

FOR
PRE-SCHOOL
AGE
CHILDREN

WRITING

ACTIVITIES

ART

E-MAIL

VIDEOS

PROJECTS

ARMY KIDS

FUN

ACTIVITY BOOK



DEPLOYMENT ACTIVITIES FOR KIDS



Army Kids Fun Activity Book: Preschool Children is one of a series of six booklets about Army separations for children and young people ages 3 to 17. These booklets were written as part of Operation READY under contract between the University of California, Riverside and the US Army Community & Family Support Center, Family Programs Directorate.

All six booklets were developed with the help of active Army, Army National Guard, and Army Reserve families, Army Community Service personnel, and Child and Youth Services staff members.

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University of California Cooperative Extension

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We sincerely thank all those who helped us produce these booklets.

August 2002

OPERATION
READY

Resources for Educating About Deployment and You

This book is intended as an Activity book which preschool aged children can work on with a parent or care provider to address the issues of a parent's deployment with hands-on activities.

There are "Notes for Grown-ups" throughout the book which give additional information and ideas to help young children understand and cope with parental separation due to deployment.

My Army Family



Preschool Children's Fun Activity Book

This book belongs to

a VERY SPECIAL PERSON
with a Mommy or Daddy in the Army.

Fun Activities for Children Ages 3-5

Note for Grown-ups:

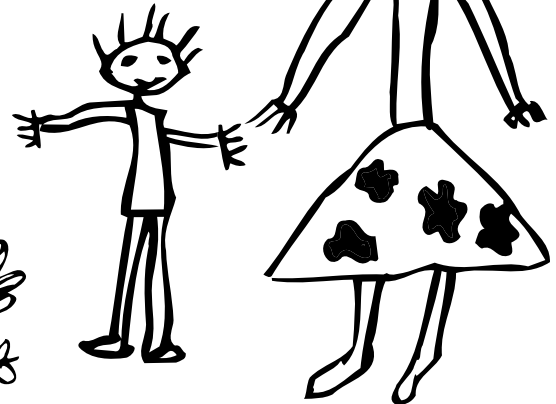
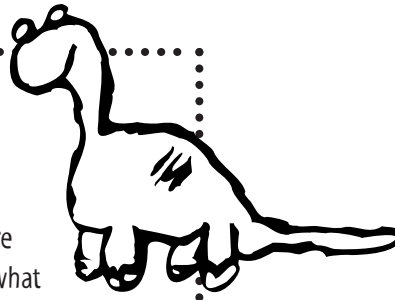
Young children like to know what is happening and what their parents are doing. Talk to young children about what kind of work their parents do for the Army. Don't wait until a parent is deploying to talk about his or her job. Young children are always very interested in what adults do when they are at that mysterious place called "work."

If possible take advantage of an opportunity for your child to see his/her parent working or to visit the parent's worksite on post; or have a co-worker take a picture of the soldier-parent at work.

Children this age also like to hear about how important their parent's job is and why they need to go away to do this job. For many children an uncomplicated response such as, "Mommy has a very important job. She fixes radios so other soldiers can talk on them. The Army needs Mommy to do her special job in (), so she has to go away for a while," is all the explanation that is needed. Even somewhat vague statements such as "Daddy is going to () to help keep the people who live there safe, and to help keep bad guys away," help children understand why a parent must leave.

Keep the language and explanation simple and concrete, and use terms your young child can understand. Be prepared to repeat the explanation, as children often need information reinforced a number of times.

Do not assume that your child is not interested if he or she has not asked about a parent's work or why the parent is going away. Provide the information voluntarily. Young children often don't know just what question to ask to get information that can help them understand their world.

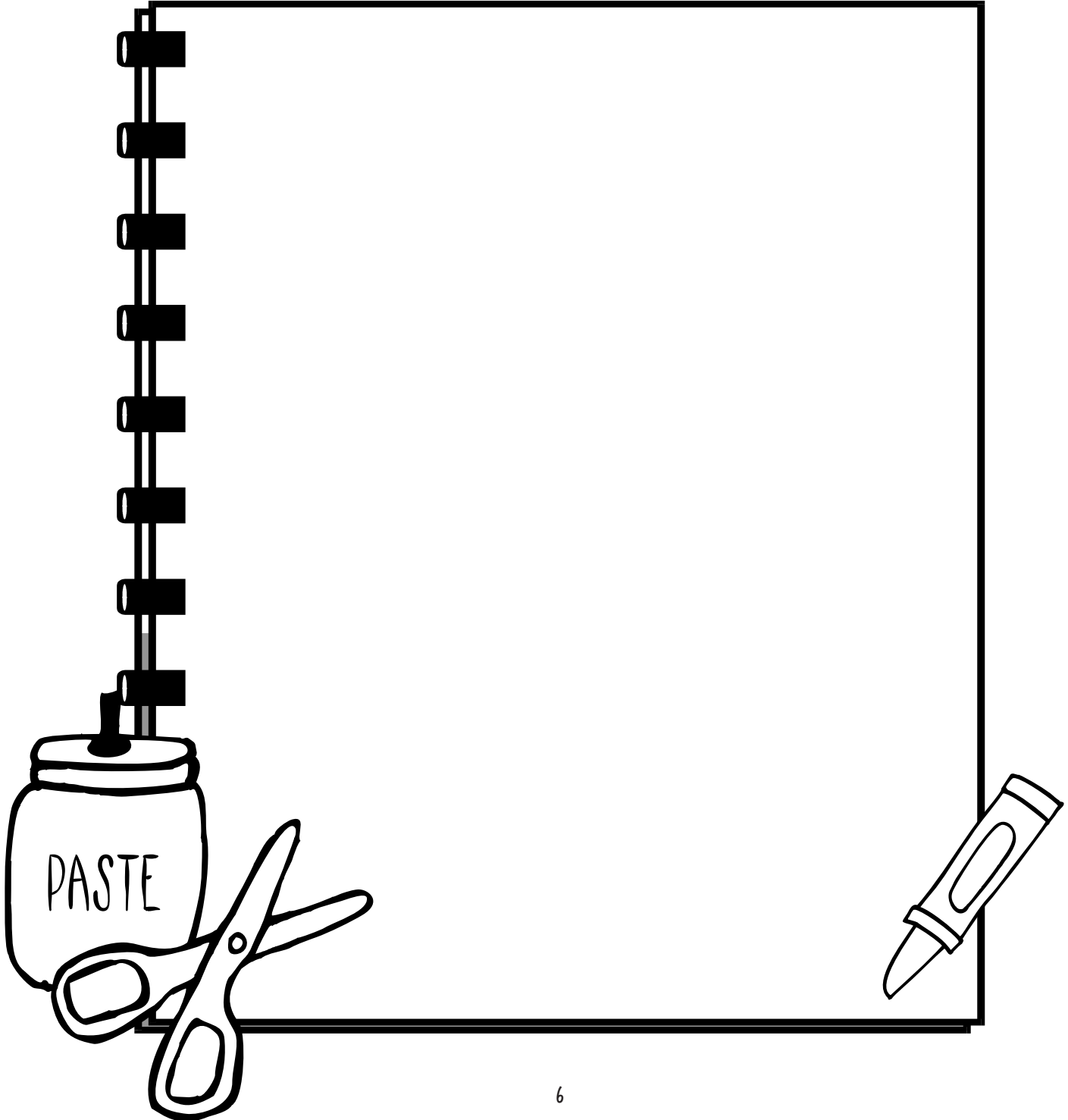




Soldiers and Jobs

Soldiers have special jobs. Ask your Mommy or Daddy about their special Army job. What Army work do they do?

Make a picture of your Mommy or Daddy doing their Army job. Color or paste pictures from photos or magazines.



Soldiers Doing Work

Sometimes soldiers have to go away to do their jobs.

Other grown-ups take care of children when their Mommy or Daddy goes away. Who takes care of you when your Mommy or Daddy goes on an Army trip?



Your Mommy



Your Daddy



Your Grandma or Grandpa



Another grown-up



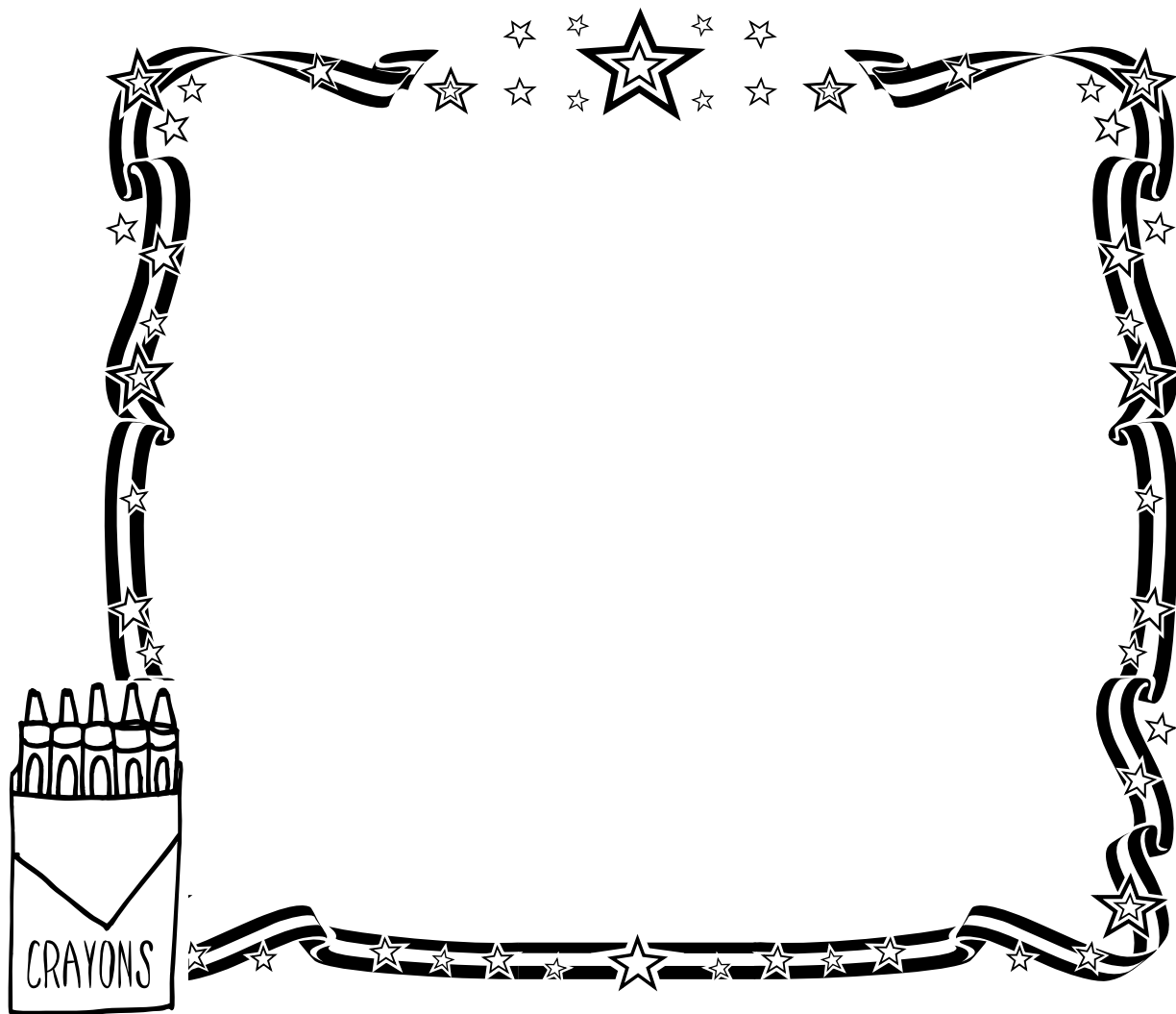


Getting Ready

Before your Mommy or Daddy goes away you can do things and make things to get ready.

Talk about Special Days

Sometimes soldiers are away on special days like the 4th of July or a birthday. Ask your Mommy or Daddy if they will be gone during special days.



Draw or color a picture of a special day. What special day is it?



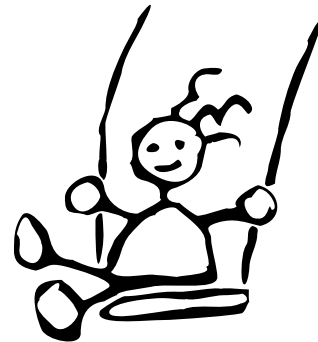
Spend Special Time Together

Spend special time with your Mommy or Daddy before they go away. What do you want to do with your Mommy or Daddy?

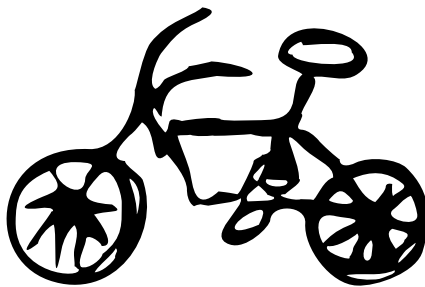
Here are some special things to do with your Mommy or Daddy.



Go to the zoo



or the park



Ride bikes



or go out to eat

What do you like to do? _____



Note for Grown-ups:

Routine is very important to young children, and they tend to be sensitive to changes in routine. For this reason, try to minimize the number of changes in daily activities that children will experience during a parental absence. If the deploying parent usually reads a bedtime story, for example, prepare story tapes for the child to listen to while his or her parent is gone or start to rotate the 'story-reading' responsibilities so that the parent or adult who remains home also frequently takes over 'story-reading' BEFORE the parent deploys.

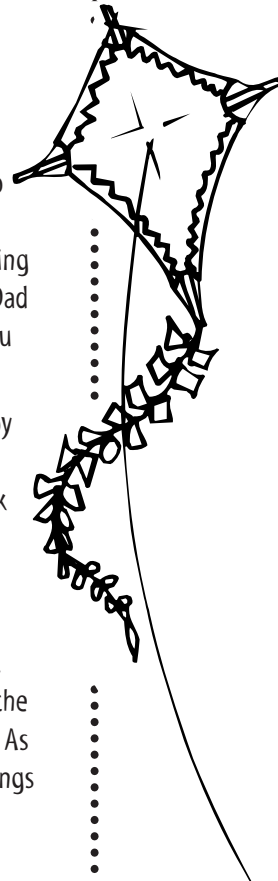
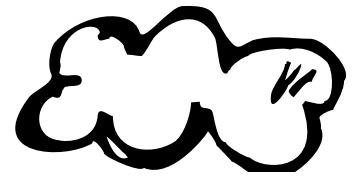
As much as possible, include the care provider or 'stay home' parent in daily childcare tasks that the deploying parent usually carries out independently, to minimize the change in routine when the parent leaves. If 'Dad the soldier' usually takes Junior to daycare, start having Mom (or whoever might be helping with transportation during deployment) occasionally drop Junior off, before Dad deploys. Talk to children about the changes they may experience, and how you will deal with them together.

Young children learn and understand by working with concrete objects and by using their senses. You can help a young child get ready for and cope with a parent's absence by engaging your child in activities like the ones in this book that result in tangible products that your child can touch, smell, see, or listen to before, during, and after the deployment.

These activities can also help children feel like they are doing something important to get ready for deployment, just like the grown-ups around them. While the parent is deployed, help children stay in contact and keep track of the days until the parent returns with the activities and materials described here. As much as circumstances permit, children benefit from making and sending things to their parents and receiving letters and other contact from them. Concrete, visible ways of marking time, like big Xs on a calendar, M&M or 'kiss' jars, and paper chains, help children understand the passage of time until a parent's return.

Before and during the deployment bring these materials out and direct your child's attention to the pictures, books, tapes, etc., frequently, even when your child does not independently initiate their use.

Help young children use these objects daily to deal with parental deployment, talk about their absent parent, and express their feelings. Talk to your child about what was going on when pictures were taken or the video was made; discuss where Mommy or Daddy is and what he or she is doing while looking at the Map, poster or treasure box; encourage your child to talk about how he or she feels when wearing Daddy's t-shirt or watering Mommy's plant.

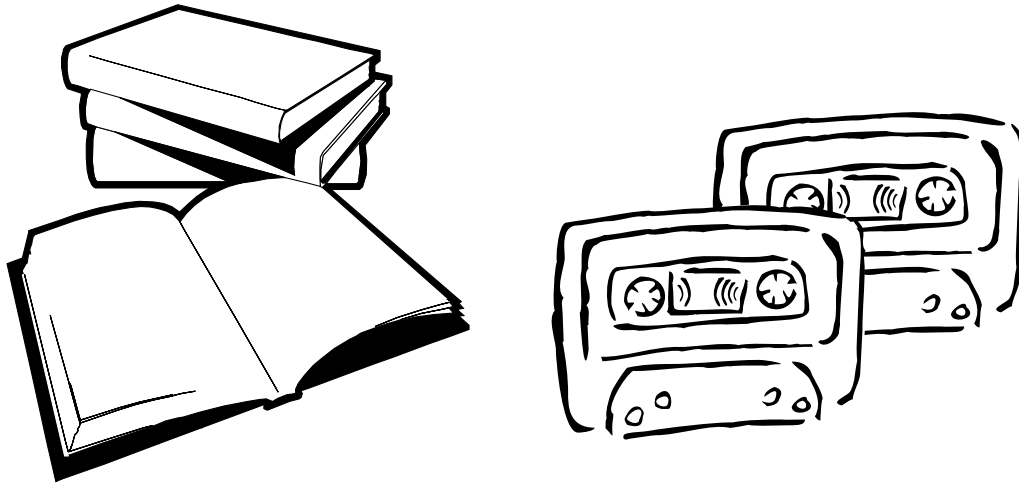


Make Things to Keep

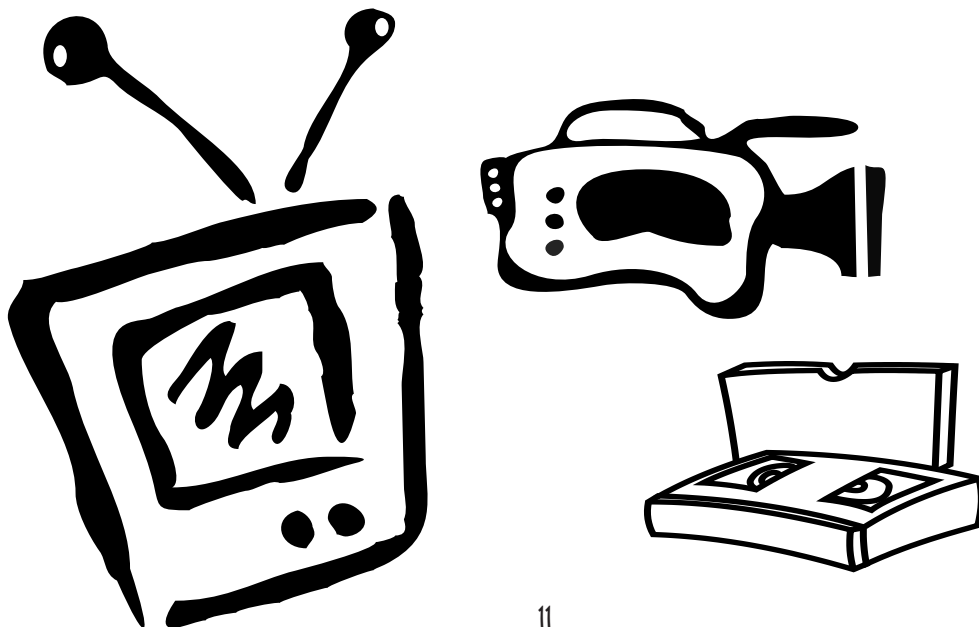
Make a Story or Video Tape

Ask your Mommy or Daddy to tape record your favorite story or song so you can listen while they are away.

What story do you like best? _____



A grown-up can help you make a movie of you with your Mommy or Daddy. You can watch your special movie while they are on the Army trip.





Mark a Map

Here is a map to cut out or copy. Ask your Mommy or Daddy where they are going. A grownup can help you put a circle on the map where you live and a big X on the map where your Mommy or Daddy will be working while they are gone.



Make a Book

Paste or tape lots of pictures and drawings of your Mommy or Daddy on paper. Decorate a cover. A grown-up can help staple or tape the pages together to make a book. Look at your Mommy or Daddy Book whenever you want while they are away.



Help Jody decorate the cover of her Daddy Book.

Make a Trip Poster

Help a grown-up put a big poster or paper on a wall. Or make a frame around a place on the wall with ribbon or yarn.

Put things about your Mommy or Daddy's Army trip on it. The map, pictures, cards, stamps, letters and other things your Mommy or Daddy sends you can go on the poster.



Make a Picture Wall

Tape lots of pictures of your Mommy or Daddy, and you and your family, on the wall by your bed, or where you play. Keep a picture of your Mommy or Daddy under your pillow, next to your bed, or in your school bag, so you can look at it whenever you want.



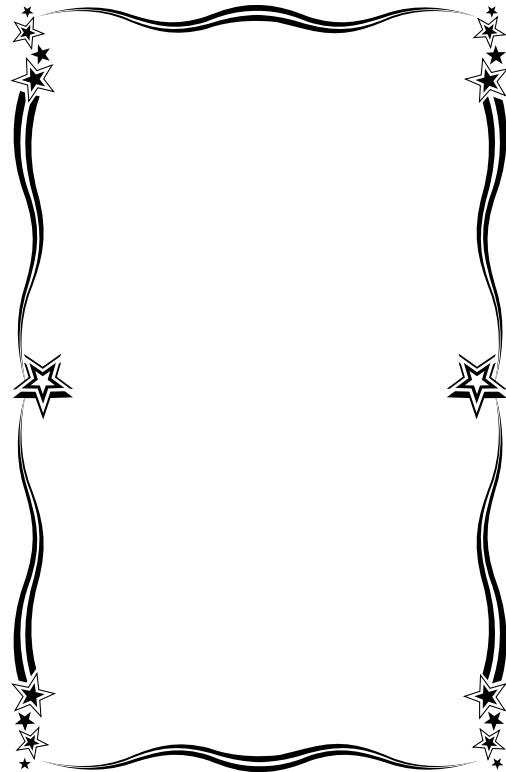
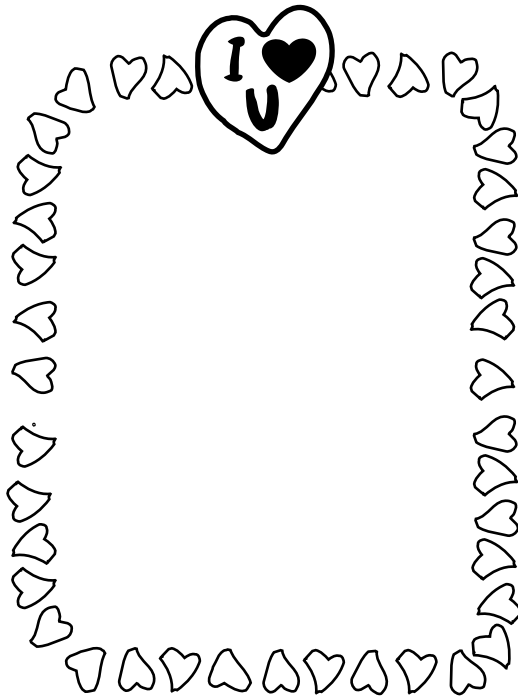
Make a Picture to Wear

A grown-up can help you make a picture of your Mommy or Daddy that you can wear.

Pick a frame for your picture. Cut out one of the frames on this page or make your own. Color the frame and paste it on cardboard. A grown-up can help you cut out the picture of your parent to fit in the frame. Paste the picture on the frame.



GO ARMY

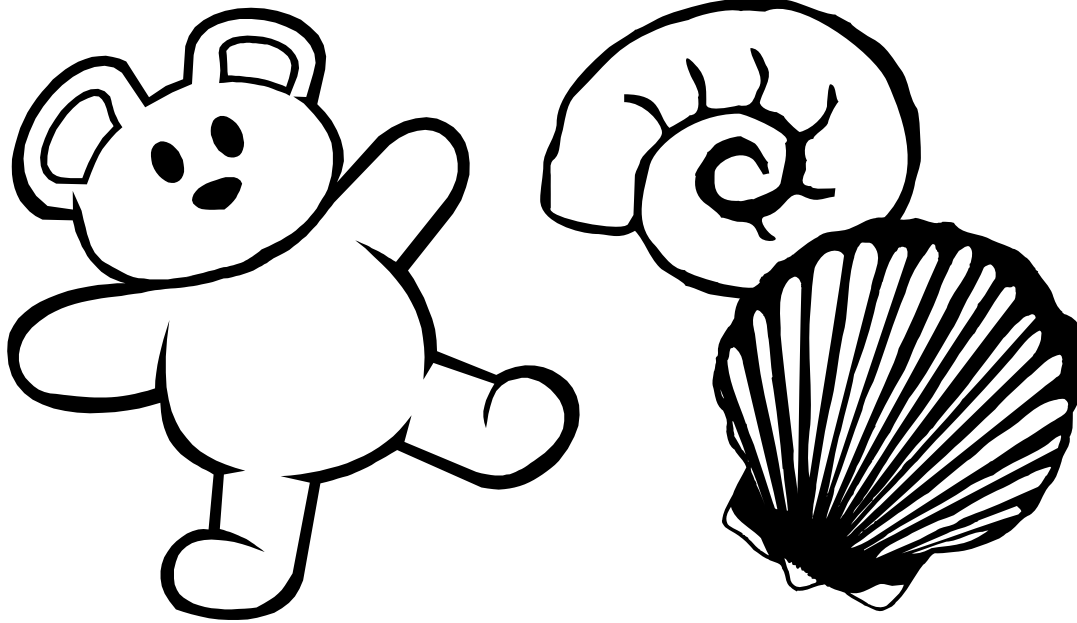


Cut out or draw an "I love you" note and paste it on the back of the frame. Glue the picture to a clothespin. When it is finished you can wear your picture of your soldier on your shirt.



Trade Special Things

Give your Mommy or Daddy something special to take with them when they go away, like a pretty rock or shell that you found or a picture or card you made.



Keep something special from your Mommy or Daddy while they are away. Maybe you can wear their t-shirt to bed, sleep with their pillow, water their plant, or take care of their baseball glove until they come home.



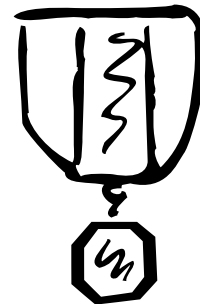
Make a Treasure Box

Make a treasure box to keep while your soldier is away. Decorate the outside of a box with pictures and pretty things. Ask your Mommy or Daddy to give you special things to put in the box, like their ribbon or medal, wings, patches, or photos.

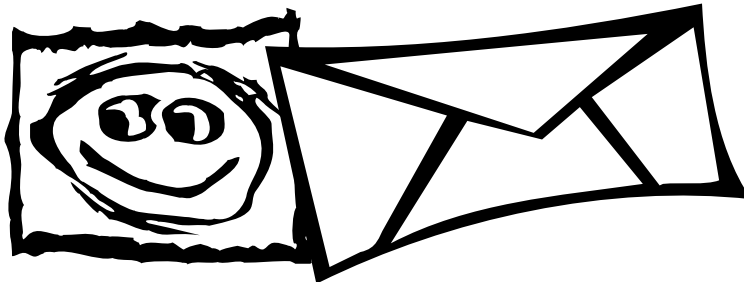


What will you put in your treasure box?

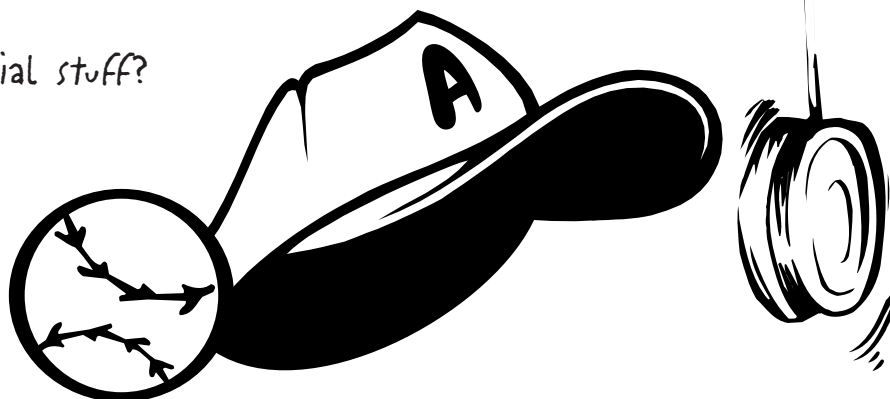
Your soldier's medal or wings?



Pictures and letters?



Other special stuff?

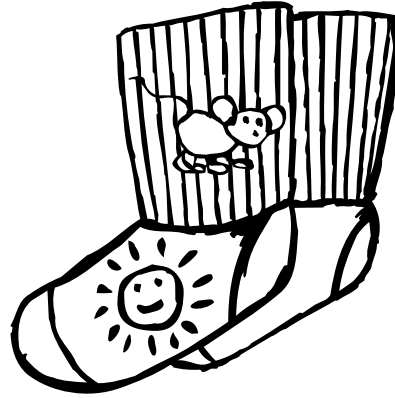




Make Something for your Mommy or Daddy

Silly Socks

Take a pair of your parent's white socks and decorate them. Draw pictures on them with markers or glue pretty things like ribbons, buttons, bows, sparkles, or stickers on them.



A Goodbye Card

Make a Goodbye Card for your Mommy or Daddy and put it in their duffel bag.

What a nice surprise for your Mommy or Daddy!

Send Things

Letters and other mail

You can stay close to your Mommy or Daddy by sending mail. Here is a 'fill-in' letter you can send to your Mommy or Daddy. Ask a grown-up to help you write what you want to say. Then the grown-up can help you mail the letter to your Mommy or Daddy.



Dear _____

Today we _____

We miss you because _____

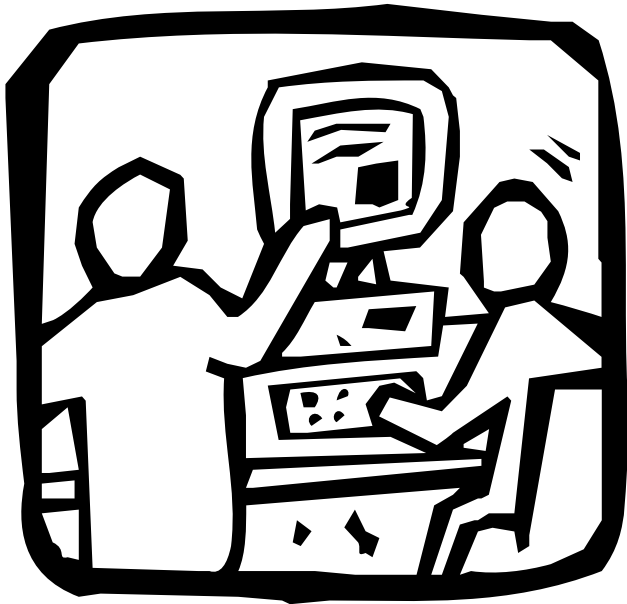
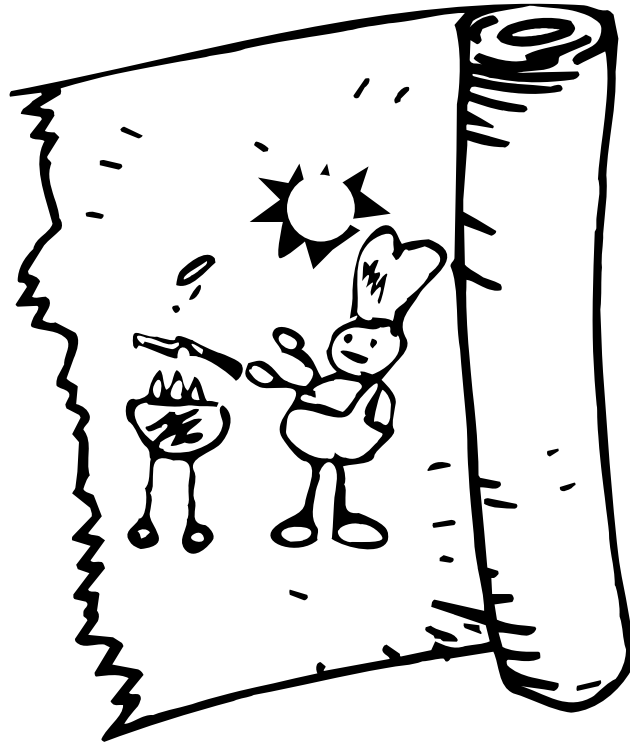
When you come home we will _____

I love you very, very, very much,



Make a picture letter

Draw or color a picture for your Mommy or Daddy on paper. Or make a BIG PICTURE on pieces of paper or the back of paper bags that are taped together to make a really BIG PAPER. You can decorate the picture with stickers or glitter or other things too. Ask a grown-up to help you write a letter on the back of the picture and mail it to your Mommy or Daddy.

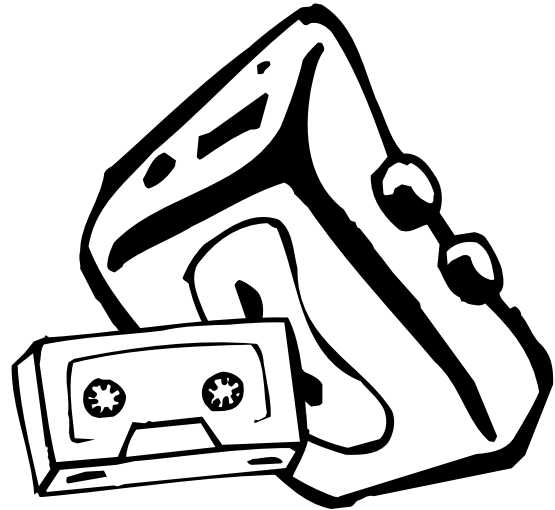


Emails

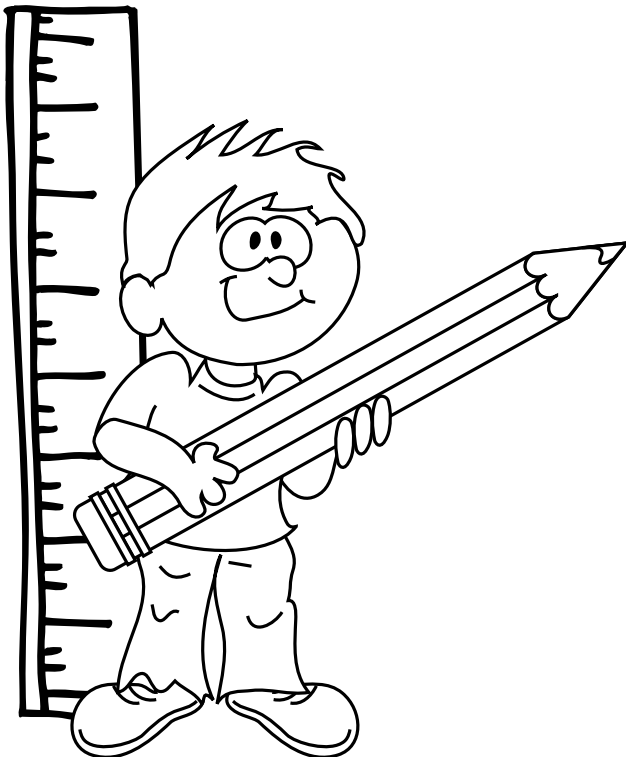
Send a special computer letter to your Mommy or Daddy by EMAIL. Ask a grown-up to help you write the letter on the computer and send it to your Mommy or Daddy.

Talk to your Mommy or Daddy on tape

Talk, sing, ask questions, or tell a story to your Mommy or Daddy using a tape recorder. Talk about who you play with and what you like to do. Tell them how much you miss them and what you want to do when they come home. Ask a grown-up to help you mail the tape to your Mommy or Daddy.



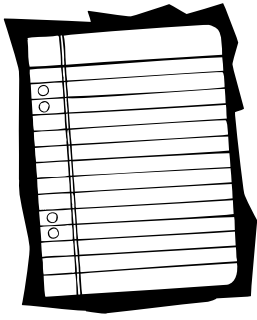
How Big Are You Getting?



Draw around your hand or foot (NO SHOES OR SOCKS) with a pencil or crayon. You can color the hand- or foot- print or cut it out and paste it on colored paper. Send it to your Mommy or Daddy so they can see how much you've grown.

Tape a piece of paper on the wall higher than your eyes. Stand with your back against the wall. Ask a grown-up to mark how tall you are on the paper.

A grown-up can help you cut a piece of string or ribbon that is as tall as you. Send the string or ribbon to your Mommy or Daddy.



Note for Grown-ups:

Children may feel any number of things including tension, sadness, anger, frustration, hurt, loneliness, worry, etc., when a parent is getting ready to leave or is gone. Children are also very sensitive to the emotional state of others around them and pick up on the feelings of others in the family.

Just about any change in a child's behavior may be related to parental deployment. A young child's reactions to a difficult event such as a parent's absence may include acting out, withdrawal, crying, unusual calm or lack of emotion, or anger.

Young children often have difficulty controlling or 'regulating' their emotions. Thumb sucking, rocking and other repetitious movements, and clutching or stroking a 'blankee' are some behavioral ways young children may moderate their feelings. Children who have seemingly outgrown these behaviors may revert to them during difficult times, such as parental separations.

Although young children experience a broad range and intensity of emotions, they're not good at recognizing or understanding their feelings. Sadness, anger, or worry may be manifest as a 'tummy ache' or just feeling 'yucky,' 'sick,' or 'bad.' You can help a young child deal with his or her emotions and become more secure and mature by talking with the child about feelings and by helping the child identify and 'put a name to' his/her feelings. "Sometimes boys and girls can feel a little sick to their tummies when they are sad because their daddies are going away. You're sad about Daddy being away, and that's making you feel a little sick too." When we acknowledge children's feelings, and help them recognize and name them, it helps young children grow up to be more secure, caring, and understanding individuals.

Remember, any feelings your child has are okay. There is no right or wrong way to feel. Tell your child that all of his/her feelings are accepted, including negative ones like anger and frustration.

Help children channel unacceptable ways of expressing their feelings into acceptable actions. Hugging or just sitting and holding the young child can help him or her deal with distressing emotions. Engaging in large muscle activities like running, climbing or playing ball can also help a young child work through intense feelings.

Make sure your child understands that the feeling is accepted, even when his/her behavior is not. "It's okay to be mad at Daddy because he's leaving, but it's not okay to hit your brother. Let's think of something you can do to feel better when you're mad that doesn't hurt someone."

Stress: Stress, and the physical and emotional feelings that accompany stress, is not just a 'grown-up' experience. Children get stressed and can be encouraged to engage in age-appropriate stress managing activities like these:

1. Practice relaxation techniques with stressed, over-emotional children. Sit with the children with legs crossed, arms at sides and eyes closed (or lie quietly on a soft surface). Encourage the children to go limp and 'floppy like cooked spaghetti', breathe slowly, and think about something quiet or calm. Encourage children to use relaxation when they are feeling 'bad.'
2. Encourage children to exercise—run, ride, swim or climb—when they feel 'bad' or stressed.

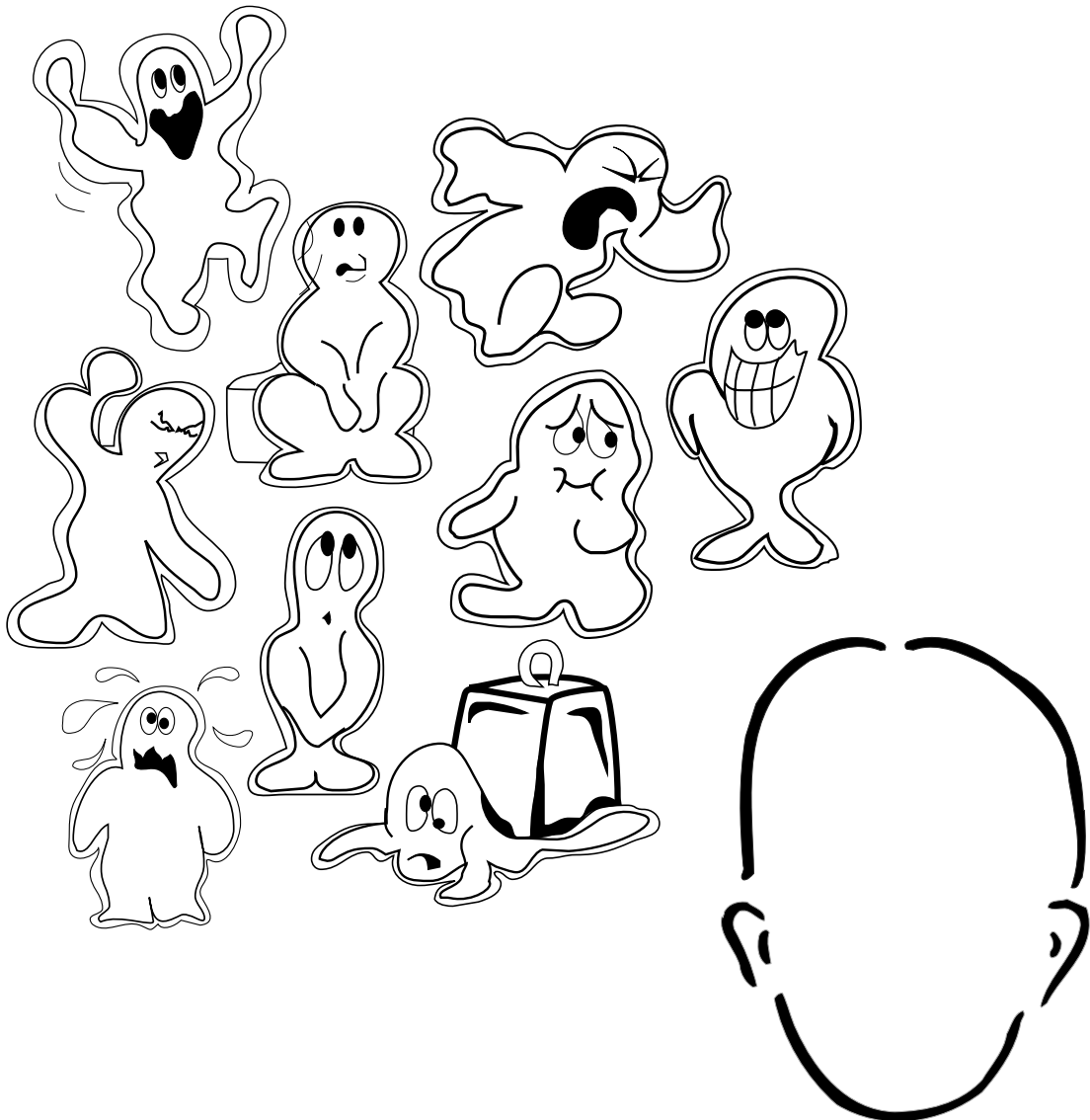
Talk about your Feelings

You may feel funny or bad when your Mommy or Daddy goes on an Army trip. You can feel icky or sick or sad or mad because they are leaving.

It's okay to feel bad or to be mad or sad when your Mommy or Daddy is away. Talk to a grown-up when you feel bad or funny.

How Do You Feel?

Circle or color picture of the way you feel when your Mommy or Daddy goes away. Or draw how you feel.

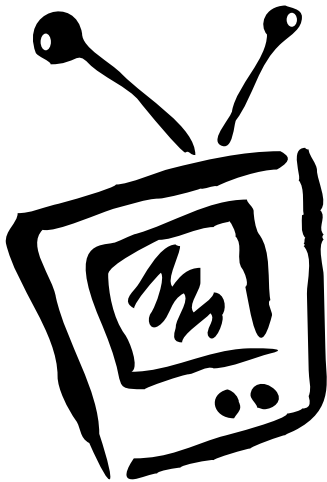
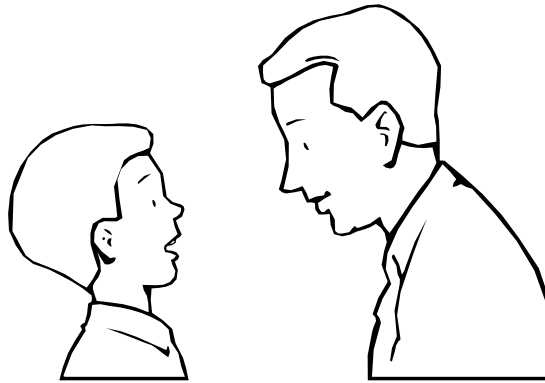




Feeling Better

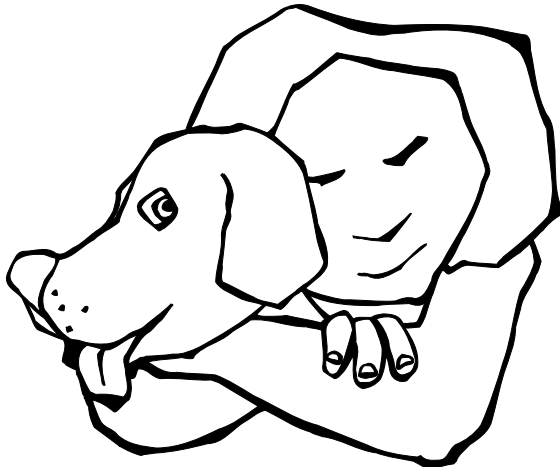
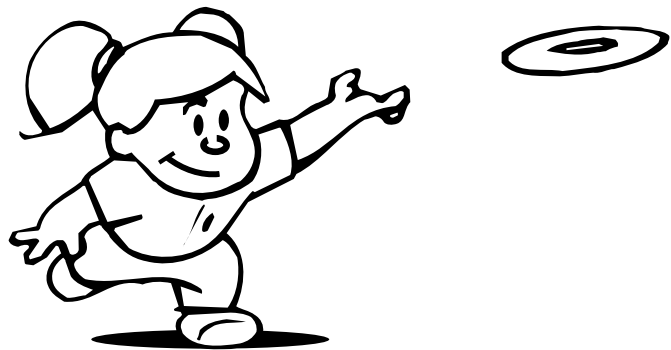
You can do lots of different things to feel better when you feel bad or icky because your Mommy or Daddy is away.

Talk to a grown-up.



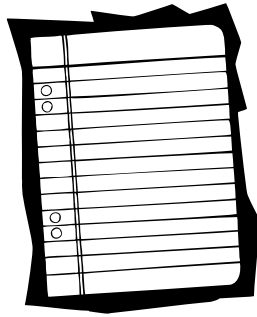
Watch a video of your Mommy or Daddy or listen to a story tape.

Run, jump, or swing real fast.



Get a hug.

What can you do to feel better when you feel icky?



Note for Grown-ups:

Young children may lack the understanding of time passage that often helps older individuals cope with the absence of an important family member. You can help young children measure the passage of time during parental absence by engaging in concrete activities such

as marking a calendar, adding a ring to a paper chain, opening a paper kiss, or eating one M&M or 'kiss' from Mommy or Daddy each day during the deployment.

Most young children are better able to cope with the absence of a loved one if they have a tangible means of identifying when Mommy or Daddy will return. Talk to the child about his or her parent's return in simple words and statements he/she understands. You might say, "Daddy will be home after three times at Sunday school;" "Mommy will be back two days after we sing Happy Birthday to Grandpa John;" or "When the M&Ms are gone, Daddy will come home."

Homecoming dates may change; training and tours may be extended. Most children do better if they are honestly notified of changes such as these. Again use simple language that young children can understand: "Daddy is such a good worker that they need him in () [for a little longer; two more weeks; until after Easter]. He misses you, and will see us as soon as he can. Let's count fourteen more M&Ms for the jar, so that you'll get the last one the day that Daddy comes home."

You know your child better than anyone else. If you feel that your child is not able to comfortably mark days during parental absence, or if you think discussion of homecoming would be problematic, you may want to skip or modify these activities.

However, counselors and child development specialists do agree that young children cope with change better when they are given adequate information about their world, presented in a developmentally appropriate way. So, if possible, help young children make sense of the passage of time during deployment, using hands-on activities such as these.





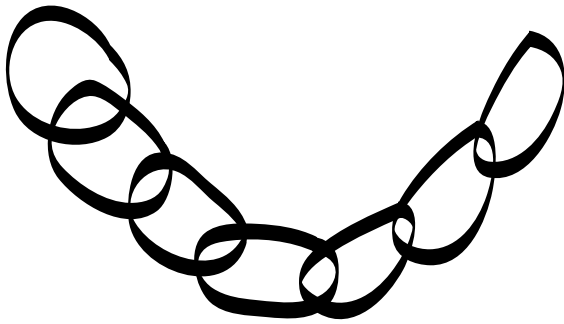
When Will Mommy or Daddy Be Home?

When your Mommy or Daddy goes on an Army trip you want to know when they will come home.

Mark a calendar

A grownup or older sister or brother can help you put big circle on a calendar to mark the day that your Mommy or Daddy is coming home.

Each night before bed make a big X on the calendar to show that the day is all gone. You will see the number of days until your Mommy or Daddy comes home get smaller and smaller.



Make a paper chain

Make one inch strips of white or colored paper. Make a chain by adding one circle of paper each day while your Mommy or Daddy is away. Use the chain to decorate your house when your Mommy or Daddy comes home.

A Candy Kiss from your Mommy or Daddy

Have a grownup count out one M&M or chocolate kiss for each day your Mommy or Daddy will be away, and put them in a jar you can see into.

Eat just one each day while your Mommy or Daddy is gone. When the candy is gone, your Mommy or Daddy will be coming home.



Paper Kisses

Before your Mommy or Daddy goes away, have them put lipstick or camouflage stick on their mouth. Have them put a kiss for you on one piece of paper for every day they will be away. Put the paper kisses in a jar.

You can have one kiss from your Mommy or Daddy each day while they are away. When the kisses are gone your Mommy or Daddy will be coming home.





Welcome Home

Note for Grown-ups:

Many parents agree that homecoming and reunion are exceptionally difficult for young children. Once again schedules are disrupted, routines change, and emotions run high.

Children may experience a range of emotional reactions from excitement to fear to depression. Children, and returning parents as well, may feel out of place or shy. Remind the child that he or she may be happy and excited, but also feel funny or scared. Talk to your child about his or her feelings about homecoming. Remind the child that any way he or she feels is OKAY.

Involve the child in getting ready for the parent's return, for example by helping prepare a 'Welcome Home' banner or making decorations for a welcome home party.

Be honest with the child. Explain that "Mommy may be very tired from working so hard, and might not want to play right away;" or "Even though you like to sleep with me while Daddy is away, remember that's Daddy's place on the bed, and you have your own special bed."

Young children often don't know what to say to a parent who's been gone. Most children mature and gain new skills during the deployment. Remind the child about these accomplishments and encourage the child to share information about "how big I'm getting" and "what I learned" with the returning parent.

Homecoming

When it's time for your Mommy or Daddy to come home you may feel funny again. You can feel happy or bad too. Talk to a grown-up about your feelings.

When your Mommy or Daddy comes home they are...



happy to be back

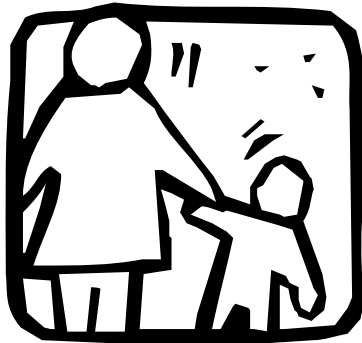


tired from working



surprised at how big you are

They want to spend time with you



and time with your parent who stayed home.



Help get ready for your Mommy or Daddy's homecoming.



Make a Welcome Home Banner

Tape pieces of paper together to make a long strip. Decorate the paper with stickers, by coloring, or by pasting things on it. Have a grownup help you write "Welcome Home" on the banner. Tape the banner up on a wall inside or outside of your house so it's one of the first things your Mommy or Daddy sees when they come home.

Make a Welcome Home Card

Fold a piece of white or colored paper in half. Color a picture for your Mommy or Daddy on the front of the card and ask a grown-up to help you write a Welcome Home message for your Mommy or Daddy on the inside of the card. Give the card to your Mommy or Daddy when they come home, or put it in a special place like on their pillow or at their place at the dinner table, so they can find it.



Decorate your house

Decorate your house for your Mommy or Daddy's homecoming with the paper chain you made, pictures you made at home, school or daycare, and other pretty or fun things.



GO ARMY

Have a Happy Homecoming!!!!!!

