



OMK Idol

Dear Family,

Today your Operation Military Kid became an OMK Idol! They did an awesome job of singing patriotic songs and having fun. Youth love music, especially music that resonates with what is going on in their lives.

When Service Members are deployed, youth find it hard to tell others what they are feeling. Gaining the confidence to sing in front of a group and having fun with others who share the anticipation and experience of deployment, can help youth talk about their feelings. OMK Idol may help your youth overcome the embarrassment and fear of singing in front of an audience and 'judges'. In participating in OMK Idol, we hope your youth feels more confident to stand up and speak out for themselves in their community.

We hope they continue to use music and songs to express and share their feelings and gain confidence to stand up in embarrassing and stressful situations at home, in their schools and in their communities. Your youth were wonderful!

Thank-you for bringing your youth to this Operation: Military Kids Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Youth Outreach Activity.

Best regards,



Conversation Starters:

- Who do you think is your hardest audience?
- What is your biggest fear?
- What is the one talent you are most proud of?
- Who is your harshest judge?
- What is your favorite band? Why?





Setting Down Roots

Dear Family,

Today we learned about trees, how they grow, and what they give to us. Each youth received a tree to bring home and plant with the Service Member as a reminder while they are away. The youth also made a card honoring the Service Member, which can be sent when the deployment takes place. Please help your youth plant the tree according to the attached planting instructions.



If you are unable to plant the tree at your residence, contact community resources to ask if your family can plant the tree. Check with schools, city/county parks or local nursing homes for other tree planting opportunities. Your local Forester may also have ideas.

Thank you for having your youth come to our program! Not only does this project help provide knowledge about trees through an activity for the youth and Service Member to do together before deployment, but it reminds them of the importance of remembering the Service Member while they are away and offers a communication piece between your youth and the Service Member.

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:

- Let's walk around our house and identify what we have that comes from trees.
- What types of trees do we have in our neighborhood?
- Talk together about how the youth will write about the tree and themselves to the Service Member (take pictures of youth and tree, talk about how the tree has changed, etc.).





Safety Comes First!

Dear Family,

Today we practiced safety issue concepts with your youth.

The safety issue scenarios were a great way to identify safety issues and how to respond to different situations. We recognize that there are many changes happening in families as deployment of a Service Member nears. In some cases, this means parents are beginning to consider the possibility of having youth care for themselves before or after school rather than being cared for by others. Many of the safety concepts covered in this lesson are the foundation to learning self-care concepts. Youth who gain confidence in their own abilities are less likely to be afraid or make mistakes that could lead to personal injury.



Help your youth talk about the safety elements covered today. You may want to review your family fire safety escape route. Maybe you would offer suggestions regarding key family kitchen safety guidelines, for example, which appliances the youth can use without adult supervision. Have them share the different scenarios covered and the recommended action steps regarding Internet safety and telephone safety.

Thank you for helping your youth participate in Operation Military Kids Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Youth Outreach Activity. If you have any questions about today's activities, please feel free to contact me at _____.

Best Regards,



Conversation Starters:

- What is our family meeting spot outside our home?
- What do we do in case of a fire in our home? What are our escape routes?
- How do you know how to trust people on the internet?
- What are the real dangers of internet use and how can you avoid the dangers?
- Are there any family safety guidelines you would like to talk about?
- Who is your designated safety contact person, should you not be available?
- How do you decide who you can trust on the internet?





Scrapping and Laughing

Dear Family,

Today we made a scrapbook for your youth to fill out while their loved one is deployed. There is one page per week. Help remind your youth to fill in the page with stories, pictures, game stats, playbills, etc. Even a fall leaf is a great thing to include. When your Service Member returns, help schedule some time so that your youth and Service Member can sit down together and go over what has happened over the last year. It will help them start reconnecting.



We also did laughter yoga and talked about different things youth can do to relax during stressful times. We made Tension Putty and practiced different stretches and breathing that can help with relaxation. Encourage your youth to share all the different relaxation exercises we did and try to make time throughout the deployment to relax together.

Thank you for coming today and bringing your youth. Operation Military Kids calls Military Kids Hidden Heroes because they serve their country just like their Service Member. I appreciate your service on the home front with the family-you are a hero just like your Service Member and youth.

Sincerely,



Conversation Starters:

- Do you feel stressed now? How? Do you think when mom/dad/sibling/etc deploys your stress will lessen or increase? Why?
- When I feel stressed I _____.
- What else can you do when you feel stressed?
- Did you meet any new friends? How would you like to stay connected with them?





Over Here and Over There

Dear Family,

Having your Service Member leave for a deployment in a new place can be scary for youth. Today we've explored a little bit about some of those places. We looked at where the countries of Iraq and Afghanistan are in relation to where we live. They also discovered some interesting new things about another country, such as different foods, customs, and even legends. We also learned how soldiers have helped youth to get school supplies, clothing and medicine.



Talking with your family and youth about what it might be like during deployment is important. If you can stay connected to your Service Member regularly, it may feel a little less scary for youth. Use a world map to show where your Service Member is deployed, and have the Service Member tell the youth about what they see. Ask your youth to think of questions about some of the things they'd like to know, write them down for them and have your Service Member send the answers once they arrive.

Today your youth also heard the story "Night Catch" by Brenda Ehrmantraut. This story was about a Soldier and son that have to say goodbye during a deployment. The father and son love to play catch, and so they choose to use the star Polaris (North Star) for their nightly game of catch. Sharing the Night Sky is just one way for a Service Member and youth to stay connected during a deployment as the sky will look very similar in Iraq and Afghanistan as it does in the U.S. Your youth will bring home a SkyMap, showing the night sky and objects that can be seen with the naked eye. A new SkyMap is available each month, free to download at www.skymaps.com. Print out some sky maps for the first few months of your deployment, then talk with your youth about what things you can each look for while you are gone. This is a fun way to play "Night Catch" with your family.

Today we also tried some simple foods commonly found in Iraq and Afghanistan. These included: Naan Bread, flat bread, a traditional raisin drink, and some dates. Attached is a recipe for Naan to try it at home. Your youth may also be bringing home some Naan bread dough, which we made today. Directions on how to cook it are attached as well. Dates from date palm trees are particularly common in the river valleys of Iraq. They can be easily found in grocery stores. Many youth have never tried them and are often surprised by their sweetness!

Throughout the various activities today, your youth gained some important life skills in sharing, empathy, nurturing relationships and sharing. Most importantly, we hope you and your youth can identify ways to share your day-to-day experiences while you're apart. Talking as honestly as you can about your feelings helps your youth understand that it is okay to feel scared, happy, lonely, proud and uncertain at various times. Perhaps you can explore together some of the questions they have about "over there." Libraries are great sources of children's books about different countries and cultures.





Thanks for helping your youth participant in an Operation: Military Kids Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Outreach Experience! We hope your youth enjoyed their OMK experience today!

Best Regards,



Conversation Starters:

- What's the most interesting thing you learned about Iraq and Afghanistan?
- From what you heard today, what part of your life is most different from youth in Iraq or Afghanistan?
- What are three things you wonder about the places I'll be going while deployed?
- Would there be something you'd like me to take along to the new country to give to some youth there?
- Would you like to eat Naan bread every day?
- What star or constellation should we both look for at night?
- Do you have any questions about what Iraq and Afghanistan are like? If so, let's find





Over Here and Over There



Recipe for Naan - Flat Bread

Naan is flat bread commonly eaten in Afghanistan and in many Middle Eastern countries. Naan is a round, flat bread. Often it is filled with cooked vegetables and rolled around them. Naan is also eaten with lamb meat or soups, or eaten plain.

Source: www.recipezaar.com Recipe #203261

Naan (For a large batch for a group)

Makes 8-10 Naan (approx. 8-10 inch circles)-enough for 25 youth to sample

- 4 cups flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 cups plain low fat yogurt
- ½ Tablespoon olive oil or vegetable oil

Mix all ingredients in a large mixing bowl. Knead dough on a floured surface until dough feels smooth and elastic. Form dough into ball and place in oiled bowl, covered with a towel, to rest for at least an hour. After resting, take dough out and cut into 10 equal pieces.

When ready to bake:

1. Heat a large frying pan or griddle with a non-stick finish. Put approx 1 Tablespoon of olive oil (or vegetable oil) into pan. Heat oven to 500 degrees.
2. Form each piece of dough into a ball, then flatten into a flat, round shape. Dough should be flattened to less than ¼ inch thick, about 8-10 inches across.
3. Place dough on hot griddle and cook over medium heat for about 2-3 minutes. It will puff up in places or all over, and there will be some black-brown spots on the bottom.
4. Slide a spatula under the Naan and transfer it to the oven, directly onto the rack, for a minute or two, just until it puffs up and begins to color lightly on the top.
5. **Note** : One method that works well is putting the Naan in the hot oven, then flipping the over to broil setting for about 30 seconds, then back to 500 degrees-this works well for getting it to puff up and brown nicely. You will have to experiment with your oven.
6. Remove Naan from over and brush lightly with melted butter if you like.
7. Serve breads hot, fresh from the oven, or let them cool and wrap them up for later use. You can serve them whole or cut them into triangular pieces.
8. To reheat, wrap in aluminum foil in packets of four or five breads and put them in 350 degree oven for 10-15 minutes or until hot.





Patriotic Weaving

Dear Family,

Today we made a red, white, and blue patriotic bracelet or bookmark. We wove this on a cardboard loom with variegated yarn. We talked about ways we show our patriotic support and how wearing the bracelet they made can be one of those. While weaving, we shared some of our family stories and heard others from Service Members.



We also made a web out of yarn and talked about the how the strings touching as they cross over each other can be compared to the connections we can build with those who are having some of the same experiences preparing for the deployment of a Service Member. It can also represent the new connections we make as we find other youth who understand that they are not the only ones experiencing some life changes, nor are they the only ones being asked to accept more responsibilities.

Assure them that if they feel overwhelmed about their new responsibilities that as a family you will talk about them and maybe be able to do some responsibility shifts. Encourage your young person to wear their patriotic bracelet as a symbol of support for those being deployed.

Thank you for helping your youth participate in Operation: Military Kid Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Outreach Activity.

Best Regards,



Conversation Starters:

- What are your top 3 household chore picks? Why?
- What makes a strong family?
- What do you think would be the worst job in the world? Best job?
- What does being loyal mean to you?





Secret Codes

Dear Family,

Today your Operation Military Kid developed a code and made a secret wallet to send back and forth in letters to their deployed loved one. Youth love secrets and it makes things special when they know that what they have to say is important and unique. Having a special and secret way of communicating with their loved one will help them stay connected and important during mobilization.



Encourage them to insert their secret message inside a letter or a card and send it to their loved one where they are mobilized. Then the loved one can send them a secret message back. What's inside? It's their secret!

Help your kid manage their feelings, communicate and share their lives by asking them these conversation starters the next time you are in the car or sitting at a table eating a meal.

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 youth's experience please feel free to contact me at:

_____.



Conversation Starters:

- If you could change one thing about your home to help you communicate with adults, what would it be?
- Do you think you are good at keeping secrets?
- Do you want to learn a foreign language? Which one and why?
- What is the trait you like the most about your family members?
- Which foreign language might you want to learn? Why?





Welcome Home!

Dear Family,

Homecoming is a reason to celebrate and can be an intense time for families as they await the return of their Service Member and get ready for the changes that reintegration brings.

Today we focused on how to give your Service Member a warm welcome home. We made a Photo Face Board, welcome signs, and T-shirts. Your child learned how to take that perfect picture and make homemade ice cream.



Attached is the recipe for making homemade ice cream. Please feel free to try this activity at home or at your next family gathering.

Thank you for coming today and bringing your child to this Operation: Military Kids Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Outreach experience.

Sincerely,

Conversation Starters:

- Do you think your Service Member will like the welcome home sign/pennant you made them? Why or why not?
- What can we do at home to welcome your Service Member?
- Other than the homecoming, where else could we wear the T-shirt?
- Where else do you want to use your photography skills?

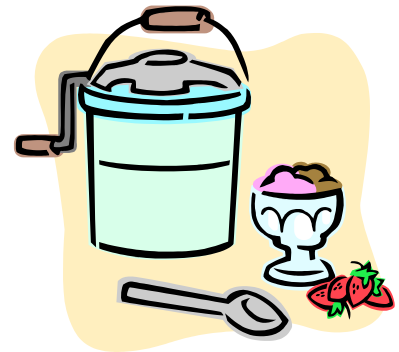




Welcome Home!

Let's Make Ice Cream

2 cups whole milk (or 1 pint/2cups half and half)
¼ cup sugar
1-2 teaspoons vanilla



Put milk, sugar and vanilla in a 1 quart, zippered freezer bag. Force out the air and zip shut. Put in another zippered bag, force out air and zip shut.

Fill a 2 pound coffee can 1/3 full of ice and sprinkle with 1 cup of rock salt. Put filled freezer bag on top of ice and salt. Cover bag with enough ice to fill can and sprinkle another cup of rock salt on top. Cover can and tape lid well. Roll can gently for about 15 minutes.

Remove bag and check to see if ice cream is hard enough. You may scoop ice cream out or may cut a small hole in bottom corner of the bag and squeeze the ice cream out.





Explore Your Community

Dear Family,

Today we explored the topic of communities and the value of knowing what your community has to offer to people of all ages. We created a map of your community and what it offered, as well as the important things your young person identified. Youth also identified what an ideal community would look like through their eyes.



This project was a good way to explore what your community has to offer and how youth could get involved. They had an opportunity to express what they valued and were frustrated by in the community and what they might do if they were 'Mayor for a Day' of your community.

I would encourage you to visit with your young person about your community and the community/civic organizations that are available and how they value youth. You may wish have a few conversations using the conversation starters listed below as well.

Thank you for having your youth participate in this Operation: Military Kids Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Outreach experience. Staff enjoyed the opportunity to meet your youth and learn about their communities. I hope it was a great day for your youth!

Regards,



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

_____.

Conversation Starters:

- What is motivating about your community?
- What is an idea you could share with your community (to try something new, something needed)?
- What is an investment in youth your community could make?
- What do you envision about the future of your community?
- What do you like about your community?
- If you were the mayor of your community for a day (with unlimited power) – what is the first thing you would do?





Smart Shopper

Dear Family,

Today we talked about being a consumer and making purchases. We learned about how to make choices and decisions by considering wants and needs and by learning about saving money. It is hoped that youth will be able to use some of their new skills and knowledge to help you make choices and decisions as you purchase items.



Please help youth continue to learn about being a wise consumer and making choices by asking them to review ads for the grocery store and consider specials or coupons, or considering the options to research a new appliance by going on-line to review consumer reports and review on-line ads from area businesses or larger retail stores.

Take some time to talk with your youth about budget, purchasing and how resources might change after deployment of your loved one.

Thank you for participating in the Operation: Military Kids Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Outreach Activity. I hope your youth had fun and that this has been a good learning experience.

Sincerely,



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

_____.

Conversation Starters:

- What do you need to consider when shopping for specific items?
- What financial alternatives are available for gift giving within our family this year during the deployment?
- When isn't it appropriate to buy something just because it is on sale?
- What would you like to help with as our family shops to be able to use your new consumer skills?





This is My Life

Dear Family,

Today we had your youth experience self-reflection and how they can manage their thoughts and feelings in the deployment situation that may feel out of their control. We spent a lot of time having fun with team building games and then we spent some quiet time alone thinking.

We made a journal in which they can write, draw, write poems, put pictures or however they want to use it. We also discussed the importance of keeping in touch with the Service Member while they are away.

The journal can be a useful tool to help them write letters or e-mails. Youth react to deployment in many ways and this is just one tool they can use to help them feel some control. Thank you so much for allowing your youth to join us 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 experience with reflection and journaling . . .
- What unique ways can you use to communicate with your Service Member?
- What are some feelings that you are experiencing right now?





Keep One-Give One

Dear Family,

Today your youth was involved in a community service learning opportunity where they had a “hands on” learning experience to give to their community. Your youth made two projects today - one to keep and one to give to a community organization connected to children and families. Your youth experienced the joy of receiving as well as giving to someone else.



The two projects that your youth made were a “photo board” where one might display photos of a loved one and a “fleece pillow” that is soft and very durable. The receiver of either of these will be reminded of the thoughtfulness of the project maker.

The photo board is a good way for youth to showcase photos of those that are very special to them. It is easy to exchange the photos displayed and this board is lightweight making it easy to display in many different areas of the home. The polar fleece pillow is very durable and soft to the touch making for happy dreams.

Take the opportunity to talk with your youth as to how they felt about the experience of making two projects and deciding which to give to someone else. Ask them to tell you about what they learned in making the projects and what other service learning opportunities might be in your neighborhood or school. This will help begin to build a broader support network for your child and family. Help your youth talk about how helping the people in their lives can made their own lives brighter.

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

Best Regards,



Conversation Starters:

- In what ways are you generous?
- How different are you from everyone else?
- What three things would you like to change in the world?
- What is the nicest thing you have ever done for someone?





Money and Me

Dear Family,

Today youth had an opportunity to learn about money. They had an opportunity to identify what money looks like and the values of each item, do some problem solving and understand the importance of goal setting when it comes to understanding money management.



Youth heard a couple of stories about money management. One of the books was, *The Berenstain Bears' Trouble With Money*; by Jan and Stan Berenstain, Random House, 1983.

Ask your youth what they learned from this book. Also, ask them if what they learned will make a difference in the next months ahead.

The life-long benefits of teaching youth good money habits make it well worth the effort. Youth find that as part of the family, they can do their part in understanding how good money management makes sense. Youth who are not taught these lessons pay the consequences for a lifetime.

During this economic time, and with the deployment of your loved one, money and money habits can be a good family conversation. Encourage your youth to accompany you when you are buying groceries. Ask them to check out the prices and compare prices.

As your loved one is deployed, encourage your youth to talk about money. Have things changed? How can we all work together to use better money management techniques? Help your youth talk about money and the wise-money decisions that can be made.

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

Best regards,

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



Conversation Starters

- Would you rather win \$100 or earn \$1000? Why?
- What would be two things you would subtract from your grocery list?
- In order of importance, how would you rank happiness, money, freedom and love?





Boxes, Stories, and Races Oh My!

Dear Family,

Today we were very busy and had a lot of fun. We made Conversation Boxes so your youth can put things they want to tell their Service Member in the box so when their Service Member calls or Skypes, your youth is ready to talk. Pictures, great grades, concert playbills, new toys, etc. can all go in the box. Help your youth put important things in the box and remind them to use the box when their Service Member calls or Skypes.



We also did story stations. Youth read a variety of Military family books and did different activities with each book. The stories are listed below and they and the activities helped the youth see their civic connection with Military families and ideas on how to stay in touch with their Service Member during the deployment.

The final activity we did was to create skaters to ride a skateboard and participate in the OMK 500. Youth worked in teams to make their skaters and then raced. This was a great way to work on teamwork, and meet other Military Kids. Ask them about the challenges they had making their 'skater'. Remember, a peer support network is very important; it is nice to have other youth to talk to who understand what a deployment feels like. Maybe they made a friend today that they would like to see again.

Thank you for coming today and bringing your youth. Operation: Military Kids Support Cycle Yellow Ribbon Outreach Experience. OMK calls Military Kids 'Hidden Heroes' because they serve their country just like their Service Member. I appreciate your service on the home front with your family - you're a hero just like your Service Member and your youth.

Sincerely,



Books we read today:

- *H is for Honor: A Military Family Alphabet* by Devin Scillian
- *The Kissing Hand* by Audrey Penn
- *Love Lizzie: Letters to a Military Mom* by Lisa Tucker McElroy
- *Daddy, You're My Hero* by Michelle Ferguson-Cohen

Conversation Starters:

- What do you think is the most important service you can do for your family and community?
- Would you rather take care of a pet or help your elderly neighbor? Why?
- What new person would you like to have as a friend? Why?
- How do you think a hero acts?





Military Children's Books

- ★ A Very Long Time by Geri Timperley and Nikki Arro
- ★ While You Are Away by Eileen Spinelli
- ★ Owl Babies by Martin Waddell
- ★ When Duty Calls by Angela Sportelli-Rehak
- ★ Daddy, Will You Miss Me? by Wendy McCormick
- ★ Daddy is a Soldier by Kirsten Hallowell
- ★ A Year Without Dad by Jodi Brunson
- ★ Daddy, You're my Hero! by Michelle Ferguson-Cohen
- ★ A Yellow Ribbon for Daddy by Anissa Mersiowsky
- ★ Red, White, and Blue Good-bye by Sarah Wones Tomp
- ★ H is for Honor: A Military Family Alphabet by Devin Scillian and Victor Juhasz
- ★ Deployment: Journal for Kids by Rachel Robertson
- ★ I Miss You: A Military Kid's Book About Deployment paperback by Beth Andrews
- ★ My Dad is Going Away, but He will be Back One Day; A Deployment Story paperback by James Thomas
- ★ Mommy, You're my Hero and Daddy, You're my Hero board books by Michelle Ferguson-Cohen
- ★ Over There board books published by the Zero to Three Project about military dads and moms who are deployed. Visit their web site at www.zerotothree.org
- ★ When Dad's at Sea hardcover by Mindy L. Pelton
- ★ Daddy's in Iraq, but I Want Him Back! paperback by Carmen R. Hoyt
- ★ 15 Reasons I Love my Dad: A Fill-in-the-Blank Book hardcover by Samantha Kappler
- ★ Love, Lizzie: Letters to a Military Mom by Lisa Tucker McElroy
- ★ Sammy's Soldier by Sarah L. White
- ★ An American Hero by Joanne Green
- ★ Night Catch by Brenda Ehrmantraut
- ★ The Impossible Patriotism Project by Linda Skeers
- ★ My Red Balloon by Eve Bunting
- ★ I'm Already Home: Keeping your Family Close when You're on TDY paperback by Elaine Gray Dumler
- ★ Surviving Deployment: A Guide for Military Families paperback by Karen M. Pavlicin
- ★ The Kissing Hand by Audrey Penn





Kool-Aid Play Dough

From The Holiday Zone at <http://www.theholidayzone.com/recipes/dough.html>

1-cup flour

1/2 cup salt

1 small packet unsweetened drink mix (Kool-aid or generic)

3 Tbsp. oil

1-cup boiling water

Combine dry ingredients. Add oil. Add boiling water. Stir well. Knead ingredients until soft dough forms. Store dough in airtight container or zip-lock bag. This dough is non-edible (harmless, but tastes awful); however, it smells great.





How Do You Learn?

Dear Family,

During our time together today, we spent time learning about how we learn and exploring how we are “smart”. Since not everyone learns the same way, we did some activities to find out how we prefer to learn. Some people learn best by listening, some by reading and others prefer music or nature to help them best understand concepts.



As you think about your youth and their preferred learning style, you may wish to ask them about their personal experiences and what came most naturally to them. Some question ideas are listed below in the conversation starters.

When you pay attention to how your youth learns best, you can also encourage them to be a good student and recognize what they need to succeed. Encouraging them to utilize those strengths, but also to try the other learning styles will help them recognize how they can learn in many situations and environments.

As your Military Family faces deployment of your loved one, think about your youth’s learning style, and how they can use their unique style to communicate with their loved one while they are deployed.

Thank you for participating in the Operation: Military Kids Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Outreach Experience. It was a great opportunity to meet your youth and help them explore their learning style and method of feeling successful about learning.

Sincerely,



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

_____.

Conversation Starters:

- Do you need to be active or use your body to better understand a topic, such as in science class?
- Can you picture things in your mind, like a camera recording a scene, or a solution to a problem?
- How does music affect your learning? Do you need it to study? Can you remember tunes easily?
- How aware of the outdoors are you? Do you notice things around you like birds, plants or animals?





Talk To Me!

Dear Family,

Today we talked about communication with family and loved ones. It's important to practice communication. The more you practice talking or writing to each other, the better you get at communication. It's hoped that your youth will be able to use some of the communication tools they learned today, to further conversations within the family before, during and after the deployment of your loved one.



One of the tools we learned today was the 'The Family Quiz Game'. This activity is great for your family to learn and grow together while having fun and creating memories together. Try it at home!

Also, conversation starters are a terrific way to start a letter or an email to a loved one. These 'starters' encourage everyone to respond and share their thoughts and open the door for further discussions when the loved one returns home.

In addition, your child also wrote a letter to their loved one. This might be shared with them upon their deployment or they may wish to mail it so the loved one gets it at a later date.

Please help your young person consider the many ways to communicate with their loved one during the deployment. It is a critical skill that will help your youth deal with the issues of deployment and re-integration.

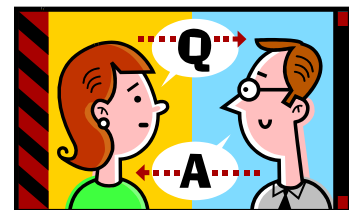
We have attached a sample of the **Family Quiz Game** and **Conversation Starter** questions. Hope you find these helpful. Have fun and encourage your youth to keep the conversations going.

Thank you from Operation: Military Kids Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Outreach for allowing us the opportunity to spend time with your young person and work on some critical skills that will help keep your family strong.

Sincerely,

Conversation Starters:

- What is your favorite board game?
- Would you rather ask a question or give an answer?
- Is it easier to talk to your mom or your dad?
- Who would you trust with a secret?



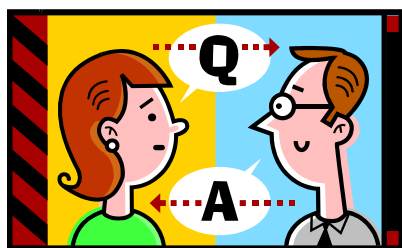


Talk To Me Parent Letter Attachment:

1. On 3x5 index cards, have each family member write questions for each of the categories. For example: What date is Sam's birthday? Where did we go on that fun rollercoaster? Who in the family that enjoys woodworking? At which holiday do we make lefse? What is Jan's favorite food?
2. Using this **Family Quiz Game format**, arrange the 3x5 index cards face down and label the point value on the opposite side of the card. You may want to tape the cards to a poster board, door, or lay them on a flat surface.
3. To play the game, select one person to serve as the reader and scorekeeper. This responsibility can rotate to other family members with each turn so everyone can play.
4. Each player takes a turn selecting a category and point value.
5. The reader turns the card over and reads the question.
6. The player gets the points if the question is answered correctly.
7. The turn passes to the next player after each question is answered.
8. When all the questions have been answered, the person with the highest number of points is declared the winner.
9. Your family can decide how to honor the winner!

Family Quiz Game

Special Days	Favorite Foods	Vacation Memories	Hobbies	Family Pets
100	100	100	100	100
200	200	200	200	200
300	300	300	300	300
400	400	400	400	400
500	500	500	500	500





Flex-a-Family

Dear Family,

Today your Operation Military Kid made a Flex-a-Family. What is a Flex-a-Family? A Flex-a-Family is a flexible, waterproof cutout of your youth or your deployed Service Member.



Nobody can be in two places at once, or can they? Flex-a-Family gives you the opportunity to pop a family member in the mail, in your backpack or in your pocket to any place that you go. When you take your Flex-a-Family along, you can take a picture of you and your family member doing fun things, like riding a rollercoaster or watching a baseball game. Take a picture anywhere with your Flex-a-Family!

Youth miss their Service Members when they are deployed. They commonly wonder what their Service Member does everyday. Youth can be encouraged to bring their 'Flexi' Service Member with them everywhere and take pictures to share with their family and with their Service Member. It is a way for youth to say they are thinking of them during mobilization and for the Service Member to feel like they are part of their youth's life and builds resiliency. Your Flex-a-Family can go ANYWHERE!

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

Best regards,



Conversation Starters:

- Do you think you are a flexible kid? Why or why not?
- What makes you strong?
- What is the funniest thing that happened to you this week?
- Who is the person you could trust with a secret?
- What can you do to be more flexible at home? At school?





Make It, Bag It, Take It!

Dear Family,

Today we made a small bag out of a hand towel. Your youth decided the color of their bag and the embellishments for the bag. They used the **running & overcast stitch** to construct the bag. This is a basic sewing stitch that can be used to mend or construct many items.



This project is a way to learn a basic skill, how to follow directions, and how to organize their stuff so that things are contained and easier to find. The skills they used making their bag have many uses. Talk about following directions, organization and hobbies that might involve sewing skills. Encourage them to organize their lives at home and at school. If they seemed to enjoy sewing, encourage them to continue using their skills. You may want to find them a mentor to help them develop this skill more.

We also encouraged your youth to write to your loved one about what they made. If it is possible, to take a picture with the youth and their bag, you might want to send it to your loved one.

Sincerely,



Conversation Starters:

- Would you rather have a messy room or a clean room? Why?
- What project would you like to sew next?
- Would you rather sew something or buy it in a store? Why?
- How could you reorganize the silverware drawer?





The Artist Among Us

Dear Family,

Today was a busy day! The youth went to six different art stations and produced glorious works of art! Some of the pieces may not be dried thoroughly, so I would encourage you to set them out for awhile. We even created our snack into artwork and then ate it up! We also had time to play “Blob.”



This project was a good way to talk about the importance of exploring and sharing our talents. We talked about ideas to send some of the art work to the Service Member and how we can keep in touch throughout the deployment. The youth can select a picture to put in the frame prior to sending.

At the bottom of this letter are some conversation starters for you to use at home and in the car. Use these questions as a springboard for conversations with your youth.

Thank you for allowing your youth to participate in the OMK Deployment Cycle Support Yellow Ribbon Outreach activity today! If you have any questions about your youth’s experience, please feel free to call me at: _____.

Sincerely,



Conversation Starters:

- Tell me the best part of doing the art projects.
- Which pieces do you want to send to your Service Member?
- Why is it important to explore your talents? What other talents do you think you have?
- Would you rather do an art project or a sewing project?
- If you could choose a special talent, what would that be?





Be A Leader!

Dear Family,

Today we did several activities around being a leader. The youth talked about what their good qualities are and what are good qualities of a leader. We identified leaders in the community and we discussed leaders in the Military Services. We played "Follow the Leader" and learned how to be a good follower. We told stories about our favorite place. We also discussed making choices and following through on their choices.



Ask your youth about their list of good qualities and have them show you their masterpiece art work. Discuss with your youth the various leaders they identified in your community. Talk about a leadership role you have as well as one your loved one has in the Service.

We read books or had book available today about leaders. You may want to check out a couple books to read with your youth. Here is the list:

- *Just Plain Fancy* by Patricia Polacco, Bantam Little Rooster Book, 1990
- *Stone Girl, Bone Girl, The Story of Mary Anning* by Laurence Anholt, Orchard Books, New York, 1998
- *Giraffes Can't Dance* by Gile Andreae, Scholastic, 2001
- *Minty, A story of young Harriet Tubman* by Alan Schroeder, Dial Books for young readers, New York, 1996
- *Martin's Big Words, The life of Martin Luther King* by Doreen Rapaport, Hyperion, 2001
- *50 American Heroes Every Kid Should Meet* by Dennis Deneberg, Millbrook Press, 2001
- *Duke Ellington* by Andrea Davis Pinkney, Hyperion Books for Children, New York, 1998
- *One Giant Leap, the Story of Neil Armstong* by Don Brown, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1998
- *The Wild Christmas Reindeer* by Jan Brett, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1990
- *We Can Get Along: A Child's Book of Choices* by Laura Murphy Payne, Free Spirit Publ., 1997

Sincerely,



Conversation Starters:

- Who do you see as a leader? Why?
- What is a hard choice you have had to make lately?
- Tell me a story about _____.
- What three things would you like to change in the world?





For the Health of It! Microwave Cooking

Dear Family,

Today we created fun foods. We were able to move through stations to create fun snacks using the microwave, as well as just shaking actions. Youth learned about healthy lifestyles, including making great snack choices. The snacks created were analyzed for which food group they connected with in the **MyPyramid** tool. www.mypyramid.gov



The project was a good way for youth to develop life skills through a foods and nutrition project, food preparation, wise use of resources, decision making, and teamwork. We discussed how we need to work as a team at home with tasks such as making snacks and cleaning up.

Thank you for participating with your youth in 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 get exercise or eat healthy?
- Should kids be forced to try new foods?
- Which of your five senses would you least want to give up?
- What recipe do you want to share with your deployed loved one?
- Would you give up junk food for one week? Why? Why not?
- If you had to cook dinner tonight what would you cook?





A Circle of Art

Dear Family,

Today the youth designed a “Mandala.” A Mandala is a form of art that youth can find relaxation while creating. There are various geometric shaped Mandalas, but the one, which the youth designed today, is the “circle completion’ shape. While drawing and filling in from the outside of the circle to the very inward point, youth are encouraged to relax, not worry, quiet themselves from the busyness of the day. They created a design using various colors and a medium of their choice.



Help your youth understand that it is okay to feel what they are feeling now, and encourage them to use this form of art, to process their feelings while their loved one is away, as well as to find a quiet and peacefulness to their day when things might get a bit crazy.

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 are your favorite colors?
- Would you rather go on a hike or go to an amusement park?
- What do you do to relieve stress?
- What is your favorite art? Why?
- What are your favorite vacation spots? Why?
- What kind of museum do you like best?





OMK Rap

Dear Family,

Today your Operation Military Kid composed an 'OMK Rap.' Youth love music, especially music that resonates with what is going on in their life.

While loved ones are deployed, youth find it hard to tell others what they are feeling and the experiences that they encounter at school and at home. Writing raps, or any type of music, can encourage them to talk about their challenges without them recognizing that they are sharing their feelings and communicating their feelings to others in a creative way.



The OMK Rap they composed made them smile and sharing their group rap with other OMK youth empowered teenagers. We hope they continue to 'rap' about their lives. Ask them about their experience.

Thanks 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:

- If you could change one thing about your home, what would it be?
- What would be a creative way to tell someone that the music they are playing is offensive?
- How would you help someone who says "I can't sing".
- Who has the most beautiful voice that you know? The worst voice? How would you tell them?
- Who is your favorite musician right now?





The Homecoming Show

Dear Family,

Today your youth put on **The Homecoming Show!** The Homecoming Show is a variety show that takes place on the way to and at the airport on the day of the return of your Service Member. Your youth participated in a skit, a marionette show, a song and dance routine or as a part of the set design team. Ask them about what they did!



We performed the Homecoming show for other OMK youth today. They were TERRIFFIC! Bravo! We recorded the show to post on TroopTube so you can see your youth and what they did today. Share the show with your friends and family.

The Homecoming Show was a good way to get youth thinking about the variety of emotions that come with the homecoming of their Service Member. Youth are excited to see their loved one again, relieved that the deployment is almost over, nervous that they and their Service Member have changed.

Help your youth with these mixed feelings by reinforcing that it is normal to feel a variety of emotions and that does not mean they do not love or did not miss their Service Member.

Thank you for coming today and bringing your youth. It was wonderful to meet them. Your teen met many other Military youth going through a deployment just like them. The peer support is wonderful and I encourage you to have your youth continue communicating with their new friends and support network.

I appreciate your service on the home front with the family - you are a hero just like your Service Member.

Sincerely,



Conversation Starters:

- What do you do when you are really happy?
- Would you rather be with your family to welcome your Service Member Home, or in a large group?
- Have you ever been at “a loss for words”?
- Who is your silliest family member?
- Would you rather be an actor or a politician?





Rest and Relaxation

Dear Family,

Today we talked about responsibilities and stress. How everyone may have added responsibilities in the family since there is a Service Member deployed. We discussed various positive ways to deal with stress. We encouraged physical activity, eating nutritious foods and taking time for activities you enjoy. We also took some time just “hang out”. Sometimes life is so busy that we don’t do that.



We encourage you as a parent or guardian to have your youth do activities they enjoy. If they seem to have withdrawn from friends and activities you may want to contact a counselor. Encourage your youth to participate in activities they enjoy. As a family make it a habit to do activities together daily, weekly, or monthly.

Thank you for participating in today’s activities. I hope your family enjoyed it. If you have any questions please contact me at: _____,

Sincerely,



Conversation Starters

- What was the best thing about today?
- What activities do you enjoy doing?
- Let’s think of things we can do as a family to rest and relax.
- You talked about stress today, what are some things that stress you about having _____ deployed?
- Do you think you have too many responsibilities? If yes, let’s talk about them.
- Would you rather do yoga or go for a run? Why?





Vacation Talk

Dear Family,

Today we took a vacation! We first did the Suitcase Relay. It was tons of fun; ask your youth about some of the things that happened. Then your youth spent time planning a vacation for one of ten cities. They made a poster and presented their posters to the group. Ask your youth about the cities they heard about and which city they thought might be the most fun to visit.



Remember, everyone loves a vacation. Thinking about and planning a vacation allows us to dream of the future and the things that we can do in new places with our family, even if you are on a tight budget and need to stay close to home. Planning a vacation is a welcome diversion and practical entertainment for youth who are under stress when their Service Member is deployed. They look forward to the time when they will return and they can spend time together. It's a way to use their imagination as well as their research and problem solving skills. Vacation Talk is also a great conversation starter for some of the 'tough to talk about' topics.

Another activity we did today was to make a Conversation Cache. This decorated jar is full of conversation starters, like those at the end of this letter, for you to use everyday. Draw a question daily and share that question with your deployed Service Member. It will help everyone talk about topics that are fun and interesting.

Vacation Talk is a fun and active variety of activities that will get Military Kids talking, not only about vacation destinations, but also it is also about their lives. Thanks for helping your youth participate in this Operation: Military Kids Deployment Support Cycle Yellow Ribbon Outreach experience!

Best regards,



Conversation Starters:

- What is your dream vacation?
- What is the most important thing for you to pack in your suitcase?
- What is more important on a vacation for you, staying in your budget or not missing one of the highlights of an area?
- Where in the world would you NEVER want to visit? Why?





Leafy Notes

Dear Family,

Today we learned about trees, which are our favorites, and why they are a favorite. Some shared they liked their tree because of how they looked, some shared a pleasant memory they had with a tree. Others remembered certain trees because they fell out of it when climbing. Not such a good memory!



We used tree leaves and leaf rubbing plates to create a note card to write a *Thank you* note to someone who has helped them or their family during the deployment time of your Service Member. Please help your youth address an envelope and mail their *Thank you* note.

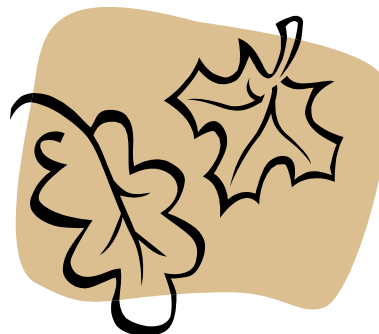
We encourage you to discuss with your child things they might want to put in their journal. It might be some daily happenings, exciting things at school or community events you've participated in. It might be the happy thoughts when someone has offered their kind help to your family. It might be drawings or pictures. We are hoping that the journal will be shared with your deployed Service Member either during deployment or upon their return.

Thank you for having your child come to our program! Not only did this project help provide knowledge about trees, but provided an effective communication tool for your child.

Sincerely,

Conversation Starters:

- If you could be any tree, what kind would you be?
- What is your favorite season? Why?
- Where are your strongest roots?
- If you were going to make something out of wood, what would you make?





Our Best Friends

Dear Family,

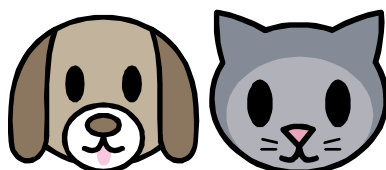
Today we explored the world of pets. We designed our own made-up animal and discussed how we would take care of it. We ate animal crackers for snack and then we made cards for the Operation Baghdad Pups organizations that will go with our donations.



Throughout the day we talked about how when we take care of pets, they can take care of us by being a great friend when we are going through difficult situations. Your family may not have a pet within the home, but we can feed the birds in our yard or visit zoos and wildlife sanctuaries to know the animals around us. Operation Baghdad Pups can be further explored at: <http://www.baghdadpups.com/>.

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 animal that you created. . .
- If you own a pet – what are some ways we can make sure [name of pet] is taken care of?
- If you do not own a pet – what are some ways we can take care of the animals around us?
- What are you feeling while your Service Member is gone?
- Would you rather have a cat or a dog? Why?





Desert Garden

Dear Family,

Today we made desert dish gardens. Youth explored various deserts (Iraq, Afghanistan, AZ, and others) and learned about cactus and other succulent plants.



An analogy was made between the dryness of the desert and the times of “dryness” in our life, as well as the age and strength of the cactus and how we too find strength within as well as strength from our peers, family, and friends to get through the “dryness” or the changes of our life. Encourage your youth to talk about their garden when you return home and place it in an area that will remind you of your loved one. Remind youth of the skills they learned today, the people who helped them, and the friends they made. Encourage your Service Member to send pictures to put in their youth’s desert garden.

You will only need to water every 7-10 days and keep them in the sun.

You may also want to think about how you can make other types of dish gardens for your home. For example, make an herb garden, to add spice and flavor to your foods. Share how they grow and what foods you are making for your family with your Service Member. Encourage your Service Member to share some of the spices and herbs from their area.

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

Best Regards,



Conversation Starters:

- What did you learn about the desert and the strength of a cactus?
- Tell me about the strength inside of you that will make you strong while (insert name here) is away? Who can we as a family reach out to for strength and support while (insert name here) is away?
- If we made a dish garden together, who could we give it to?
- What other type of dish gardens can we make?





Frogs are Fun!

Dear Family,

Today your young person had the opportunity to learn about frogs. We learned about the metamorphosis that frog's experience – from eggs being laid in the water to becoming a tadpole and developing legs and lungs and then living on the land instead of water. Has your young person gone through a metamorphosis that you could talk about? (This might be the change from being a baby to growing taller, developing new skills, or accepting responsibility during the deployment.) It's important to help your young person see how they have grown and changed over time and if possible, identify how that has happened.



Learning about frogs is a good way to be more aware of the environment and the creatures around us. It might be interesting to have your child talk to their loved one who is deployed and ask questions about the frogs in their region and learn about the differences or similarities. Learning together can be a fun way to connect and share stories about what each person sees or hears throughout the day.

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 the day.

Best Regards,



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

_____.

Conversation Starters:

- Can you tell me how you would imitate any of the frog noises you learned today?
- How do you think our family has gone through metamorphosis during deployment?
- What might be an idea of an activity we could do together that relates to frogs?
- What does the word metamorphosis mean to you?

