



talk,

listen,

connect™



Helping Families During Military Deployment

A Special Magazine for
Parents and Caregivers

- » Getting the Family Ready
for Deployment
- » Staying Connected
During Deployment
- » A Memorable Homecoming

Produced in partnership with and funded by

WAL★MART®

Talk, Listen, Connect In recognition of the contributions made by The Armed Forces of America—The Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, National Guard and Reserves—Sesame Workshop presents “Talk, Listen, Connect,” a bilingual educational outreach initiative designed for military families and their young children to share.

We are proud to offer support to help military families and their children when service members are deployed.

A Special Magazine for Parents and Caregivers » **Talk, Listen, Connect: Helping Families During Military Deployment**

Editorial & Design

Content Director: Jeanette Betancourt, Ph.D.

Editorial Director/Editor: Rebecca Herman

Writer: Leslie Kimmelman

Copy/Line Editor: Jeanette Leardi

Assistant Director, Domestic Research: David Cohen

Senior Curriculum Specialist: Jane Park

Spanish Translation: GlobalVision International

Project Director: Lynn Chwatsky

Project Coordinator: Debbie Plate

Project Assistant: Helen Cuesta

Marketing Director: Gao Roever

Designer: Kristin Richards Lauricella/Lauricella Design

Illustrations: Josephine Lauricella

Sesame Street Magazine: Art Director: Colleen Pidel • Senior Editor: Kama Einhorn • Assistant Editor: Mary Buri • Contributing Editorial Assistant: Beth Sharkey

Sesame Workshop: Executive Vice President, Education, Research, and Outreach: Lewis Bernstein, Ph.D. • Executive Vice President, Creative Director: Liz Nealon • Executive Vice President, Chief Marketing Officer: Sherrie Rollins Westin

Advisers: Major General Charles F. Bolden, Jr., U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.); CEO of JACKandPANTHER LLC • Colonel Stephen J. Cozza, M.D., USA (Ret.) Chief, Department of Psychiatry, Walter Reed Army Medical Center • Amy Goyer, Coordinator, AARP Foundation Grandparent Information Center • Mary M. Keller, Ed.D., Executive Director, Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) • Sylvia Kidd, Director of Family Programs, Association of the United States Army • Michael L. López, Ph.D., Executive Director and co-founder, National Center for Latino Child & Family Research • Patty Shinseki, member advisory boards of: U.S. Army Amputee Care Program at Walter Reed Medical Center, Citizen-Soldier Support Program, and Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) • Jean Silvernail, Ed.D., Chief of Military Child in Transition and Deployment, Department of Defense, Military Community and Family Policy • Janice Witte, Director, Office of Children and Youth within the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Military Community and Family Policy

“Sesame Street®,” “Sesame Workshop®,” “Talk, Listen, Connect™,” and associated characters, trademarks, and design elements are owned by Sesame Workshop. © 2006 Sesame Workshop. All Rights Reserved. Sesame Workshop, One Lincoln Plaza, New York, NY 10023 • www.sesameworkshop.org/tlc

Produced in partnership with
and funded by

WAL★MART®

Additional support
provided by

New York State
omh
Office of Mental Health



A creation of
sesameworkshop.
The nonprofit educational organization behind
Sesame Street and so much more

Family Matters



Being part of a military family can be a real challenge, one that may begin long before deployment and continue even after homecoming. Your deployed family member is providing a selfless, patriotic service. All children look up to their parents as heroes. But for children with a parent in the military, “hero” takes on new meaning. By making it possible for him or her to serve, the rest of the family is heroic, too. Still, every phase of deployment has an impact on the entire family, particularly the youngest members.

As a parent at home, you and your young child must deal with a variety of emotions and adjustments. That’s not easy. No matter your circumstances, it’s important to remember that you are not alone. To help military families with young children manage these unique situations, Sesame Workshop has created “Talk, Listen, Connect.” In this special magazine you’ll learn:

- » what to expect during pre-deployment, deployment, and homecoming;
- » strategies and activities to help young children through these times;
- » ways to keep your family connected.

Choose from the ideas that seem right to help ease your young child’s transition. And, of course, you are the expert—keep doing what already works for you and your family!

Let your child know that others care. Tell him when a friend or extended family member asks about him.



Pre-deployment

Your family is a team. But the team is about to undergo some changes; pre-deployment is the first of those changes. Often, this is the time that causes the most anxiety. The deployed parent hasn't left yet but isn't really available. The work hours are often long. Mom or Dad may be home or perhaps away training; there are already comings and goings.

This may be the phase when young children need the most reassurance. They may not quite understand why a parent is leaving. They may even feel that somehow they've done something to cause that parent to leave. Offer concrete information to your young child in ways that he can understand. Prepare and plan as a family. Knowing what to expect may help your child feel less afraid. Even when you're not all together in one spot, you'll still be connected.

Your Child and You

» **Share appropriate information with your child in a way she will understand.** For example, use a map or globe to show where her parent is going.

» **Emphasize the special training the parent has had.** Explain that he'll be working in a group with others who have also been trained to protect one another and to do their jobs safely. Explain that at the same time, your child will continue to do the things he always does—growing, learning at school, and having fun.

» **Build a support system around your family.** Reach out to, and connect with, important people in your child's life. Talk to extended family, clergy, coaches, neighbors—anyone you're counting on for

help, so they'll be better able to offer support. Set up lines of communication with your child's caregivers and teachers. Talk about what you are doing with your child and why.

» **Swap special personal objects,** such as a small toy or patches from the deployed parent's favorite jeans. The parent and the child can use them as mementos and look forward to swapping back after homecoming.

» **Find ways to keep the deployed parent "close."** Print photos on pillowcases and T-shirts for both child and parent. Make a photo collage of shared parent-child moments and hang it where your child will see it often.



Spend as much time together as possible, and give plenty of hugs! Make audio or video recordings of the deployed parent reading favorite bedtime stories or singing familiar lullabies. These can be played during those times when the parent is missed most.



Let's Talk!

Young children are still learning to put their feelings into words. Here are some ways to help discover their thoughts and concerns.

» **Answer questions as completely as possible.** "Where's Dad?" "What's he doing?" "When is he coming back?" This last one is tricky, since young children don't have clear ideas of time. Try using a calendar, crossing off each day that the parent is away. Use a holiday as a reference point: "He'll be home close to Halloween." Or weather: "She left when it was hot outside; she'll be back when it's cold." Don't focus on an exact date until it's absolutely certain that the date won't change.



Your child will be full of questions at this time. Don't be surprised if you find yourself answering the same ones again and again!

» **Help your child express herself.**

What does she miss most about Mom or Dad? What is she looking forward to doing together after the parent returns? Your child can show her feelings by making faces in the mirror: proud, worried, angry, and so forth. Help her label each face; reassure her that it's okay to feel all these ways.



Reassure your child that any negative feelings he has are valid. Try to come up with ideas for ways to work through them together.

Deployment

Things change again once a parent has been deployed. There *will* be bumps, and it's important to acknowledge this to your child. But step-by-step, all of you will readjust. You may have to rethink the way some things are done at your home. You'll find yourself creating a new "normal." Your family can take pride in its strength as it adjusts, and it *will* adjust.

Maintaining familiar routines comforts children and helps them feel secure. If you've always read one book and sung one lullaby at bedtime, don't change now! Keeping your child busy—with family and friends, outdoor activities, and preschool programs—will help fill the days with positive thoughts and will give your child things to look forward to.

New routines can make your time together even more special. Camp out in the living room on Saturday nights, or have a weekly backward day—sandwiches for breakfast and eggs for dinner. Be creative!



Like the deployed parent, the entire family is courageous. Teach your child that being brave doesn't mean he can't be sad or scared. It simply means he's doing his best despite those feelings. **Praise his bravery; have him color and cut out a "courage badge" that he can tape on his shirt.**

Comfy, Creative—and Courageous

- » **Extended family members or friends may be able to help** maintain your routines. Don't be shy about asking for help and support. You may also want to seek out other families who are experiencing deployment. Share feelings and strategies.
- » **Remember to have fun.** Continue to fill your home with love. Allow as much time as possible for special moments of playing, reading, and cuddling. But don't be surprised at whining or less-than-perfect behavior, as this is how children may react to change. Carefully monitor what your child watches or hears on TV or radio, turning off any coverage of wars or other violent events that may be disturbing. Make sure your child's caregivers do the same.
- » **Give your child age-appropriate chores to do,** such as helping set the table. Provide ways for her to make small decisions independently, such as whether to wear her blue or her red socks. These activities should focus on building her sense of independence rather than being just a burdensome responsibility.
- » **Regular activities,** such as dancing to music, walking in the park, and eating nutritious snacks and meals, can help the whole family feel better. Remember to set aside some free time for yourself—as well as plenty of time for sleep!

Did you get my kisses, Momma?

I sent them all the way across
the ocean to you on the breeze.



Family Connections

Deployment can be one of the most trying experiences for a family with young children. Here are some ways of maintaining a sense of togetherness in the midst of separation.

- » **Encourage ways for the deployed parent to stay connected.** You can help your child send updates: photos of playtime, an e-mail about her latest haircut, a birthday card she received. She can also dictate a story about her day, draw pictures to illustrate it, and send the “book” to Mom or Dad.
- » **Communicate creatively.** Perhaps parent and child can wish on a star at a prearranged time, or send kisses on the breeze, across the ocean and back again. Follow up: “Did you get my kiss?” Some times of the day, such as bedtime, may be especially difficult. That’s a great time to try this kind of creative communication.
- » **Practice phone skills for long-distance calls,** including how to say a nice “hello” and “good-bye for now.” Encourage your child to think of things to share, such as singing the ABCs or a new song, or talking about something new that he has learned.
- » **Prepare your child for important holidays.** Holidays can be especially rough when a parent is far away. Make a plan before the holiday arrives. Talk to your child’s teacher about the best way to handle school holiday events. Can the child bring a grandparent or someone else? Know in advance how you’re going to celebrate birthdays, religious holidays, Mother’s or Father’s Day, and so on. If possible, the deployed parent can choose some cards or gifts before leaving.



A picnic or party, if you’re up to it, can be a great way to welcome home the deployed parent, as well as a way to thank friends and family for their support.

Homecoming

It’s homecoming day! Actually, this day may be the result of weeks of preparation and may last for months. It’s a happy time for your family—but it’s also *one more change*, which means your child will need your special support. With some planning, you can prepare him for the challenges, and joys, of having his family together again.

Together Time—Before

- » **Talk with your child about what to expect.** Ask her how she’s changed while Dad or Mom has been away. Has she lost a tooth? Grown an inch? Made a new friend? Remind her that her parent has probably changed, too, and may look or act a little differently than before.
- » **Involve your child in planning something special,** such as coloring a “Welcome Home” banner or helping bake a cake. Discuss the day’s schedule in advance.



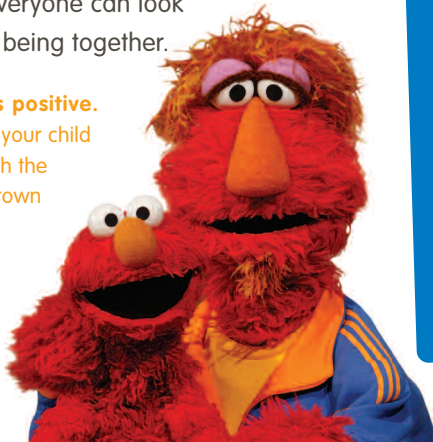
Together Time—the Day Of

- » **If your child feels shy** about greeting the returning parent, don't push. You go first. Let him see Mom and Dad hug.
- » **Talk! Tell your young child that things may seem strange at first**, but you were all a great team before, and you'll be a great team again. Encourage your child to talk about what she has learned during this time.

Together Time—After

- » **Take it slow; be patient.**
The returning parent needs time alone, with the other parent, and with each child. You may have to rethink family roles and adjust routines. Keep the emphasis on caring and sharing, and remind your children how much you love them.
- » **Continue healthful routines.** Engage in daily physical activities or share mealtimes as a family.
- » **Thank your extended team!**
Let them know how much you appreciated their help. Now that the deployed parent is home, everyone can look forward to being together.

Keep things positive.
Discuss with your child ways in which the family has grown stronger.



Read and Find Out More

Share these books with your children:

While You Are Away
by Eileen Spinelli,
illustrated by Renee Graef
(Hyperion Books, 2004)

Hooray for Our Heroes!
by Sarah Albee, illustrated by
Tom Brannon (Dalmatian Press/
Sesame Workshop, 2005)

I Pledge Allegiance
by Bill Martin Jr. and Michael
Sampson, illustrated by Chris Raschka
(Candlewick Press, 2002)

Some helpful Web sites:

www.deploymentkids.com
www.militarychild.org
www.militaryonesource.org
www.militarystudent.org
www.nmfa.org
www.parentsasteachers.org
www.survivingdeployment.com
www.zerotothree.org/military

Please visit
www.sesameworkshop.org/tlc
for a printable copy of this parent/
caregiver magazine and for more
downloadable material—including
the "Talk, Listen, Connect" video.
Feel free to share this information
with friends and family.

Photo by Richard Termine.