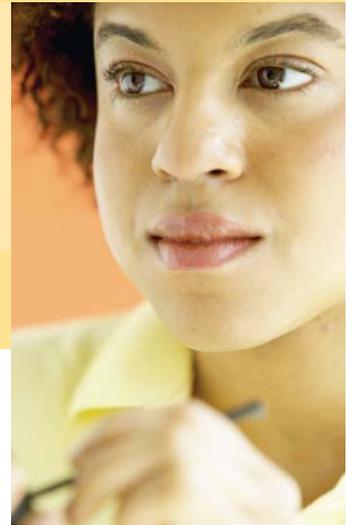


When You Might Be Deployed

Planning for Separation

If you are a federal worker with a potential for nationwide deployment that could exceed more than just a few weeks of family separation, the following information, modified from a Department of Defense advisory document, could aid in making a family separation more manageable.



Preparation

Too often, family members deny the possibility of duty separation, and pretend it is not going to happen. This denial can be emotionally harmful. Once separation occurs, they are likely to find themselves unprepared. It is much healthier for families to face issues directly and become better prepared to positively address the lifestyle changes brought about by separation. Adequate preparation for all family members is the key to minimizing the problems that will inevitably arise during a separation. Sometimes families avoid talking about things that bother or worry them. They are afraid that talking about things will make matters worse. In reality, open discussion provides family members the opportunity to clarify potential misunderstandings, get a better idea of what is expected, work out solutions to identified problems, and to better prepare themselves for the coming separation.

Control

Having a sense of control over events is a significant moderator of the stress associated with separation. We all desire some sense of control even in the face of uncontrollable situations. Feeling that you have no control over a situation can lead to

characteristics of learned helplessness. The perception of even some control can be enough to lessen most negative responses and become a base for building positive coping behaviors. An individual's appraisal of upcoming events as being highly stressful or undesirable but manageable will significantly influence his or her coping level. That appraisal is related to the degree to which individuals feel that they have adequate knowledge, coping skills, social support, and some control over future events. Preparation for coming events, especially undesirable events, can greatly alter a person's attitude. Therefore, the importance of education and preparation cannot be overstated. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Parents

Single parents and dual career couples face the same reality. They may experience even greater stress and responsibility during preparation for the separation. No other "parent" remains at home, and therefore, separation takes on an increasingly stressful dimension.





Ready “To Part”

There is a difference between being ready “to go” and ready “to part.” Being ready “to go” means having your suitcase packed, all shots up to date, and/or other duty-essential preparations completed. Being ready “to part” from your spouse and/or other family members means being aware of the personal and family issues related to separation, and being prepared to deal as constructively as possible with those issues.

Plan Ahead

This is one of the keys to a successful family separation. There are many things you can do before you leave that will prevent your spouse from feeling that he or she has to handle it all alone, and you from worrying about all the things left undone.

- Spend an evening with your spouse to discuss the assignment or deployment, how both of you feel, what you worry about, how to handle emergencies, how to solve problems, and what you think needs to be done around the house to get things together.
- Have a “show-and-tell” day. Ask your spouse to show you how to do the chores that you do not usually do, whether it is checking the oil in the car or doing the laundry. Learn these things BEFORE your spouse departs on an assignment or deployment.
- Before departing, make sure the remaining spouse is the one with the keys and checkbook.

So much depends on your advance preparation. The more you can learn and accomplish before the family separation, the more confident both of you will be when the parting time comes.

This material is adapted from the “Predeployment Guide: A Tool for Coping” on the Air Force Crossroads Web site at <http://www.afcrossroads.com/famseparation>.