

## USEFUL DEFENCE NUMBERS

**Defence Housing Authority (DHA)** Complete housing and relocation service. The Cairns office is located at 10 Grove Street, phone: **1800 249 711**. For maintenance issues phone: **1300 366 615**

**National Welfare Coordination Centre (NWCC)** A 24 hour information and referral service for families of deployed Defence personnel: **1800 801026**.

**Health Advisory Line** After-hours telephone health advisory service for permanent ADF members: 1800 IM SICK (**1800 467 425**)

**All Hours Support Line (AHSL)** A confidential telephone support service for ADF members and their families that is available 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. Services that you can access include psychology, medical, social work and chaplains: **1800 628 036**.

**Defence Service Centre** Military & Civilian Pay and Conditions  
An initial point of contact for military and civilian personnel with questions about pay and conditions of service: **1800 000 677**

**Defence Families of Australia (DFA)** Free Information and assistance for ADF families - Ph: **1800 100 509**

**Veterans and Veterans' Family Counselling Service (VVCS)** is available to veterans of warlike or peacekeeping deployments and their families: **1800 011 046**.

**Defence Chaplains - Navy** Ph: 07 4042 0245      **Army** Ph: 07 4045 9399

**Defence Legal Officer - HMAS CAIRNS** Ph: 07 4042 0434

## USEFUL WEBSITES

**Defence Community Organisation** [www.defence.gov.au/dco](http://www.defence.gov.au/dco)

**Defence Community Recreation Centre** [www.dcrc-cairns.com](http://www.dcrc-cairns.com)

**ADF Pay & Conditions Manual** [www.defence.gov.au/dpe/pac](http://www.defence.gov.au/dpe/pac)

**Defence Families Australia** [www.dfa.org.au](http://www.dfa.org.au)

**Defence Housing Authority** [www.dha.gov.au](http://www.dha.gov.au)

**ADF Financial Services** [www.adfconsumer.gov.au](http://www.adfconsumer.gov.au)



# Absence from Home Family Preparation Guide



## **DEFENCE COMMUNITY ORGANISATION (DCO)**

**VISION:** That the Defence Community is self reliant

**MISSION:** DCO is to establish the conditions upon which Defence Families and the Defence Community can achieve self reliance

### **DCO Cairns - Who are we and what do we do?**

The role of the DCO is to support ADF Members and their families address the unique challenges associated with a Defence lifestyle. Our services are free and confidential.

The DCO is under command of a central directorate (HQDCO) that provides the strategic and policy advice on the nature of support which should be provided to personnel and families. The DCO is structured into Area Teams staffed by professionals who are skilled in understanding the impact of military service on personnel and families. There is a DCO office located in close proximity to every major military establishment in Australia.

Staff at DCO Cairns include:

**Defence Social Workers** (DSW) are professionals who are knowledgeable about the Defence lifestyle and system. They can assist you to understand and address personal, family and work related issues. They also provide advice, assistance and professional reports to Command to assist them with decision making.

**Military Support Officer** (MSO) is a Navy member who provides support, advice and assistance to Defence personnel and their families. The MSO liaises with the Defence Social Workers, ADF Units and Commands.

**Family Liaison Officer** (FLO) provides information and support to the Defence family. The FLO can supply members and their families with a range of information, including community facilities and support groups, especially in relation to new postings or deployments.

**Regional Education Development Liaison Officer** (REDLO) communicates with Defence families and educational facilities to monitor Defence families' needs in relation to education. Whether families are moving intrastate, interstate or overseas, they can provide information about education in the new locality. They can also assist if there are education learning difficulties in the present location. The REDLO is based in Townsville but visits Cairns on a regular basis.

### **When to make a new Will**

Circumstances change and a Will needs to be kept up-to-date. You will need to make a new will in the event of: Marriage, Divorce, Cohabitation (living together), Births, & Deaths. Some of these affect the legality of a previous Will, others merely make it probable that your Will no longer provides for all those you want to provide for.

### **POWER OF ATTORNEY**

This is a legal document that allows you to name a person who can act on your behalf when you are not able to act yourself. For example, you may give a person the authority to execute documents in the name of the grantor, as if he or she actually signed the documents. Although it is a useful instrument which allows one to take care of the legal affairs of another during that person's absence, a power of attorney can also be a dangerous document, because actions done with its authority are legally binding on the absent party. There are two main types:

- **Limited**—the person named can only act on specified matters for a specified period of time.
- **General**—the person named can act on all matters for the period of time indicated.

## **CYCLONES**

Cairns is in the Tropical Cyclone Belt which means that during the Summer months (November - May) there is a likelihood of Cairns being hit by cyclones. Cyclones are severe tropical storms and are rated from mild to severe (1 - 5). Information booklets on cyclones and how to prepare for them are held at DCO or visit the Council Offices where you can pick up free cyclone and other community information brochures.

All Navy vessels are sailed from Cairns in the early warning stages of a Cyclone to escape the destructive winds and to be available to return to Cairns after the Cyclone for any necessary cleanup.

If you have never lived in a tropical area before it can be a highly anxious time when the first Cyclone warning of the year is issued. It is important be prepared, get to know your neighbours and have an emergency kit ready to go at all times.

## ***BUDGETING***

What about the family's finances? Will there be sufficient monies coming in to cover known expenses? What about the unexpected? These questions and others will be increasingly important when your partner is deployed. Careful planning goes a long way. Assumptions are often made that less will be spent while the partner is gone. Often spending increases. In effect, you may be supporting two separate 'households'. More may be spent on eating out, phone calls, child care, travel and repairs.

Start planning your finances before deployment. Take stock of expenditures; and discuss and evaluate the family budget. Also discuss who will pay what debts/payments, when each is due. The **ADF Financial Services Consumer Council** may be of some assistance. Check out their online Budget Planner and Pre-deployment Checklist [www.adfconsumer.gov.au](http://www.adfconsumer.gov.au)

## ***LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS***

The best advice concerning legal matters is to plan ahead and to catch small problems before they grow into large ones. A free legal advisory service is available to Defence personnel by appointment with the Navy Legal Officer at HMAS CAIRNS, where the drawing of non-complex Wills and Power of Attorney documents can be completed. Apart from making wills, these sessions are advisory only and are not for the purpose of conducting litigation, conveyance or other legal matters.



### **WILLS**

#### **Why you should have a Will?**

A will is a legal document that tells how you want your property (assets and other belongings called termed your estate), divided after your death. If you die intestate (ie without having a Will), the State will decide how to divide your property. This process may cause significant emotional and financial hardship for the surviving family members. It is extremely important to have a valid up-to-date Will.

### **DCO Cairns – How to contact us?**

You will find our office at: 3 Jensen Street Manoora  
Phone: **07 4053 9300** Fax: 07 4032 1340  
Email: [dco.cairns@defence.gov.au](mailto:dco.cairns@defence.gov.au)

Office hours are 8:30am to 5:00pm Monday to Friday

After Hours Emergencies: contact the National Welfare Coordination Centre (NWCC) **1800 801 026**

Requests for DCO assistance by Defence personnel should generally be made through the Member's Supervisor / Divisional Officer (Navy) on form – AC698.

Self-referrals are acceptable for Members and their family by appointment.

## ***DCO CAIRNS SERVICES, PROGRAMS and DEPLOYMENT SUPPORT***

- Defence Kids Program—5 weeks (Term 3)
- Thriving as a Defence Partner—5 weeks (Term 2)
- Pre deployment Briefings for ADF Personnel and Partners
- Deployment Support Guide
- Workshops for Parents of varying age groups
- Reunion Workshops for couples

### **DEFENCE KIDS PROGRAM**

This is a **fun, interactive, educational** and **supportive** program for primary school aged Children.

It provides tools for children to cope and adjust to family separations, disruptions and change. Topics include:

- understanding Defence parents' jobs;
- managing change;
- linking thoughts, feelings and behaviours;
- making and keeping friends; and building self-esteem

## **THRIVING AS A DEFENCE PARTNER**

This program focuses on the challenges of deployment. This program aims to help make deployment life a little easier for partners by:

- Looking at the positive and negative aspects of separation
- Developing survival strategies
- Maintaining healthy relationships
- Realising you are not alone and gaining a support network
- Sharing experiences

## ***CRISIS SUPPORT***

- Emergency financial assistance
- Special Accommodation for Emergencies (Domestic Crisis)
- Social work assessment for compassionate landings/returns

For more detailed information on what DCO can do to assist families during crises contact the DCO Social Worker.

## ***DEFENCE FAMILY SUPPORT GROUPS***

The following groups are available at the Defence Community and Recreation Centre (DCRC) which is located next door to DCO at 3 Jensen Street, Manoora, Ph: 40539305. The DCRC provides:

- Limited hours occasional childcare Monday & Thursday
- Extreme Tuesdays – craft classes and various training courses
- Play Group – Friday morning
- Community Newsletter - Tropic Topics

## ***ADF SUPPORT SERVICES***

### **CHAPLAINS**

The Chaplains are responsible for the spiritual and pastoral needs of Defence personnel and their families. The Chaplain is available to all personnel and their families for advice and support in many areas. He is also available for all sacramental needs: reconciliation, marriage preparation, and Baptism.

## ***PRE-DEPLOYMENT TIPS***

- Make out a long range budget together and include unforeseen expenses
- PMKEYS – ensure emergency contacts details are provided and accurate
- Wills and Power of Attorney, are they valid and up to date?
- Private documents - does someone in the family know how to access these if needed in your absence?
- Insurance - car, life, home - home building, home contents... when due?
- Is your partner aware of all debts?
- Car, washing machine, fridge repairs. Do those at home know how to fix these or arrange for their repair?
- Automobile Club membership – is it up to date?
- Email - how often are you going to write? Make sure your expectations of each other are realistic. Expect difficulties and delays.
- Telephone - Think about how often? Length of call? Will they ring first day of a port visit? Are you on the best plan?
- Relatives - do they expect contact? What kind? How often?
- Duplicate calendars - note special events, birthdays, school, sport or community activities. Keep each other updated.
- Children's discipline - establish rules, norms, duties, curfews etc in advance.
- Do you know your local DCO telephone numbers, contact names, and services offered?
- Emotions - recognise that everyone may feel different at the prospect of separation. Accept this and be prepared to talk about feelings.
- Support systems? - family, friends, church, school, co-workers. Form your own group!
- Regular outings for at-home partner - can you arrange a baby-sitter?
- A special family day out together - need not be expensive
- Contact with DCO Cairns - maybe a call to the MSO, FLO, Social Worker or Chaplain will help you to keep up-to-date with what's going on

## RE-ESTABLISHING INTIMACY AND SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

Intimacy means mentally getting together, as well as physically getting together. Letters/phone calls help maintain the 'mental side' while away and this is confirmed on coming home, but what about the 'physical side'? Sexual relationships need to be re-established. Things may not be exactly the same as when you left. Your fantasy and your partner's fantasy may be different. You must establish good **COMMUNICATION** and **TRUST**. This is an important part of good and satisfying sex.

### Roadblocks to satisfying sex:

- Jealousy (not talking honestly).
- Anxiety (about performance or other matters such as fidelity, weight gain/loss).
- Going too fast/too slow at the wrong time (not reading partner's 'cues').
- No 'courtship' (no romantic talk, no foreplay, no after play).
- Children in the house.
- Visitors/relatives around - make space and time for each other.
- Anger/resentment.
- Illness/fatigue.

### Tips for "Good" sex:

- Relish the process of getting back together - like it was the first time for you both again
- 'Tune in' to your partner. Practice makes perfect!
- Compliment and comment on any special arrangements your partner has made e.g. bedroom, dinner, dress, perfume/aftershave
- Don't expect too much the first time (must establish intimacy)
- It's normal to feel strange together after a separation. Have patience and respect. Reassure each other
- Tell each other your expectations. Talk about any issues. Give it time
- Do special things to 'set the mood'. Romance each other, and have fun!

## HOW TO PREPARE FOR DEPLOYMENTS

It is important that Defence personnel and their families who are approaching periods of separation (short or long), prepare both emotionally and practically for the experience. Adequate preparation will prevent at-home partners from feeling that they have to handle it all alone, and deployed members from worrying about all those things left undone.

Pre-deployment is the time to ensure that communication lines are open. Communication is an essential part of keeping any relationship alive. However when you are separated for so long by such a great distance, positive communication becomes a vital necessity and will reduce the possibility of awkwardness when you are reunited.

Set aside some time with your partner to discuss the deployment, how both of you feel, what you worry about, how to handle emergencies (such as illness of parent at home) or to fix problems, and what you think needs to be done around the house and yard for example.

### STAGES OF DEPLOYMENT

For those left at home, each stage of a deployment may be characterised by some fairly strong feelings and reactions. There are some activities that one needs to undertake either because they are necessary or because they help to alleviate or prepare for the separation. Emotions ranging from anxiety, resentment and abandonment, through to excitement, hope, satisfaction and relief may arise during the deployment cycle.

#### 1. Pre-Deployment

Anticipation of loss  
Emotional & practical preparations



#### 2. Deployment

Emotional confusion  
Adjustment to absence  
Increase in activities



#### 3. Expectation of Reunion

Nervous apprehension  
Excitement  
Planning homecoming activities



#### 4. Reunion

Honeymoon phase  
Readjustment  
Emotional rollercoaster  
Re-establish intimacy and roles



Individuals will vary in the kind and strength of their feelings. However, it is important to accept that separation is an emotive issue, and experiencing a variety of emotions during this time is completely normal. It is important to talk about these feelings with each other. Those personnel who are deploying also experience some or many similar feelings too.

### **Pre Deployment**

- Expectation of separation prior to deployment
- Feelings: excitement, denial, fear, anger, resentment, hurt
- Activities: financial planning, car repairs, home repairs
- Emotional withdrawal (shortly prior to deployment)
- Feelings: confusion, ambivalence, anger, pulling away, resentment
- Activities: talking, sharing, and planning reunion
- Reactions: coolness, arguments and disagreements are common

### **Deployment**

- Emotional Confusion (For a short time after departure)
- Feelings: sense of abandonment, loss, emptiness, pain, disorganisation and feeling overwhelmed
- Activities: being more busy than usual
- Reactions: crying, loss of sleep, loss of appetite
- Adjustment (most of deployment)
- Feelings: hope, confidence, calm, less anger, loneliness
- Activities: establishing routine, establishing communications, personal growth, and independence.

### **Expectation of Reunion (prior to homecoming).**

- Feelings: apprehension, excitement, high expectations, worries
- Activities: planning homecoming, cleaning, dieting, grooming

### **Reunion**

- Honeymoon (until first argument!)
- Feelings: euphoria, excitement, confusion

- A 'perfect' reunion with your child may not occur
- You may just want to relax, put your feet up and enjoy being at home whilst friends / partner / family may want to party with you and to make up for lost time or vice versa

### **Your friend's /partner/ family may notice in you:**

- You may have 'changed'
- You may be unused to the noise and confusion of family
- You may be unused to crowds/cities/children
- You may feel 'threatened' by your partner's new friends/support systems, or wonder how you fit into this group of friends or the family now.
- You may feel hurt if the children are slow to show affection.

### **Tips for those coming home:**

#### **TALK to each other and LISTEN.**

Remember previously unresolved problems may surface.

Support good things your friends/partner/family have done.

Be prepared to make some adjustments.

Go slowly when re-establishing your place with friends/family.

Curb any desire to take immediate control.

Go easy on stories about where you've been/what you've done (expect a little envy).

Expect your partner to be 'different' (e.g. more confident, independent).

Give each other a little space.

Expect that things that worked before might not work now.

#### **Extra Tips for those at home:**

Avoid scheduling too many things.

Go slow in making adjustments and be patient.

Remind home comers they're still needed and much loved

## ***RETURN AND REUNION***

### **COUPLES**

Change often accompanies separation. Reunion can sometimes be more stressful than separation. Knowing what to expect and how to deal with changes can make the return more enjoyable and less stressful.

During the deployment, both the absent partner and the at-home partner will almost certainly follow a new routine. New routines are usually accompanied by greater responsibility. As a result, both people will probably experience some form of personal growth. A period of adjustment to re-establish old patterns and to establish yet newer, better ones may be required after reunion. Bearing this in mind, don't expect or perhaps even want, to fall into "how it was" overnight.

Some hints listed below may be helpful in reuniting, and in re-establishing intimacy.

#### **For those coming home:**

Some things may have changed while you were gone:

- 'Roles' at home may have changed in order to manage normal chores
- Your expectations may be different to your partner's expectations - talk about them
- Face to face communication may be hard at first
- Sexual closeness may be awkward at first (see re-establishing intimacy)
- Partners may be more independent and have learned new coping skills - this doesn't mean you're less loved or less important
- Friends/partners may have new friends, job, support systems, social activities (see re-establishing intimacy)
- You may have changed in your outlook on life and your priorities - how do friends/family fit into this?
- Expect the possibility of a homecoming 'letdown' - things do not necessarily go to plan or expectation
- Children have grown and may be 'different' in many ways

- Activities: talking, re-establishing intimacy, and readjusting
- Readjustment (takes time to feel like a couple/family again)
- Feelings: discomfort, role confusion, satisfaction, happiness
- Activities: renegotiating relationships, redefining roles, settling in

Feelings and activities at each of these stages will be different for each of us and that is O.K.

### **LOVING AND LEAVING**

When your partner deploys, a piece of you goes too; but that's what you want, for part of you to be with them. You find that you too, keep them present with you. You may sleep with their picture on your bedside table, or you may leave a pair of their shoes by the front door.

When your partner leaves, you may go through a whole series of different emotions. A week or two before they leave you begin to "psych up" for their leaving, and you both get very busy thinking about details that need to be tended to before they go. You both may feel excited; maybe a little worried about how you will manage.

A few days before they leave you may begin to put distance between the two of you, building a few walls, maybe withdrawing from each other. You may become irritated with each other and you may even fight. This distancing reaches a peak about two to three days before they leave when you may both think your partner should be gone so that you can begin counting down to the reunion - which may seem an eternity away! This "distancing" is normal and helps you to cope with your partner going away ... for a while.

### **The Day of Departure**

Whatever you say to each other may seem awkward and not quite right, and afterwards when you reflect back on not seeing each other for a substantial period of time, you may wonder why you couldn't have had a more romantic, more 'right' goodbye. This is normal.

For the first day or so after they leave, you may feel like a robot, just going through the moves, almost as if you are in shock. You might just want to stay home. You may want no one around you. You may feel depressed and have no energy.

You may wonder if it was easy for them to leave you, especially if they seemed excited about going away. You may feel overwhelmed by all the responsibilities you are facing. You may get angry with your partner, with Defence, with the whole world! You will get over that too, and find you can handle the separation. You'll probably find yourself, within a few days or weeks, beginning to settle into a pattern. If you don't find some comfortable pattern and you continue to feel upset, call a friend and talk about it, or call your DCO or Chaplain and get some professional assistance to get you over the hurdle.

The new pattern of your life while your partner is gone may find you a little more subdued, and certainly lonely. Sleep may come a little more easily after the first few weeks of the separation, but probably not as easily as when they are home. If you find a routine that works whilst your partner is away, stay with it! That regularity is very comforting.

### **The Homecoming**

Shortly before they come home, you may begin planning for the homecoming. In addition there may be niggling worries:

- \* Will they have changed?
- \* Will they still love me?
- \* Will they approve of the changes in me?
- \* Will we be as close as we were before?

As the time gets nearer you will probably get more and more excited, may sleep less and less, and in your mind you may play over the various versions of the homecoming.

In the last few days you may seem to find yourself caught up in many different emotions. Whilst happy about your partner's return, you may also be apprehensive - your partner's return threatens your hard won independence. It is quite common and normal to feel this way.

The 'Big Day' arrives and you probably haven't slept well. Understand that your partner is also apprehensive about the homecoming. They may be a little unsure and wonder if you have learnt to do without them - that they're not needed, or wanted anymore. Keep this in mind as you face a deployment - the leaving and the returning are not easy, but they aren't forever. Neither the separation nor reunion is ever just like you imagined. Both have their drawbacks, but both have their rewards too!

- If there is something you want to discuss on the phone you may want to flag it first in an email.
- Be creative – may be chance to develop your romantic side!

**Letters** - There is nothing better than having a letter arrive in the post and be able to carry it with you so that you can read whenever you like. Revive the art and make your letters a memorable part of your communication to treasure.

Children especially love receiving postcards in the mail as it is an affirmation of how much they are thought about and loved. They also love sending their treasured artwork to the parent away.

**Care Packages** - Care packages can be like sending a little bit of home to your loved one. They can contain gifts, food items, toiletries, or anything that the member might want or need. Packages are often opened in front of others, so it is wise to safeguard privacy and not send anything that would embarrass you or your loved one in front of others.

For care packages it is best to use sturdy containers and to use caution sending perishable goods. Mail may be subject to quarantine inspection, which should be taken into consideration and will require a customs declaration signed and attached. Keep in mind that mail can take longer than expected. Free postage applies for all mail up to a cubed weight of 2kg to all Australian Forces Post Offices.

### **For Delivery to HMA Ship personnel:**

PMKeys number, Rank, Initials, Family Name

Name of HMA Ship

AFPO 10

AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCES NSW 2890 (or *PERTH WA 6958 for west coast based ship*)

### **For Delivery to Land based personnel:**

PMKeys number, Rank, Initials, Family Name

Name of Unit / Operation

AFPO (*insert number of AFPO*)

AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCES NSW 2890



**Phone Calls** – When you are separated and in a situation where telephone calls are limited in frequency and duration – be prepared with what you want to convey, even write a list:

- How many phone calls will you make and when? How long will you talk for? Are you on the best plans with the cheapest call rates?
- Are there any important issues that require clarification and can be dealt with in the time available, so that misunderstandings can be avoided and your partner is not left in a state of uncertainty.
- What does the other person need to know – is it something they can help with? If not- is it worth telling them?
- If you just need to “unload” – it might be best to do it with a friend, relative or member of DCO. While it may feel good to get things off your chest- remember your partner is a great distance away and can't see you, and know that all is well a few minutes later. Your partner may stress about your situation unnecessarily.
- Enjoy your calls and let your partner know how much you care.



**Email** – This is a great way of communicating when it is available to your partner, as the timing is not so critical. Some of the same rules apply:

- How often you will email. Discuss the email restrictions and potential difficulties.
- Although tone of voice is not relevant here, the tone and intent of your email is.
- If you are angry, or not sure what you have written is appropriate to send it – write it and wait 24 hours before sending. When you cool down you may find you may want to make a few alterations or erase it altogether. Just the writing out of how you feel may be all you needed.

## ***TIME MANAGEMENT AT HOME***

For many Defence partners, especially those with children, deployments are a special challenge. Time becomes a premium and the added responsibilities of work, ‘single parenting’ and taking care of the house can add extra stress.

For working partners, the deployment period may be a time to cut back on extra activities if it means more unwanted time away from family members. If the remaining parental carer is too busy or absent from the children too often, the children will sense loss at home - not only of the parent who is absent, but also of the one who continues to provide family stability and security. It is also good self-care to buy in some paid help in the way of gardeners, cleaners and respite childcare.

## ***STRESS MANAGEMENT AT HOME***

The added responsibilities faced by the at-home partner during deployment can be very stressful. Here are some hints on managing this:

- Take care of yourself too! Don't try to fix only family and friends.
- Get involved in things that make you happy.
- Avoid too much alcohol, caffeine, nicotine and excess food. Liquor and drugs reduce the perception of stress, but they don't really reduce stress.
- Be flexible; accept that you can't remain in control of everything all the time!
- Plan for stress. Set realistic and achievable goals that leave time for breaks and limit work.
- Learn how to praise yourself and accept praise.
- Keep a sense of humour with you at all times.
- Start thinking about what you really want out of life and begin to work toward those goals.
- Take a relaxation or health day every week!
- Avoid ‘turning in’ on yourself. Let people know what you want
- Learn how to express irritation and appreciation to others.
- Too much alcohol.

## ***CHILDREN AND DEPLOYMENT***

There are positive aspects of separation. It can be a time for personal growth and development, and foster maturity and independence. It can also prepare children for the separations and changes they will experience later in life. However, having one parent coming and going regularly can be difficult for some families. This is especially so if the separation is the first and/or if the children are young. The fact that negative reactions are not unusual, does not lessen the stress experienced by all concerned, or the difficulties encountered in managing them. Here are some practical ideas on what can be done in the deployment period.

### **ACTION PRIOR TO DEPLOYMENT**

- Make friends with the Defence. Families that can take pride in the members unit or ship are better able to accept the purpose for deployments
- Take your kids to visit the workplace or ship
- Be sure your child sees where 'Dad' or 'Mum' eats, sleeps and works. An eight to ten year old will appreciate knowing the workplace or ship is safe. Show him or her some of the safety equipment and describe the training everyone must practice in order to keep each other safe. Pre-teens and teenagers can learn a great deal seeing and hearing about the function of a ship and its sophisticated technology
- Talk to your children about the deployment before it happens. Communicate your thoughts and feelings about the separation
- Build an emotional bond. The deploying parent needs to spend quality time with each child before they leave
- Let children help the deploying parent to get ready to leave - even preschool children can help too!
- The deploying parent can give a special gift such as a jar of treats that can only be eaten once a week – also helps children understand how many weeks you will be gone.
- Swap some small token with your child, something that can be easily packed such as a drawing, an old cap, a little toy or stuffed animal
- The deploying parent could agree to send emails to the child's class telling them of their daily activities

## **CHILD CARE**

The increased responsibilities faced by the at-home parent at the time of deployment may necessitate the use of childcare services. The Family Liaison Officer at your local DCO can supply information on the whereabouts and contact numbers for childcare centres in your residential area.

Limited hours child care is available at the Defence Community Recreation Centre. The centre is licensed with relevant Government authorities and all staff are appropriately qualified.

## ***COMMUNICATION DURING DEPLOYMENT***

Deployments involves a separation period between the Defence member and his / her partner, friends and family. It is vital that plans to keep 'in touch' are made prior to deployment and that you try to keep to these plans. Communication during a separation period is essential as it boosts morale for both the Defence member and the family at home. Also, by keeping each other up to date on changes regarding finances, personal experiences, achievements, friendships, goals, etc the reunion process can become less awkward.

### **GENERAL INFORMATION**

Prior to deployment, make some decisions with your family and friends about communication. Decide in advance if there's bad news or problems, how much you want to share. Evaluate the impact of such news and the frustration of being so far away and unable to help. But don't try to keep all problems from each other. This may make them feel you aren't sharing or that they aren't important.

### **COMMUNICATION TIPS.**

Most of our communication is nonverbal: facial expressions, hand actions, body posture and touch. When we use the phone, email or letters, we need to be aware that we are communicating without these other means. Be careful to clarify jokes or other witticisms that may be ambiguous to the other person who is a long way away and may be anxious and preoccupied with your safety.

## **WHAT PARENTS CAN EXPECT OF THE CHILDREN**

Natural feelings of children upon a parent's return include: happiness, excitement, worry, fear, anger and guilt (e.g. for being 'bad' whilst parent away, not keeping promises, not writing, school performance etc).

**Babies** of one year old may not know you, cry, change habits, pull away, fuss, cling to partner, or ... help! ...all of these things.

**Toddlers** (1-3 years) may not be familiar with you, be clingy, have temper tantrums, regress, or cry.

**Preschoolers** (3-5 years) may be excited, angry, feel guilty, need time, be demanding, or 'act up' out to seek attention.

**School age** (5-12) may be excited, feel guilty, feel anxious about your return, or talk a lot.

**Teenagers** (13-18) may appear disinterested whether you are there or not, anxious about your welfare, even resentful about your absence. Teenage sons may have been the 'man of the house' and have some difficulties relinquishing this.

**Adult sons/daughters** may also have concerns, for example about responsibilities, or 'changes' in them or you.

Children of any age may feel guilty about not living up to standards/responsibilities. Some children fear their parent's return because of threats of discipline - "wait till daddy/mummy gets back". Some children feel torn by their loyalties to the partner who stayed home.

Throughout deployment, the family at home needs to work on talking about the deployed parent. Talk about fun things you've done in the past and what the parent might be doing whilst away. Talk about, and make lists of changes that have happened while they've been gone. Sometimes you or a child may feel sad and not want to talk about the deployed family member and that's O.K., but you should address the feelings and perhaps also share them upon reunion.

- Take pictures of the family. Focus on the deploying parent doing ordinary things around the house, such as washing the car, sitting in their favourite chair and cooking dinner. This is particularly important for preschoolers who have short visual memories
- Discuss the household chores at a family meeting so that everyone has a clear understanding of their responsibilities. This can prevent friction later
- Don't expect your children to fill the responsibilities of the deploying parent - i.e. don't tell your son that "he's the man of the house". It's hard enough for children to sort out their own feelings without having to struggle with the responsibilities of being a parent
- Children should be expected to assist with household chores. Even the youngest family member can help, for example helping clear the dinner table. Parents need to agree on what are reasonable chores for each child
- Help your children do better in school by making time, for example to visit their teacher. Often children of school age react to the deployment by misbehaving in the classroom or performing poorly in school work. A teacher who is aware of a situation is in a better position to be sensitive and encouraging

## **ACTION DURING DEPLOYMENT**

### **AT HOME PARENT**

- Continuity of routine and discipline is important to both you and the kids. Small children can feel deserted when a parent leaves. Maintaining 'normal' daily routine helps kids to feel secure, comfortable and that part of their life is predictable.
- Children usually test rules in the beginning, to find out how far they can go now that one parent is gone. "Wait till your father/mother gets home", makes a monster of dad/mum and a weakling of dad/mum. It also can add to a child's feeling of insecurity.
- Try to balance exciting trips and treats between the time the serving parent is at home and when they are not. That way neither period is all good or all bad in your child's mind.

- Some families include a special thought in the evening grace or bedtime prayers. This ties the child to their absent parent and all others in similar situations.
- Expect children to stay in touch with their absent parent. Keep a video camera/digital camera handy. Encourage your child to write, email, or dictate messages to be written often.
- Encourage your child to express his/her feelings about the parent going away. It is very important that the child knows it is all right to feel angry or sad and not to feel that such emotions must be kept hidden. Help your child to learn acceptable ways to express emotions, talk about them and cope with these feelings. Many children can find emotional release and satisfaction by exercising vigorously, writing in a diary, singing, playing a musical instrument, or listening to music.

#### **DEPLOYED PARENT**

- Creative communication is the absent parent's challenge. Keep in mind what events are happening back home and what the kids are doing. Is school in session? Has the family celebrated a holiday?
- Consider the age of your child. Teenagers may need to be urged to email. Emails written specifically to a teenage daughter or son may appeal to a teen's need for privacy, because the deployed parent and teenager share something "of their own"
- Postcards, books, photos of the ports you visit can stimulate interest in learning more about our world.

#### **HINTS FOR A SMOOTH DEPLOYMENT WITH CHILDREN**

- Hang a map of where the absent parent is going on the refrigerator or on a bulletin board. Use map pins or marking pens to identify the locations their parent will be in. This lets the children see where their parent has been and know that each day brings him/her closer to home again.
- Each child should be encouraged to email the deployed parent who should answer these emails individually.
- Presents are important but they don't have to be expensive. The deploying parent can buy or plan presents for birthdays and holidays in advance and attach special messages and leave them at home.

- Keep the deployed parent posted on family events such as sporting schedules, class plays, etc. In return the deployed parent can write about the daily routine, what an evening meal is like, who works where, how and what is served, and what a work day is like.
- Kids love getting gifts through the mail from other countries, especially if it's something you might not find here. T-shirts, postcards, coins, dolls, and souvenirs from various ports are items they can share at school with their friends and teachers.

#### **REUNION**

Make the homecoming special, but don't build the children's expectations up so much that there is no way the reality can match the anticipation. Like everyone else, the deployed parent needs to be remembered as a real person, not a fantastic figure that they can't live up to.

Nothing necessarily stays the same. Keep in mind that mum, dad, and the kids may have all changed. Changes are often good, but can cause discomfort. For example, the style of discipline can change from what the serving parent imagines or remembers before their departure. Parents need to take time to get to know each other again, both with and without the children, before making judgements about the changes.

Accept the fact that the absent parent cannot "make up" all the time they've missed with the family. Videos, photos, diaries, presents and school work help to minimise what they have missed. Recognise that there have been events that cannot be retrieved, then get on with building the emotional bond while they are in port.

Who gets the first hug? Sharing the deployed parent and the time spent with him/her upon returning home can become a problem if children feel shut out and/or if mum and dad are denied some privacy. Plan for this scenario before the absent parent gets home. If the kids are especially anxious for their attention, let them spend the first few hours at home with him/her as their audience. Adults are supposed to be better at waiting their 'turn' than are kids. Kids will eventually need a nap or a break for outdoor exercise.