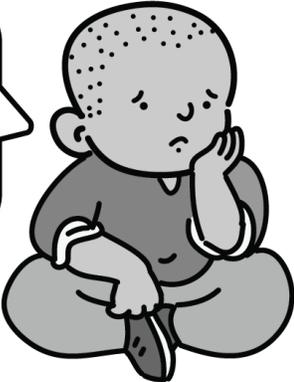




Saying Goodbye

Try to look through my eyes to understand what I might be feeling.



Figuring It Out Together

Here are some of the ways that you and your partner can work together to support yourselves and your child with saying goodbye.

Be Kind to Yourself and Each Other Before Deployment

The weeks and days before deployment are stressful. Emotions are often running deep for weeks beforehand. Try to be realistic about what to expect. You may find the pre-deployment period to be a loving, family time. However, it could be a bumpy time that leaves you thinking, "Let's get on with saying goodbye already."

Many families report increased arguments and hurt feelings in the weeks before deployment. This is common. Pre-deployment is a time when it can be easier to begin to distance yourself rather than experience the pain of saying "goodbye." Your Service member may begin focusing on his or her mission. The at-home parent may withdraw and begin preparing him or herself for the at-home-alone months ahead. Preparations for deployment (communicating with family, home repairs, doing a big food shop, putting paper work in order, training exercises) can take time and energy.

Being aware that bumpy times and big feelings are normal, can help you cope as the deployment looms. Flexibility and a sense of humor can help too.

Talk About How You are Going to Keep in Touch

Conversations about how and when you plan to communicate with each other can help assure your moments of connection go as smoothly as possible, no matter how many miles apart you may be.

Options to communicate may include phone calls, texts, emails, web chats, and letters. Yet, even with the technology that didn't exist a few years ago, there may be times when communication will be bumpy. Anything could happen and keep you from communicating on the day and time you have planned: the internet could be down at home or away, an unexpected mission could arise, a communications blackout downrange could be ordered, heavy traffic on the way home from child care could happen, or your baby could have a giant poop when the phone is ringing.

It can be helpful to acknowledge that there may be times when you cannot or should not share information. For example, when the Service member is at an undisclosed location or on a mission there may be restrictions on what can be said, even if there can be communication.



There could be times when the parent at home may want to buffer the away parent from certain information to not put the downrange parent in distress, which can be distracting and ultimately dangerous out in the field. A big home repair, a fight at work, a rough time with a toddler who insists “no” may be examples of times the at-home parent may ask him or herself: “Why share news if there is nothing that my partner can do? Telling him or her may only cause worry.”

Finally, talk about who you can both turn to for assistance in communication in case of a serious health issue, injury, or even a death – whether at home or downrange. This includes your home visitor and rear detachment people for the parent on the home front and the chain of command and buddies for the Service member.

Be Up Front That During Deployments, Rumors Fly

During deployments, rumors often fly – on the home front and in the field. Rumors can be about anything, though gossip about partners being unfaithful is a common one. This can upset everyone involved.

If rumors begin to spread about others, it can be very helpful to stay out of the action and not pass them on. If the rumors are about you or your partner, talk with a friend and calm down. Then, decide if you want to talk with your partner while you are apart or wait until he or she returns. Hold off on any big decisions or actions until you’ve had time to cool down and talk together.

Create a Family Care Plan

Working together to care for your child begins before the deployment with the creation of a family care plan. While slightly different for each Service branch, developing this plan will give you both the opportunity to affirm and record the basics of how you plan to work together to meet your child’s needs and will provide a sense of confidence that the daily routines of your child’s life are recorded and your family’s paperwork is in order.

Information in a family care plan includes details about a child’s daily activities, your family’s routines, medical and dental information and contacts, information needed to reach close friends and relatives who will remain part of your child’s life, contact information for resources your family uses on and off base, and the location of important documents. These documents should include wills, insurance certificates, and power of attorney forms. Care plans will also include information about the importance of dependent IDs and how to use services available on your installation.



Give Your Child a Chance to Say “Goodbye”

It wasn't that long ago that people used to think and say, “Babies and toddlers don't notice when a parent is away for deployment. They are too young.” Many did not think it was even necessary for a parent to say “goodbye” to a baby or toddler before leaving for months.

Today, we know that isn't true. Babies and toddlers *read* the emotions of their adults and definitely are aware that the voice, hugs, and smiles of someone dear is missing when a parent is away. While it can be tempting to skip goodbyes, saying goodbye teaches an important lesson about trust: the people you love and who love you do not just disappear. Saying “goodbye” is a first step in working together to support your child with a long absence from a parent.

Your baby will not understand the words you say, but she will sense something is happening when one parent is leaving. Give her a hug and a kiss and a sentence of two about what is happening. Assure her she will be safe with her at-home parent and that the parent who is going away will come back. If she is an older baby, invite her to wave or blow a kiss.

Toddlers and twos are just beginning to understand goodbyes. They don't yet understand time, but they will know that this goodbye is more than saying “goodbye” at child care or when a babysitter comes for an evening. Explain what is happening simply to your toddler, “Mommy is going to work far away. You and I will stay here together at home. We'll talk with Mommy on the phone and video and say, ‘I love you’. And she will call us and say, ‘I love you’ too.”

Give your toddler a chance to say goodbye in the way that she chooses. For example, she may want to give Mommy a giant bear hug or 10 kisses and/or sing her a song or draw her a picture to put into her duffel. She may end up protesting or be quiet and watch or even walk away. All are ways of saying, “I love you.” “I will miss you.” “I don't want you to go.”

Give Yourself a Chance to Say “Goodbye” and Do so in a Way That Works for You

Try to give yourselves a chance to say “goodbye” before you reach the crowded and emotion-filled designated point of departure.

Take care not to let visions of what should be interfere with what is and what works for you. For some parents, a goodbye might happen during a walk, dinner out, or even a night or weekend get-away. For others, it might be a high five and “I'll really miss you,” or it could be working together to get things around the house done and talking about post-deployment plans. Others may find the last weeks and days together are spent apart due to training exercises or at-home arguing that involves feelings that are too big and mixed to put goodbye into words. No matter how you say goodbye or don't, it is OK. This is a challenging time so give yourself and your partner a break.