



Fun with Sun Safety

Dear Family,



Today we discussed personal sun safety and youth made a sun visor. Youth began to understand that they can take some ownership in self-responsibility as it relates to developing healthy life styles.

Youth began to understand that there are some things in their lives that they can control and some things that they cannot. Helping youth understand that information is important as they make decisions in their lives. As youth look at the importance of taking responsibility of protecting themselves from the sun, they also know that they must take responsibility in their relationships and other parts of their lives.



The concept of self-responsibility is an important part of growing up and fitting into family dynamics. Youth understand that they must learn to make decisions, and also learn to take responsibility for their actions. The concept of self-responsibility can be applied too all areas of their lives, including responsibility: in your family, with school work and for a job. It's also important for your youth to think about self-responsibility as your Service Member is re-integrated with your family.

For more information about sun safety, please go to any of the following websites:

http://www.cancer.dartmouth.edu/melanoma/PDFs/MiddleYears_Files/sunsafetyfactsheet.pdf

http://www.sunsafetyalliance.org/pdfactivities/Activities_for_Middle_School.pdf

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/info-u/babies/BE393.html>

<http://www.youthinformation.com/Templates/Internal.asp?NodeID=90394>

Thanks for helping your youth participate in an Operation: Military Kids Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Outreach Experience!

Best regards,

Conversation Starters

- Which is more important, intelligence or common sense?
- Would you rather play at the beach or work in an ice cream shop? Why?
- Where was your favorite vacation?
- What is your favorite type of sun screen?
- What are each persons responsibilities in our family?





Military Kids Rock!

Dear Family,

Today we played Military Kids Trivia and learned about some of the more famous Military Kids, Shaquille O'Neal, Bill Cosby, etc. We also talked a bit about the Military and made a stomp rocket, bottle submarine, and tank. We wanted the youth to see their strong heritage with the Military and other Military youth.



Ask your youth to share what we did today, what they liked or disliked and start a conversation with your Service Member about what equipment and rank they use/are. The more youth know, the more empowered they are.

Thank you for coming today and bringing your youth.

Sincerely,



Conversation Starters:

- How did you do in Military Kids Trivia? Did you know a lot about Military Kids or were you surprised about many of the answers?
- How is our family like a rocket ship?
- What makes our family strong?
- How have you changed through this deployment? How has our family changed?





My Homecoming Tale

Dear Family,

Today we make a ZoomAlbum that tells a youth's individual "Homecoming Tale". As you know, every homecoming is different and every homecoming is experienced differently by different people. No matter when a Service Member arrives, it is an emotional experience that will be full of joy, tears, and hugs. But your youth's experience of the homecoming may be different than yours.



The "Homecoming Tale" is a good way for youth to discuss and illustrate how they feel about the mobilization of their Service Member and the emotions that they felt when their Service Member returned. Their ZoomAlbum is a window into their perspective on the homecoming of their Service Members and is an opportunity for them to share their point of view. The "Homecoming Tale" may open the door for discussions that might help them express their feelings about reintegration of your Service Member into your family.

Help your youth talk about the people and the elements in their lives and how things change. Remind them that they are resilient and that they are strong. Remind them that they have their own tale to tell and that that is important to them and to you.

Another way to help your youth manage their feelings, communicate and share their lives is by asking them the conversation starters at the end of this letter the next time you are in the car or sitting at a table eating a meal.

Thank you for having your child come to our program and participating in Operation: Military Kids Deployment Cycle Yellow Ribbon Outreach Experience.

Best regards,



Conversation Starters:

- What are your favorite types of stories?
- Do you have stories that you would like to tell? What kind?
- Do you think stories help you with your feelings? Why? Why not?
- Was your homecoming story different than you imagined it when your Service Member was mobilized? How?
- What ways can you share your homecoming with others?





The Great Outdoors – Inside!



Dear Family,

Today we set up camp – inside! Camping is a great way to be with friends and family. We made s-mores, trail mix, learned knot tying, sang camp songs and more! We even had a Uniformed Service Member set up a bivouac to show is how the Service Members ‘camp’.

The project is a good way to discuss how we can create family times together. During our discussions, we talked about why it’s important to spend time together as a family and ways that activities together can help families through different situations. Enclosed in this letter are some conversation starters for you to use with your youth through the reintegration process.

Thank you for allowing your youth to participate in the session today! If you have any questions about your youth’s experience, please feel free to call me at _____.

Sincerely,

Conversation Starters:

- What are some feelings you’ve had since Service Member has returned?
- Let’s talk about some things we can do together as a family.
- What are some things we need to work on to be close as a family?
- What other ways would you bring the outdoors inside?
- What is your funniest camping memory?





Seeds of Peace

Dear Family,

Today we talked about conflict and different ways to bring resolution. We talked about how conflict is normal and natural; there will always be different opinions on things. We also talked about how one reacts to conflict can be good or bad so we brainstormed different positive ways to handle different types of conflict.



We did many activities. One of which was that the youth wrote a Conflict Resolution Letter with ideas on how to solve some of the world's conflicts. You should have received a copy when you picked up your youth. It's interesting to see all of the different youth generated resolutions.

The other thing you are taking home today is a Conflict Plant. We planted seeds like they do in Iran for the New Year, no-ruz. Please help your youth tend the seeds for the next 13 days. On the 13th day, take your seedlings outside and throw them over a wall or into running water. Throwing out the seedlings is symbolic. The seedlings symbolize any family quarrels or conflicts and in throwing them out, you throw out the family conflicts and start afresh.

Thank you for allowing your youth to participate in the Operation: Military Kids Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Outreach Experience today. I hope they enjoyed their time and can tell you more about their day.

Sincerely,



Conversation Starters:

- What are some of the conflicts you have in your life? Mine are _____. What are some ways we can resolve our conflicts?
- What family quarrels should we throw out with the seedlings? Should we make any changes before we throw the seedlings out so those conflicts don't come back?
- I know change can be challenging. What are some conflicts that occurred because mom/dad/sibling/etc. deployed? Did those conflicts disappear when they returned? Did new conflicts arise? Explain.





TeamWorks! Design It! Build It! Share It!

Dear Family,

Today we built a lot of things!! We became sculptors, Fruit and VeggieMobile designers and bridge builders! We talked about how you build a team with other people—whether it's your family team, or a team of friends, or a group at school.



Our ME Sculptures tell a lot about each of us as individuals. Ask your youth to explain all the parts of their sculpture. This project was a great way to think about what makes each person in our family unique and special. It also reinforced that each member of your youth's family is an important part of who they are—whether they are with them or far away. Often in the busy-ness of day to day life we forget to tell our youth that we see special skills or personality traits in them, and that we appreciate them for their uniqueness.

Building with food is always fun—today your youth had to build their snack before eating it! We created veggie and fruit cars, planes, ships, trucks, etc. out of many different kinds of vegetables and fruits.

We also built and designed a bridge using just newspapers and tape in just 12 minutes! We talked about how families also have to keep communicating and perhaps trying a new strategy if the first one doesn't work so well! Team work can be frustrating because people might not do YOUR idea...again we talked about trying new things and trusting that someone else might also have a good idea.

One of the messy things we did today was Oogly. Oogly is a mix of cornstarch and water but boy is it interesting to play with! Oogly acts like a liquid sometimes and a solid other times...depending on how you move your hands in it! When we tried mixing a little food coloring in it to change the color, we discovered that this is very hard to do! We talked a little bit about how change can be hard for families too—sometimes you have to move slowly to help everyone adjust to the change. With Oogly, if you move too fast, the Oogly just gets hard. We learned you had to be patient to get the Oogly to change color. You have to be patient with changes that your family is going through also.

Best regards,

Conversation Starters:

- Do you ever worry about not being successful at something at home or school?
- If you could build anything, what would you like to build?
- Do you think change is messy?
- Would you rather work in a team or do it yourself?
- How do you think we should solve problems when we have them in our family?





It's Time!

Dear Family,

Today youth had an opportunity to look at the importance of time management and the importance that good communication can play when making decisions about their time.



Your youth participated in an activity that asked them to recognize how they make decisions on spending their time. As we know, parents often make those decisions for pre-teen, teenage youth, depending on family structure and weekend. During the time that a loved one is deployed and then reintegrated into the family, this often means that youth might be given either more structured time, or less structured time, depending on the family structure.

Many youth can feel that they lack the time to do everything they want. Instead of doing “fun things” they are often “stuck” with doing chores around the house, doing some extra child care duties if they have siblings, or other activities that were not their idea.

Youth need to understand that the truth is everyone has the same amount of time; it's how the time is managed that really counts. Youth were asked to appreciate the fact that as a member of the family, they will be asked to re-prioritize their time, sometimes, to help accomplish family goals or tasks. Now that their loved one is reintegrated with the family, everyone in the family is asked to re-look at how they spend their time. Time management and good communication skills become even more important.

Be sure to recognize that youth still need their down time. They still need to do some things both for themselves and by themselves. Talking about and helping youth understand that good communication can help everyone in the family achieve their goals. People are not born knowing how to manage time; it's something that takes time to learn. It's a skill.

Thanks for helping your youth participate in an Operation: Military Kids Deployment Support Cycle Yellow Ribbon Outreach Experience!

Best regards,



Conversation Starter:

- If you had a day to do whatever you wanted, what would you do? Why?
- Can you give the gift of time? How?
- Does time really fly? Or does time stand still? When does this happen?
- When your Service Member was deployed, was time slow or fast? Why?





A Family and Friends Mobile

Dear Family,

Today we made a mobile that features family and friends. Youth chose pictures and attached them to foam core. On the backside of the picture/foam board image, they used a permanent marker to write the name of the person and one positive word about each of them. For example, 'Uncle George' Fun! After that, they assembled their mobile and balanced their images on the structure of the mobile so that it was balanced.



The family and friends mobiles are a good way for youth to discuss and illustrate how tricky it can be to balance the different people in their lives. When you shift an image on the mobile, it can affect the entire structure, just like when a loved one is deployed and returns. Their loved one is an important part of their family and community structure.

Making a mobile can visually cue youth into thinking about the delicate balance of their lives and the challenges that this balance can be for others.

Help your youth talk about the people and the elements in their lives and how they maintain a balance. Youth should be encouraged to put the mobile up at home so that they can have a visual reminder of the elements that are balanced in their lives.

Thanks for helping your youth participate in an Operation: Military Kids Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Outreach Experience!

Best regards,



Conversation Starters:

- What would you do if you saw someone lose their balance and helping them would put you in danger too?
- Where are the places in your community that help you relax?
- How would things change if you adopted a pet?
- How would you spend a million dollars?
- Would you rather walk a balance beam or balance a teeter-totter?





Circle of Life

Dear Family,

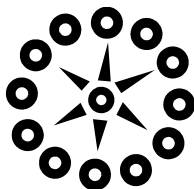
Today we discussed our circles of influence. Everything we did today involved a circle – games, snacks, activities. Youth took some time to reflect on the adults that are in their lives that are there to support them.



We discussed what happens when our circles or situations change. There are things that we cannot control in our lives, but when we have a strong circle of support, we are surrounded with the right influences and skills to help us get through.

Thank you for allowing your youth to participate in the session today. If you have any questions about your youth's experience, please feel free to call me at _____.

Sincerely,



Conversation Starters:

- Tell me about your day.
- Who do you feel supports you?
- What were you feeling while Service Member was gone and then now?
- What is your definition of integrity and do you have it?
- Would you rather travel to new place or somewhere you have been before?
- Tell me everything you know about circles.





Debate Day

Dear Family,

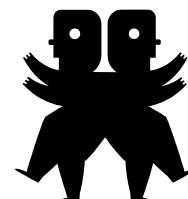
Today we talked about conflict and different ways to resolve it. We talked about how conflict is normal and natural; there will always be different opinions on things. We also talked about how one reacts to conflict can be good or bad so we brainstormed different positive ways to handle different types of conflict.



We did many conflict activities including debate. Youth had to argue both sides of an issue to help them see how conflicts have more than one perspective. Youth also made persuasive posters. We had an election to see which poster was the most persuasive. You will have to ask your youth who was the most persuasive and won.

Thank you for allowing your child to participate in the Operation: Military Kids Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Outreach Experience today. I hope they enjoyed their time and can tell you more about their day.

Sincerely,



Conversation Starters:

- What are some of the conflicts you have in your life? Mine are _____. What are some ways we can resolve our conflicts?
- How did seeing both sides of an issue help you come up with a resolution for that conflict? Why is it important to look at both sides of a conflict?
- What's persuasion? How can it help you resolve conflicts?
- I know change can be challenging. What are some conflicts that occurred because mom/dad/sibling/etc deployed? Did those conflicts disappear when they returned? Did new conflicts arise? Explain.





Team Spirit!

Dear Family,

Today we learned and laughed with a bunch of activities designed to have the group work together and build their skills of communication, problem solving, and cooperation.

Through the activities, we had some great conversations about the strengths of our family and experimented with ideas for communicating. In Pretzel Talk, we experienced the challenges of one-way communication as we tried to make a design using pretzel sticks. We talked about times when one-way communication can be useful, as well as how two-way communications can be very helpful with friends and family. Ask your youth if they would like to try this activity with you at home.



In the obstacle course, we had to help someone else get through the obstacles and they had to help us (the "crosser" was blindfolded). You might ask your youth about our discussion about the obstacles we all face and what ideas they have for helping each other through challenging times. Alphabet Dancing was a wild and funny relay that showed us all how we could work together.

Each of these activities helped us think about, and talk about, how we communicate with friends, family and others, as well as how we work together or support each other. We hope your youth built some valuable skills in listening, problem solving, and communicating.

Thank you for allowing your youth to participate in the session today!

Sincerely,



Conversation Starters:

- What do you think is your greatest obstacle right now?
- Would you rather go through basic training or be in a Broadway play? Why?
- Would you choose to be the worst player on a winning team or the best player on a losing team?
- What's a good loser and are you one?
- Would you rather tell someone something important face-to-face or write a note?





Things That Bubble, Fizz and Pop!

Dear Family,

Today your youth was a scientist! We did several investigations to see what happens when you combine different solids and liquids. We read a book called “What is a Scientist?” by Barbara Lehn. We did many of the things scientists do...observe, make predictions, test our predictions, record data, and wonder why things happened? We learned about carbon dioxide, the gas that is the fizz in soda pop and the gas that made things pop during several of our experiments. We hope your youth had a great time discovering that science is everywhere!



Ask your youth to show you how we conducted the experiment called Pop Goes the Baggie! You can do this together at home; you will need a quart sized zip-lock style baggie, 1 tablespoon of baking soda, ½ c. Vinegar, and ¼ c. warm water. This is an experiment to do outside. We discussed how changing one item in an experiment (called the variable) could change the outcome. At home, you can try using more vinegar, cold water, or more baking soda. You could ask your youth what else happened in today’s program that made them WONDER ...whether it’s science related or not.

You can create an “I wonder” poster at home, and have family members write what they wonder about. You could choose one or more to explore or learn about with your youth...or some of them might just be great things to talk about at the dinner table!

We also discussed how today they took on a new role as a scientist. We then discussed how during the deployment and since your loved ones’ return each person in the family has probably taken on new roles or tried something they hadn’t done before. This may include a youth having new responsibilities at home, a teen having more or less “freedom” to make their own decisions, a parent having different roles while a spouse is deployed, a Service Member who has specific roles while deployed and very different roles upon return home. All of these are new for members of the family and extended family. We talked about roles that were harder or easier. Transitions can be difficult in different ways, and it can help to know what’s “easiest” or “hardest” for the people you love.

We’ve included another easy science activity that you could do at home. It’s called OOGLY, and it uses cornstarch, water and 2 drops of food coloring. It’s just messy and fun yet it also has a few great analogies about change. Everyone deals with change differently, so it can be a great conversation starter in your family! Thanks again for being a part of today’s activities!

Conversation Starters:

- What new roles have you had in the past year or so?
- Did you see that I also had some new roles? What did you see different? Can I tell you about what that was like for me?
- What was EASIEST and what was HARDEST while____ was deployed? Since their return?
- Do you ever feel pressure like that baggie filled with gas in your experiment?
- Do you ever feel so much pressure you feel ready to “pop” like your baggie did? When does this happen? What might I do to help you handle that or talk



Oogly

Oogly is simply a mixture of cornstarch and water, but everyone who tries it seems to love playing with it! It also offers a great way to talk about change.

Supplies:

1. Cornstarch (minimum 2 cups-use more for larger groups or for more Oogly!)
2. Water
3. Food coloring if desired
4. Large bowl, aluminum roasting pan, or plastic tub
5. Table covering if done indoors
6. Access to sink and paper towels



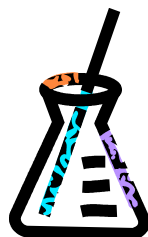
Directions:

1. Wash hands before beginning.
2. Pour dry cornstarch into large bowl or pan.
3. Mix in water with your hands or a spoon, about ½ cup at a time to avoid adding too much water. It takes about as much water as cornstarch.
4. You can tell when enough water has been added because all the powder forms into a stiff liquid. Mixing this stuff can be hard work! Notice what happens when you try to mix it quickly??
5. If you plan to use the OOGLY more than once, add a teaspoon or so of bleach, otherwise bacteria from people's hands will start to grow a culture! If you add the bleach and keep it covered, you can use it over and over.

Note: If you add too much water, just let the mixture set for a few minutes and pour off the excess water that settles on top!

If desired, you can add several drops of food coloring to the mixture after it has been thoroughly mixed.

Cleanup is easy-Oogly wipes up easily and vacuums up easily after it dries



Cartoon Comic Strip Art





Dear Family,

Today we used cartoons and comic strips to teach the youth how to draw in a “Grid” format. Youth then replicated their skill with the photo they brought in or which we took when they arrived today. As they worked on the drawings, they developed their skills of decision-making, problem solving, and those of planning and organizing. Your youth also learned how to break down a seemingly overwhelming task into smaller chunks to get them done. This is a good skill to remind your youth of if things become overwhelming in their lives.



Drawing is an excellent way for youth to release their feelings and frustrations, as well as to use their skills and creativity to design something for themselves, for their loved ones, as well as for others needing support and encouragement. The Grid method of drawing hopefully will enable the youth to feel successful as he/she produces an art piece for all to enjoy. Help your youth find a place in the home to “feature” their artwork, and encourage them to use this technique to create other pictures that she/he can use to make cards, etc. for those in the VA Hospital, Senior care centers, children and adults in hospitals, etc.

Thank you for allowing your youth to participate in the Operation: Military Kids Deployment Cycle Support Experience today. I hope they enjoyed their time and can tell you more about the day.

Best regards,



If you have any questions about your youth’s experience please feel free to contact me at:

Conversation Starters:

- What new things did you learn when you were drawing today?
- Did you run into any problems as you were drawing? What did you do? What kept you going?
- You really cared about what you were doing, just as (insert name of loved one) cared about their work when they were gone. In what ways can we show them that we care about them?
- Who could you, or we as a family, re-create a picture for?





Celebrate!

Dear Family,

Today we made a celebration cake in celebration of family and friends. Youth chose the cake and components of the process. After the assembly of the cake, they celebrated their accomplishments.

Learning the joy of celebrating the little items of life is sometimes difficult during challenging times. It's important as a family and community to enjoy what the day has to offer. Making the cake was part of the being a team member and creating fun for the group. There is a delicate balance in our lives and the challenge that balances this out, needs to be appreciated.

Help your youth talk about the people and the elements in their lives. How do they maintain the balance of challenges and joys? Youth should be engaged to share their highs and lows for the day. Below are conversation starters you can use at your next meal.

Thank you for helping your youth participate in an Operation: Military Kids Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Outreach Experience!

Best Regards,

If you have any questions about your youth's experience please feel free to contact me at:

_____.

Conversation Starters:

- What makes you feel good about yourself?
- What would you do if you were a King or Queen for the day?
- Do you learn more when you win or when you lose?
- What is the most important thing in being a good friend?
- What is your favorite family tradition?
- What is your favorite holiday and why?
- What is the best way for people to show you that they love you?





Me & My Neighborhood

Dear Family,

Today we made a map of your youth's community. They identified and located various people and places that were important to them. We discussed how important it is to be able to navigate our communities for support as we deal with stresses and joys in our lives.



They also learned how to use a compass to navigate their way. We asked what their family compass was. We also asked how they've worked together as a family, through the various stages of deployment, to find their way. The neighborhood mapping activity brought a lively discussion as they saw the intersections of the places and people in their lives.

Help your youth talk about the decisions they've been making and are making to choose positive, supportive people in their lives. Who are those people and resources in your youth's life that are important to them outside the immediate family? Who do they go to as they are making decisions? Do you feel they've enough information and background to make wise choices?

The compass exercises are a good way for youth to discuss and illustrate how tricky it can be to navigate through life. By reading one clue or point wrong it can send you way off course.

Have your youth share their Neighborhood Map with your family. Have your youth teach your family how to use a compass.

Thanks for helping your youth participate in this Operation: Military Kids Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Outreach Experience!

Best Regards,



Conversation Starters:

- Are you more comfortable as a leader or a follower?
- What's the first thing you'd do if you were president?
- How does a person become courageous?
- Who is one of your heroes and why do they inspire you?
- Would you prefer to have many acquaintances or a few very close friends?





Our Feathered Friends

Dear Family,

Seasons and moving or migrating are a part of our natural world. In the Military, youth experience many changes, and even some moves, with the deployment of their loved ones. When their Service Member returns home after they've been away, they return to their home and have to find new ways to nourish themselves. They build a new home and create new environments.



Making homes for, and feeding birds, help provide birds with a healthy habitat. It's also a great reminder to the youth that they need to build a home and habitat where they can flourish too.

Today we talked about birds, their homes, foods and habitats. We made simple bird feeders and a Wren birdhouse. The feeders and house are good ways to begin family discussions. Family decisions should be made on where to hang them so that family members can watch and identify which birds come to the feeders and identify when Mrs. Wren begins to build her nest in the birdhouse. We suggested that your youth check out more materials about birds at the library or go on-line.

Help your youth talk about their birding experiences today. You may want to share with them what your favorite bird is and why it's your favorite. Have your Service Member talk about the birds they observed during their deployment. If there weren't any or only a few, talk about the effect the environment had on the bird population. If possible, take your family on an outing. Explore a near-by Nature Trail or park or visit a Zoo. Point out and talk about the many different birds you see or hear. Encourage your youth to take along his Birding Journal, or encourage them to make journal entries when you arrive back at home.

Thank you for letting your youth participate in this Operation: Military Kids Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Outreach Experience. We hope your family will enjoy watching the birds at the feeder and that you soon will be enjoying their colorful plumage and cheery songs.

Best Regards,



Conversation Starters:

- What is your favorite type of bird?
- What type of seeds do you like to eat?
- If you had to choose a type of house to build for you, what kind would you make?
- Would you rather learn to fly a plane or have wings?
- Where would you migrate if you were a bird?



Marker Robots

Page 1 of 1

Wren Nest Box

Entrance hole size is 1 1/8" in diameter.
Lumber size is nominally 1"x 6" (actual size is 3/4" x 5 1/2").
Approximately 4' of 1"x 6" is needed to make the wren nest

Dimensions and Assembly Details:

- Main Board Sections (Total Length: 4'):**
 - Bottom:** 4" high, 5 1/2" wide. Includes 1/4" holes drilled in bottom for drainage.
 - Front:** 8" high, 5 1/2" wide. Includes a 1 1/8" entrance hole.
 - Sides:** Two sections, each 8" high and 5 1/2" wide. Includes holes drilled in sides for ventilation.
 - Roof:** 8 1/4" high, 5 1/2" wide.
 - Back:** 11" high, 5 1/2" wide. Includes predrill holes for easier mounting.
- Assembly Details:**
 - Pivot Nails:** Used to attach the side panel to the front panel.
 - Drill pivot holes slightly larger than nail shank.**
 - Provide space between top and side to allow swing.**
 - Side pivots to allow cleaning.**
 - "Lock" nail holds side closed. Drill hole slightly larger than nail shank.**
 - Drill holes in sides for ventilation, and in bottom for drainage.**

5/8/2009





Dear Family,

Today your youth was engaged in a special “hands-on” learning opportunity where they learned how a closed circuit worked and how they could use this knowledge to create a Marker Robot. Your youth took some simple supplies and applied the closed circuit theory to produce a functioning Marker Robot that could produce a unique art drawing. This principal of closing the circuit is very true in families as they engage the family in the community in making a strong family closed circuit. The result is that families are able to bring strength and beauty to their family and communities. Sure, they may need to modify their model but they are working together for the common family goals. Your youth learned how important it’s for everyone to work together to accomplish a goal. They saw how if only one piece is missing the whole project didn’t accomplish what it could together.



The Marker Robot is a good avenue for youth to discuss the strengths of their family; how one can take the same materials and the concept of a closed circuit and make a workable robot; and by rearranging the size or position of the marker or the position of the glue stick the robot would function but the resulting marker drawing would be different.

Help your youth talk about the people and elements in their lives and how they all work together to form a closed circuit producing colorful artwork. Youth are encouraged to show and explain the closed circuit concept and how the robot can produce a colorful art piece. This is a visual reminder of their closed family and community circuit that can accomplish family goals together.

Best Regards,



Conversation Starters:

- What do you think was your most creative idea this week?
- Would you rather solve a problem or ignore it?
- Do you think it is more important for a team to win or for a display of good sportsmanship?
- If you could invent a robot, what would you want it to do?

POWER Foods





Dear Family,

Today we explored wise food choices. We explored that one way to help us stay healthy is by choosing and eating foods that are nutrient rich, POWER foods. These are foods that have more nutrients for the number of calories you consume. When you make a choice about what to eat, choose “POWER” foods first – colorful fruits and vegetables, lean meats/protein, low fat dairy products and whole grain breads.



The game of sorting through power foods and non-power foods involved decision-making and selection. With food products, your youth also measured out serving size portions. Your youth also helped make a healthy snack using fruits and vegetables. For additional information about nutrition, explore MyPyramid at <http://mypyramid.gov/>.

Thank you for helping your youth participate in an Operation: Military Kids Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Outreach Experience!

Best Regards,



If you have any questions about your youth’s experience please feel free to contact me at:

_____.

Conversation Starters

- Is it harder for you to eat healthy or get exercise?
- Should kids be forced to try new foods?
- What would you like to learn to cook? Why?
- Would you give up junk food to live 10 years longer?
- Do you think other cultures have different POWER foods than you?

Be a Smart Snapper!





Dear Family,

Today we discussed the difference between a “want” and a “need”. How your youth can earn money and then how to make a spending plan to purchase items they want or need. We also discussed how to give a gift without spending any money, using our time and talents.



You may want to have a conversation with your youth about your values around spending and saving money. Give them an example of something you are saving for before you purchase it. Ask them what some of their wants are and share some of yours. As a family, you may want to discuss how you can give of your time or talents to someone or an organization.

The University of Minnesota Extension has great resources for families and money management. Check out their website at <http://www.extension.umn.edu/Youth&Money/>.

Here are a few money phrases that adults use with youth that they may not understand. Say the phrases below to your youth. Talk about what each saying means.

- Money does not grow on trees.
- I am not made of money.
- Save for a rainy day.
- Have a nest egg.
- Do not be a spendthrift.

Thank you for participating in the event today. I enjoyed working with your youth. If you have any questions please contact me at: _____

Sincerely,



Conversation Starters:

- What did you learn today?
- Would you like an allowance? Do you think your allowance is enough?
- How can we share our time & talents with others?
- Ask your youth to share their savings goal worksheet.

Stay Healthy Stay Strong!





Dear Family,

Today we talked about Staying Healthy and strong self-esteem. Your youth participated in activities where they could identify locations where germs can be found. They identified what they can do to reduce the chance of germs multiplying and spreading disease, thus keeping them healthy.



We also talked about the talents that they have. They were encouraged to put their names on a group chart showing which talents and interests they have. He/She recognized many talents that they did not think about before.

We also talked about being a friend. Being a good friend means offering affirmations to boost someone else's self-esteem, so do not be surprised when you see some notes on the refrigerator or other locations.

The next thing we discussed was goals. They set an immediate goal of something they want to accomplish this week. We encourage you to set some family goals with them such as things you would like to do in the next year.

Help your youth talk about their feelings, be sure you share how much you appreciate them and how helpful they were when your loved one was deployed. Your youth's self-esteem can be increased by you:

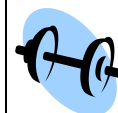
- Appreciating your youth
- Telling your youth that you love them
- Spending time with your youth.
- Encouraging your youth to make choices
- Fostering independence
- Giving genuine importance to your youth's opinion and listening
- Taking the time to explain reasons
- Feeding your youth with positive encouragement
- Encouraging your youth to try new and challenging activities

Also encourage your youth to share what is in their "Happy Bag" and thanks for helping your youth participate in Operation: Military Kids Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Outreach Experience!

Best Regards,

Conversation Starters:

- What is the nicest thing you have ever done for someone?
- What one goal do you hope to accomplish this year?
- What new person would you like to have as a friend?
- Have you ever stuck up for someone else when they needed an ally?



Take These Wings and





Dear Family,

Today we studied butterflies and built a caterpillar house (directions are below). The youth made a butterfly snack and we were able to spread our wings outside for a while. We also had a Uniformed Service Member that spoke with us about the possible changes that the Service Member may have experienced. Towards the end of the session, the youth put together a butterfly journal and recorded what they learned. They can take pictures of the caterpillar they put in their house and of the butterfly.



Instructions for Caterpillar House:

1. To ensure the caterpillar food plant stays fresh, fill the disposable cup with water. Add a rock to the cup to make it more stable.
2. Put foil over cup.
3. You can insert fresh plant cutting in the slit of the foil for the caterpillar. The foil will keep the caterpillar from falling in to the water.
4. Put a clean paper towel in the bottom of the bottle.
5. When you get home, you will have to search for a caterpillar outside to put in your caterpillar home. You will want to use the same plant that it was on and put it in the home.
6. Show the youth how to close the flap and seal with scotch tape.
7. You will want to replace the paper towel everyday once you get your caterpillar in there to keep the bottle clean. Remember to tape the door shut. Every time you open it the caterpillar could escape.
8. Keep putting fresh clippings of the same plant in the cup.
9. Keep the bottle out of the sunlight. It is too warm for the caterpillar.
10. After the caterpillar stops eating, make sure you place an elevated twig for the caterpillar to attach to and for the butterfly to hang onto as it emerges. Make sure there is enough room around the chrysalis for the butterfly's wings to dry.
11. Once the butterfly hatches, wait several hours for the butterfly wings to develop and dry before you release the butterfly.
12. Let the butterfly go near where you found the caterpillar.
13. Enjoy watching the butterfly take its first flight!

The project was a good way for the youth to think about the changes that they have experienced during the deployment. Please help your youth by discussing some of the changes that came with the deployment – growing, new chores, new hobbies, etc. and how the family may have changed. Thank you for allowing your youth to participate in the session today.

Sincerely,

Conversation Starters:

- Tell me what you learned about butterflies today.
- How do you see that our family has changed during and after the deployment?
- Let us take a walk outside (in park, zoo, etc.) and see what butterflies we can identify

Clay Pot Sculptures





Dear Family,

Today we made a sculpture out of a clay flowerpot that was broken into many different pieces. Pieces were closely studied and arranged in a creative way to create beautiful masterpieces. They used hot glue guns to secure each piece of clay pot together. Youth learned to work quickly when gluing clay pot pieces together, because the glue dries quickly. Some pieces joined easier than others did. They used their imaginations as they studied their pieces to come up with the perfect sculpture. Some just used their own pieces and some either borrowed or loaned pieces. Some also shared their ideas with one another as they imagined their sculptures.



The sculptures are a good way for youth to discuss and show how one needs to step back and carefully observe each piece from a variety of angles before beginning their sculpture. Just as it is wise to step back and carefully observe a situation before rushing ahead blindly. They all seemed to pick up momentum as they began to hot glue their sculpture together. They quickly realized how they needed to use a variety of pieces to give their new sculpture balance, depth and beauty.

Help your youth talk about decisions they are making in their lives. Who are the people and resources they can go to as they are making decisions? Do they feel they have enough details or background to make wise choices? Place the sculpture in a special place in your home to be a visual reminder that nothing stays as it was but takes on a different form that can shine in a more positive way.

Thanks for helping your youth participate in an Operation: Military Kids Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Outreach Experience!



Best regards,

Conversation Starters:

- Can you think of a way you have used things that were broken or recycled to make something new? How did that feel?
- What makes something art?
- When are old things better than new things?
- What one thing would you like to know about the future?

Growing Together





Dear Family,

Today we read the Native American folktale called “The Three Sisters.” This story is a good way to show how a family can, and should, support each other, especially during the reintegration phase of a deployment. The corn provides a stalk for the bean. The bean provides nitrogen for the corn and the squash/pumpkin provides ground cover for the plants to grow. The “Three Sisters” support each other and help each other grow, just as a family should do.

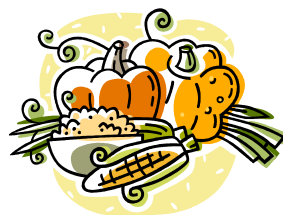


We also tasted a Three Sisters 5-layer dip. This and other recipes that contain the “Three Sisters” are attached to this letter. We would encourage you to try these recipes with your family.

Then we worked with your youth to make a mint herb garden that they can care for in your home. They decorated their gardens and learned about how to use the mint leaves to make OMK brew. Help your youth to care for their mint herb gardens and find time to have a cup of OMK brew and talk about how they are feeling about life at home.

Thanks for helping your youth participant in an Operation: Military Kids Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Outreach Experience!

Best Regards,



Conversation Starters:

- Do you think you are more like corn, squash or beans? Why?
- Would you rather grow your food or gather your food?
- What is your favorite type of beverage?
- What adds spice to your life?
- Should kids be forced to try new foods?

Recipes





Three Sisters Enchiladas

12 Corn Tortillas – 1 ½ Cups bean puree (you can use homemade or purchased bean dip) – Vegetable oil spray – 1 Medium onion, chopped – 2 Cloves garlic, minced – 1 Red and 1 green pepper, sliced thin – 1 Quart tomato sauce – 1 Zucchini or summer squash, diced – 2 Tablespoons cilantro – ½ Cup reduced fat shredded cheddar or Monterey Jack cheese

Saute onions, garlic, peppers and squash in oil until tender. Add tomato sauce and cilantro. Turn heat down and simmer for 15 minutes. Coat a casserole dish with vegetable oil spray and line with half the tortillas. Spread bean dip over tortillas and top with cheese. Add remaining tortillas. Add tomato squash sauce on top and bake covered for 1 hour at 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Yield: 8

Three Sisters Corn Casserole

1 Pound frozen whole kernel corn – 1 Pound frozen green beans – 4 Cups summer squash, diced (about 1 pound) – 1 Pint fat free sour cream – ½ Cup egg substitute, beaten – 4 Tablespoons margarine, melted – 1 Cup yellow cornmeal – ½ Cup Jalapeno peppers, diced – ½ Cup reduced fat Monterey Jack cheese, diced – Vegetable oil spray

In a large mixing bowl, mix sour cream and egg substitute together. Add remaining ingredients and mix well. Coat a baking pan or casserole dish with vegetable oil spray and fill with mixture. Bake at 350 degrees Fahrenheit for 45 minutes until golden brown. Yield: 10 (1-cup) servings

Three Sisters Stew

1 Tablespoon olive or canola oil – 1 Large onion, sliced – 1 Clove garlic, crushed – 1 Jalapeno chili, finely chopped – 4 Cups yellow summer squash, sliced (about 1 pound) – 4 Cups zucchini, cut into 1 inch pieces (about 2 medium) – 4 Cups butternut squash, peeled and cubed (about 1 large) – 3 Cups green beans, cut into 1 inch pieces (about 1 pound) – 1 Cup frozen whole kernel corn – 1 Teaspoon dried thyme leaves – 2 16-Ounce cans kidney beans, undrained

Heat oil in Dutch oven over medium heat. Cook onion, garlic and chili in oil about 2 minutes, stirring occasionally, until onion is tender. Stir in remaining ingredients. Cook over low heat 10-15 minutes, stirring frequently until squash is tender. Yield: 6 servings

Three Sisters 5 Layer Chip Dip

1st Layer – 1 16-Ounce package Anasazi Beans

2nd Layer – 4 Ounce grated cheddar cheese

3rd Layer – 8-Ounce sour cream

4th Layer – 1/3 Cup salsa (thick)

5th Layer – 1/8 Cup Chopped Chives

Prepare beans by boiling in water for 50 minutes. Cool beans, drain; and crush in a skillet to make refried beans. Add 1 Tbsp of oil to beans, cook until hot. Cool beans. In four individual serving dishes layer ingredients in order listed. To serve, add red corn chips around the outside of the dish. To eat, dip chip through all the layers. This dip may be made up to a day ahead.

Marketing Madness!





Dear Family,

We live in a complex media world. It influences our well-being, our health, nutrition and physical activity. Every day 11-14 year old youth spend nearly 7 hours using media, including television, computers and video games. We are barraged with marketing and advertising messages. In fact, over the last 3 decades, the number of television commercials youth viewed rose from about 20,000 per year to more than 40,000 per year. The majority of these advertisements are for food, primarily candy, cereal, and fast foods.



Health experts are calling for nationwide action to reduce the rising rates of childhood overweight and obesity. According to a 2005 report from the Institutes of Medicine, more than 15 percent of young people in the United States are obese, and many more are at risk for becoming overweight or obese. Youth take in more calories than they need, but most don't meet recommended intakes for several essential nutrients, including calcium, potassium, and dietary fiber.

Research shows that nearly half of American youth ages 12-21 are not physically active on a regular basis. Youth attending today's session:

- Became aware of and thinking critically about media's role in influencing our nutrition and physical activity choices
- Built skills to help make informed decision about being physically active and eating nutritiously in daily life

Thank you for supporting your youth in attending this Operation: Military Kids Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Outreach Experience!

Best regards,



Conversation Starters:

- Do your friends influence the decisions you make about what to eat?
- What do you think is one way you have been swept into marketing madness since your (Service Member Name) came back from his/her deployment?
- What should you do before taking advice from someone?
- Why is input from others sometimes helpful when making a decision?
- How does the media influence our family purchases? Are there some changes we could make?

Walk In My Shoes





Dear Family,

Today we transformed an old shoe into shoe art. Shoe art is a good way for youth to visualize a person's beauty, character, and identity by changing something old and discarded into something beautiful.



The colors painted and the embellishments on the shoe are an expression of your youth's identity and reflective of the journey your youth walks in their Military family. Talk about the transformation that your youth has undergone and about new choices that they can make to assert their identity and make healthy choices. Old shoes can turn into new shoes, as old habits can turn into good, new habits, like getting enough sleep, eating right, time for themselves, exercising.

Talk about old roles and new roles that challenge your family as you re-adjust from your deployment. Encourage your youth to see the richness and beauty in themselves and others.

Thank you for helping your youth participate in an Operation: Military Kids Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Outreach Experience. We hope your youth had fun!

Best Regards,



If you have any questions about your child's experience please feel free to contact me at:

Conversation Starters:

- Tell us about the old shoe you transformed into a piece of art. Why did you choose the colors, embellishments, etc, that you did?
- Where in our home should we feature your shoe?
- When we look at the shoe, it will remind us of your uniqueness and character. Let's talk about what is unique and beautiful about (name the others who live in the home).
- Shoes help us keep moving, keep fit, what can we do together now that (insert name of person) is home so that we can keep healthy and stay fit?

What's Your Story?





Dear Family,

Today we made skits, commercials, poems, songs and artwork about the youth's deployment experience. The youth chose which form of expression they wanted to use and decided which part of their deployment story they wanted to share with others. They created their story and then shared it with the group.



This project is a good way for youth to think about their deployment experience and learn how to share and communicate their story with others. Military youth have unique issues, such as having a loved one in harm's way, taking on extra responsibilities at home and feeling as if they are alone and isolated in their experience. Telling their story is a great way for them to express themselves and build awareness in others about the unique challenges of Military Kids.

Help your youth talk about the struggles and great experiences they had during the deployment cycle. Encourage them to share their story with others so that your youth and other military youth may be supported during deployments.

Thanks for helping your youth participate in an Operation: Military Kids Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Outreach Activity!



Best regards,

If you have, any questions about your child's experience feel free to contact me at: _____.

Conversation Starters:

- What did you share with others about your deployment experience?
- Did anyone else have an experience similar to yours? What made it similar? What was different?
- How could you share your story with others?
- What have you learned from the deployment experience that would be helpful for others to know? Have everyone in the family respond if they can.

U.S. National Symbols: A Patriotic Tour





Dear Family,

Today we learned about American Symbols and how they represent our freedom and our patriotism. We learned about our Flag, our National Bird, the National Flower and other symbols of freedom such as the Liberty Bell. Each youth had the opportunity to share what freedom means to them and to make a Rose, our National Flower.

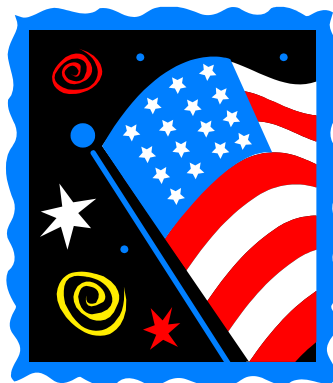


Thank you for having your child come to our program! Not only does this project help provide knowledge about a few of our National Symbols, it can serve as the opportunity for your family to identify and then go on a virtual tour of some additional ones. If you want an idea of how to start, or what symbols you might visit, just do an internet search on National Symbols. Have a wonderful trip!

Sincerely,

Conversation Starters:

- How many National symbols can you name?
- How many historical sites have you visited? Were they all about our country?
- Why do you think it is important to talk about our symbols?
- What does freedom/Patriotism means to you?
- What freedom are you most grateful for?



Weather it Out





Dear Family,

Today we explored the world of weather. We made two simple weather gauges and learned about recording weather data. We also tried our hand at predicting forecasts.

The rain gauge can be outside to measure rain and snow. The wind gauge can be used to measure the strength of the wind.



We also spent some time talking about what forecasts allow us to do – be prepared. We then discussed that we may not be able to forecast different situations in our lives, but we can be prepared to get through them. The weather log can also be used as a feelings log.

Thank you for allowing your youth to participate in the session today. If you have any questions about your child's experience, please feel free to call me at:

_____.

Sincerely,



Conversation Starters:

- Tell me about your weather gauges. Where should we place them?
- What were you feeling while Service Member was gone?
- What are some ways we can get through tough times together as a family?
- What is your favorite season? Why?
- Would you rather have rain or snow?
- What's your personal weather today?

Fitness Challenge!





Dear Family,

Today youth participated in a fitness challenge. We discussed physical wellness being important to overall health. A physically healthy person gets plenty of exercise, eats the proper foods, gets quality sleep, maintains appropriate weight and does not abuse drugs, alcohol or tobacco. Youth should achieve 60 minutes of daily physical activity, adults 30-60 minutes. This can be completed as part of a sport team, in your own home, playing games in the neighborhood, at swimming lessons - the list goes on and on.

- Physical fitness helps with weight management, improves health, and strengthens and conditions the whole body and also reduces your risks of many chronic disease life heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and osteoporosis
- Physical activity helps you:
 - *Have more energy
 - *Cope with stress
 - *Improve your self-image
 - *Be less tired out
 - *Feel less anxious or blue
 - *Relax and be less tense
 - *Fall asleep and sleep well
 - *Look better
 - *Control your appetite
- *Tone your muscles
- Physical education is an ideal way to encourage activity and develop fitness among youth that will prepare them for an active lifestyle
- Only a quarter of high school students participate in daily physical education on a regular basis
- Parental activity is very important in promoting activity among youth
- Walking helps keep you physically fit
- Regular exercise can help prevent bone loss, boost your energy level, and increase your muscle strength
- Plan to increase your physical activity to 30 minutes per day for adults or 60 minutes a day for youth

Best regards,



Conversation Starters

- If you could spend a whole day with a parent, what would you do?
- What is your favorite sport? Why?
- Do you like individual or team sports better?
- What sport do you enjoy doing with your family?
- How can you as a family do daily physical activity together?
- What are the top 5 stressors you have had since the return of your deployed loved one?

Marvelous Missio

Dear Family,





Today we did several project missions. They included citizenship, youth leadership, clothing, creative arts, small engines, wildlife, foods, financial management, and animal science. Ask your youth about each of the activities.



To complete each project they worked in teams to complete each task. To make it interesting each team was timed to see how quickly they could finish a task. The teams that did well figured out what each person's skill was and utilized it. We talked about what it was like to work in a team where you did not know everyone. We discussed how that was similar and different to having their loved one home now. We also talked about leadership. Who was a leader on their team, were they a good or bad leader. What are skills of a good leader?

You may want to discuss with your youth your experiences of working on a team. Name one team with which you work. When do you like to work on a team? When do you like to work alone? What are qualities of a good group leader?

Thanks for participating in this Operation: Military Kids Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Outreach activity. We hope you and your family enjoyed the day. If you have any questions, please contact me at _____.

Sincerely,



Conversation Starters:

- What are qualities of a good leader?
- What qualities does that person have?
- What qualities do you need to be a good team player?
- If you could plan a mission, what would it be?
- What makes our family a team?

