

## Maintaining a Psychological Presence During Parental Absences

Although military members may be geographically separated from their children from time to time, they can still maintain a psychological presence in the lives of their children. Psychological presence refers to the degree to which a child feels a parent present in his or her life, despite a geographical distance. If a parent is psychologically present while deployed, his or her child(ren) may feel less distressed by the absence. The following are strategies to maintain a psychological presence of a parent during deployment.<sup>1</sup>

- When possible, phone calls, texts, emails, web chats, and letters are forms of communication that can help to bridge the distance.
- Children often enjoy having tangible reminders of their parent or family member. Photographs, stuffed animals, and deployment dolls (stuffed toys that can be made to look like the family member) are reminders that children can look at or touch throughout the absence.



- For younger children, having videos of the absent parent performing daily tasks such as getting ready before work, cooking, or washing dishes can be comforting.
- Scent is a powerful reminder for many people. The absent parent can leave an article of clothing or hat they have worn for the child to smell, or they can put the article of clothing on a stuffed animal, which the child can use for comfort.
- Family members can participate in the same activity as the Service member who is away, such as reading the same book, playing the same game, or working on the same puzzle.



- The family member who is away can leave small surprises or presents for the child(ren) to find throughout the absence, such as small photos, toys, or tickets to fun events.
- Children may choose to share a favorite toy by sending it with their deployed parent to feel more connected.
- Families can celebrate holidays, birthdays, and other special events before or after deployment.
- A deployed parent can leave a special object, such as a blanket or necklace, with the child for comfort.

<sup>1</sup> Blaisure, K. R., Saathoff-Wells, T., Pereira, A., Wadsworth, S. M., & Dombro, A. L. (2012). *Serving military families in the 21st century*. New York, NY: Routledge.