

20 TIPS

FOR MILITARY DADS

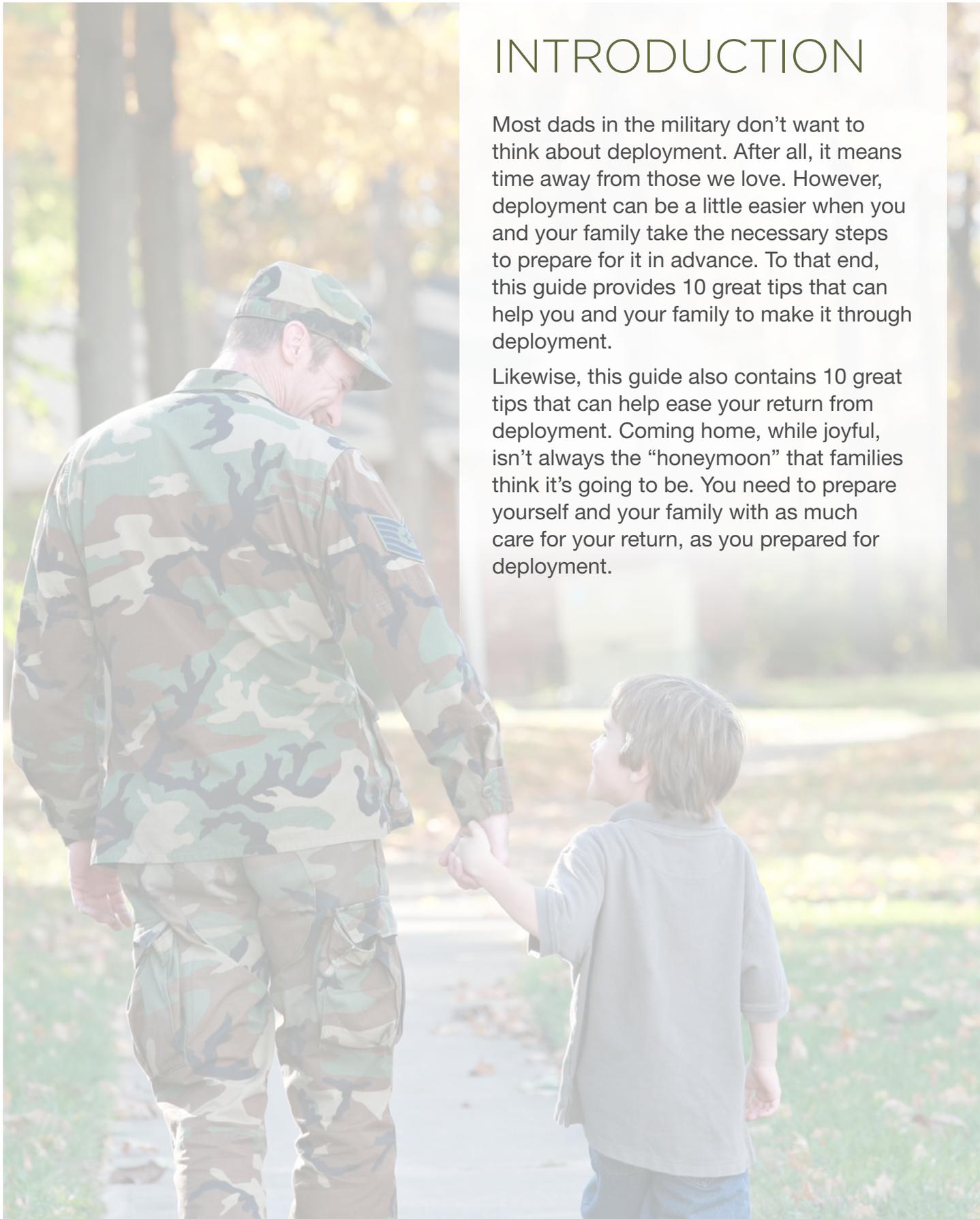
TO CONNECT WITH
THEIR CHILDREN
DURING DEPLOYMENT
AND RECONNECT
AFTER DEPLOYMENT

**National
Fatherhood
Initiative®**

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INTRODUCTION

Most dads in the military don't want to think about deployment. After all, it means time away from those we love. However, deployment can be a little easier when you and your family take the necessary steps to prepare for it in advance. To that end, this guide provides 10 great tips that can help you and your family to make it through deployment.

Likewise, this guide also contains 10 great tips that can help ease your return from deployment. Coming home, while joyful, isn't always the "honeymoon" that families think it's going to be. You need to prepare yourself and your family with as much care for your return, as you prepared for deployment.

Before and During Deployment



Create a Connection Plan

Before you leave, create a plan to stay connected and record it in writing or in electronic form. Involve Mom (or your children’s primary caregiver)* and your children if your children are old enough to provide input. Plan to connect through phone calls, letters, email, and video. You could also send video or audio messages to your children and Mom (e.g. mail files via a flash drive, email, or through your smartphone). For real-time communication, use video conferencing (e.g. Skype, Zoom, etc.) or an instant message service through your smartphone. Use what works best for you and your family, and use it often.



*If someone other than your children’s mother provides care for your children, such as a grandparent, consider that person whenever “Mom” is mentioned in this ebook.



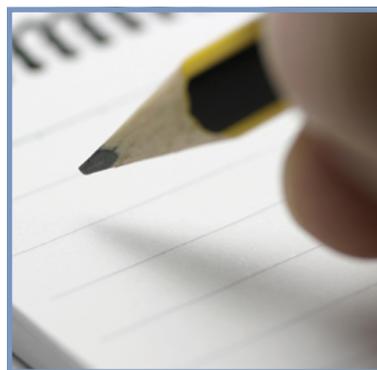
Put a “Message in a Bottle”

Before you leave, write as many short messages to your children as you can. Put them in a large jar, can, or box. Tell your children to pull out one message a day while you’re gone.



Create a Family Journal

Before you leave, create a Family Journal. Make a copy for you and copies for your children and for Mom. While you’re away, write in the journal (e.g. record your children’s milestones) and include items (e.g. photos) that will help you keep pace with what’s happening at home. Tell your children and Mom to write and include items in their journals. Then share the journals after you return home.





Record Helpful Contact Information

Before you leave, identify the contact information (e.g. phone numbers and email addresses) of friends, relatives, and businesses that can help Mom and your children—especially in a pinch. Think about the people and businesses that can provide what your family will miss while you're gone. If you handle most of the home repairs, for example, give Mom the contact information for a person or business that can help with repairs. Record the contact information so that Mom and your children will be able to locate it quickly or in an emergency (e.g. on their smartphones).



To help you record the most important information, go to the appendix at the end of this ebook. There you will find tables with information in areas (e.g. medical and financial) that will help you and Mom organize the most important information for her to have at her finger tips.



5. Get Your House in Order

Before you leave, take care of financial, medical, and legal needs. Create a Family Care Plan (FCP), offered by the military. It describes how your family will handle its financial, medical, and legal affairs during your deployment. Include how to handle an increase in income and other benefits that might result from your deployment.



6. Learn the Basics of Child Development

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Before and during deployment, learn about the physical, emotional, and social milestones as your children age, especially if you will be deployed for a long time. Armed with knowledge about how children develop, you will know what is appropriate for your children to be able to do at their respective ages. Get up to speed with National Fatherhood Initiative®'s *Help Me Grow* guides for infants, toddlers, and older children. If your installation doesn't provide these guides, tell Family Support Personnel to order them at www.fathersource.org.



TIP:

Order National Fatherhood Initiative®'s *Help Me Grow* guides to help you (and mom) better understand the basics of child development!
store.fatherhood.org/child-development-guides

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Prepare for Changes in Your Children

One of the hardest facts of deployment is not seeing the changes in your children. You might miss their first steps, words, birthday, ball game, or prom. One way to not miss out on these milestones is to follow the 1st and 3rd tips shared earlier so that the changes don't overwhelm you when you return. If you have access to the Internet while you're away, use National Fatherhood Initiative®'s free online "Countdown to Growing Up™" development tracker at www.fatherhood.org/countdowntogrowingup to track the progress of your children in hitting their milestones.



8

Talk with Your Children about Their Fears

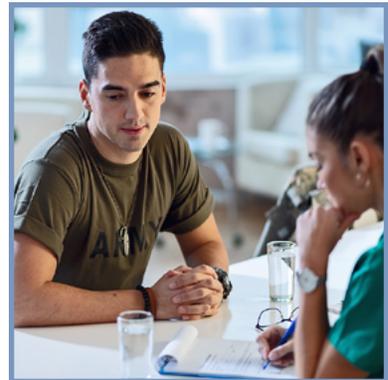
Deployment can scare and worry your children, not to mention you and Mom. Before and after you leave, allow your children to ask questions and express their fears. Don't minimize their fears. Calmly talk with your children about their fears and reassure them that you'll do everything you can to stay in touch. Remind them of your Connection Plan.



9

Get Help if You Need It

You and Mom are not islands unto yourselves. You or Mom might need emotional or spiritual guidance especially if either of you (or the children) has a crisis during your deployment. Look for groups, counselors, and spiritual leaders in your community or on your installation. If nothing else, call a friend or relative and ask for help.



10

Remember Your and Your Family's Sacrifice

Military families sacrifice a lot especially during deployment. Your family will give up personal time, family time, and a stable home life. Remind Mom and your children (and yourself) often about the meaning of this sacrifice, that all of you are in it together, and that it benefits all Americans.



Coming Home

1

Create a Reconnection Plan

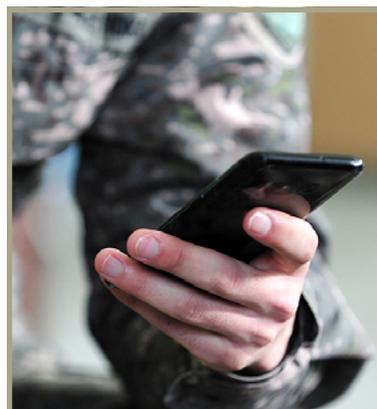
Prepare yourself and your family for your return. Before you reunite with your family, talk with Mom and your children about what will happen after you return. Share with them what you hope and expect to happen and ask them to do the same. Identify specific ways to reunite, and record them in a Reconnection Plan.



2

Talk with Mom

To better prepare yourself for your return, talk with Mom about the challenges that she and your children have had while you were gone. This knowledge will help you to more effectively reconnect with Mom and your children. Talk about what each member of your family went through while you were gone, and show that you care about what their lives have been like since your deployment.



3

Expect Things to Have Changed

Mom and your children will have changed while you were gone. If you were deployed for a long time, they might have changed a lot. Mom will have had to assume much of the role that you played at home. It will take time for your children to adjust to having two parents in the home again.

You will have changed as well. Before and after you return, be sure to reflect on your changes and how they will impact your family. To handle these changes, you, Mom, and your children might benefit from help from outside your family. Get help if you and your family need it.



4

Be Aware of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

You might have experienced traumatic events while deployed. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is not uncommon in veterans of war. Are you depressed, angry, hopeless, or restless? These feelings can be warning signs of PTSD. If you have any of these warning signs, don't try to work through them by yourself. Get immediate help from a doctor, counselor, or chaplain who knows how to help with PTSD. (Your family might also have had some trauma while you were gone, and they might show some of the same signs.)



5

Take it Slow and Easy

You or your family might feel the need to rush back into a “normal” life. But rushing back can cause more stress than it's worth. Take enough time to ease back into your role of father, especially when it comes to the everyday challenges of being a parent (e.g. disciplining your children). Ease back into your relationship with Mom as well.



6

Make Plans for Family Time

Plan a family trip or private time with Mom and each of your children. Ask what they want to do as a family and only with you, but don't try to pack in too much. Take this time to get to know each other again especially if you've been gone for a long time. Include these plans in your Reconnection Plan.





Close Out Your Family Care Plan (FCP)

Sit down with Mom and go through your FCP. Talk about how well you followed it, and identify the changes you need to make in the financial, medical, and legal parts of your family's life after deployment. Plan for reduced income or benefits from deployment that you might no longer have upon your return.



Attend Post-Deployment Events

Your unit, installation, or community will provide post-deployment events to celebrate your return and to help you reunite with your family. These events vary based on the unit, installation, and community. Check with your Family Support Personnel for information about these events.



Apply Lessons for Your Next Deployment

Record the lessons you learned while deployed. Identify what went well and didn't go well especially with your Connection and Reconnection Plans. Then identify what you will do differently upon your next deployment. Save this information in a location that is easy to remember.



10

Share Your Lessons with Other Fathers and Families

Share your lessons with other fathers and families especially if they've never dealt with a deployment. Offer to help another family create a Connection, Reconnection, or Family Care Plan.

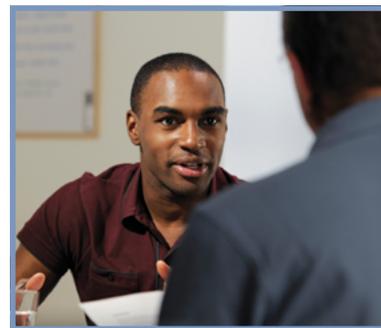


Bonus Tips for Reserve and National Guard Personnel



Talk with Your Employer

If you will leave a civilian job to deploy with your Reserve or National Guard unit, talk with your employer, before you leave, about what they can expect. Laws protect your job, but nothing can replace open communication with your employer about how they can adjust to fill your shoes while you're away. Talking with your employer before you deploy will ease your return to your job.



Attend Post-Deployment Events

The Reserve and National Guard offer Post-Deployment Events. These events—part of the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program—can help you and your family access military resources that can help reduce the stress that comes with deployment and post-deployment. They can also help you reconnect with fellow members of your unit.

For more information on the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program, visit www.yellowribbon.mil.



BANK/CREDIT UNION INFORMATION	
Checking, Savings, and Money Market Accounts	
• Number of Each Account	• Bank/Credit Union Name
• Address, Phone, and Email	
Certificates of Deposit (CDs)	
• CD Number	• Holder/Bank/Credit Union Name
• Maturity Length and Date	• What to do when CD matures (e.g. roll over into a new CD)
Safety Deposit Box	
• Number and Location	• Location of Key
• Contents	

INVESTMENTS AND RETIREMENT	
Retirement Accounts (401k/403b)	
• Number of Each Account	• Custodian/Holder/Company Name
• Address, Phone, and Email	
Individual Stocks, Bonds, and Mutual Funds	
• Number of Each Account	• Custodian/Holder/Company Name
• Address, Phone, and Email	

AUTO, LIFE, HOME, AND OTHER FINANCIAL INSURANCE
Policy Numbers
Location of Policy Papers
Expiration/Renewal Dates
Payment Schedule, Dates, and Method
• Monthly, Twice a Year, Once a Year
• Payment Date (e.g. 30th of every month)
• Check, Automatic Withdrawal/Debit
Carrier/Insurer/Company Name
Agent's Name, Phone Number, and Email

HEALTH, DENTAL, VISION, PRESCRIPTION, & OTHER HEALTH INSURANCE AND PLANS
Policy/Plan Numbers
Location of Policy Papers
Expiration/Renewal Dates
Location of Insurance Cards for Each Family Member
Payment Schedule, Dates, and Method
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly, Twice a Year, Once a Year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Payment Date (e.g. 30th of every month)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check, Automatic Withdrawal/Debit
Carrier/Insurer/Company Name
Agent’s Name, Phone Number, and Email

NAME, PHONE, EMAIL, & ADDRESS FOR PROVIDERS
Family Doctor
Children’s Doctor/Pediatrician
Area Hospitals and Clinics that Take Insurance
Pharmacy
Dentist and Orthodontist
Eye Doctor
Specialists Seen by Family Members for Health Issues

EMERGENCY CONTACTS
For Dad, Mom, and Kids
Poison Control

HEALTH RECORDS & ISSUES FOR EACH FAMILY MEMBER
Location of Shot and Other Health Records
Allergies to Food and Medicine
Blood Type
Regular Prescriptions/Pills Taken

HELPFUL PHONE NUMBERS	
Family	
• Personal and Work for Mom, Dad, and Kids, Personal, and Work	• Relatives
• Kids' school(s)	• Kids' coaches or sports teams/clubs
• Babysitter	• Takeout eating and delivery (e.g. pizza)
Work	
• Mom's, Dad's, Kids' Boss or Superior	• Base/Post Commander's Office
• Key Co-workers	
Emergency	
• Family Doctor	• Kids' Doctor
• Hospital/Clinic for emergencies	• Family Friend(s) to help in case of emergency
• Poison Control	• Pets' Vet
Auto and Home	
• Car Shop/Mechanic	• Tow Truck or Roadside Help
• Cable, Phone, and Internet Service	• Computer Service
• Garbage and Recycling	• Snow Removal
• Electrician	• A/C and Heating
• Plumber	• Natural Gas
• Water	• Appliance Service
• Security System	• Lawn Service
• Paper Delivery	

HELPFUL INFORMATION	
About Family Members	
• Dad's or Mom's Rank and Unit ID	• Birthdays and Anniversaries
• Social Security Numbers	• Relatives' Addresses
How to Deal with Problems Around or with the House	
• No Electricity, Water, Gas, A/C, or Heating	• No Cable, Phone, or Internet Service
• Plumbing or Septic Tank	• Check and Reset Circuit Breakers and Replace Fuses
• Shut off	
» Water to house or parts of it	
» Electricity to parts of the house and appliances	
» A/C and Heating	
» Sprinkler System	
Location of	
• Extra Keys to Car, House, Mailbox, Safety Deposit, etc.	• Security System Control Panel and Code
• Safety Deposit Box	• Safes and Fire Safes and Keys, Codes, or Combinations
• Circuit Breaker Box	• Sprinkler System Control Box
• Water Shut Off Valves	• A/C and Heating System
• Hot Water Heater	• Bank/Credit Union, Investment, Insurance, and Other Financial and Medical Documents
• Wills, Living Wills, Powers of Attorney, and Other Legal Documents	• Birth and Marriage Certificates, Social Security Cards, Passports, and Other Personal Documents
• Burial/Funeral Instructions	• Car Registrations
• Appliance Manuals/Instructions	