

## **TEEN FACILITATOR'S GUIDE**

### **YOUTH COPING WITH MILITARY DEPLOYMENT: "PROMOTING RESILIENCE IN YOUR FAMILY"**

Congratulations. You have in your hands a communication tool to help teens deal with reunion issues after family separation. This video has been developed by a group of concerned military professionals and family members who have a passion for helping families deal with separation and reintegration stress. While there are plenty of educational tools available for adults, there are few made specifically for our teen family members. It is our collective dream that you, as a family member, family care provider, or simply a concerned community member, will be able to use this child-friendly format to help our teens deal with issues related to family reunions after long deployments. It is made up of video interviews of teens talking to other teens about their experience.

The interviewer's questions and narrator's script were carefully constructed to be sure the content addressed real teen issues commonly experienced while undergoing separation from close family members (see narrator script). Participants weren't professional actors but just regular teens attending an operation purple camp for teens currently experiencing a deployment separation. This video of their answers to deployment-related questions provides an educational tool that can be used to engage children, their families, and community support personnel that serves to educate all on the deployment cycle in a format that would allow them to speak out and address worries, fears, and concerns surrounding impending or actual separation from loved ones (parents, grandparents, sisters, brothers, guardians, etc.). It can be used pre, during, or post deployment to stimulate discussion and promote healthy coping behaviors.

Whether you are using this video in your home, or as part of a community reintegration program sponsored by a family care provider or military readiness group, we suggest that you follow these guidelines:

1. Review the video before using it. It was developed and funded with a grant from the American Academy of Pediatrics. The discussion includes references to possible injury and responses to news events. Be prepared to address further discussion about your group's concerns for safety and welfare of their deployed family member. It is important to know your community resources (doctors, counselors, chaplains) and how they can be accessed before viewing this video with your teens.
2. Assess your group, their environment, and the phase of deployment they are currently in (see the "Deployment Cycle" handout). This may influence which section(s) of the video you decide to emphasize or discuss in more detail at this time. The video was developed to be used ideally during the sustainment phase of deployment, just before redeployment, but can be used at any time (see attached handout on deployment phases). It addresses reunion issues of children 12 to 18 years of age and discussed in small or large groups, together with family, friends, teachers, clergy, and/or military family readiness support units.

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3. The DVD can be viewed from beginning to end with follow-up discussion at a later date and time, or by pausing as needed after each of the seven sections (see Adolescent Video Screenplay) to interject additional information, allowing for questions and discussion pertinent to the viewing audience. Cameron, the teen narrator, summarizes each section prior to the interviews. If staff resources and time permit, consider breaking up into small groups and asking questions, eliciting personal reactions to what they have just seen. In this way, you may identify children with more serious personal issues who might benefit from additional help dealing with separation and/or reintegration problems.
4. Example discussion questions have been provided for each of the seven sections to assist you in facilitating meaningful discussion. By all means, rephrase the questions to suit your group's situation and add others, as appropriate.
5. Knowing the point-of-contacts (POCs) in your community; chaplains, teachers, doctors, social workers, unit and school counselors, who you could refer the child and family to, would be very helpful. If possible, have a community sign-up book for visits with your medical, school, and spiritual providers. At the conclusion of the video and discussion, bring it out and let people sign up for an evaluation. As an alternative, have a contact list of those who would be willing to talk to teens individually about their concerns. Remind the attendees to look at websites and other handouts contained on the video.
6. Thank everyone for coming!

Additional information and handouts are provided on the DVD when viewed as a CD on your computer. Contact numbers for the originators of the script and video are provided below for any questions you may have. You may want to contact them and discuss how to market and utilize the video intervention tool in your community either by using the DVD or by conducting 'live' teen interviews yourself. Enclosures with this guide provide information on the deployment cycle phases, depression signs and symptoms, and reference materials organized by age group.

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## SECTION CONTENT/ CONCEPT & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**INTRODUCTION :** Pictures of deployments, families and active duty troops. Key statements come at a rapid pace that will be seen again in the full interviews to follow.

### **SECTION 1 – Deployment Concerns**

Family relationships are strained by deployments. While adults are often able to handle the changes and make necessary adaptations, our teens may have a much more difficult time dealing with them without outside help. They are certainly aware that things are different; that their world has changed (or is changing), but not always sure why, or if they are alone in feeling the way they do. Since the normal cycle of deployment finds loved ones pushing each other away to make the separation easier to handle, our teens may harbor feelings that they alone were the cause of negative interactions just before the deployment, certainly not the case. The Operation Purple attendees discuss how they felt/feel about the deployment from their family member (FM). This section deals with the questioning phase and healthy ways families can anticipate and begin to deal with separation.

### **SECTION 2 – Difficulties With Deployment**

Ask questions dealing with how the teens felt/are feeling about the deployment of their FM. How did they handle it before the separation and how are they handling it now? This would be a good time to go over the normal reactions of people going through the early phase of separation/deployment, if it hasn't been discussed before (See Enclosure A - Deployment Cycles).

#### **Example questions:**

1. Has it been the same for you? How has your life (how have you) changed?
2. How has it been different (or the same) for you than for these kids?
3. What are you feeling? Why do you think you feel the way you do?
4. What things did you do getting ready for your dad or mom to go? What have you done since they left? How has your routine changed?
5. Did anybody have fights and get angry with anyone before they left?
6. Anyone have a situation like Tyler, with homework?

### **SECTION 3 - Worry**

While many teens have been separated from their FM before for military duties, each time is different, especially if the current deployment includes combat with its inherent danger for real injury, or even death. People tend to avoid talking about these fears, but especially if injury is a real possibility, they need to be discussed openly and honestly. Children need to be reminded that it's normal to worry, but also that the vast majority of our FMs do return home safely. After all, we are the best military in the world and we watch out for each other. Recognize the fears, but don't dwell on them and become paralyzed and dysfunctional. The best way to avoid problems is to simply talk out the negative feelings with someone the teen trusts.

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### **Example questions:**

1. Do you worry about the same things as these kids? Does it make a difference where they are?
2. How do you deal with your fears? Why do you think you feel the way you do?
3. Does your FM have a way of letting you know how safe they are?
4. Does your worry change routine? How do you cope?
5. How is your at home parent handling their fears? How do you support them?
6. Is your worry a daily event? Do you have good and bad days?

### **SECTION 4 – Watching the News**

Most kids find that watching news coverage of the war can be upsetting, as only the negative parts seem to be shown. Positive stories rarely make the news. It usually best to look for the positive in what's being shown, and key on what the deployed FM is relaying back home. The at home parent often takes on the role of monitoring news reports and informs the children as needed.

### **Example questions:**

1. Do you watch the news on TV; listen to the radio?
2. Which media do you believe? Who can you believe?
3. How does your family (plan to) handle the media information?

### **SECTION 5 – Coping**

Coping is what we do to feel better when we feel bad or don't understand our feelings. There are as many different ways to cope as there are people. Some coping mechanisms are healthy and helpful, and others only make things worse. It's important to learn healthy ways to cope. Staying angry definitely doesn't help. Doing activities outside the home and taking up new hobbies relieve the stress well. Just hanging out with friends can be a good coping method. One of the best is to talk to others, especially someone else whose family member is deployed.

### **Example questions:**

1. How are coping?
2. Is communication with the deployed FM a good thing to do?
3. Who do you talk to? How do you communicate with them?
4. Do you plan for the future or just live for today?
5. Is it good to keep just a few friends, or make new ones during deployment?

### **SECTION 6 – Support**

Teens need to remember that they are not alone during the deployment experience and that it's ok to let a trusted adult know when they're feeling bad. The military community is very concerned about family members and is anxious to be of service, if only asked. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness, but of strength.

### **Example questions:**

1. How has your school helped you out?
2. Have you found a chaplain helpful? A doctor?

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3. Do you get help as a family, or individually?
4. How did you find someone to talk to? How often should a person talk it out? Is it easy for you to talk about it?
5. How can you support someone else? Is it possible to help someone too much?
6. How can you best support your at home parent?

### **SECTION 7– Personal Growth**

Things change once the FM leaves, but not all change is bad. When we're tested, it's surprising how much we can learn and do on our own. Everyone handles less supervision differently. Some like it, while others don't. Most times the teen becomes a second parent out of necessity. The extra responsibility often leads to more independence, like getting the car keys, which can be a good thing.

#### **Example questions:**

1. Who's been "in charge" (the disciplinarian) in your house, usually? How about during this time? Who will be "in charge" when mom or dad gets home again?
2. Has anyone had to take care of a younger brother or sister during the deployment? Has your relationship changed with them – is it better or worse?
3. Has anyone been living in a different place during the separation?
4. Have you been able to "get away with" things during this time you couldn't before? Will that stay the same, do you think?
5. Will things go back to the way they were before at your house when they return?
6. How has your mom or dad at home handled the situation? (How are they doing?)

### **SECTION 8 – Wrap-Up**

Hopefully, the teens saw at least a couple kids who were dealing with the deployment the same as they are and have learned some new ways to cope. Everyone handles the deployment experience differently. It's a difficult time for everyone, though. If the feelings a person is having don't feel "normal," they should get help and think positively.

#### **Example wrap-up questions:**

1. So how is your family doing? How are you doing?
2. How do you know if someone has clinical depression? Would you recognize if a friend was suicidal? How about a returning parent?
3. What's the "honeymoon period?"
4. What are your expectations for how it'll be when they get back?
5. Should you all take "block leave?"
6. How will you balance time alone and/or together when they get back?
7. Have things changed around your house? Remained the same? What things will go back to the way it was before? What things do you want to stay changed?
8. Were there any things causing problems before mom or dad left that you'll want to talk about when they get back?
9. What's the first thing you're going to do with them when they get back?
10. How long do you think it'll be before things get "back to normal" for you? Will there be a re-shifting of authority at your house?
11. How have you matured? Will you regress for a time and just "be a kid again?"