

Ready, Set, Go! *

Short Course

Leader's Guide



*An adaptation of the national OMK "Ready, Set, Go!" training manual originally produced by the Washington State OMK team, 2007.

Acknowledgements

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Special recognition is given to Sarah Jones who's lecture on the Military Culture is the foundation of the video and powerpoint presentation which are part of this short course.

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- Sarah Jones, Army Reserve Child & Youth Services,
- Frances Swenson, Kansas American Legion,
- Junnae Campbell, Program Development Director, Boys and Girls Club, Manhattan, KS.

Lessons Learned:

The Ready, Set, Go! development committee have used these materials with many groups in many communities, and there are "lessons learned" from those presentations that facilitators of the short course should attend to:

1. Inventory the information included on the flash drive; make sure that all electronic files are accessible.
2. Invite a military person to attend and participate in the presentation. Ready, Set, Go! is primarily an awareness program about the military culture and how community members can support military-connected youth and their families. Familiarity with the current military culture will greatly enhance your program. Invite members from a local National Guard Unit, Family Readiness Group, American Legion Post or VFW.
3. Be prepared to deal with strong emotions. Ready, Set, Go! is not based on a political agenda, it is intended to create awareness and generate support for youth and families. Still, the topics of military culture, deployment, the realities of war and the issues facing soldiers, their families and communities upon return home are serious. Be prepared to know when and whom to refer audience participants who have expressed need for long-term support and assistance. Military One Source (1-800-342-9647; www.militaryonesource.com) provides all military members and families with 24/7 support and private counseling.

For more information about the Ready, Set, Go! short course or Kansas OMK contact:

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Welcome

Welcome to the Ready, Set, Go! short course (or “briefing” to use a military term). This course and accompanying resource kit introduces you to the Operation Military Kids (OMK) project and the military culture. The goal of Ready, Set, Go! is to create awareness and to generate community support for military-connected youth and families who are geographically dispersed (i.e., primarily those who are members of National Guard and Army Reserve components). This is a big undertaking to accomplish within one hour (such as a “lunch and learn” for businesses, schools, faith groups, etc.), but we know you’re up to the challenge!

Most people have not thought about how war, deployment of troops, and return home of soldiers have affected families “in our own backyard”. When members of the National Guard, Army Reserve and other military parents living as civilians in communities are mobilized, their children become different. Now they are “military kids.” They may still look the same to teachers, coaches, club leaders, neighbors and friends, but their lives are turned upside down. They often must cope alone with the unknown, with worry and with a new role in their own families. Still, many military-connected kids find strength, resilience and new opportunities to lead and grow while their loved one is deployed. Not all deployments result in harm to military kids, but many do.

Many parts of their usual support networks may no longer be adequate. Those parts – such as the parent who remains in the family, or the grandparent providing care since both parents are deployed – may also be stretched and exhausted. Extensive media coverage of on-going military operations creates daily anxiety. Military kids need to connect with other youth in similar situations. They need friends and adults who can empathize and who can help them cope with their new world, and they still need to have fun!

The objectives of the Ready, Set, Go! short course are to:

- Educate the public on the military culture, and the impact that deployment and return has on soldiers, families, kids and the community at-large.
- Generate community support networks for military youth “in our own backyard” when soldier parents are deployed and after they return.
- Collaborate with others in the community to ensure that caring adults are attuned to the unique needs of military kids.
- Support military kids coping with the stress of knowing their deployed parents may be in harm’s way and upon return of the parent who has been deployed.
- Encourage on-going 4-H programming for military-connected kids and their families.

In this purple kit you will find additional information to support your Ready, Set, Go! short course. The flash drive includes Adobe PDF files of these materials as well as a 15-minute video presentation with powerpoint outlining the military culture. By the way, the purple color for this kit not only represents K-State but it is also the color that represents all branches of the military. Purple symbolizes inclusion of all military branches under common goals and mission.

We hope you enjoy using OMK’s Ready, Set, Go! short course (i.e., briefing). OMK is a national initiative funded by the U.S. Army and is managed by a state team. That state team would like to know how your Ready, Set, Go! short courses progress, the results of your community’s efforts and the lessons learned that you’d like to share with others. Please send us copies of your briefing feedback forms and let us know how OMK can continue to support your local work.

Very truly yours,
Kansas development team for *Ready, Set, Go!* short course
Ann Domsch
Elaine Johannes, Ph.D.
Diane Mack
Erin Sanders-Hahs

Ready, Set, Go! Suggested Presentation Format (one hour)

1) Before you begin

- Invite military participants and a co-facilitator with military experience.
- Have copies of handouts and local resources.
- Check-out computer equipment and use of flash drive (see instructions below).
- Provide newsprint, flipchart and markers to record ideas for community efforts.
- Provide healthy refreshments – food always makes people more comfortable and usually more attentive.

2) Presentation Timeline (1 hour)

5 minutes – Welcome and introduce the participants. (If time permits, facilitate the blanket activity to build team rapport.)

2 minutes – Introduce the topic by reading the suggested introduction and lesson objectives.

15 minutes – Play the video/powerpoint program from the flash drive or give your own.

10 minutes – Lead a discussion of how your community could support military youth.

5 minutes – Encourage questions and answers.

2 minutes – Participants complete feedback forms.

(Mail them to your state OMK coordinator. Contact information is located at: www.operationmilitarykids.org)

3) Suggested Presentation Introduction

“Welcome to the Operation Military Kids, Ready, Set, Go! short course. Operation Military Kids (OMK) is a national initiative. It is funded by the U.S. Army, and is managed by a state team. Most people have not thought about how war, deployment of troops and return of soldiers have affected kids and families “in our own backyard”

When National Guard, Army Reserves and other military parents living in communities are mobilized, their children become different. Now they are ‘military kids.’ They still look the same to teachers, coaches, club leaders, neighbors and friends, but their lives are turned upside down.

Many of their usual support networks may no longer be adequate. So what do we need to do to help? This program should help us to better understand the military culture and give us information about what is happening with our military kids.”

The objectives of the Ready, Set, Go! short course are to:

- Educate the public on the military culture, and the impact that deployment and return has on soldiers, families, kids and the community at-large.
- Generate community support networks for military youth “in our own backyard” when soldier parents are deployed and after they return.
- Collaborate with others in the community to ensure that caring adults are attuned to the unique needs of military kids.
- Support military kids coping with the stress of knowing their deployed parents may be in harm’s way and upon return of the parent who has been deployed.
- Encourage on-going 4-H programming for military-connected kids and their families.

Any questions? (respond to questions, concerns, etc.). Okay, let’s begin (use either the 15-minute video/powerpoint presentation or facilitate your own 15-minute presentation)

4) Group Discussion. Brainstorming and action planning for community support

Allow time for reflection and discussion. Move the discussion towards two or three ideas for community awareness and support. Reflect on the list of ideas from the “Ways Communities Can Support Military Families” handout. Write ideas, action steps and follow-up responsibilities on the newsprint or flipchart so that the group sees what “next steps” are. Agree to follow up and meet again.

5) Thank the participants (especially those who are military connected) and ask that all complete and return the Ready, Set, Go! feedback form.

Learn More:

1. www.operationmilitarykids.org (Operation Military Kids)
2. www.defenselink.mil (Department of Defense)
3. www.militarychild.org (Military Child Education Coalition)
4. www.guardfamily.org (National Guard)
5. www.arfp.org (Army Reserves)
6. www.armymwr.com (Family and Morale Welfare & Recreation Command)
7. www.militaryonesource.com (Military OneSource – online, phone and face-to-face counseling for military families)



Slide 1

Welcome to the Ready, Set, Go! short course.

Provided by: Operation Military Kids (OMK) through K-State Research and Extension and its state partners.

Ready, Set, Go! an OMK Short Course

Operation Military Kids (OMK) creates awareness and support for military-connected youth who live in our Kansas communities.



Slide 2

(Note: modify this introduction for your program)

Greetings from Operation Military Kids or OMK. I'm Ann Domsch, Kansas OMK Coordinator.

OMK is a national initiative operating in 34 states.

Kansas OMK is a service of K-State Research and Extension in cooperation with National Guard, Army Reserves, Kansas Dept. of Education, Boys and Girls Club, American Legion, K-State School of Family Studies and Human Services and Kansas 4-H.

OMK builds national, state and local partnerships



Operation: Military Kids

- Creates state and local community support networks for military youth when families parents are deployed
- One state, community and military agencies to support children and youth and their families with health, people and organizations in their communities.
- Delivers a wide range of recreational, social and educational programs for military youth living in our communities.
- Acknowledges the strength and sacrifice of military kids in America's home front through their heroic and special contributions to war.
- Supports military kids coping with the stress of having one deployed parent (or two) in the military.
- Educates the public on the impact of the deployment cycle on families, friends, kids and the community as a whole.

Visit www.operationmilitarykids.org for more information about Operation: Military Kids.



Slide 3

OMK, which is funded by the Army:

- Creates community support networks for military youth “in our own backyards.”
- Supports kids and their families who are coping with the stress of having a deployed or returning parent.
- Collaborates with schools and other organizations to ensure that adults are attuned to the unique needs of military youth.
- Educates the public about the impact of deployment and return on soldiers, their families and communities.
- Delivers recreational, social and educational programs to military youth living in our communities.

This is a big task and OMK needs your help to accomplish these goals. This Ready, Set, Go! short course helps communities get READY to help military youth, SET goals for impact, and GO about helping military youth and their families.

Thank you for your support. Enjoy the rest of Ready, Set, Go!

Culture of the Army

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Slide 4

My name is Sarah Jones and I am the Army Reserve Child and Youth Services Outreach Liaison Specialist.

I work in Kansas City and am part of the Kansas OMK state team. This Ready, Set, Go! short course highlights the culture of the Army so that you have a better understanding of the context in which military families live.

Understanding Culture

Culture is the knowledge, experience, values, ideas, attitudes, skills, tastes and techniques that are passed on from more experienced members of a community to new members.



Slide 5

Understanding the culture of the military is important because that understanding helps us to work more effectively with the families living within that culture.

Culture is the knowledge, experience, values and attitudes that are passed on from one member of the culture (such as a soldier) to another.

Mission of the Army

- ★ Preserve the peace and security, and provide for national defense
- ★ Support national policies
- ★ Implement national objectives
- ★ Overcome any nations responsible for aggressive acts that imperil the peace and security of the United States



Slide 6

Knowing the mission of the Army helps us to better understand the Army culture.

The mission of the Army is to preserve the peace and security and provide for national defense. They work to support national policies, implement national objectives, and overcome any nations that are responsible for aggressive acts against the United States.

U.S. Army Values

Loyalty—Bear true faith and allegiance to the U.S. Constitution, the Army, and other Soldiers.

Duty—Fulfill your obligations.

Respect—Treat people as they should be treated.

Selfless Service—Put the welfare of the nation, the Army, and your subordinates before your own.

Honor—Live up to all the Army values.

Integrity—Do what is right, legally and morally.

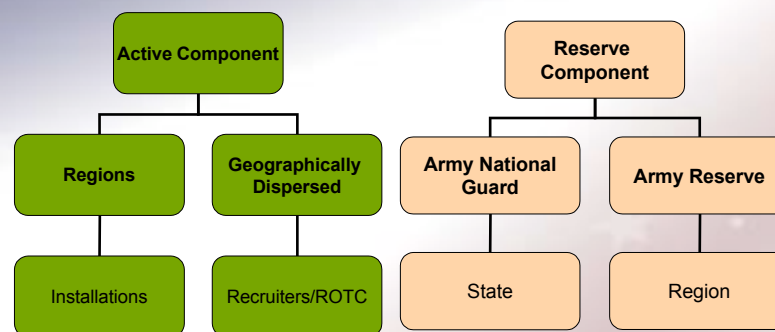
Personal Courage—Face fear, danger, or adversity, both physical and moral courage.



Slide 7

The U.S. Army has Core Values that they work within. The core values are posted around installations and are part of every mission that soldiers do, both either in peacetime and war. The Army's core values are: Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage.

U.S. Army Component Structures



Slide 8

The United States Army has two components. The active duty component includes full-time soldiers who live on installations. Typically, they live near an active duty post, but sometimes they are geographically dispersed.

The active duty component also includes Army recruiters and ROTC instructors that may live off the installation. They are full-time employees of the Army.

There's also the reserve component of the Army which consists the Army Reserve and National Guard. The National Guard is set up as a state-based organization. They are called to duty by the governor of the state, but can also be federalized for larger missions.

The Army Reserve is set up regionally. I work within the 89th Regional Readiness Command which includes Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri and Iowa. The Army Reserve mission is strictly federal, and is only activated by the President. When the Reserve component is activated, that puts them at the same status as the active duty Army.

Thousands of Army Reserve and National Guard soldiers are now full-time soldiers due to Presidential activation.

Service Members (May, 2007)

	Active Duty	National Guard	Reserve	TOTAL FORCE
Army	512,400	350,000	205,000	1,067,400
Air Force	359,300	106,800	76,100	542,200
Navy	365,900	-----	83,400	449,300
Marines	178,000	-----	39,600	217,600
				2,276,500



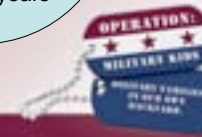
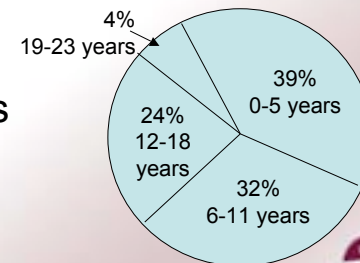
Slide 9

This chart shows the population of the United State military as of mid-2007. You can see that Reserve and the National Guard soldiers make up about half of the total strength of the United States Army.

Demographics (May, 2007)

The Army Family

- 55% Married
- 50% Parents
- 8% Dual Military
- 6% Single Parents



Slide 10

The Army has more families now than it ever has had. The Army was initially designed for the single soldier. The pay and missions were primarily set-up with the young, single soldier in-mind.

That's now changed. There are a lot more families that comprise the Army, and efforts are underway to maintain a high quality of life for them.

In mid-2007, about 55% of Army active and reserve component soldiers were married. Fifty percent of soldiers have minor children. Eight percent of families are dual-military which means that both parents are serving in the armed forces. Then 6% of soldiers are single parents.

The pie chart shows the breakdown of the ages of children within Army families. A large percentage (39%) of children are under age 5. Then the school age group (ages 6-11) is the second largest. Teenagers (ages 12-18) are 24% of the total. There's a small percentage that are adult children that are considered dependents. These may include adults with special needs or disabilities.

Elements of Military Culture



- Relocation
- Structural Authority
- Threat of Danger
- Strength Reduction
 - Realignments
- Inadequate Pay



Slide 11

There are several elements that are unique to the military culture. These elements are:

- Relocation
- Structural Authority
- Threat of Danger
- Strength Reduction
- Realignments
- Inadequate Pay

Relocation

- Permanent Change of Station
- Relocation due to Deployment
 - Change Schools
 - Change Support Network
 - Extracurricular Activities
 - Graduation Requirements



Slide 12

Relocation is a common aspect of military culture. Military families typically move from installation to installation every few years.

The Army is working to make the time at each installation longer, which is better for kids, spouses and the soldiers. Permanent change of station is the term used when a family moves from one installation to another. In the reserve component, families also have PCS (permanent change of station) and move from one reserve center to another when they are full-time soldiers.

Relocations are also due to deployment. Remember that 8% of the Army is dual military – both parents are soldiers. At times, both parents may be deployed and their children may go to live with extended family members or family friends. Thus, they must relocate during deployment. This is also the case for children of single parent soldiers.

During deployment children can be affected by changing schools and changes in support networks. They may not be able to participate in their regular extracurricular activities (i.e., sports teams). More changes are layered on top of what's already going on in the family. Relocation can also impact graduation requirements that vary from school to school.

Structural Authority

- Rules are obeyed without question
- Frequent use of punishment
- High level of control
- High standards for behavior



Slide 13

Structural authority also impacts military families. Soldiers are soldiers all of the time. They are responsible to their commander and are responsible to the soldiers that are subordinate to them. Within that social environment, structural authority is very effective, it gets the mission done. Rules are obeyed without question. Soldiers are trained to “jump when they are told to jump” because unquestioning obedience is important for their safety and the safety of those around them.

There's frequent use of punishment in order to meet the Army's objectives. There is a high level of control and high standards of behavior. In general, society expects more of soldiers just as we expect more from police officers and fire fighters. Those professionals serve us; we have higher standards for their behavior. That manifests differently in military family life than it does in the soldiers' work life. A “chain of command” doesn't usually work in a family.

Threat of Danger

- 150,000 Soldiers in Iraq
- 50% in Combat Zones
 - No Safe Retreat
 - Ambiguous Enemy



Slide 14

Threat of danger is an element of the military culture that is more prevalent now than it was just a few years ago. Military families know that there's a chance that their soldier can be relocated to a hazardous duty work location. They're getting sent to war and that makes it difficult for the family.

In mid-2007, we had approximately 150,000 soldiers serving in Iraq. We also have soldiers spread across the world working in different locations. In Iraq, about 50% of soldiers are in combat zones. Those families know that their soldier is on dangerous missions.

The current war is also different – there is no safe retreat. The enemy is very ambiguous. Soldiers can be on the streets of Baghdad and see a family walking down the street and not know if one is a suicide bomber or someone who wants to hurt the soldier. It's not clear who the enemy is, so there really is no safe haven to go to to get away from the combat.

Research is being done on the affects of danger threats. Currently, research findings are scarce because the Army hasn't fought a war like this before. We haven't had this many family members being impacted either.

Strength Reduction (May, 2007)

	Active Duty	National Guard	Reserve	TOTAL FORCE
Army	512,400	350,000	205,000	1,067,400
Air Force	359,300	106,800	76,100	542,200
Navy	365,900	-----	83,400	449,300
Marines	178,000	-----	39,600	217,600
				2,276,500

World War II – 10%
Global War on Terror - >1%



Slide 15

Strength reduction is another element of the military culture that is prevalent now. In World War II, approximately 10% of the United States was serving within the military; a large part of our nation's population was serving. Now less than 1% is serving in the Army or in the military. This 2007 serving chart shows that the United States has just over 2 million soldiers, less than 1% of our population. That means that our soldiers have frequent deployments, they have to stay longer, and that multiple, repeated deployments are impacting soldiers in a way not seen before.

Realignment

- BRAC – Base Realignment and Closure
- Relocations
- “Outside the Gates”
- Access Community Resources



Slide 16

Realignment or restructuring the Army within the United States is primarily due to BRAC (Base Realignment and Closure). Through BRAC, the Army determines which installations to enhance and which ones to close. This means another relocation for families who must move to another post. In Kansas, there are units coming back from Germany as part of the Big Red 1. Those families will relocate near Ft. Riley. For OMK and communities it means that we need to reach out to active duty families who live “outside the gates” of installations. For example, Ft. Riley may receive extra family members resulting in more children living in the area. Consequently, more families needing resources and community services like housing, transportation, schools, health care, recreation, and child care. Unfortunately, families living “outside the gates” typically don't have access to the resources that are available inside the military installation. The family is still allowed to go onto the installation for help and services, but many must commute long distances for children to take part in military-related activities or for families to receive face-to-face support.

Inadequate Pay (May, 2007)

- Married Soldier with one child = food stamps
- Income: Base Pay (\$1596); Base Allowance for Housing (\$1156); BAS (\$267); Tax and other deductions (-\$250) = \$2769. (2006 Base Pay for E-3)
- Expenditure: For a typical household with one child, monthly expenses are \$2,720.
- Balance: \$49.00



Slide 17

Inadequate pay is another element of the military culture. This slide shows the 2006 base pay for an enlisted soldier (level E3) who is married with one child.

Note their income and what soldiers get for housing and food. The chart shows that only \$49 is left at the end of the month. This family would automatically qualify for food stamps.

Inadequate pay contributes to the many risk factors that military families must cope with. It is another element of the military culture that communities need to understand and deal with as they support families and youth.

Learn More. . .

- **OMK** – www.operationmilitarykids.org
- **Military Child Education Coalition** – www.militarychild.org
- **Family and Morale Welfare & Recreation Command** – www.armymwr.com
- **Army Reserve Family Programs** – www.arfp.org/cys
- **National Guard Family Programs** – www.guardfamily.org
- **National 4-H** – www.national4-hheadquarters.gov
- **The American Legion** – www.legion.org
- **Boys & Girls Clubs of America** – www.bgca.org
- **National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies** – www.naccrra.org



Slide 18

Learn more about the military culture, how the current war is impacting families and how you can help.

Check out these Web sites and their resources.

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Thank you for participating in this section of Ready, Set, Go!  
Now, consider how your community can help.

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For more information about OMK and Ready, Set, Go! contact:
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A Blanket Community

If time allows, conduct this awareness activity after the welcome and introduction.

Objectives:

- Create awareness.
- Build group rapport.

Activity Instructions:

Supplies:

- Blanket, tarp, or tablecloth
- Several objects to represent various aspects of the community such as balls, empty plastic water bottles, other objects with different shapes and textures.

Procedure:

Place the blanket or tarp on the floor and have all participants align themselves on the edges. Each member picks up an edge of the cloth and holds the blanket tightly. Add objects to the center of the blanket. Each participant holding the blanket will assume a community role: teacher, parent, business owner, law enforcement officer, doctor, county employee, school administrator, elected official or other community member.

Add the objects and tell the group that these are the children in our community and that we have to keep them safe. Have the group make a wave with the blanket but at the same time keeping the children on the blanket. Begin telling the group that the business owner, a member of the National Guard has been deployed. That person drops out, then call more people to be deployed until you are down to two or three people.

Questions to ask:

1. What happened as people started leaving their spots on the blanket?
2. How did you feel in trying to keep all the objects on the blanket?
3. How did your role/responsibility change as others left the blanket?
4. What implications does this activity have for how we respond to the military youth and families in our community?



Ways Communities Can Support Military Families

Neighbors, friends and whole communities can support military youth and their families in many ways. Be it a community-wide campaign or kindness shown to a neighborhood family, support can ease the stress of troop deployment and return.

Include your own ideas in the following lists:

Community Groups and Clubs –

- Sponsor parades, special events (Veteran's Day, Military Appreciation Day, and Military Family Fun Day).
- Champion community awareness of the impact that deployment and return has on families and the whole community.
- Tutor military kids while parents are deployed.
- Serve as a mentor or “extra parent” for a military family.
- Distribute a list of community resources for military families new to the community (e.g., where to recycle, who can repair a car on weekends, list of trained baby-sitters, licensed home-based child care).
- Provide transportation to sport practices and events, doctor's appointments, parent-teacher conferences, or meetings.
- Provide materials for Hero Packs (i.e., book bags filled with items to provide children with fun activities and ways to stay connected to their parents and remember deployed loved ones).
- Sponsor military support networks in churches, clubs, businesses, neighborhoods.
- Ask the local Army Family Readiness Group (FRG) what military families need, and provide it.
- Invite military-connected youth to join recreation teams, clubs, youth groups, and theatre troupes.
- Sponsor a help-day for a military family (e.g., paint the fence, fix a deck, rake leaves, mow yards, fix leaky faucets).
- Volunteer to do the shopping for a family.
- Sponsor baby sitting and child care training for military youth.
- Sponsor a college, training scholarship for military youth.
- Create scholarships allowing military youth to participate in sports clubs, competition teams, and special events.
- Invite families and returning soldiers to speak at service club meetings.
- Sponsor grandparent “clubs” to plan fun events for military kids.
- Other: _____

County and City Government –

- Declare a special military family recognitions.
- Provide waivers or passes for local recreation facilities.
- Include military families on local commissions, committees, advisory boards.
- Designate a committee or commissioner as the community's military “champion.”
- Include military family support messages on governmental Web pages. Use OMK banners in governmental offices. Distribute OMK seals and stickers as bill inserts.
- Adopt a local Guard Unit, military component and/or branch.
- Other: _____

Schools –

- Insure that staff are aware of the unique challenges confronting military youth.
- Allow class time for supervised emailing, letter writing, drawing, journaling to communicate with deployed loved ones.
- Foster resiliency and recognize strengths.
- Sponsor military appreciation events at school games, concerts, plays and competitions.
- Display OMK banners in schools.
- Other: _____

Everyone –

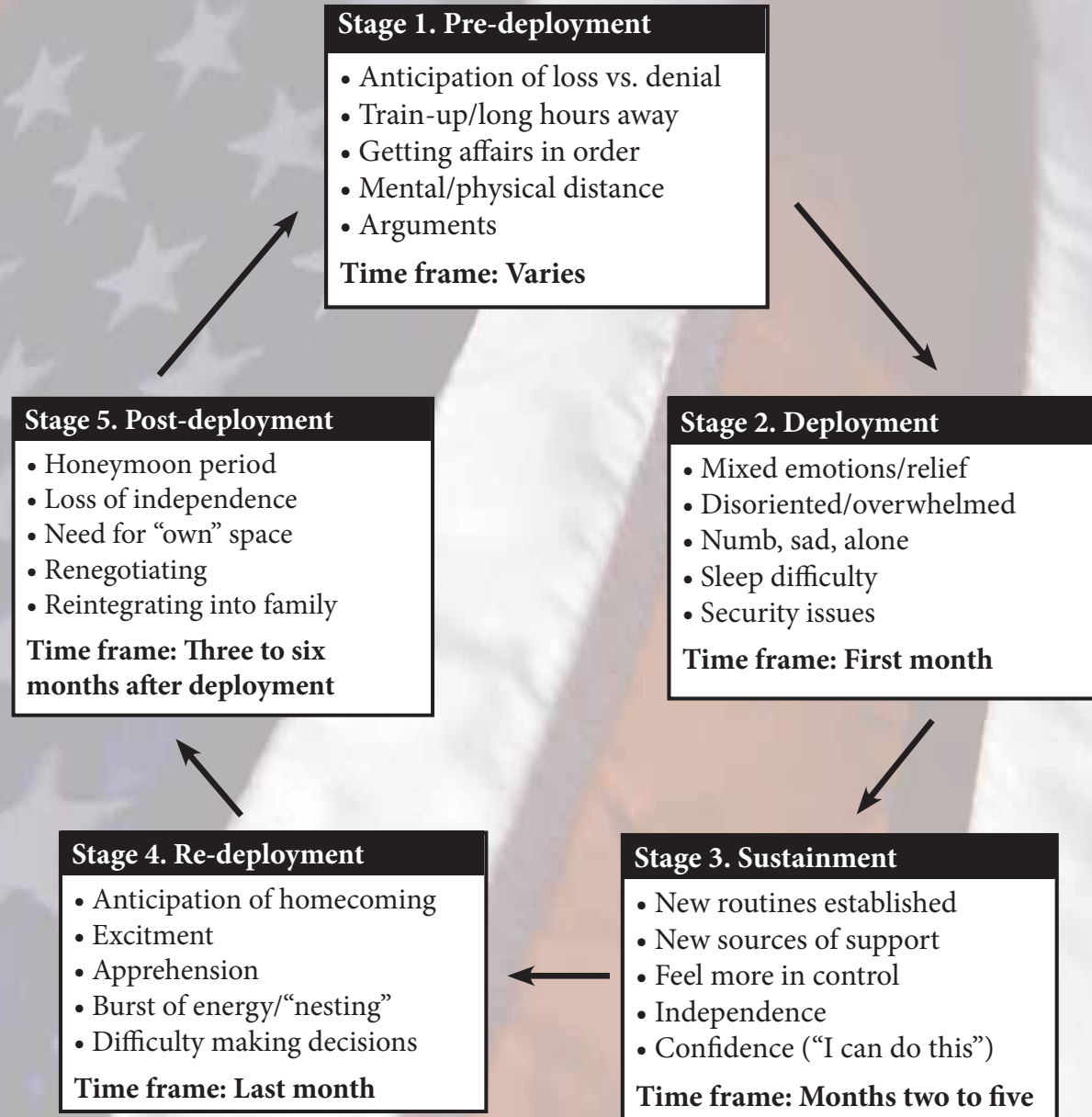
- Become familiar with the military culture, deployment cycles and issues impacting the return of soldiers.
- Create memory boxes, books for returning parents.
- Acknowledge strength and resilience within military families and youth.
- Be a friend.
- Listen.
- Other: _____

Let Kansas OMK know what you've added to this list. Send your ideas to:

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The Stages of Military Families Coping with Deployment



The information on this page is adapted from “The Emotional Cycle of Deployment: A Military Family Perspective”, by LTC Simon H. Pincus, USA, MC; COL Robert House, USAR, MC; LTC Joseph Christenson, USA, MC; and CAPT Lawrence E. Adler, MC, USNR-R. Available at the Army’s HOOAH 4 Health Web site — <http://www.hooah4health.com/deployment/familymatters/emotionalcycle.htm>
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Typical Children's Reactions to Deployment

During deployment, children often experience negative changes. Many of these changes are normal. However, it is important to know how to deal with these changes and know when to seek additional assistance.

Infants (<1 year) Must be held and actively nurtured in order to thrive. If a primary caregiver becomes significantly depressed, then the infant will be at risk for apathy, refusal to eat and even weight loss. Early intervention becomes critical to prevent undue harm or neglect. Pediatricians can perform serial exams to ensure growth continues as expected on height/weight charts. Army Community Services and Social Work can assist with parenting skills and eliciting family or community support. Lastly, the primary caregiver may also benefit from individual counseling.

Toddlers (1-3 years) Will generally take their cue from their primary caregiver. One issue is whether it is the mother or father who is the soldier leaving — especially when children are very young. If the “non-deploying” parent is coping well, they will tend to do well. The converse is also true. If the primary caregiver is not coping well, then toddlers may become sullen, tearful, throw tantrums or develop sleep disturbances. They will usually respond to increased attention, hugs and holding hands. The “non-deploying” parent may also benefit from sharing day-to-day experiences with other parents facing similar challenges. In particular, it is important for the primary caregiver to balance the demands of caring for children alone with their own needs for time for self.

Preschoolers (3-6 years) May regress in their skills (difficulty with potty training, “baby talk,” thumb sucking, refusal to sleep alone) and seem more clingy. They may be irritable, depressed, aggressive, prone to physical complaints and have fears about parents or others leaving. Caregivers will need to reassure them with extra attention and physical closeness (hugs, holding hands). In addition, it is important to avoid changing family routines, such as sleeping in their own bed, unless they are very scared. Answers to questions about deployment should be brief, matter-of-fact and to the point. This will help to contain the free-floating anxiety of an overactive imagination.

School age children (6-12 years) May whine, complain, become aggressive or otherwise act out their feelings. They may focus on the soldier-parent missing a key event; for example: “will you (the soldier) be here for my birthday?” Depressive symptoms may include: sleep disturbance, loss of interest in school, eating or even playing with their friends. They will need to talk about their feelings and will need more physical attention than usual. Expectations regarding school performance may need to be a little lower, but keep routines as close to normal as possible.

Teenagers (13-18 years) May be irritable, rebellious, fight or participate in other attention-getting behavior. They may show a lack of interest in school, peers and school activities. In addition, they are at greater risk for promiscuity, alcohol and drug use. Although they may deny problems and worries, it is extremely important for caregivers to stay engaged and be available to talk out their concerns. At first, lowering academic expectations may be helpful; however, return to their usual school performance should be supported. Sports and social activities should be encouraged to give normal structure to their life. Likewise, additional responsibility in the family, appropriate to their emotional maturity, will make them feel important and needed.

Unfortunately, some children may have great difficulty adapting to the stress of a deployed parent. If they are unable to return to at least some part of their normal routine or display serious problems over several weeks, a visit to the family doctor or mental health counselor is indicated. Children of deployed parents are also more vulnerable to psychiatric hospitalization — especially in single-parent and blended families.

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