

EFMP & Me Podcast, Season 2, Episode 6: Preparing for Deployments

Transcript

- **[Jen Wong]** You've got an upcoming deployment, and you want to make sure that each person in your family is as ready as can be. Every deployment is different — so how can you best prepare? We'll talk about that and more in this podcast for families enrolled in EFMP.

I'm Jen Wong and today, we're talking about preparing for deployments.

- **[Jen Wong]** Hi, and welcome to the EFMP & Me Podcast series season two, brought to you by the Office of Special Needs and Military OneSource. I'm Jen Wong, Program Analyst with the Office of Special Needs and your host for today's episode. This podcast series highlights a variety of topics that can be further explored by visiting EFMP & Me on Military OneSource. EFMP & Me is a digital tool that provides valuable topics, resources and checklists related to the Exceptional Family Member Program. This is available to service members, families, service providers and leaders 24/7. In today's episode, we will be talking about preparing for deployment. And joining me today is Rose Anderson. Thank you for joining me today, Rose. Could you tell me a little bit more about yourself?

- **[Rose Anderson]** Hi, Jen. It's a pleasure to be here with you. Yes, of course — I'm a Program Analyst with the Office of Military Family Readiness Policy, Children, Youth and Families. I'm the deployment assistance program manager and the subject matter expert on deployment support. I'm also a spouse of a retired Air Force member. And again, I'm so excited to be here today.

- **[Jen Wong]** Rose, I really appreciate you being here for this discussion. Thank you so much. It's a pretty well-known fact that deployment is a part of military life, right?

- **[Rose Anderson]** Yes. Yes.

- **[Jen Wong]** So, something I learned in a previous conversation that you and I had is that each deployment can be different and how you prepare for each deployment may look a little different each time. And so now knowing that, I wanted to explore and expand on that and talk about all that goes into preparing for deployment and the importance of that pre-deployment phase for all military families, including military families with special needs.

- **[Rose Anderson]** Yes, Jen. Not only can each deployment look different every time, but deployment may affect each family member in different ways too.

- **[Jen Wong]** OK.

- **[Rose Anderson]** There is a range of different emotions involved. We recognize that all family structures are slightly different, that families' needs are diverse. And what works well for one family may not work for another family. Also, what works great for one deployment may not really work for the next deployment. You may need to do some tweaking. Only you know what

works best for your family. You understand the routines that definitely keep everyone in your family on track. There's an abundance of resources out there which is great because you get to choose what works best for you and your family.

- **[Jen Wong]** Rose, I think you just gave the best summary for today's conversation. You summarized it right there because you're right, we're going to share a ton of resources today. There's a lot out there. And so I want to say up front for our listeners, we hope that you sit back. Relax. Listen in. Don't feel obligated to take notes because all of these resources that Rose and I are going to discuss will be listed along with this podcast recording on Military OneSource. So with that being said, deployment is a very important topic so let's jump right in. And so Rose, you mentioned a deployment can be different each time and even for each family member, so can you speak a little more to how an upcoming deployment may impact everyone in the family a little bit differently?

- **[Rose Anderson]** Well, everyone may have different feelings and experience different emotions when it comes to an upcoming deployment. It's very important for everyone in the family to understand the phases of deployment, to manage expectations and really have those important conversations with everyone at the table, even your children, because everyone may react differently. Being prepared may help ease a lot of the stress involved with a deployment. And that's why planning ahead for deployment is so critical because it can help make sure everyone knows what to expect and where to go get support.

Planning ahead could help ease a service member's worries about leaving family members behind, and at the same time, help alleviate some of those concerns that family members and extended families may have. It's so good to talk about how roles may change and how family routines may shift a little bit during a deployment. It's also good to prepare a backup plan in case things don't really turn out like you originally expected. That way you'll know who to contact and where to go for help.

- **[Jen Wong]** That makes a lot of sense. And Rose, listening to you speak it makes me think I, I recall working with a family who happened to be enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program and they were preparing for an upcoming deployment. And now that I think about it, each family member really did have different concerns. And so for the service member, it was like you mentioned, it was the stress of worrying about family while also preparing for the mission. And this particular spouse was concerned with juggling her own health care needs and also the needs of her children doing it all solo. And I remember the older sibling felt worried about dad and the younger sibling, well, dad had expressed that he wasn't sure if the younger sibling really was grasping what was going on, and so dad was concerned if this was really going to hit this child pretty hard when it came time for dad to leave.

- **[Rose Anderson]** Yes. And that's why it's so important to pay attention to the children. Involve the children in the planning phase, help them get a better understanding of what's going on, what's going to happen, and get their suggestions and buy-in. Allow them to express their feelings and concerns and make sure they know it's OK to ask those questions. Give them the opportunity to ask those questions so they can be heard. So bottom line I would say, don't forget to involve the children in the planning.

- **[Jen Wong]** That's really critical and it sounds like preparation is intended for the whole family.

- **[Rose Anderson]** Right.

- **[Jen Wong]** And so let's get into what are some of the things that families can do to prepare in that pre-deployment phase?

- **[Rose Anderson]** Well, Jen, the pre-deployment phase can be so busy. It's a busy time.

- **[Jen Wong]** I bet.

- **[Rose Anderson]** Yes. It's the period leading up to the deployment. During this phase, it's important to get your legal affairs in order. Make sure to update or create essential legal documents like power of attorneys or wills. I would say your installation legal office should be able to provide free legal assistance when you start creating these documents. It's also good to create an emergency contact list. Make sure to include all your medical contacts, unit contacts, include contact information for immediate family, neighbors, local friends, child care providers, those are just some of the examples. And Jen, it's also a good time to spend some time to organize your finances. Make sure you create a list of what bills need to be paid, create a budget and set aside some funds for unexpected expenses.

I would say, consider visiting your installation Military and Family Support Center to connect with a financial counselor for this type of assistance. And don't forget, you can also contact counselors from Military OneSource for support with money management and debt.

Something else to do during the pre-deployment phase is to discuss how you will be staying in touch as a family. Communication during a deployment plays such a critical role in keeping your relationship strong. Discuss expectations about let's say how often you might be able to talk, what you're allowed to talk about, what methods of communication might be available to you. Just keep in mind that there may be times that due to the mission, you may not be able to connect.

- **[Jen Wong]** Right.

- **[Rose Anderson]** Yes. And one more thing, single and dual military parents, you are required to create a family care plan. This is to ensure continuity of care for your children. So you'll need to designate a primary and alternate caregiver. And I would say actually all families could benefit from creating a family care plan.

- **[Jen Wong]** You know what? You're right, Rose. I think all families could benefit from the family care plan.

- **[Rose Anderson]** And Jen, we've talked about each deployment being different. In some cases, I've seen spouses who choose to relocate closer to their family or support system while their spouse is deployed. Have you seen this with families with special needs?

- **[Jen Wong]** Speaking from my experience, I've seen a variety of scenarios. On one side, the family may choose to relocate closer to their support system, but then there are these added considerations. So reestablishing and accessing services and supports at that new location, things like medical care, special education services, community services, are they near a base? Are there financial concerns in moving? And so on. And then on the flip side, a family may choose to have an extended family member or friend move in and they'll act as that support or caregiver role. And there's even considerations in this scenario. How is that person going to access services? Will they also live on base if the family's on base? Will that person be able to drive family members to appointments and how will that person fit into the established everyday routine?

And so, some of these things I think are considerations for all military families, but they may be more complex for a military family with special needs. And so, I think it's important for families to know that they can reach out to their EFMP Family Support Provider for support. You can do what's called a family needs assessment, and you'll work alongside your Family Support Provider and come up with a service plan. And what that service plan does is it explores what works for your family in your particular circumstances in that moment.

- **[Rose Anderson]** Jen, I'm glad you mentioned that because along with going through these steps as a family to plan for the deployment, it's important to identify your network of support prior to the deployment. So, let me tell you about the Military Family Readiness System. This is a system that maximizes access to a network of support services. It enhances military family readiness and resilience and promotes family well-being. The Military Family Readiness System is essentially this big network that consists of programs and services that are provided by the Department of Defense and other federal, state and community based agencies and organizations. So, there is this whole system out there to support you. It's all in support of the military community.

- **[Jen Wong]** Rose, and that's what I love is that, the military community is just that. It's a community. It's clearly evident from this podcast series because the topic of community or networks of support, it consistently comes up in these conversations regardless of what the topic is or how it relates to MilLife. It really comes back to community and support.

- **[Rose Anderson]** Exactly. So the key is really knowing how to tap into this network. Just knowing how to leverage the resources within that entire military family readiness system to meet you where you are. Family's needs will change from deployment to deployment like we talked about. So knowing how to get support from both your informal and formal networks will help families build confidence in their ability to prepare, adapt and even overcome challenges. I would say your nearest installation Military and Family Support Center and Reserve Component Family Program can connect you with these support services. Reach out to your, say deployment support providers, your financial counselors, you mentioned the EFMP Family Support Providers. These are just a few.

The professionals at the Military and Family Support Centers can also provide referrals. They can provide these referrals to other programs and services that are part of this bigger Military Family Readiness System I just mentioned. So for example, they may refer you to those service-specific family readiness groups, or local community support groups that are out there.

- **[Jen Wong]** Absolutely. Absolutely, Rose. I completely agree with you and I appreciate you bringing up the Military and Family Support Centers. They're near and dear to my heart. I used to work at several of them.

- **[Rose Anderson]** Me too.

- **[Jen Wong]** It's absolutely a huge resource to military families. And so I would even suggest military families with special needs, when you contact that Military and Family Support Center, make sure you update your family contact info with the folks at the center, like the EFMP Family Support Provider so that way you can keep that line of communication open during the deployment. And like you mentioned Rose, ask the professionals for those referrals to community groups, both on and off the installation. So you can really build and tap into that informal network of support. And lastly, while we're thinking of these people out there who can offer support, remember that there are those people who might be virtual or just a phone call

away. Military OneSource has a variety of specialty consultants. They're available 24/7. There's EFMP ROC Special Needs Consultants. There's deployment consultants. You name it.

- **[Rose Anderson]** I'm so glad you brought up Military OneSource. There is this great deployment self-help tool on Military OneSource and it's called Plan My Deployment.

- **[Jen Wong]** Right.

- **[Rose Anderson]** This tool can help you get prepared, stay connected, stay organized and well informed about resources throughout the deployment cycle. The Plan My Deployment tool is organized by the phases of deployment. So from pre-deployment, deployment, and reunion and reintegration. It's very easy to navigate. Service members, family members, and loved ones, they can find printable task checklists, helpful tips, and lots of articles with resources. I would say, think of Plan My Deployment tool as your deployment how-to-guide.

Another very useful resource on Military OneSource is MilitaryINSTALLATIONS. If you are looking to find installation-specific information, contact for programs and services or community information for installations worldwide, this would be the place for you to start.

- **[Jen Wong]** That's great. I agree. There's so much on Military OneSource, there really is. And I would recommend even two more resources specifically for military families with special needs. And they're both available on Military OneSource as well. There's the EFMP & Me. And so EFMP & Me has checklists with suggestions of things to consider and where to go for more information, lots of ideas, lots of resources. And specifically I'd recommend there's a checklist on EFMP & Me called Preparing for Deployment. And there's also a checklist on EFMP & Me about discussing deployment with your child. And we talked earlier about how it's so important to keep the children involved.

- **[Rose Anderson]** Yes.

- **[Jen Wong]** There's even a checklist for that discussion. And another organizational resource I'd recommend is the SCOR and that stands for Special Care Organization Record. And if you've been around EFMP for a while like I have, you'll recognize this is the yellow binder, right? And families can actually download a packet of all those fillable forms that are inside that binder. And those forms help track the records for your family member with special needs, whether their medical or educational or care records, or like you mentioned earlier, emergency contact info, all of that, you name it. And we had recently updated the SCORs with current information and customized to different family members. So, you'll see there is a SCOR for children with special needs. And one for young adults with special needs, one for adults with special needs and one for elder care. And so there's one for everyone and they're customizable. So you can customize a set of pages to keep all that important information organized in one place.

- **[Rose Anderson]** That sounds very helpful. And again, these are just a couple of the many more free resources on Military OneSource.

- **[Jen Wong]** Absolutely. Absolutely. You're right. Because so far we've already covered a lot of helpful information.

- **[Rose Anderson]** Yes.

- **[Jen Wong]** A lot of helpful information that's going to help families to effectively navigate the pre-deployment phase. But let's say a family has gone through all the preplanning. They know

their network of support. They know where the resources are. The service member has now deployed and now they're in the mix of the deployment. Rose, what happens next?

- **[Rose Anderson]** Well, this is when you get to put your plan into action, right? So you definitely have to keep an open mind because no plan is ever perfect. Here are some things you can think of, you can do. I would say first, manage expectations because deployments are fluid. They can shift. There may be bumps in the road. So be prepared to make some adjustments, some slight tweaks to your plan and that's OK, but you definitely have to stay positive and be patient. Make sure to check with your children. We talked about children earlier. They may be feeling stressed, too. So each child may react differently during the deployment depending on their age and previous experience with separation.

Something else, I would say, don't forget to practice self-care. Find ways to relieve your stress, tensions or fears in a productive manner. One way would be to relax with these wellness apps, like the Military OneSource Chill Drills and other stress-relief tools. And something that I've done while my husband was deployed was making sure I scheduled "me time."

- **[Jen Wong]** Absolutely.

- **[Rose Anderson]** Yes. And find some time to exercise and do some little pampering from time to time. I would say, consider signing up with a Military OneSource health and wellness coach to keep you motivated, because that's important. You have to stay motivated. And finally, I would say, stay connected with your service member. Encourage communication and find new and different ways to tell them how important they are to you and making sure they know that you're OK. And that you're definitely waiting patiently for them to return.

- **[Jen Wong]** Absolutely. Those are all really great tips, Rose. And we mentioned how the military community is such a community and how networks of support are a common theme across MilLife. So I'll say it again, stay connected to your networks of support — your friends, your neighbors, the family who care about you and want to help. Ask for help and don't be afraid to be specific. And I say this because Rose, what do you think is the most common response when somebody comes up to you and says, "Hey, how can I help?"

- **[Rose Anderson]** Oh, I don't need anything. I'm fine. Right?

- **[Jen Wong]** Absolutely. Right. Everyone wants to offer help, but then no, everything's fine.

- **[Rose Anderson]** Correct.

- **[Jen Wong]** But like you said, we know that even with planning in the pre-deployment phase, situations change, needs can change, maybe regularly scheduled appointments get rescheduled to a different time now or the frequency of appointments increase. So now you need to reach out for help with rides or child care or what have you, or maybe there's a change in academics or behavior for your child and it's time to reach out to that IEP team to really best support this child in the academic environment. Change happens and that's OK, and so I guess what I'm trying to say is, don't hesitate to be specific and to ask for that help.

- **[Rose Anderson]** Exactly. Help is available in many different forms. Jen, can I take a couple of minutes just to recap some of the deployment support resources you can reach out to?

- **[Jen Wong]** Absolutely. Very important. Please do.

- **[Rose Anderson]** OK. So, if you don't know where to start, you can start with your nearest Installation Military and Family Support Center and Reserve Component Family Program. These

are great resources to get you connected with deployment support services. And I know Jen, you mentioned it a couple of times, your installation EFMP Family Support Providers, they can help you find information about family support groups in the local area. And they can also tell you about events for deployed families. And let's not forget about installation school liaisons. This is another great resources for parents with school-aged children, right?

- **[Jen Wong]** Absolutely.

- **[Rose Anderson]** And it's so important to seek support from your informal networks — your family readiness groups, your chaplains, your teachers, your friends, your neighbors, there's a host of folks that make up your informal network. And if you're looking for some help getting yourself or your children through certain unique challenges that you're experiencing, or perhaps you're looking for some coping skills or maybe building some new life skills, you may want to look into the Military and Family Life Counseling Program and the Child and Youth Behavioral Military and Family Life Counselors. These are non-medical counselors that are located at your local installation and they can provide support. Jen, one last one, OK? I promise.

- **[Jen Wong]** OK.

- **[Rose Anderson]** There's also the Military OneSource confidential peer to peer specialty consultants. Sometimes it's easier to talk to someone who's going through what you're going through. They experience what you're experiencing. With these peer to peer consultations that's exactly what you'll get.

- **[Jen Wong]** That makes a lot of sense. Those are really important resources and so important to really keep in your back pocket.

- **[Rose Anderson]** Yes. Exactly. Exactly. Jen, from my experience working with families going through deployment, I've seen firsthand how planning and being prepared helped ease the stressors associated with all the phases of the deployment cycle. So from pre-deployment, deployment, and reunion and reintegration.

- **[Jen Wong]** Rose, this conversation has been so helpful, a lot of great info, a lot of great key takeaways and resources about how to really reach out for support, know your resources and be organized in that pre-deployment phase. It's really encouraging to hear how military families, including military families with special needs, are surrounded by such a community of support, an abundance of resources, so much out there to help, no matter what phase of deployment they're in like you mentioned. I want to thank you again for sharing all of your knowledge and your expertise. You are so helpful. This is a very important conversation to our military families out there.

- **[Rose Anderson]** Thank you, Jen. Yes. Very important conversation. And it was such a pleasure to talk with you today.

- **[Jen Wong]** Absolutely. And I also want to thank our listeners. Rose and I hope that the information shared today will help you or help a family you know access the available supports and incorporate them into your pre-deployment planning. Don't forget to visit EFMP & Me. There's those helpful checklists and additional resources. And we want to thank you for listening today.

- **[Jen Wong]** You've been listening to a podcast for families enrolled in EFMP brought to you by the Office of Special Needs and Military OneSource. If you haven't already, check out our other

episodes with lots of useful information for families enrolled in EFMP. I'm Jen Wong. Thanks for listening.