

The toolbox

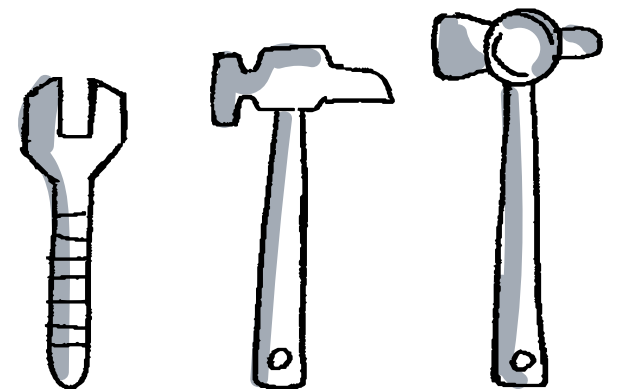
Information, tips and tricks to help you accompany your **0-5 year old** through the reality of a parent's absence.



CRFM
Valcartier
MFRC

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| INTRODUCTION | 4 |
| THE CYCLE OF EMOTIONAL REACTIONS TO DEPLOYMENT | 5 |
| UNDERSTANDING HOW YOUNG CHILDREN REACT | 6 |
| REACTIONS THAT A YOUNG CHILD MIGHT HAVE | 9 |
| COMMUNICATION | 10 |
| PREPARING CHILDREN FOR THE PARENT'S ABSENCE | 11 |
| STRATEGIES FOR HELPING CHILDREN COPE WITH THE PARENT'S ABSENCE | 14 |
| SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES | 18 |
| DISCIPLINE | 20 |
| TEMPER TANTRUMS | 22 |
| TALKING ABOUT MISSIONS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN | 25 |
| PREPARING FOR THE PARENT'S HOMECOMING | 27 |
| HELPFUL BOOKS | 29 |
| RESOURCES AND REFERENCES | 32 |

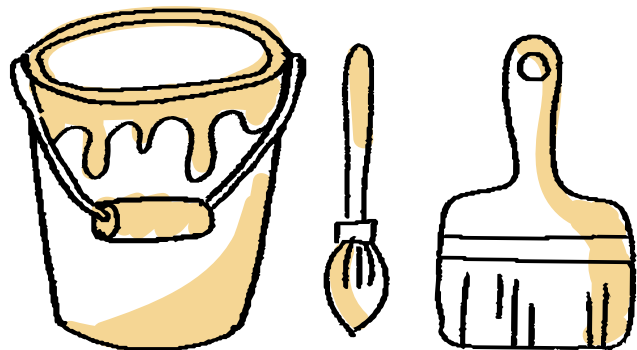


INTRODUCTION

In our meetings with parents of children ages 0 to 5, we gathered a great many questions and comments about the challenges associated with supporting children as they adapt to the absence of a parent. We found that few tools existed to facilitate interventions with this young clientele.

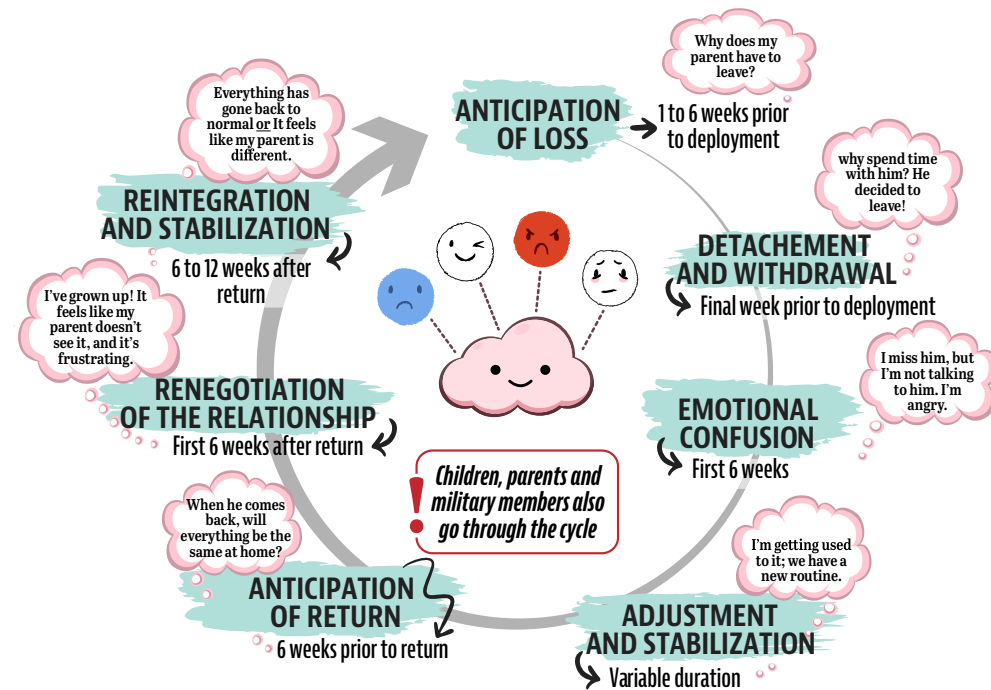
In January 2003, a committee of volunteers was set up to try to fill that gap. The committee was composed mainly of mothers who had experienced the absence of their military spouse. Since the tool's creation, Valcartier Military Family Resource Centre workers have improved upon it by adding up to date information.

We would like to thank the volunteers who participated in this project for their work and involvement. Such a tool would never have been possible without their contribution.



THE CYCLE OF EMOTIONAL REACTIONS TO DEPLOYMENT

Deployment is a very emotional experience, both for the CF member being deployed and for the family—especially for the member's children being left behind. Understanding children's various emotional stages in reaction to a deployment and realizing that these feelings are completely normal can relieve certain fears. Here are the stages :



UNDERSTANDING HOW YOUNG CHILDREN REACT

How children adapt to absence raises major questions for parents and caregivers alike. Why does a child react one way instead of another? Why is one child's reaction different from their brother, sister or other children?

To gain a little bit more insight, it is important to bear in mind that various factors have an impact on how children adapt to absence. Some of those factors are related to the individual child (every person is unique), others are related to the parent who is caring for the child during the absence, and still others are related to the absent parent.

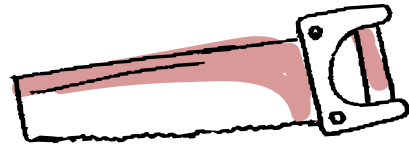
ADJUSTMENT FACTORS RELATED TO THE CHILD

the child's emotional development level

The child's ability to express their feelings, their sense of security, and their ability to cope with parental separation are all factors to bear in mind.

The child's level of attachment to the parent who is going away

For example, if the child has a close emotional bond with the parent who is going away, who is regularly involved in activities with that parent, or spends a lot of time with them, the child's reaction may be more pronounced because they will have more grieving to do.



ADJUSTMENT FACTORS RELATED TO THE AT-HOME PARENT

Acceptance of the military spouse's role

Children who see that the at-home parent willingly accepts that the military spouse is being asked to leave home for work may more readily accept the idea of the extended absence, which is an important step in the process of adapting to it.

The at-home parent's own adaptation to the absence

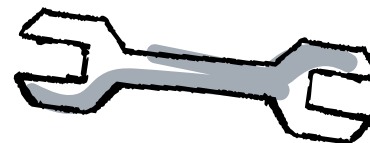
Children will see absence as less of a burden if the at-home parent is in control of their own emotions, knows how to take advantage of the support offered by those around them, and focuses on maintaining a healthy lifestyle, etc. Children are very sensitive to their parent's emotions.

The emotional support the at-home parent provides to their child

The parent's level of attention, listening skills, openness, and availability to play with the child to break up the routine, as well as the quality of the time that they spend with the child and their ability to get the child to express their feelings, are all important factors.

Rules and routines

Maintain the activities, routines and rules that the child had before the parent left, but do not put pressure on yourself. The child will feel more secure and adapt better to the absence.



ADJUSTMENT FACTORS RELATED TO THE PARENT WHO IS GOING AWAY

Preparing the child before the departure

A child who is informed of the departure, who is given explanations and answers to their questions, and who is included in the preparations and in activities that allow them to store up memories (photos, videos of time spent with the parent before the departure, etc.) will be better able to adapt.

Staying in touch with family during the absence.

A child who has regular contact (letters, packages, emails, telephone calls, video calls, etc.) with the parent who is away will adapt more easily to the parent's absence. Choose the right time for family members and the military parent to be in touch; if necessary, do it less often, but focus on the quality of the interaction.

OTHER FACTORS

Family harmony

If a child has had the opportunity to see the strength of the bond between their parents and their attachment to their family, the child will be less likely to experience the absence as a break up. Doing activities with the military parent as a family or as a couple before the departure can help to reassure the child.

The level of danger associated with the mission

The riskier the mission, the more anxiety it could cause the child and the at-home parent. In such cases, the child will feel the parent's stress.

REACTIONS THAT A YOUNG CHILD MIGHT HAVE

BEFORE THE ABSENCE

Confusion, a lack of understanding, surprise, guilt, sadness and anger may overwhelm the child before the parent leaves. Those states of mind could lead to one or more of the following behaviours, to varying degrees:

- Neediness;
- Irritability;
- Attention-seeking;
- Sleep and appetite disturbances;
- Various physical ailments (eczema, stomach aches, etc.);
- Regressive behaviors.

DURING THE ABSENCE

Feelings of sadness, abandonment, anxiety, confusion about routines, guilt and low self-esteem are some of the feelings that children may experience during their parent's absence. These can lead to the following behaviours:

Sleep and appetite disturbances;

Behavioural problems that may be an outward manifestation of the parent's anger or anxiety;



Some of the child's behaviours may have already been present, but may be amplified when one parent leaves, or be more manageable when both parents are present.

AFTER THE ABSENCE

When the parent returns, the child may be happy, excited, need reassurance, be angry as a way of punishing the parent for going away, or avoid the parent because the child has trouble recognizing them. Those reactions may cause the following behaviours:

- Attention-seeking behaviours: The child needs a lot of attention. Attention-seeking can result in both good and bad behaviour;
- The child demands more attention from the parent;
- The child exhibits avoidance-type behaviours.

COMMUNICATION

It is essential to communicate with children in a healthy way on a daily basis. It may require some effort, but the investment is worth it. Sometimes, even if children are very young and still do not talk much, they tell us a lot through their actions.

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Children speak to us through their bodies. Little boo-boos, such as, "I have a stomach ache," can signal a need for affection. Excessive restlessness may indicate that they feel anxious about something or that they need stricter boundaries. It is important to observe your child's behaviour. In addition to trying to understand the meaning of a child's non-verbal behaviour, we should read between the lines: "Is Daddy coming tomorrow?" can mean "I miss Daddy." We need to help children express their true feelings and needs.

non-verbal language, for example: eye contact and to take time

to give your child affection, hugs and kisses, which has an effect of calming them.

COMMUNICATION RELATED TO THE PARENT'S ABSENCE

Children can sense a parent's emotions even if the parent tries to hide them. That's why parents need to be as transparent as possible and admit, for example, that "Mommy misses daddy too." However, parents must remain aware of their parental role and express only things that can help children understand what is going on.

If a child cries, ask them why they're crying. Always check that you are understanding what they are trying to communicate, and be careful not to influence them with your adult concerns.

Children may need a type of communication that is specific to the absent parent, for example, cuddling with mommy or playing sports and/or twirling with daddy. Provide opportunities for them to be able to communicate their feelings with "substitutes", such as an uncle, aunt, grandparent, or friend.

It is good for children to meet other kids who are going through the same thing as they are, just as it is important for parents to be in contact with other people to talk about what they are going through. It makes everyone feel less alone.

PREPARING CHILDREN FOR THE PARENT'S ABSENCE

Children's reactions are largely dictated by the reactions of their parents. The key to smoothly handling a parent's absence is proper preparation. If parents are well prepared and adapt well, there is a good chance that their children will do the same. Being well prepared means anticipating changes and difficulties and finding ways to deal with them.

The impact of a parent's absence on young children should not be minimized by pretending that they do not understand what is going on.

That is why it is good to give children a way to mark the passage of time. For example, you could try the following:

- Place a number of candies or vitamins in a jar that is equivalent to the number of days that the parent will be away. It is easy to add or change the amount if the number of days changes.
- Have the kids remove a link from a paper chain that contains one link for every day or week that the parent will be away.

Every child experiences separation differently and, even if this is not the first time that the parent has gone away, the child might experience the parent's absence in a completely different way. It is important to be cognizant of how young children might react or express sadness when faced with the challenges associated with the absence of a parent. Notify the daycare centre of the parent's impending absence and let them know that your child's behaviour might be affected.

Children, especially those ages 0 to 5, interpret reality based on cues that they receive from adults, especially their parents. It is important to avoid inadvertently reinforcing their fears and worries. When children ask questions or talk about their concerns, give them age-appropriate answers and avoid providing too many explanations or answers that are overly elaborate. In order to understand the reason for their question, ask them what they think before you answer. If the separation is difficult for them, techniques to distract them may help but may not be enough. You will need to get used to their feelings of sadness and provide them with the support that they need.

TIPS BEFORE THE DEPARTURE

- Encourage all family members to share their feelings.
- You can involve the whole family in preparing for the departure. Getting the parent's luggage ready makes the impending absence more concrete for children.
- Give a meaningful object to the child (for example: a shirt, stuffed animal, dog tag, etc.) that smells of the absent parent's cologne or perfume.
- Do family activities and take photos, then create a souvenir album or placemat.
- Record the military parent and the child telling stories and singing songs so that they can both watch the videos when they need to.
- Record the parent telling a story before they leave. The child will be able to watch the video when they are missing the parent.
- Keep a bottle of the deployed parent's perfume or cologne. When the child is missing the parent, the perfume or cologne can be sprayed on a stuffed animal or on the child's pillowcase to comfort them.
- Make the child a montage of laminated photos depicting the activities that they did with the departing parent before the parent left so that the child can keep the photos in their room or close by.
- Start transferring routines from the departing parent to the at-home parent (e.g., bath time routine, bedtime routine, etc.). According to some psychology studies, a new routine takes 21 days to become well established.

DURING THE DEPARTURE

Involve the children in the chores that need to be done (e.g., make a chore list) that will help you, and it will empower them.

Allow the children to fully experience their emotions and help them name them.

LITTLE RELAXING RITUALS THAT CREATE A SPECIAL BOND

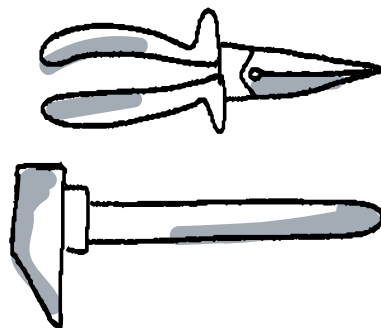
For children, the absence of a parent not only causes them to temporarily lose a person they love, it also cuts them off from the small cherished rituals that they share with that parent. We forget, however, that the at-home parent can take over for the absent parent and recreate some of those rituals. For example:

- Every evening, François gives his son Mathias a bath. Instead of soaping a washcloth, he uses a sponge fish. The at-home parent can do the same thing if he knows about that ritual.
- On Saturday mornings, Julie watches cartoons with her two daughters and brings the comforter from her room. If Michel knows about that, he can recreate that little ritual with his daughters while their mom is away.

Before the deployment, make a list of the special rituals that the children have with the departing parent in order to remember them all.

STRATEGIES FOR HELPING CHILDREN COPE WITH THE PARENT'S ABSENCE

- Maintain the usual daily routines as much as possible.
- Express your expectations in a positive way. Explain what you want instead of what you don't want.
- Accept the child's feelings and allow the child to express them in ways that are socially acceptable.
- Find tools or ways (e.g., an emotion chart) to make the child familiar with and able to recognize different emotions. You can also play a game together where you imitate emotions in the mirror.



- Express your own feelings about the absence and talk honestly with your child in age-appropriate terms that they can understand. Let them know that it is normal to have new feelings and encourage them to tell you how they feel.
- Keep the child in contact with the deployed parent, but go at their pace, through exchanging letters, drawings, cards, videos, emails, telephone calls, parcels, etc..
- Comfort your child and show them that you are there to support them.
- Show that you are interested in the child's activities (games, books, songs).
- Use children's books to discuss the child's emotions and how they are experiencing the parent's absence.
- Don't forget: every little bit of affection counts!

HOW CHILDREN BENEFIT FROM ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING A ROUTINE

Security/comfort

Children feel safe because someone else is taking care of their well being; they don't have to worry about anything. They feel that they are being guided, and they need those boundaries.

Trust

Children learn to trust others when their caregivers follow a reliable routine. Their trust in the world at large is based on those early experiences.

Self-confidence

Their self-confidence increases when they are able to predict what will happen.

Good habits

Children learn good life habits by having routines.

HOW PARENTS BENEFIT FROM ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING A ROUTINE

Planning

A routine allows parents to plan and accomplish what needs to be done. Find a way to plan that works for you using a list, your cellphone, a calendar, etc.

Discipline

When tasks are part of an established routine, children "test" the rules less often with bad behaviour.

ONE MOTHER'S SUGGESTION

I wrote down the names of games and activities that my children like on little slips of paper and put the slips in a box. The games and activities were things like finding hidden objects, holding puppet shows, dancing, playing memory games, playing music, playing "restaurant" with handmade paper menus, playing "auto shop," playing with a racetrack rug or building blocks, playing dress-up and parade, playing computer games or games that involved both the children and myself, using a foam mat with letters and numbers for the children to find, crafting, building things with playdough, playing hide and seek, etc..

When I have time, we draw a name from the box and play the game. I define different play areas inside and outside the house, e.g., there is a place where the children know that they can get dirty, another where they can build things, another where they can dress up, and so on.

IDEAS FOR KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH THE PARENT WHO IS AWAY

Write a letter using pictures instead of words: The deployed parent can replace the words with their own drawings, which will rouse the child's interest and help them put together the story.

Make a puzzle letter: Have the child place small illustrations (drawings, stickers, pictures cut out of magazines, etc.) to complete the sentences in the letter.

Use the Internet to send digital photos of the soldier's work on mission.

Before the departure, have the departing parent leave behind small objects or written messages. You can give them to the child in their lunch box, on their pillow, at breakfast, etc., as a surprise.

The deployed parent can send the child a souvenir or object by mail (such as a sweater, toy or stuffed animal) that is representative of the parent's mission or location.

Send the deployed parent any object that they can return to the child filled with love or covered with kisses.

Encourage the child to keep the mementos associated with the absent parent in a special box. The mementos might include photos of the child and the absent parent, a sweater that smells like the parent, letters, etc.

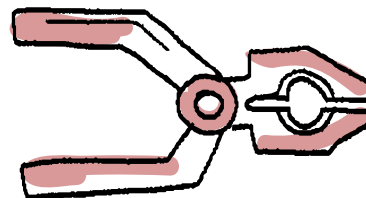
The parent who is absent should avoid writing long letters. Children prefer something more visual that is personally addressed to them, such as a postcard, a photo, a short note, a drawing that conveys the message, a letter with pictures that the children can identify, a video, etc.

One Mom's Tip

I got the book "A Father to be Proud of" by Sheila Johnston online. At the beginning of the deployment, I read the story in the book.

Then, I gathered together photos of my husband at his job and photos of my children.

After gathering together all of the images that I needed, I made a



montage and adapted the story using our photos. The girls, who were 18 months and 3 years old at the time, were really excited about the story with the personalized images.

For several months, reading the book was a special part of the daily routine for me and my girls. It allowed the girls to feel closer to their dad despite the distance that separated us. This is an activity that you can try with your own children.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Here are some activities that can be done to keep in touch with the parent who is absent.

Photo frame

Take a piece of stiff cardboard, place a photo of the child in the middle of it, and trace around the photo. Remove the photo and draw a large "X" in its place. Explain to the child that this space must be left empty so that the picture can be pasted in later. Help the child paint different varieties of dry pasta and glue the noodles onto the frame. Allow the glue to dry, and then paste the child's picture into the middle of the frame and send it to the parent who is away.

Hearts

Cut hearts of different sizes out of red, pink and white paper. Fold a piece of construction paper in half to make a card, and then glue the hearts onto it and draw a picture of a person or animal on the front. Write a sweet message inside and send it to the parent who is away. You can also decorate the outside of the envelope as long as the address remains legible.

Memory box

Take a shoebox and decorate it with family photos, drawings made by family members, or other images that the child likes. The child can use the box to store all the treasures (photos, drawings,

trinkets, gifts, etc.) that they collect during the parent's absence and that they would like to show the parent upon their return. The box can also be used to store the objects, letters, etc., that the deployed parent sends to the child.

Homemade puzzle

Make a drawing or write a message on a sheet of construction paper. You can also use a meaningful photo for this project, such as a family photo. Cut the paper into several large puzzle pieces and send it to the deployed parent.

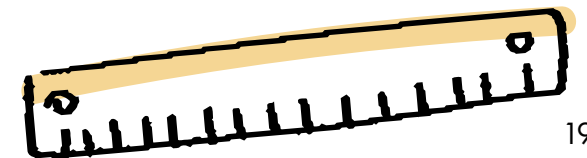
Secret message

Squeeze a lemon and save the juice. Dip a Q-tip in the lemon juice and write a message or draw a picture on a blank piece of paper. Dry it and send it to the parent who is away.

To read the message, the parent just needs to expose the sheet of paper to a heat source, such as a light bulb or candle, for a few moments. Make sure that you explain to them what they need to do to read the message!

Paper plate letter holder

Take two paper plates and cut one of them in half. To create a letter holder, attach a half plate to the full plate along the uncut edge with glue or a stapler (the tops of the plates should be facing each other). Decorate the letter holder with wool, buttons, dried flowers, coloured pencils, etc. At the top of the letter holder, make a hole for a piece of string that can be used to hang the holder on the wall. The child can use the letter holder for the drawings and messages they want to send to the deployed parent or for the letters that they have already received.



Baby video

Make a video of your baby babbling and vocalizing. Sing and talk softly to the child from time to time during the recording. Afterwards, play the video back to baby; the baby will enjoy watching and hearing you both. Then, you can send the video to the parent who is absent.

DISCIPLINE

Discipline allows your child to understand what is acceptable and what is not. Discipline also helps your child develop social skills, empathy, self-control, concentration and planning skills.

Children need rules to help them find their bearings. Applying them in a consistent and coherent way makes children feel secure. Imposing boundaries teaches them to deal with limitations and apply socially acceptable rules.

Each child reacts in their own way to the absence of a parent. Some children will seek to test the limits of the at-home parent and question the rules. If that is the case, be understanding but firm. Discipline is not always easy. The following rules and tips are designed to make your responses more effective and your life a little easier, and they should be of some help in your role as a parent.

THE GOLDEN RULES OF DISCIPLINE

- Establish short, clear and concise rules that are age-appropriate.
- State what will happen if the rules are not followed.
- Your behaviours and actions must reflect your words and rules: You say it, you do it, and if the rules are not followed, there are consequences.
- Once established, a rule must be consistently applied; it can't be one day "yes," one day "no," one day "maybe," etc.

- Consequences must be logical, proportional, and specific to the disobedient behaviour—a tantrum at the grocery store can result in the child being deprived of that outing (logical) or of the treat that you usually buy them at the store. You can also choose to take away your child's toy a few times (proportional) rather than for weeks at a time.
- Generally speaking, discipline must be consistently applied. You cannot let everything slide one week and then apply all the rules the next.

SOME TIPS TO MAKE DISCIPLINING YOUR CHILD EASIER

Use "I" statements to clarify your requests to the child.

Avoid "don'ts" as much as possible. Instead, formulate your requests in a positive way by expressing what you would like your child to do: "Please walk" versus "Don't run!"

Focus on positive behaviours and ignore negative ones whenever possible. Praise your child through actions and words.

Ignore behaviour that you do not want to encourage in your child, but take action if the child is being aggressive or disrespectful.

Offer "controlled" choices to your child. Your child will feel that they have some decision-making power and will feel less like they are constantly being forced to do things. For instance, you can ask, "Are you cleaning your room now or after snack time?"

Lead by example and model how you want the child to act. For example, **you don't ask a child to stop yelling by shouting at them.**

Apply the consequence as soon as possible after the bad behaviour, since children live in the present and move quickly on to something else. Apply a consequence that is proportionate to the disobedient behaviour.

State only the consequences that you are able to apply and

uphold. Telling the child that they are going to bed early when you will not be home before the usual bedtime is an example of a consequence that is impossible to apply.

Make it clear to the child that it is their behaviour, **not them**, that is bothering you.

Use a chore list for the family.

HOW TO DEAL WITH CONSTANT "I WANTS"

- Take preventive action by clearly defining your expectations in advance and setting out the framework that you want followed (e.g., "We'll go grocery shopping together, and I'm telling you right now that I'm only buying what's on my list, so no candy. But after the grocery store, we can go for ice cream if you want").
- Acknowledge your child's desires: "I know you'd love to have that toy; I understand you."
- Consider what the child wants and make a list of the items: "I can't buy it for you now, but put it on your wish list so that we won't forget it."
- Praise your child when they are in control of themselves; tell them that they did the right thing and that you are happy and proud of them, without going overboard.

TEMPER TANTRUMS

TIPS FOR WHEN CHILDREN LOSE CONTROL OF THEIR EMOTIONS

- Use willful indifference for small tantrums.
- Make the child take a timeout for as long as it takes them to calm down, stand at a reasonable distance from the child and do not try to move them.
- Avoid provoking the child; relax your face, avoid looking at them in the eyes, and stand aside. Do not ask the child to

look at you in the eyes. No one likes to look other people in the eye when they did something wrong.

- Do not speak. The child is not ready to listen to you. Do not try to argue or reason with the child.
- Softly singing a song that you both like can be calming for both of you and make the situation less intense.
- Speak in a low voice and get on the child's level by crouching down. Tell the child what you expect from them as clearly as possible.
- Speak to the child in a gentle voice until they've calmed down, help them express how they are feeling and why they are angry, and point out the difference between their feelings and their actions, if necessary ("There's nothing wrong with being angry, but you shouldn't throw things. Tell me what you can do instead?")
- Reaffirm to the child that you love them despite their temper tantrum, and help them find ways to resolve the problem in the future.
- Praise the child as soon as they become calm or behave well. Bring them back to the activity.
- To avoid tantrums, warn your child in advance that a change is coming soon rather than taking them by surprise. When children are under stress, it is usually harder for them to control their emotions, and their behaviour is not at its best. Set an example when you are yourself angry. For example, say, "Mommy's angry; I'm going to go calm down."

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Build an emotional thermometer to help the child identify how they're feeling. The answers can be surprising.

Set aside a space, an "angry corner," where the child can go when they're in a bad mood but that is different from the punishment corner. This special space (a small, cozy corner)

can be arranged to the child's taste (e.g., with cushions, photos, books, a stress ball, play dough, etc.). Take note: if the angry corner is in the child's room, it could lead to sleeping problems.

TIPS FOR WHEN ADULTS LOSE CONTROL OF THEIR EMOTIONS

Children learn to manage their anger based on how the adults around them control themselves. If children see us throwing a tantrum, they will do the same thing because they think it is the normal way to react. Children imitate what they see and hear; they are like sponges.

All parents feel angry sometimes, and it is possible to get through it. Feeling angry is normal, but it can be expressed without resorting to violence. When anger rises up or overwhelms you, try the following techniques:

- Take ten deep breaths before speaking or acting.
- Leave the room for a few minutes (if the child is safe, of course).
- Remember a more enjoyable time that you had with your child.
- Ask yourself why you're in such a bad mood.
- Call a friend and tell them what's going on.
- Tell your child, in a few words, that you're angry right now, but that it will pass.
- Go into a different room, punch a pillow, practice yoga, or do a relaxation exercise to reduce your tension and anger. If your mood swings bother you, ask for help or support to change the way you and your children interact.
- Call the parents' helpline to vent and decompress (see [page 32](#) for contact information).

TALKING ABOUT MISSIONS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Pay attention to the information that is circulating in the media.

Answer the child's questions while being reassuring.

Show the child photos of the places where the deployed parent is located.

Verbalize the reason for the mission using language that your child will understand. Use softer terms, such as, "Daddy is going to help people who are having a hard time."

Since it is your job as parents, aunts/uncles, babysitters or neighbours to ensure children's psychological equilibrium, here are some ideas on how you can talk to them about war and danger. These ideas are suggestions taken from the National Center for Children Exposed to Violence:

- The ability to listen to children and their concerns calmly is one of the best ways of comforting them.
- Let the children talk, and listen to them all the way through before starting to respond and reassure them. Listen first and offer reassurance afterwards.
- Give them the opportunity to experience and express all facets of their emotions, even if they may not seem justified at first glance.
- Reactions differ from child to child and depend on many factors, including the child's age, developmental level, experiences of loss or past trauma.
- Children do not always react verbally. Sometimes they express their worries by being more disruptive or agitated or by doing the opposite and isolating themselves. Try to decipher what they are trying to tell you.
- Try to see things from the child's perspective. Answer the child's questions simply and clearly, and tell them the truth.

Do not add to or embellish reality. Do not provide more information than what they ask for. If necessary, they will ask more questions.

Put yourself on their level and prepare to be surprised. Even if their comments, questions or fears seem far-fetched or even funny to you, do not overlook them: they may reflect much more intelligent and profound thinking than you might have thought.

The younger children are and the less developed their language skills, the more likely they are to react through their body: health and routines may be affected. Be flexible and reassuring while maintaining routines, as these provide a sense of security.

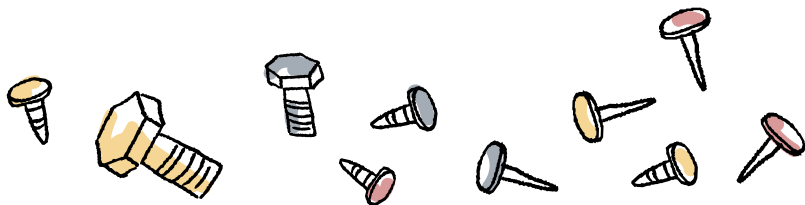
Don't underestimate the magical effect of hugs and kisses. Rocking chairs are also an excellent therapeutic tool.

Minimize children's exposure to violent news and television programs. The more concrete and explicit the images of war are, the more likely children are to be affected. If they have to see such programming, watch it with them and discuss it afterwards in order to gather and reframe what they have seen and perceived.

Take care of yourself. Kids can sense a parent's mood swings. Make a list of things you can do for your own self-care.

Pay attention to the adult conversations that take place in kids' presence. Children may appear to be playing, but they can hear what you are saying.

Find out why a child is asking a particular question, and find out what they already know or understand about the subject before answering.



PREPARING FOR THE PARENT'S HOMECOMING

It is important to take time to talk with the child before the military parent returns. Find out what the child thinks and feels about the parent's homecoming. It may seem strange, but the homecoming requires just as much preparation as the departure, since it also comes with its share of challenges. All family members, including the child, will have changed and evolved during the parent's absence. That is why returning to normal family life requires some readjustment. Here are a few ideas to make this transition easier for children:

Involve children in preparing for the return (e.g., make a welcome banner, prepare the returning parent's favourite meal, decorate the house, bake a cake, etc.).

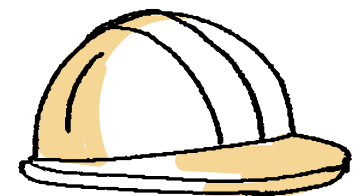
Talk about what is going to happen ("We'll pick up mom/dad at the airport and . . .").

For babies: Play videos/show photos of the deployed parent before their return, give the baby a sweater that smells like the parent and talk to the baby about the return as though they can understand what you're saying.

Spend time as a family and/or as a couple, but also devote time to each child individually. And, set aside some alone time for yourself.

TIPS FOR THE RETURNING PARENT

During the absence, children, like their parents, have learned new things; they have obviously gone through changes. Generally speaking, when the parent comes home, it is important not to rush into anything and to take the time to gradually readjust to things. Here are a few tips to help the returning parent get to know their young children once again.



For babies and toddlers

Care for the baby as a couple (bath time, diaper changes, meals, bedtime routine, etc.).

Sit on the floor at the child's level and let them come to you.

Avoid forcing the child to cuddle, kiss or play with you. It is important to go at the child's pace.

Be patient and understanding.

Show interest in the child's activities (games, books, songs).

Show interest in what the child has learned during your absence and in their progress, and praise the child.

Start by taking on the role of "daddy" or "mommy" (games, attention, tenderness, etc.), and then gradually take on the role of "father" or "mother" (discipline, rules, authority, etc.).

For preschool-age children

Listen to them carefully and acknowledge their feelings.

Tell them you love them.

Show interest in their activities (games, books, songs).

Take an interest in what they learned while you were away and in their progress, and praise them.

Start by taking on the role of "mommy" or "daddy" (games, attention, tenderness, etc.), and then gradually take on the role of "father" or "mother" (discipline, rules, authority, etc.).

HELPFUL BOOKS



What a tantrum!

Author: Mireille D'Allancé

Publisher: Scholastic

Year: 2000

No-Drama Discipline: The Whole-Brain Way to Calm the Chaos and Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind

Author: by Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson

Publisher: Random House Publishing Group

Year: 2014

How Parents Can Raise Resilient Children: Preparing Your Child for the Real Tough World of Adulthood by Instilling Them With Principles of Love, Self-Discipline, and Independent Thinking

Author: Frank Dixon

Publisher: Kindle Edition

Year: 2020



Solve Your Child's Sleep Problems

Author: Richard Ferber

Publisher: Touchstone

Year: 2006

I'm sleeping at last!...my parents too

Author: Evelyne Martello

Publisher: Éditions du CHU Sainte-Justine

Year: 2014



The way I feel

Author: Janan Cain

Publisher: Parenting Press

Year: 2000



This Makes Me Angry

Author: Courtney Carbone

Publisher: Rodale Press

Year: 2018

Liking the Child You Love: Build a Better Relationship with Your Kids--Even When They're Driving You Crazy

Author: Jeffrey Bernstein PhD

Year: 2009

A practical guide to solving preschool behavior problems

Author: Eva L. Essa

Publisher: Delmar Publishers

Year: 1999



The Angry Child: Regaining Control When Your Child Is Out of Control

Author: Dr. Timothy Murphy and Loriann Oberlin

Year: 2002

Tantrums! Managing Meltdowns in Public and Private

Author: Thomas Phelan

Year: 2014



Parenting Toolbox: 125 Activities Therapists Use to Manage Emotions, Increase Positive Behaviors & Reduce Meltdowns.

Author: Lisa Weed Phifer, Laura Sibbald & Jennifer Hunt Roder

Year: 2018

How do you feel?

Author: Anthony Browne

Publisher: Candlewick

Year: 2013



Baby play: 100 fun-filled activities to maximize your baby's potential

Author: Wendy S. Masi and Roni Cohen Leiderman

Publisher: Creative Publishing International

Year: 2001

365 Activities You and Your Toddler Will Love: An Idea a Day for Toddler's Growing Mind!

Author: Nancy W Hall

Year: 2006

Love you forever

Author: Robert Munsch

Publisher: Firefly Books

Year: 1986



Just me and dad

Author: Mercer Mayer

Publisher: Golden Books

Year: 1977



Mommy's a soldier

Author: Shawn Bélisle

Publisher: Director Military Family Services

Website: crfmv.com/en/documentation/

Jojo's mom is away

Author: Nathalie Connolly

Publisher: Director Military Family Services

Website: crfmv.com/en/documentation/

A father to be proud of

Author: Sheila Johnston

Publisher: Director Military Family Services

Website: crfmv.com/en/documentation/

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

Valcartier Military Family Resource Centre (VMFRC)

Building 93, Courcelette
418-844-6060 or
1-877-844-6060
info@crfmv.com
www.crfmv.com

VMFRC Emergency Childcare Service

418-844-6060 or
1-877-844-6060 or
418-844-5224
(emergency number available on the message)

Parents' helpline

1-800-361-5085 or
ligneparents.com [French site]

24/7 Family Information Line

1 800 866-4546

Quebec Info-santé: 811

Poison Control Centre: 1-800-463-5060

Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux de la Capitale Nationale [integrated university health and social services centre of the Capitale-Nationale region]
<http://www.jhsb.ca/en>

Quebec City crisis centre:

418-688-4240
Portneuf and Charlevoix:
1-866-411-4240
centredecrise.com

Entraide-Parents

418-684-0050
entraideparents.com

Le petit Répît

418-525-0858
lepetitrepit.ca

Groupe les Relevailles

418 688-3301
relevaillesquebec.com

Éducatout

educatout.com

VALCARTIER MILITARY FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE

Building 93
P.O. box 1000, Succ. Forces
Courcellette, Québec, G0A 4Z0

418 844-6060
toll free: 1 877 844-6060
Fax: 418 844-3959

Info@crfmv.com
www.crfmv.com

 [CRFMValcartier](#)



CRFM
Valcartier
MFRC



Canada