How do the Stages of Deployment Impact Family Dynamics Based on the New Deployment Paradigm?

A Master’s Project

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By:

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Abstract

In this society heroes are often regarded as people who sacrifice everything for the greater good. They are viewed as strong, impermeable, flawless human beings who have transcended the greed and maladjustment that plagues the rest of humankind. Their families are proud pillars, lifting them with support and love. Yet beneath this impenetrable picture are many men and women with concerns: children with bad grades, unhappy spouses, stress, and financial problems; human beings who have mental health needs that are not being met. This paper will help civilian mental health professionals better appreciate the significant clinical differences between the military and nonmilitary cultures to more effectively serve the unique needs of the military population.
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How do the Stages of Deployment Impact Family Dynamics Based on the New Deployment Paradigm?

**Problem Statement**

Approximately one third of the United States population has been directly affected by the deployment of a family member serving in the military (Rotter & Boveja, 1999; Darwin, 2009). These estimates do not include the many service members who are deployed with babies still in utero (Darwin, 2009; Haas & Pazdernik, 2007). “As the number of military personnel, active and veteran, increase in the United States, there is a growing need for mental health providers in and outside the military” (Laser & Stephens, 2011, p. 29). Many advances have been made in regard to the treatment and attention that returning service members are offered after their deployment. Special attention has been given to returning service members suffering from combat stress, including stress associated with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). However, more attention must be paid to the effects that a service member’s deployment has on his or her family.

“Reintegration into a family for a service member, who has been living in a warzone for 12 months or more, is a new paradigm for U.S. families, and there is little guidance on the unique needs of these families” (Flake, Davis, Johnson, & Middleton, 2009, p. 272). Flake et al. (2009) recognized the need to learn and understand the effects that a service member’s deployment has on his or her family in addition to understanding the effects of combat stress on the service member. Despite this, military children and families have gone largely neglected by mainstream psychologists. “Most studies are done by researchers who are present or former members of the military or immediate members of military families. Studies are too rarely published in the mainstream psychology journals” (Park, 2011, p. 65).
There are programs that are designed to help military service members and their families cope with the stress of military life and deployment. However, their effectiveness is still unknown as they remain isolated from the civilian populace and may not be understood by civilian mental health professionals. More needs be done to bring the needs of military children and families into mainstream psychology so that the helping professions can truly support the military.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine each of the stages of deployment and the impact each stage has on the military family. To do this the paper will first describe each stage of the deployment cycle and the unique stressors that each stage may introduce to the family setting. Specific family roles will be assessed to help anticipate the reactions they may have to these stressors based on their age and position within the family. Finally, this paper will examine the programs currently in the employ of the military and the level of support that these programs are able to provide to military families.

**Rationale**

With each deployment cycle military families experience long periods of separation and multiple changes to both the family dynamics and the family system (Laser & Stephens, 2011). There is research available regarding parental and spousal separation through several contexts: death of a parent or spouse, divorce, and incarceration are a few of the more highly researched areas. While these instances of parental or spousal absences may be related to a parental or spousal separation caused by military deployment, the current research on these topics cannot merely be lifted from their intended contexts and applied to a military family.
Additionally, there is research regarding what the deployment cycle means for the deployed military member including the increased risk for PTSD. Military families whose service member is suffering from the effects of PTSD may need extra support and help with the reintegration process as the military service member returns home from a combat zone. However, not every service member who has been deployed has suffered from PTSD and the military families who are not suffering from the effects of PTSD may still find that they need extra help and support through the deployment process.

While other separations also cause changes to the family system, none can duplicate the cycle of military deployment because none contain the sense of ambiguous loss or the serialization of changes to the family dynamics.

The United States military has changed several times since its inception. Since the Vietnam War the military has transformed from a draft system to an all-voluntary force (Laser & Stephens, 2011; Esposito-Smythers, Lemmon, Wolff, Bodzy, Swenson, & Spirito, 2011; Rotter & Boveja, 1999; Sheppard, Malatras, & Israel, 2010; Jensen, Martin, & Watanabe, 1996). With this transformation the service members who make up the military have also transformed. Today more than half of military service members have families (Laser & Stephens, 2011; DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Riggs & Riggs, 2011; Lincoln, Swift, & Shorteno-Fraser, 2008; Huebner, Mancini, Wade, McElhaney, Wiles, Butler, & Ford, 2010; Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011). Therefore, more spouses and parents are being ordered to leave their families to prepare for, and serve in, combat than ever in the past.

The military again changed dramatically since the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in September of 2001 (Lincoln, Swift, & Shorteno-Fraser, 2008; DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Huebner, Mancini, Wilcox, Grass, & Grass, 2007; Lowe, Adams, Browne, & Hinkle, 2012;
Cernichky, 2010). Today’s deployments are longer and more frequent than ever before (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011; Chandra, Lara-Cinisomo, Jaycox, Tanielian, Burns, Ruder, & Han, 2009). This is despite news and media reports that military branches are seeking to decrease the amount of time that a service member is deployed.

Mental health professionals who work with military families and military dependents have a responsibility to learn about and understand how each stage of deployment can impact a family and the changes that occur within the family system. Understanding these effects may help mental health professionals to support family members during a deployment cycle. New systems of support can be developed and offered to these families.

**Significance of the Study**

The United States government has conducted several studies on the effects that deployment has on its service members. In comparison, a few government-funded studies have been done on the effects that deployment has on the families of military service members (U.S. Army, 2013). However, many of these studies appear to focus on how the military family can best support its military service member, especially if that military service member returns home suffering from combat stress. These studies are offered freely to military personnel to share with their families (U.S. Army, 2013; Department of Defense, 2012), yet there is no indication that they have been reviewed or analyzed by mainstream psychologists even when many civilian mental health professionals work with military families. Among these studies included a potential emotional cycle of deployment. However, because the majority of these studies had been sponsored by government agencies there was no indication as to the level of validity of the data. This paper will be the first completely independent offering of a model of the emotional cycle of deployment that can be used by mainstream psychologists.
Relevance to the Counseling Professions

According to Basham (2007) most of the research and psychotherapy models used to support returning military service members and their families are based on cognitive-behavioral models. However, “little attention is paid to how deployment stressors shake the foundations of intimate partnerships and other family relationships” (Basham, 2007, p. 83). Park (2011) reported that building a strong military required that military families have strong relationships. As Park wrote, “positive family functioning boosts a service member’s morale, retention, and ability to carry out missions” (Park, 2011, p. 65). When service members are not anxious or stressed about things happening with their families they tend to perform better.

Mental health professionals can help facilitate this morale boost with service members by communicating with and supporting the military family. This paper will detail possible perceptions and emotional reactions that may lead to particular behaviors. Counselors and therapists can then use this information to support and encourage the military family and educate them to do the same.

Relevance to Children, Couples, and Families

According to Chandra, et al. (2010), “research…suggested an association between parent separation during deployment and youth behavioral problems” (p. 17). An increasing number of military service members with families facing deployment leads to an increasing number of families and children facing problems as a result of these deployments. Some of these problems may include problems sleeping, declining grades, communication breakdown, and interrelation problems including child maltreatment associated with higher levels of stress and anxiety (Chandra et al., 2010).
Definition of Terms

**Psychosocial morbidity.** Ro and Clark (2009) discuss the various degrees to which a person’s psychological and social functioning can be influenced by his or her environment. Psychosocial morbidity is defined within context as a severe drop in a person’s psychosocial functioning significant enough to deem that person at high risk for developing a “physical, emotional or cognitive dysfunction” (Flake et al., 2009, p. 272).

**Ambiguous loss.** When is a loss not quite a loss? According to Pauline Boss, PhD (2007), ambiguous loss is a loss that is unable to be verified and is, therefore, unable to attain closure. Whenever a member of a family unit leaves the home there is a sense of loss experienced by the remaining members. The family members who stay try to compensate for this loss by reassigning responsibilities or readjusting their roles within the family and explaining the situation to the children. In cases of divorce and incarceration this loss can be lessened through visits, letters and other forms of communication with the family member who has left. With these forms of loss, the person is no longer in the house but they are still present within the family’s life. Their roles may change, but once accepted the loss is ameliorated. In contrast, a person’s death is a permanent loss. Those who remain understand that the person will be missed and loved but there is no longer a physical presence. The family cannot lessen their feelings of loss through communication. The deceased person’s role is reassigned or dissolved as the family works to overcome the loss. New roles may be created.

When loss occurs through a military induced separation such as deployment the loss itself is unclear. The partner or parent who has been deployed is still an important part of the family system on whom the rest of the family depends. There is still a psychological presence and a permanent role associated with that military service member; however, there is no physical
presence to carry out that role. The role itself does not change although the roles of the people who are still at home may.

For example, if a mother is deployed she is still a mother and her husband and children still depend on her to be a wife and mother. While she is gone she is still a wife and mother and her role as such does not change even though her husband’s role as a parent may temporarily change to that of a single father. These temporary adjustments in roles may add to the ambiguity of the loss they are experiencing. In this example the husband at home is married because he has not lost his wife, but his role is that of a single father because his wife is not physically present where he can communicate with or consult on a regular basis.

Additionally, the members of the family do not always know or understand the degree of loss they are experiencing, the length of time for which they will be experiencing this loss, or the circumstances surrounding the loss.

**Family.** Darwin (2009) asserts that every soldier has a family; and that whenever a soldier is deployed, the entire family is called to serve. Darwin’s (2009) assertions come from a definition of family that includes siblings, parents and in many cases, extended families, which include cousins, aunts, uncles, as well as grandparents. It is true that every time a service member deploys, his or her parents, siblings, cousins and other family members are all affected. In this regard even unmarried military service members who have no spouse or children to classify as dependents have families that will be affected when they leave. However, this paper defines a military service member’s family as the individuals who live in his or her home even while he or she is not deployed: a spouse or domestic partner, and any children for whom the military service member is directly responsible.
Service members. The term “service member” will be used throughout this paper to refer to the family member who is serving in any branch of the U.S. Military. Each branch of the military uses different descriptors for their members. These titles are in place to differentiate levels of authority within their respective branch of the military, as well as the specific branch being served. In addition these titles identify whether or not that member is committed in an active duty context or as a member of the National Guard or Reserve. Unless otherwise specified, the term “service members” will be used to refer to any member of any duty status of any branch of the military.

Military deployment. For the purposes of this paper deployment is defined as a military-issued strategic movement of service members from their home base or fort to a new area to carry out a mission. The mission may include training, supply and material movement, or peaceful tours as well as providing support to various places in the world, including war zones (Military Deployment Center, 2013). Military deployments happen at any time, both wartime and peace time, and usually involve the service member’s separation from his or her family. The cycle of deployment begins when the service member receives notice that he or she will be leaving his or her home for a mission and ends when the service member is fully able to reintegrate into his or her family after returning from the mission.

Assumptions

The stages of the deployment cycle are named here according to the Deployment Cycle Support (DCS) sector of the U.S. Army (U.S. Army, 2013). This was done to help coordinate the emotional impact that each stage can have based on the seven stages that a family endures through the deployment cycle described by the United States Department of Defense (2012). Other branches of the military may call the individual stages of their deployment cycle by other
names, but it is assumed here that under these other names the activities, duties, and emotional impact will be the same.

There are many differences among the military branches in the United States. For example, every branch uses deployments to train or support its agenda but the length of time that a deployment may last varies. The Air Force has deployments that range from 4 months to 12 months long, and service members can expect to be deployed every 20 months (U.S. Air Force, 2013). McIlvaine (2011) reported that the United States Army decreased its deployment lengths from 12 months to 9 months.

Because this paper is intended to address service members from all military branches the length of the deployment cycles is not regarded as an impacting factor. That is not to say that the length of time a military service member is separated via deployment does not have an impact; on the contrary, the length of time that a service member is deployed may have a tremendous effect on both service members and their families. Flake et al. (2009) asserted that children whose parents were deployed for more than 12 months were less vulnerable to psychosocial morbidity than those whose parents were deployed for 6 months or less. Other researchers debate this report. Chandra, et al. (2010) had expected difficulties would diminish as the service member’s deployments were extended. Shorter deployments would mean less time stabilizing the family after the service member’s initial departure, less time for the family to realize and learn to rely on its own strengths without the service member, and less stability during the deployment. However, Chandra et al. (2010) instead found that children “may have more trouble handling household and school responsibilities as the deployment extends, attenuating any initial resilience in the early deployment months” (p. 22). Additionally, children may have difficulties reconnecting with their returning parent if that parent has been away from home for an extended
amount of time (Chandra et al., 2010). Wexler and McGrath (1991) found that although longer deployments may lead to higher levels of stress and anxiety, they may also lead to higher levels of pride and patriotism.

It is reasonable to assume that many caregivers within the military have grown accustomed to managing their lifestyle and home as a single parent. Separation through deployment is expected and appropriate (Hillenbrand, 1976) and the service member’s family is often separated from the service member through extended training and peacetime deployments (Flake et al., 2009). However, growing accustomed to handling a stressful situation does not remove the stress from that situation. It does mean that people have acquired better coping skills and stress management techniques that help them to keep the stress from interfering with their functioning.

Because of their lack of exposure to military life or parenting, there is also an assumption that young couples, new parents, and the families of new military recruits, are influenced more by the stress of military life than those who have served with the military longer. Families of National Guard and military reservists are often held separate from enlisted military members. This may be due to the idea that they are located closer to their hometowns and familial support than active duty military families. Additionally, reservists and National Guard members do not always have access to the same support from military installations.

Finally, military service members are being deployed faster and at a greater frequency than before (Laser & Stephens, 2011; Mmari, Roche, Sudhinaraset, & Blum, 2009; Park, 2011). Many times a military service member has not had the chance to fully reintegrate into his or her family life at home before receiving new orders for deployment. The family has not had
sufficient time to adjust to the service member’s return before once again facing the anticipation of their departure.

This lack of closure on one round of the cycle can lead to more stress and difficulties that will influence the coming round of the cycle. This is of special concern if the service member’s return from one deployment was especially stressful. Mmari et al. (2009) discovered that for many adolescents, the service member’s return is the most stressful stage within the deployment cycle: “Some adolescents…discussed how different they and their returning parents were to each other, and it took a great deal of time, energy, and stress to get to know each other again” (pp. 464-465). If a service member’s return is, in fact, the most stressful point within the deployment cycle, then skipping that stage or not being able to complete that stage satisfactorily will have strong negative effects during the next round of deployment.

Many service members have returned from combat deployments with symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and traumatic brain injury. The mental health and well-being of spouses, significant others, children (and their friends), and extended family members of deployed service members continues to be significantly challenged by the experiences of wartime deployment as well as by combat mortality and morbidity. (Siegel, Davis, & The Committee on Psychosocial Aspect of Child and Family Health and Section on Uniformed Services, 2013, p. 2002)

There is research available regarding the effects that PTSD, depression, anxiety and related stressors have on the service member and on his or her family. As such, this paper will not give much attention to these added stressors. Although it is true that PTSD can have a significant effect on the family. Gewirtz, Erbes, Polusny, Forgatch, and DeGarmo (2011)
describe the deployment of a parent into a combat zone as a “catastrophic stressor” (p. 57). The purpose of this paper is to detail the impact that each stage within the military’s deployment cycle has on the service member and his or her family, and how that impact may affect family dynamics. By removing variables such as PTSD, more attention can be given to the deployment itself and the impact that deployment can have even on healthy service members and families.

Flake et al. (2009) found that parental stress and functioning was a major factor in determining whether or not children of military service members would be at a high risk of psychosocial morbidity. Although their study only included the stages within the deployment cycle that involve physical separation (deployment, employment, and redeployment), parental stress and functioning likely have a strong effect on children’s stress during the predeployment and postdeployment phases as well. Chandra, et al. (2010) also found distinct links between the mental health of a caregiver staying at home during a service member’s deployment and the behavioral problems that the children may experience during their service member’s deployment and postdeployment. Combat stress, such as that associated with PTSD, may heighten or exacerbate stress levels within the family.

Finally, Adler has stated that human behavior is often driven by the need for a person to move from a perceived negative toward a perceived positive (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). This movement is determined by the individual’s belief about where they stand on a scale of negative to positive. With this pattern of thinking there must be some perceived positive consequences for the family and dependents of military service members. However, most of the research done regarding the impact of military deployment on service members and their families focuses on negative outcomes (Esposito-Smythers, et al., 2011; Laser & Stephens, 2011; Flake, et al., 2009; Rotter & Boveja, 1999; Chandra, et al., 2010; Darwin, 2009; Mmari, et al.,
2008). Therapy models that rely on positive outlooks such as strength-based therapies, would benefit from the understanding of these positive outcomes. If there are no positive perceptions with regard to the impact that military deployment has on a family, then the military would likely be comprised solely of single service members with no dependents or service members who do not like their dependents and strive to stay away from them. More research is needed to explore the positive outcomes of military deployment on military families and children.

**Limitations**

Researchers have divided the deployment cycle into three major stages: (1) predeployment, the time between when the service member receives his or her notice that he or she will be getting deployed and when the service member actually leaves; (2) deployment, the time that the service member spends away from home as determined by his or her orders; and (3) postdeployment, the time when the service member returns to his or her home as ordered by the military (Laser & Stephens, 2011; Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011; Kelley, 1994; Huebner et al., 2010). As such, much of the research done regarding the effects of deployment on families is centered on these three major periods rather than the seven stages described by the military today (U.S. Army, 2013). This paper will attempt to take the previous research of these three stages and apply it to the seven stages whenever possible.

Additionally, the research already done on military families has focused on the traditional structure of a military family: a mother and a father with one or more children living in the same house. In this structure the father would get deployed leaving the mother at home to care for the children during his absence. However, as society has changed, its military configuration as well as its definition of family and its policies regarding gender equality have all changed with it. Many military families now have the mother as the deployed service member rather than the
father. There are a growing number of families in which both partners may be deployed. A number of service members are single parents either through divorce, widowing, or by choice.

Gay and lesbian families, especially those who are still fighting to have their partnership recognized legally, add a new kind of relationship upon which a deployment can have a tremendous effect. There is very little research done on these new variations of what a military family endures during a service member’s deployment. This paper will try to relate, whenever possible, how the stages of deployment can impact all families, including the newer configurations of families listed here. However, there is a clear need for more research to distinguish whether or not these newer configurations of a military family endure a deployment cycle in the same way that a traditional family does.

A civilian, with no direct military experience, is writing this paper. Other than having lived near a military installation and worked on post, no other formal military learning has been achieved prior to this paper. Further interest in military life was piqued after a short experience volunteering for a Family Readiness Group (FRG). Because this paper is written from a civilian’s perspective it will not be isolated from mainstream psychology. However, this also means that some military installations and programs may not be fully understood, as they are not always disclosed to civilians.

Finally, this paper is written through the perspective of Adlerian Psychology. A central part of Adlerian practice centers on the theories of early recollections and birth order to help an individual better understand how he or she perceives situations and to identify the core purpose that drives his or her behavior. Early recollections, those memories formed before the ages of five or six, are used as a basis for discovering beliefs about a person’s personality and style of life. These beliefs include, but are not limited to, things such as what it means to the person to be
a man or a woman, what constitutes good behavior, and how best to resolve intrapersonal conflict. Adler asserted that all of these values and beliefs are formed within the first five or six years of life through observation and interpretation of those observations. These are made on the unconscious level and provide a worldview that determines how a person will act and react throughout the rest of his or her lifetime barring traumatic events (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

Thinking as an Adlerian, no two children are ever born into the same family atmosphere even though they may be born into the same family (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). This belief is derived from the idea that a person’s birth order has an effect on the personality and lifestyle development of that person. The first-born child may react to his or her parent’s deployment differently than the second-born child even if both children fall under the same age group and are in the same family. It is hoped that future mental health professionals will be able to take this information as one piece of a puzzle to be combined with other factors, such as birth order, when working with the families of military service members.
Cycle of Deployment

Deployment

Table 1: Anticipatory Guidance for Cycle of Deployment to Assess and Intervene in the Family System (adapted from Siegel & Davis, 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of Deployment</th>
<th>Provider Assessment and Anticipatory Guidance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Predicting difficulties with deployment</td>
<td>Assess previous history of family dysfunction, mental health issues in parents, special needs of children, recent family relocation, and previous problems during a deployment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predeployment (Training Up and Mobilization)</td>
<td>Discuss responsibilities and expectations of each family member during upcoming deployment. Make plans and goals for family rather than “put lives on hold.” Decrease likelihood of misperception and distortion. Prepare for communication strategies and expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deployment</td>
<td>Initiate plans made during predeployment. Continue family traditions and develop new ones. Facilitate children’s understanding of the finite nature of the deployment by developing timelines (as age appropriate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainment</td>
<td>Establish support systems (extended family, friends, religious group, family support groups, etc). Communicate with deployed service member via email, phone, and letters. Avoid overspending. Spend some time without the children. Ask children how they are doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postdeployment (Return Adjustment and Reintegration)</td>
<td>Take time to communicate and get to know each other. Spend time talking to each other. Take time to make decisions and changes in routine. Lower holiday expectations. Keep plans simple and flexible. Do not try to schedule too many things during the first few weeks. Let the deployed parent back into the family circle.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The word deployment conjures different feelings. To many civilians deployment means that a service member is leaving his or her home to go and fight in a combat zone. To a service member it means that the military is positioning him or her in readiness for training or combat. To that service member’s family deployment means a long separation from a beloved family member (Flake et al., 2009). An increased sense of danger, daily uncertainty, and an ambiguous feeling of loss all accompany this prolonged separation. A service member’s deployment is accompanied by several factors that can each influence a family’s psychosocial functioning.
These factors include “changes in routine, parenting challenges, and worries about the service member” (Flake et al., 2009, p. 276).

**Life in a canoe.** Imagining that the family is sitting together in a canoe can help when trying to visualize a military family and the effects that military life has on that family. The canoe itself is large enough to hold the family safely and comfortably. There are oars present to help with steering and navigating, and the family can distribute these oars as they see fit depending on their beliefs and values.

Once the military service member receives orders that he or she will be deployed, changes can be seen within the canoe as he or she prepares to swim for shore. Some family members will grasp the sides of the canoe, which may start to rock as the service member stands to get ready to leave. The oars may get redistributed to make up for fewer hands on deck. Even the water around the canoe may begin to show ripples. The actions taken here by the family are in response to the anticipation that the service member is going to depart.

When the time comes, the service member jumps out of the canoe. The canoe itself rocks and the family, still on board, must work to help stabilize it. In extreme cases some members of the family may fall out of the canoe and need help to climb back in. The ripples in the water become larger than before as the service member leaves the vicinity. No matter how prepared the family thinks it is for this departure the canoe will still rock and each member will find that he or she will need to work together to stop it from rocking. The actions taken here are in response to the initial departure and withdrawal of the service member from the family.

Ultimately, the canoe stabilizes and the ripples in the water calm down. The family members have been able to adjust to their new roles and are able to keep the canoe from leaking
or rocking. They become comfortable with their new responsibilities and have learned to use other resources for support.

After some time, the family receives word that their beloved service member will be returning to the canoe. Anticipation of the service member’s arrival leads to an evaluation of the roles and system that were put into place to cope with his or her departure. Some decisions, which would normally have been made right away, may be put off until the service member has returned.

Finally, the service member swims back to his or her family. Once again, the waters are filled with ripples as he or she swims from shore to the canoe. The family members work and adjust to try to help the service member climb out of the water and into the canoe. In extreme cases, one family member may fall out of the canoe while trying to help the service member in; it is even possible that the service member may need some extra help climbing out of the water. Where possible, the family will try to fall back into the same roles and responsibilities as they held prior to the service member’s departure. Oars will be redistributed according to the family’s beliefs and value system. The entire family, this time with the help of the service member, will need to work to stabilize the canoe in time before the service member is ordered to deploy again.

Although this analogy does not fully describe the stress that military families endure, it does portray the full cycle of a service member’s deployment and how that deployment can impact a family at various stages. This analogy also serves as a visual representation that almost every one can imagine. With this analogy in place it becomes easier to recognize that no matter how many times a service member has deployed or how long that service member has been in the military, each deployment will have an impact on the family. Every jump into the lake will
cause the canoe to rock. Some deployments may seem to have a more severe impact than others, particularly if the family is poorly prepared or informed.

Figure 1: The Emotional Cycle of Deployment as it falls in line with the Stages of Deployment (Adapted from Department of Defense, 2012; Military Deployment Center, 2013; DeVoe & Ross, 2012)

**Stage 1: Train-Up and Preparation – Anticipation of Departure**

Once the service member receives his or her warning order that he or she will be deploying, that service member enters into the train-up and preparation stage of deployment (Department of Defense, 2012). During this stage, many of the tasks assigned to the service member include administrative personnel tasks such as training, counseling, and medical exams.
These activities often require that the service member work longer hours as they prepare to mobilize.

Much that happens during this stage within the cycle is attributed to anticipation of departure rather than the departure itself. At work the service member is assigned tasks and duties that are focused on personnel administration such as briefings, medical evaluations, and training. At home, the service member is also tasked with getting prepared to leave.

Preparing to leave will entail different responsibilities for different service members depending on the configuration of that service member’s family. Service members with a legally recognized spouse or domestic partner will need to ensure that their spouses have access to any financial and medical information that he or she may need while the service member is away from home (Department of Defense, 2012). Single parents, dual deployed parents, and parents whose partnerships are not yet legally recognized – such as gay or lesbian families – will also need to find and establish guardianship for their children, establish living wills, and possibly assign a power of attorney to someone to handle any problems that may come up during their separation. These types of responsibilities, which focus on preparing the family for the worst-case scenario, bring about many negative emotions and stress that can be difficult to cope with if the service member and his or her family are not adequately prepared. In some cases discussing these topics can lead to arguments and more stress.

The warning orders for a service member’s departure may come with feelings of denial or of anticipation of a coming loss. It may be common for families to begin creating lists of things they want to complete while the service member is still in the home. Additionally, members of the family may be adding more to their lists than normal in an effort to make up for time they are
about to lose. Some of these activities may include, but are not limited to, repairs and improvements made to the family car and home (Laser & Stephens, 2011).

**Effects on family.** DeVoe and Ross (2012) described the predeployment stages as “a ‘holding pattern’ for the family during which adaptation cannot yet begin” (p. 185). The family may not be able to fully adapt to the military service member’s absence until that service member actually deploys, but as portrayed in the canoe anecdote, adjustments do begin the moment the military service member receives his or her orders for deployment. Training schedules for the military begin to build up in intensity and length requiring that the service member begin staying at work longer during this stage. For the service member, there may be “conflict between the push to ‘ramp up’ with the unit’s training regimen and the pull to spend time with family and loved ones before departure” (DeVoe & Ross, 2012, p. 185). This conflict between home and mission may serve as a source of tension between the service member and their family. “Tempers may flare, feelings may easily get hurt, and each family member may be very defensive” (Laser & Stephens, 2011, p. 29).

Further adaptations occur as the service member is readied for the mission ahead of him or her. “The service member is making him or herself ready for battle, which includes emotionally separating from the family so that he or she can be singularly focused for war” (Laser & Stephens, 2011, p. 29). Because the service member begins to distance him or herself emotionally from his or her family, the family begins to adjust to the distance before the service member has left his or her home. “The family is trying to cope during predeployment with the contradiction between denial that the loved one is actually going to war and anticipation of loss of the loved one from the family system” (Laser & Stephens, 2011, p. 29).
Stage 2: Mobilization – Detachment and Withdrawal

Although the mobilization stage is often grouped together with the train up and preparation stage, this stage holds one critical ritual for military service members and their families that cannot happen during any other stage within the deployment cycle. During the mobilization stage military service members must say goodbye to their families. This small act, following the tension created during the intense training regime and trying to get affairs in order at home, is extremely important “for military-connected families, especially for children and adolescents” (DeVoe & Ross, 2012, pp. 185-186).

In the military mobilization occurs during the last days and up to a week before the service members depart their homes (U.S. Army, 2013). During this time the deploying parent may begin to look ahead contemplating how his or her family will fare through their absence (DeVoe & Ross, 2013). Many times the military service member will start to withdraw emotionally from his or her family so that he or she may be prepared mentally for the job at hand. The list that the service member and his or her family may have developed during the train-up and preparation stage is finalized during mobilization as the service member begins to realize which tasks the family can or cannot complete before he or she leaves.

Effects on family. Just as military service members try to detach themselves emotionally from their families as they prepare for their mission, families respond by detaching themselves from their service members to keep from being hurt once they are gone (Rotter & Boveja, 1999). The emotional distance felt between military service members and their families during this time can interfere with family communications as well as with intimacy between spouses and partners.
There is an unspoken reality that military families experience while they try to say goodbye to their service members: “This isn’t forever but what if it is?” (DeVoe & Ross, 2012). This reality sets mobilization apart as one of the most critical stages within the cycle of deployment. Even through the tension created by the train up and preparation stage, family members tend to understand that their service member is coping with the anxiety and stress associated with leaving their family. Despite the emotional distance and anger that may have developed over the weeks leading up to the service member’s departure this reality gives family members a chance to express their love and say goodbye to their service member.

According to DeVoe and Ross (2012), skipping this phase, especially the act of saying goodbye itself, can be detrimental to the family. When the service member cannot cope with sad goodbyes they sometimes avoid saying goodbye directly by leaving at a time when their family is not home or are asleep. “Although well-intentioned, when parents do not say goodbye face to face, the results may be that children become highly preoccupied with their parents’ whereabouts and when they might ‘disappear,’ even when deployment is not a factor” (Devoe & Ross, 2012, p. 186).

**Stage 3: Deployment – Emotional Disorganization**

The deployment stage generally refers to the length of time during which the military service member is physically away from his or her home. The early weeks while the service member is gone are a time of confusion and disorientation as the family struggles to adjust. The old roles and responsibilities that are in place while the service member is home are no longer relevant to the family’s configuration, however new routines have not yet been established. The service member has left to carry out his or her duties as ordered by the United States military and
communication will remain sporadic and irregular throughout this time. Confusion can be exacerbated by the uncertainty of deployment.

As new roles and responsibilities are negotiated in the home between the at-home caregiver and the children, parents seeking emotional and physical relief from the stress that has accumulated over the past months often bring their older children into a miniature co-parent role (Laser & Stephens, 2011). Although this may provide needed support and relief to the parent, this may also cause undue strain and higher levels of anxiety for the children. “Parents need to support their children to be children and not mini-adults” (Laser & Stephens, 2011, p. 31). Some children, especially older children and adolescents who are trying to get recognized as adults, may step into these co-parenting roles without encouragement from their parent. However, “these additional stressors may task the adolescents’ limited coping resources beyond their capacity” (Huebner, et al., 2007, p. 113).

Effects on family. The stages leading up to deployment can be emotionally draining for the military service member and his or her family. Because of this the immediate time following the service member’s departure may be characterized by a sense of relief that the wait is finally over (DeVoe & Ross, 2012). In some cases a feeling of guilt may follow this initial sense of relief, giving way to a time of “disorientation and mixed emotions” (DeVoe & Ross, 2012, p. 186). Families may also “struggle with feelings of loss, grief, and fear, while also taking on new duties and routines” (Esposito-Smythers, et al., 2011, p. 498).

There is a common, though inaccurate, conception that the more deployments a military family has faced the easier they become. However, the canoe analogy illustrates how preparation is more important for an easier deployment than repetitions. Even prepared families will still experience some upset to their routines when their service member first deploys. In some cases
the fact that families have gone through multiple deployments, especially if those deployments have been relatively close in sequence, may prove to be less helpful than people might believe. The United States military warns that partners and spouses may feel burnt out through repeated cycles of deployment (U.S. Army, 2013; Department of Defense, 2012). Linnerooth, Mrdjenovich, and Moore (2011) define professional burnout as emotional exhaustion that leads to depersonalization and reduces a person’s desire to accomplish certain tasks. Mainstream psychologists have not researched the claims that military spouses and partners may suffer from emotional burnout, yet Linnerooth, Mrdjenovich and Moore’s definition can be placed within the family caregiver’s context during multiple deployments to deduce the possibility.

**Stage 4: Employment – Recovery and Stabilization**

During the employment stage military units are carrying out their missions (U.S. Army, 2013). This is the only stage within the deployment cycle that has a prescribed length of time as determined by the military’s needs. This is the culmination of the preparation and training that the service member and the family had undergone in each of the stages leading up to this point. Families that were more prepared for the deployment may enter into a stage of stabilization more quickly than families who were less prepared. Military installations, including some of those located in warzones, are able to set up communications so that families can speak with their service members through phone calls and social media (Department of Defense, 2012) as well as through letters and emails.

**Effects on the family.** In many ways, the employment stage of the deployment cycle should be called strength building. Families remaining at home after their service member departs manage to recover and stabilize through the discovery of their strengths and a boost to their morale and confidence (Laser & Stephens, 2011; Rotter & Boveja, 1999). Spouses and
partners develop further confidence as they find that they can manage the household, children and other activities that had overwhelmed them during previous stages within the cycle (Department of Defense, 2012) and this newfound confidence can lead to a sense of pride and accomplishment. Sheppard et al. (2010) discussed reports that many military families experienced the greatest disruption to their stability during the pre- and postdeployment phases (see Figure 3), possibly due to “both the increased stress inherent to these periods and the unique challenges associated with these stages” (p. 605).

Many of the behaviors exhibited by children during predeployment and the beginning period of deployment begin to “diminish as most children enter a readjustment phase” (Flake et al., 2009, p. 272). During this time the service member’s family has successfully set up a new routine and is able to use new resources and support. Many times this adjustment to the service member’s deployment comes out of a need “to support their children’s needs and reassure them of the ongoing integrity of the family despite the time, distance, and ambiguity of the circumstances” (DeVoe & Ross, 2012, p. 186).

In the case of married spouses in which one spouse has been deployed, the remaining spouse can become overwhelmed at the concept of being forced to change from a co-parenting role to that of a single parent (DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Esposito-Smythers, 2011). Additionally, spouses and partners who have had to cope with multiple deployments in fast succession may need added support and help before they can find the inner strength needed to fully adjust to their military service member’s departure (Department of Defense, 2012).

For many, the employment stage is among the most crucial stages of deployment. Besides coping with the loss and uncertainty that comes with the deployment of a loved one, through that loss the remaining family can discover and foster the growth of new strengths. The
development of these strengths is crucial to the stability of the family. “When the at-home parent is not able to fully stabilize, the accumulated and sustained stress increases mental health concerns for the parent and thus the children during the deployment” (DeVoe & Ross, 2012, p. 186).

**Stage 5: Redeployment – Anticipation of Return**

Redeployment in the military is the counterpart to the military’s train up and preparation phase. During redeployment, service members are given notice that they will be returning to their homes and families (U.S. Army, 2013). This notice can lead to a bustle of activity as the family begins to anticipate the return of their service member. Various questions and concerns may surface depending on how many changes the family implemented during the service member’s absence. For example, military parents getting ready to return home often have questions regarding how their family will be able to accept them back into the home after a deployment (DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Laser & Stephens, 2011; Lowe, et al., 2012). Many times, these questions center on the ability for a child, especially a young child, to recognize his or her parent after a long separation.

**Effects on the family.** Military families receiving notice that their service member is returning home may cause them to scrutinize the changes that they have had to make during his or her absence (DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Laser & Stephens, 2011; Rotter & Boveja, 1999). Even if these changes were deemed necessary in previous stages of deployment, if they do not align with what the family believes their service member will be expecting, they may decide to discard these changes in favor of previous practices. Changes that came about naturally and unexpectedly may also be a new source of anxiety. For example, if the remaining spouse gains weight or if the house is no longer quite as clean as it had been prior to the deployment, the at-
home partner may worry that the returning military service member will not be able to understand or accept these changes (Rotter & Boveja, 1999). Decisions that the at-home spouse made while managing the household alone may be revisited as the partner worries whether or not the decision will be accepted by their spouse or partner upon his or her return. Examples of these decisions may include things like whether or not to allow children to date, large purchases such as furniture or new paint in the home, or different methods for accomplishing various tasks. The confidence and pride that the at-home spouse had begun to develop through their partner’s deployment may falter if they believe that the changes and decisions they have made in their absence will not be accepted.

**Stage 6: Postdeployment – Return Adjustment and Renegotiation**

Postdeployment is often thought of as the time spent after a military service member returns home, as the end of the cycle. However, postdeployment specifically refers to the period immediately following the service member’s return prior to his or her full reintegration into the family. During this time, the routines that the family had established to cope with the service member’s absence may be scrutinized or questioned as to their relevance, yet the routines that were in place prior to the service member’s deployment have not been adopted in their place. Any changes in the home that were made while the service member was away may not be understood or recognized immediately, and there is the possibility that the service member will approach the home while ignoring some of these changes. For example, if bedtime routines changed, the returning service member may ignore the new routine in favor of the routine he or she had known prior to his or her deployment. Because of the happiness present when a service member is reunited with his or her spouse and family, this is also sometimes referred to as the
“Honeymoon Stage” of deployment (DeVoe & Ross, 2012). However, while the reunion may be joyful the demands that are placed on the family members can often lead to new problems.

**Effects on the family.** The activities that a family faces during postdeployment center on the adjustment to the service member’s return and renegotiation of their role within the family. When the service member returns home, “there is excitement, anticipation, and relief” (Flake et al., 2009, p. 272). The realization that their service member may come home to a family that is very different from the family that was left behind may be a source of worry for the military family. For example, the returning service member may not readily accept changes in children’s appearance and maturity. Adolescents who have earned the at-home parent’s acceptance of their new role as a young adult may not be willing to give up that acceptance (Huebner, et al., 2007). Younger children who have formed stronger bonds with the at-home parent may have difficulty reconnecting or bonding with their returning parent (DeVoe & Ross, 2012).

Postdeployment “can be a turbulent time for the family, as members must re-form into a functioning system” (Marek, Hollingsworth, D’Aniello, O’Rourke, Brock, Moore, Butler VI, Zhang, & Wiles, 2012, p. F16). Marek, et al. (2012) notes that the negative stress factors that occur during postdeployment can reach their peak as late as four to nine months after the service member’s return, especially if the service member is coming home to a routine far different from the routine that was in place at the time of his or her departure.

Spouses and partners who have become accustomed to a new sense of independence while their service member was deployed may have difficulty adjusting their schedule to accommodate a return to the co-parenting role. This adjustment may lead to feelings of being stifled or oppressed if the spouse is not ready to completely give up their sense of independence (Laser & Stephens, 2011; Rotter & Boveja, 1999; Esposito-Smyther, et al., 2011). Tensions and
arguments may increase as the returning service member and his or her family begins the process of reevaluating and redefining their expectations and roles within the home. The returning service member may begin to feel as though he or she is more like an unwelcome stranger in his or her home rather than a returning loved one.

**Stage 7: Reconstitution, Reintegration and Stabilization**

Once the service member and his or her family have managed to cope with the stress and anxiety that can accompany the service member’s initial return, they enter into a new stage of recovery and stabilization called reconstitution (U.S. Army, 2013). Military service members often return to the same employment schedule they had prior to their deployment (Department of Defense, 2012; Rotter & Boveja, 1999; Laser & Stephens, 2011; DeVoe & Ross, 2012).

**Effects on the family.** During this time, roles and responsibilities of individual family members are successfully renegotiated in accordance with the family’s beliefs and values while considering any changes implemented during the deployment. The family is now able to return to a new normal (Department of Defense, 2012).

**Exceptions**

The stages listed above represent a normal cycle of deployment as experienced by many healthy military families. However, each family will cope with and handle the sense of loss and anxiety that they experience during the deployment differently (Huebner, et al., 2007). Some of these differences may be related to things beyond the family’s control, such as how long the service member’s deployment will last and how often the service member will be deployed.

In some cases, the military service member may return to the home suffering from the effects of combat stress, including PTSD. The additional anxiety can affect both the service member and his or her family by adding complications to the postdeployment and reconstitution
stages. These complications may mean that the family and its service member will need support in addition to the help that they received during the service member’s deployment.

**Military reservists.** Members of the military’s National Guard and Reservists may experience deployment differently than their active duty counterparts (Laser & Stephens, 2011). Many of these differences are due to the configuration and operations of the National Guard and Military Reserves. For example, National Guard and Reserve units are not required to live on or near a military installation (Laser & Stephens, 2011) while they are home. Many reservists hold jobs outside of the military taking the necessary time off from their employment to perform their duties and missions only when their units are mobilized for a mission. According to Laser and Stephens (2011), military reservists and guard members are also paid less than active duty military members. This difference in pay may add to the financial strain faced by military families with a deployed service member. Additionally, if the deployment is lengthy or if the service member faces a series of multiple deployments, the service member may face additional hardship upon his or her return if his or her employer could not protect his or her job.

Other differences lie in the location of the military reservists and guard members. Because they are not living on or near a military installation the families of deployed reservists and guard members may not have access to the same level of support from military families and programs that were set into place on military installations. However, they may have support from family members who live closer to the family (Laser & Stephens, 2011). By living far removed from the military, reservist and guard families may also find themselves living in a community where anti-war sentiments are high (Laser & Stephens, 2011; Department of Defense, 2012).

**Dual-deployed and single parents.** Families in which the parents must leave their children in the care of a guardian, such as in the case of dual-deployed parents and single
parents, face unique stressors throughout the various stages of deployment that other military families do not face. For example, while many married military service members leave their children in the care of their spouse or partner, dual deployed and single military service parents must grant guardianship of their children to someone outside of the home. This may mean that the children will have to move once their service member deploys. Moving around can have a variety of effects on a child ranging from adding stress (Flake, et al., 2009; Huebner, et al., 2007) to inducing trauma (Lowe, et al., 2012).

Married service members can trust that their spouses or partners will make parenting decisions that are closely aligned to their own beliefs and values. However, when a service member has to grant guardianship of his or her children to another family member or friend, some parenting decisions will be based on a new set of values and beliefs (DeVoe & Ross, 2012). Such decisions may include punishment and discipline, dating, and wardrobe choices. This may cause difficulties during the postdeployment and reconstitution stages.

**Gay and lesbian families.** Depending on their home’s location, gay and lesbian service members and their families may find themselves the victims of prejudiced or hateful behavior. While some states have adopted laws granting gay and lesbian couples the benefits of a married class of people, other states are slower to revise their laws. In these states, gay and lesbian couples who have children may not yet be legally married as defined by the state government. In cases such as this, the state may not recognize the couple as a partnership and the service member may still need to grant guardianship of his or her children to someone else during his or her deployment.
Summary

Family separation is never an easy situation. Even in cases where such separations are considered necessary and expected, such as within the context of the military, the separation can have several negative effects on the family. Although there are stresses and anxiety that can accompany the loss of a parent in many other contexts, such as through divorce or incarceration, military deployment is a cyclical process of loss that starts with the anticipation of a military service member’s departure and continues through until that service member is fully able to reintegrate into his or her family. Thus far, the generic impacts and emotional consequences that the various stages can have on a family unit have been reviewed. Next, this paper will discuss how specific family members may react to these stressors based on their age and role within the family.

Impact on Family Members

Military Families

Creech, Hadley, and Borsari (2014) claim that nearly 1.4 million children in the United States currently have at least one parent in the military. Most of the research available focuses on traditional, two-parent households in which only one parent gets deployed (Laser & Stephens, 2011). However, attention must also turn to other familial configurations such as single parents, dual deployed parents, and families headed by same-sex couples. In cases such as these, the stress of deployment can be exacerbated by the further need for the military service member to grant guardianship of his or her children to another family member or a friend (Laser & Stephens, 2011) for the time that he or she is gone. If the service member’s marriage is not legally recognized where they live those families may not receive as much support as other military families which can exacerbate their stress even further.
Many of the families are involved in the military are newly formed families. Some young men and women volunteering to serve in the military sometimes feel as though they have not had the chance to live a full life. When they receive their orders for deployment these men and women who feel that they still have not fully lived may begin to act impulsively (Laser & Stephens, 2011). Impulsive behavior may include taking risks that they would not normally take, impulse buying, and marrying. “This gives the service member an added sense of purpose while away and a feeling that someone is waiting for them” (Laser & Stephens, 2011, p. 30).

Couples and spouses with a longer history may be able to tolerate the stresses that surface throughout the deployment cycle more efficiently than newer couples. “Military families experience considerable stress, periods of long separation, and changes to the family system due to family members planning to enter a war zone” (Laser & Stephens, 2011, p. 28). For newly formed families roles and responsibilities may not have been fully formed at the time of deployment making their renegotiation more difficult.

“For the family member remaining behind, the time during a deployment can seem like an eternity experienced as a series of emotional ebbs and flows as they attempt to cope with the demands of a single parent family” (Lowe, et al., 2012, p. 18). Activities that would normally have been handled by both parents, such as school related activities for their children, medical concerns, and discipline of the children, are instead addressed by the parent staying at home during the service member’s absence (Darwin, 2009; Sheppard, et al., 2010). These changes in the family system can lead to high levels of stress that interfere with the at-home parent’s functioning. Sheppard, et al (2010) explains that in families where child maltreatment was found, “the overall rate of child maltreatment was 42% greater during deployment than during nondeployment” (p. 601). Creech, Hadley, and Borsari (2014) found that the rates of
maltreatment during large-scale deployments nearly “doubled during deployment, with parental departure and return particularly risky periods” (p. 459).

The absence of a parent in any child’s life is not ideal. During the 1970s, many thought that the absence of a father would lead male children to develop feminine roles (Hillenbrand, 1976). However, as Hillenbrand (1976) explained, there was no solid evidence that implicated a parent’s absence could actually “produce maladjustment, [however] it does appear to increase the probability of developmental difficulties” (p. 452). Jenson, et al. (1996) affirms, “deployment per se rarely provokes pathological levels of symptoms in otherwise healthy children” (p. 441). Children who grow up in the military who are otherwise healthy, well adjusted, and well-prepared to handle the stress and strain of deployment can, with the right levels of support, adjust to deployment without developing a risk for psychosocial morbidity (Flake et al., 2009, p. 272). Children who are otherwise at risk for high anxiety or strains, however, may exhibit heightened levels of anxiety if not given the support they need (Siegel, Davis, et al., 2013, p. 2002).
### Table 2: Common Reactions to Deployment (adapted from Siegel & Davis, 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child’s Age</th>
<th>Feelings</th>
<th>Behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>Confusion, Anger, Guilt</td>
<td>Clinging, demands for attention, Problems separating from the remaining parent, Irritability and aggression, Regression (thumb sucking or bedwetting), Sleep disturbances, Feeding issues (more picky), Easily frustrated and more difficult to comfort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Age</td>
<td>Confusion, Anger, Guilt, Increased sadness (loss), Worry, Fear</td>
<td>New behavior problems or intensification of already existing problems, Regression, Rapid mood swings, Changes in eating or sleeping, Somatic complaints, Need to be “normal”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent</td>
<td>Anger, Sadness, Depression, Anxiety, Fear</td>
<td>Misdirected or acting-out behavior, School problems, Apathy, loss of interest, Denial of feelings, Increased importance of friends, Trying to take charge of the family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Children Ages 0-5**

Young children have a level of magical thinking that can be hard for parents to understand and predict. For example, when a parent leaves the home the child may believe that the parent is leaving because he or she does not wish to be near the child even when all evidence points to the contrary. Parents may love and dote on their children while in the home but their inevitable departure may still elicit feelings of wrongdoing or being unwanted on the part of the child (Laser & Stephens, 2011). The behaviors that a child exhibits after a parent leaves the home is often done in an effort to regain a sense of security when the world begins to look insecure to the child.

According to Jensen, et al. (1996), “children whose parents had deployed demonstrated modestly higher levels of child depression…compared with children whose parents had not
deployed” (p. 436). Similarly, spouses and partners whose military service members have deployed also show higher levels of depression, affirming that the children’s reaction to deployment parallels the at-home parent’s reaction.

**Anticipation of departure.** Once a young child is informed that his or her parent will be leaving the home the child may act out by throwing tantrums or exhibiting other poor behaviors (Laser and Stephens, 2011). Children under the age of six do not always have a clear grasp on concepts such as length of time, employment or jobs, or the idea that his or her parents may need to spend some time and attention on other important things (Laser & Stephens, 2011; DeVoe & Ross, 2012).

For children, if a parent does not spend time with them then it must be because the parent does not want to spend time with them. If a child believes that a parent does not want to spend time with him or her then the child may conclude that he or she is not worth spending time with, or is doing something which is driving the parent away. A child may react to these feelings by becoming clingy, increasing demands on the parent, or by distancing him- or herself from the departing parent. According to Jerles (2011), the behavioral manifestations of the child’s fears will affect every aspect of that child’s daily life. Teachers are often the first to notice these behavioral changes. As the time for deployment draws nearer, the anticipation builds, and many toddlers exhibit a “sense of confusion that can result in aggressive coping behaviors” (Jerles, 2011, p. 22).

**Detachment and withdrawal.** Because of their level of cognitive development younger children cannot always fully understand the length of time that a parent may be gone or the reasons why a parent is leaving (Laser & Stephens, 2011). However, even young children can sense the changes in behavior within the household as the tension displayed between parents
during the mobilization stage of deployment begins to climb. Military service members begin to withdraw from their families during mobilization and the remaining parents may begin to react in kind to protect themselves from being hurt later in the cycle. Young children, unable to explain their perceptions of this tension, may begin to lash out. They may be angry with the parent who is leaving but take their anger out on the caregiver who is staying at home with them. Last minute or recurrent goodbyes may increase the feelings of tension experienced by young children (Siegel, 2013).

**Emotional disorganization.** Although the previous stages of deployment are marked by externalizing feelings of anger and sadness, Jensen et al. (1996) also assert that deployment leads to higher levels of internalizing symptoms. Symptoms that are only known to the child, such as depression, may be harder to discern if the child has stopped externalizing his or her behavior. Research suggests that a parent’s deployment has a stronger influence on young boys rather than young girls (Jensen, et al., 1996); however, these findings may be based on the previous configurations of military families that included fathers being the service members who were deployed. New studies will need to be conducted to discover if there is a change as to whether or not boys or girls are more vulnerable to the effects of deployment based on whether their father or their mother is the deploying service member. No research has been done for children who must be delivered to a new guardian, such as in the cases of dual-deployed or single parents.

In addition to internalizing some of these feelings, young children may begin to exhibit new behaviors and habits once the deployed parent is absent from the home. Some of these habits include attention-getting behaviors and regression (Shaffer, 2008). Regression occurs when an individual changes his or her current level of maturity to return to an earlier stage of
development and is often accompanied by childlike mannerisms such as bedwetting, sucking a thumb, and even asking for a bottle (Mercer, 2011; Shaffer, 2008).

**Recovery and stabilization and anticipation of return.** Young children may begin to form stronger bonds with their at-home parent as the family reaches a new level of stabilization without its service member. Young children, especially under the age of six, most often form strong bonds that lead to attachment and trust with caregivers that can be with them during these developmentally sensitive years.

Young children will display a variety of reactions to the news that their service member will be returning home. Children who have a memory of their absent parent may react with elation or fear depending on how positive or negative that memory is. Children who do not have a memory of their absent parent may react with confusion, questions, and shyness that leads to withdrawal (Kelley, 1994).

**Return, adjustment and renegotiation.** Because of the strong bonds of trust that the young child has formed with his or her at-home caregivers while his or her parent was deployed, there may be a difficult time re-establishing trust with the child upon the service member’s return (Chandra, et al., 2011; Esposito-Smythers, 2011). In cases where the goodbye was skipped in an effort to save the child – or the parent – the pain of departure, the trust may be even harder to earn (Lowe, et al., 2012). During the service member’s initial return young children may question whether or not the service member will stay in the family, and for how long. Because of the possible lack of a memory about a deployed parent, children who were very young during their parent’s deployment, under the age of three, may need extra time to reestablish any bonds with the parent upon his or her return (Laser & Stephens, 2011).
Reintegration and stabilization. Children tend to be very resilient (Huebner, et al., 2010). Many younger children can be very accepting of new circumstances and adjustments. Prior to the age of five children are still establishing their place in their world, which at that time consists solely of the family unit (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). As the returning service member reenters the home, even shy children will be able to adjust to his or her presence and role within the family and can learn to define his or her role around the other.

Children Ages 6-10

“The uncertainties and stress of the military lifestyle that affect family structure changes, may also interrupt life events, and fragment the successful education of students involved” (Hooker, 2011, p. 9). One way that many military families choose to offer stability in their children’s lives is to ensure that they receive stability from another source. Some military families may move back to their hometowns to offer their children the stability and support of an extended family while others may choose to remain closer to the military installation in an effort to offer their children the opportunity to stay in the same school. Adults often view moving as a natural part of life that can be easily dismissed. However to a child, a simple thing like moving to a new house can be traumatic if accompanied by too many other changes and stressors (Flake, et al., 2009). Young children may lash out against these changes by exhibiting vengeful behaviors designed to hurt the parent they perceive is hurting them.

Anticipation of departure / detachment and withdrawal. “Before a parent’s deployment, a child may become emotionally withdrawn, apathetic or exhibit regressive behavior” (Flake et al., 2009, p. 272). Young children may sometimes feel powerless to protect themselves, the at-home parent, and the deployed parent from any perceived danger (Jerles, 2011).
Once they begin to sense a parent’s emotional withdrawal many young children may try to bribe or bargain with a parent in an effort to retain their love and attention. They may begin making promises of better grades or better behavior, particularly if they believe that these are the reasons that their parent is leaving the home. If these bribes do not work they may begin to escalate their reactions into more hurtful behaviors designed to seek revenge for their parent’s departure.

**Emotional disorganization.** Hooker (2011) surmised that school age children might experience a decline in their grades due to both the service member’s deployment and the at-home caregiver’s behavior. “Early in deployment, the child can be overwhelmed, sad, anxious, and clingy, manifesting increased somatic complaints or developing aggressive behavior” (Flake et al., 2009, p. 272). This increased level of need may result in attention-getting behavior, rapid mood swings, and withdrawal from friends and family (Shaffer, 2008).

**Recovery and stabilization.** Children may not trust that the at-home parent will stay in the house once the service member leaves. This can be aggravated if the service member skipped saying goodbye to the child during the mobilization stage of deployment (DeVoe & Ross, 2012). However, once the at-home parent is able to establish new routines children will often follow the example set for them.

**Anticipation of return.** For many children, especially children learning to count and use a calendar, the notice that their service member will soon be returning home is a joyous stage. They may begin gathering their accomplishments to display for their parent upon his or her arrival counting down the days or weeks until his or her return. In some cases the military may change the service member’s expected date of return based on the military’s needs and operations. These changes may lead to some feelings of confusion or anxiety for the children.
who have already begun preparing for their loved one’s return (DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Huebner, Mancini, Wilcox, Grass, & Grass, 2007; Lowe, Adams, Browne, & Hinkle, 2012).

**Return, adjustment and renegotiation.** If the service member returns home with symptoms of PTSD or displays difficulties reconnecting with his or her family, younger children may have a hard time perceiving this difficulty for what it is and may instead perceive this as an indication that the returning parent is in some way unhappy with the child’s performance or behavior (Chandra, et al., 2011; Esposito-Smythers, 2011; Siegel, Davis, et. al., 2013).

Some children may develop signs of separation anxiety upon the service member’s return (DeVoe & Ross, 2012) which may complicate the family’s normal functioning. This level of anxiety may be further exacerbated when accompanied by reminders of the service member’s deployment, such as wearing the military uniform in the house, precipitating more emotional or behavioral distress in young children.

**Reintegration and stabilization.** Many children initially blame themselves or their behavior when a parent leaves the home. After the stabilization phase, these feelings of guilt may give way to feelings of anger toward the absent parent. Some children may decide to internalize their anger for fear that expressing their anger may hurt or anger the at-home parent and, consequently, force the parent to leave as well (DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Huebner, Mancini, Wilcox, Grass, & Grass, 2007; Lowe, Adams, Browne, & Hinkle, 2012). If offered the needed level of support and encouragement many children may begin to feel a sense of pride in their service member’s job as a military warrior. Some children may exhibit feelings of separation anxiety, however once trust can be established, young children can develop the same level of attachment to the service member that they have formed with the at-home parent (Huebner, Mancini, Wilcox, Grass, & Grass, 2007; Lowe, Adams, Browne, & Hinkle, 2012).
Children Ages 11-13

Some children naturally step into an adult role within the home after a parent deploys to ensure that the family can stabilize and adjust to the parent’s absence (Hooker, 2011; Park, 2011). This may lead to role ambiguity upon the return of the deployed parent may contribute to higher levels of stress and anxiety experienced by school age children.

**Anticipation of departure/detachment and withdrawal/emotional disorganization.**

Adolescents and pre-adolescents may have a deeper understanding of what a parent’s deployment means. This level of understanding may decrease the anger that children feel toward a deploying parent, however fears and anxiety concerning their parent’s safety may increase (Laser & Stephens, 2011).

A common theme of altered behavior is that school grades begin to deteriorate, aberrant and impulsive behaviors increase, and a general mode of ‘touchiness’ exists around these middle and upper grade student – often without their being aware of the likely cause. (Jerles, 2011, p. 22)

Jerles goes on to note that once a child has conquered these challenges, his or her sense of self worth can often be higher than his or her peers (Jerles, 2011). Young adolescents may start modeling what they perceive is their parent’s behavior when learning how to handle or react to stress (Huebner, et al., 2010).

According to Flake, et al. (2009), children in grades seven and eight are at the highest risk for developing psychosocial morbidity than children in other age groups. This may be due, in part, to the many changes that younger adolescents are undergoing developmentally. Cognitively, young adolescents are beginning to develop abstract thought. Friends and peers start
to take on an important role of influence over the behavior and desires of many young adolescents.

**Recovery and stabilization.** Although researchers have advised against allowing adolescents to enter into more adult roles within the family system, such as by taking on the responsibility of a co-parent, many adolescents appear to thrive under these new responsibilities: “A few adolescents seemed to take pride in their assumed new ‘adult’ roles in the household, noting that these enabled them to grow up faster and therefore be more responsible and dependable” (Mmari et al., 2008, p. 464). This may be related to the motive to move between a perceived negative (being viewed as a child) to a perceived positive (being viewed and recognized as an adult), once again emphasizing Adler’s belief of a person’s purpose to move from negative to positive (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

**Anticipation of return.** Young adolescents who have been reprimanded or in trouble during a parent’s deployment may begin to worry about their service member’s return home and how their service member will react to past actions (DeVoe & Ross, 2012). Around the age of 11 and higher, children and young adolescents begin to develop a more abstract ability to think and interpret their surroundings, including the ability to begin predicting and anticipating future events (Mmari et al., 2008). This increase in cognitive abilities may add to stress as a new source of anxiety.

**Return adjustment and renegotiation.** For adolescents living in military families a deployed parent’s return can be extremely difficult. This difficulty can center “on the fact that routines and responsibilities had changed and the returning parent was not aware of the changes, expecting everything to be the same as it was when he or she left” (Huebner et al., 2007, p. 118).
For example, adolescents who have established social routines during their parent’s absence may be pressured into spending all or most of their free time with the parent upon his or her return (Mmari, et al., 2008). This pressure may be difficult as the teenager may feel a disconnect between him or herself and the returning service member: “Many felt that they had hardly anything to talk with their fathers about as they ‘barely knew anything about him’” (Mmari, et al., 2008, p. 465).

**Reintegration and stabilization.** Because young adolescents have formed stronger bonds with the at-home parent, they may not welcome another parent role back into their life readily. “They may quietly or openly refuse to be parented by the returning service member” (Laser & Stephens, 2011, p. 33). According to Mmari, et al. (2008), some adolescents claimed that their at-home parent’s depression hurt their relationship.

**Children Ages 14-18**

Adolescents can also suffer from physical manifestations of high stress and anxiety due to parental deployment. In addition to behavioral problems and a decline in academic performance, adolescents may have systolic blood pressure and high heart rates (Park, 2011). “Adolescents who adapted well during parental deployment showed the ability to put the situation in perspective; positive reframing; the embracing of change and adaptation as necessary; effective coping skills; and good relationships with family, friends, and neighbors” (Park, 2011, p. 68). Teenagers are in a unique stage of development that warrants a variety of behaviors and reactions. Adolescents are still children in that they still require some guidance and direction as provided by a parent or caregiver, but because of their heightened desire for responsibility and adult companionship many adolescents step into the role of a co-parent (Mmari et al., 2008).
Mmari et al. (2008) explain that because adolescents are physically more capable of caring for themselves than younger, less self-sufficient children, many at-home caregivers will consider them less likely to require “substitute adult care and supervision during the time of parent-child separation… parental deployment is likely to have an especially profound impact on the mental, social, and emotional health of adolescents” (p. 456).

Anticipation of departure. The adolescent’s family environment has a strong influence on the coping abilities that adolescents exhibit during various stages within the cycle of deployment. “Parents can model healthy or unhealthy ways of dealing with stress and their behaviors are often modeled by their adolescent” (Huebner, et al., 2010). Adolescents who have relied on unhealthy means of coping such as internalizing depression, may tend to display more depressive symptoms when anticipating a stressful period (Mmari et al., 2008).

Detachment and withdrawal. Adolescents are especially vulnerable to the stresses that parents exhibit (Laser & Stephens, 2011; Rotter & Boveja, 1999; Huebner et al., 2010). This may be due in part to the fact that they are becoming more adult-like in appearance and behavior. Parents try to protect their younger children from the stresses that they are feeling by arguing behind closed doors or offering positive explanations regarding the service member’s departure (DeVoe & Ross, 2012). However, because adolescents are capable of a deeper level of understanding than younger children, fewer parents hide their frustrations from the adolescent (DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Mmari et al., 2008). As a result, the adolescent may have learned to emotionally distance him or herself from the deploying service member in the same manner as a spouse might (DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Laser & Stephens, 2011; Flake et al., 2009).

Emotional disorganization. Adolescents will sense the at-home parent’s need for help throughout the household and step into a role that can provide such support. Because of their
own need for guidance and parental support this can lead to further role confusion, especially if
the at-home caregiver comes to rely on the adolescent’s support too much (DeVoe & Ross, 2012;
Laser & Stephens, 2011; Flake et al., 2009). Teens have reported withdrawing from social
activities and a decline in their academic performance due to less time available and less
supervision (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011).

Because of their fear for the deployed parent’s safety, some teenagers may become more
irritable. This can lead to disrespectful behavior both at home and at school as well as risky
behaviors including cutting and substance abuse (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011).

Recovery and stabilization. The adolescents who perceive more support and
reassurance from the at-home parent reported higher levels of adjustment to the deployment
experience (Huebner, et al., 2010). Conversely, adolescents who feel less support from their at-
home caregivers may have more difficulties adjusting to the departure of their service member
(Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011; Huebner et al., 2010). During the recovery and stabilization
stage of deployment adolescents may have tried to step into a more mature role by assuming the
responsibilities of a co-parent. Although their intentions may be to help support and encourage
the at-home parent, support for these adolescents may be lost or forgotten due to their exhibition
of mature behavior and self-sufficiency (DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Huebner et al., 2010).

Adolescents who are assigned these new roles may feel the most pressure to fulfill these
roles satisfactorily and may find they are sacrificing other roles that had previously been
important to them such as social activities (Huebner et al., 2010). Examples of being assigned a
new role may include statements such as “you’re the man of the house, now” or “take care of
your brothers” which a departing parent may often make in an effort to show trust and
encouragement to their teenager (DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Huebner et al., 2010). However,
Huebner, et al. (2010) warns that if an adolescent must give up other roles in an effort to assume these new responsibilities, they may not be carrying a developmentally appropriate load. Adolescents may internalize their feelings rather than discussing or sharing them for fear that sharing their negative feelings may exacerbate the pressures and stress of their at-home parent (Huebner et al., 2010).

Anticipation of return/return, adjustment and renegotiation. Adolescents approach the news that their deployed parent is returning home with mixed emotions. However, adolescents who have taken on new roles within the household may worry about having to give up their new responsibilities (Huebner et al., 2010; DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Flake et al., 2009). Adolescents preparing for adulthood have a uniquely difficult time during a service member’s return (Laser & Stephens, 2011).

Teenagers are prone to the effects of anti-war campaigns more than younger children, which can lead to higher stress levels (Chandra et al., 2011; Esposito-Smythers, 2011). Because the media coverage of military deployments focuses on negative incidents, the teenager may have a heightened sense of fear both for his or her own safety and for the safety of his or her parent (Chandra et al., 2011; Esposito-Smythers, 2011). Additionally, adolescents who may have distanced themselves emotionally from their service member may remain distant upon the service member’s return (DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Huebner et al., 2010).

Huebner et al. (2010) explains that adolescents may feel resentment toward their returned parent because that parent “did not recognize how much they had matured during the course of deployment, how much more responsibility they were ready for” (p. 21). Adolescents may also have a hard time trusting that their service member is home to stay (DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Chandra et al., 2011, Huebner et al., 2010).
Reintegration and stabilization. Adolescents feel a myriad of both positive and negative feelings throughout the reintegration stage (Huebner et al., 2010). Feelings of increased maturity and responsibility lead to a desire for more responsibility and feelings of pride, while difficulties trusting the deployed service member may remain high. Some adolescents may withdraw from the family to pursue other interests that they may have sacrificed during the deployment (Huebner et al., 2010, p. 13).

Spouses and At-Home Parents

![Diagram showing the hypothetical effects of the various stages of the deployment cycle and their impact on family stability](adapted from Sheppard et al., 2010)

Figure 2: The hypothetical effects of the various stages of the deployment cycle and their impact on family stability (adapted from Sheppard et al., 2010)

One indicator of how children might react to a parent’s deployment may be predicted in the reaction of the spouse or partner who remains at home after the service member has deployed. According to Esposito-Smythers et al. (2011), “there exists ample evidence to suggest that parental functioning affects youth emotional and behavioral health” (p. 500). Researchers have reported in the past, the stress and anxiety felt by children and adolescents of military
service members can be directly influenced by the level of stress and anxiety expressed by the parents (Flake et al., 2009, DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Laser & Stephens, 2011; Rotter & Boveja, 1999). This influence is likely reciprocal, meaning the stress the at-home parent exhibits will lead to further stress and anxiety in the child, which will in turn lead to more stress and anxiety in the at-home parent in a spiraling fashion (Flake et al., 2009; DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011).

Similarly, at-home parents and spouses who are well prepared to cope with the stress and strain of deployment can positively affect their children (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011). When parents exhibit feelings of confidence and pride their children will likely exhibit similar feelings, leading to feelings of more confidence and pride in the parent in the same spiraling fashion. Figure 1, adapted from Sheppard et al. (2010) offers a visual representation of how the stress and functioning of a caregiver can impact the stress and functioning of a child, and together they can impact the stress and stability of a family through the various stages of deployment.

**Anticipation of departure.** “Military couples face unique stressors that are associated with the culture of the military as well as the agonies of combat experienced in the midst of an active war zone” (Basham, 2007, p. 83). According to Laser and Stephens (2011) arguments between couples become commonplace early in the deployment cycle. Part of this may be attributed to the seriousness of the plans and activities that they must accomplish prior to deploying (Laser & Stephens, 2011; Basham, 2007).

Couples may begin to experience conflicting feelings upon receiving new of an upcoming deployment. Some feel they should be enjoying each other’s company and making the most out of the few days that they have together before the deployment (DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Basham,
2007). But, some couples are also angry or overwhelmed with a sense of hopelessness (Basham, 2007; Laser & Stephens, 2011). Sometimes, decisions may become difficult to make.

**Detachment and withdrawal.** Spouses and domestic partners often complain that the service member becomes emotionally distant during the train-up preparation and mobilization stages (Laser & Stephens, 2011). Research suggests that this may lead to a feeling of relief once the service member is gone, indicating that the anticipation and withdrawal stages can be the most difficult for the spouse and partner to cope with (Laser & Stephens, 2011). This may be because other methods of coping with the stress are not yet applicable; the military service member is still in the home physically but is not psychologically available for support, yet the partner cannot seek out other forms of support. Additionally, fear that something bad may happen to their service member may keep some spouses from sharing feelings such as frustration or anger in an effort to ensure that their service member leaves with a positive memory of them.

**Emotional disorganization.** There is a chance that the emotional loss and grief associated with a spouse or partner’s deployment may lead to feelings of depression in the remaining parent. Whenever a spouse or partner is deployed the at-home spouse “experiences a loss of emotional support, increased responsibilities, and a major need to adjust role accountability” (Gambardella, 2008, p. 170). Conrad and Hammen (1989) investigated the supposition that depressed parents were more likely to report maladaptive behavior in their children inaccurately. This investigation found that depressed parents, and especially depressed mothers, tend to be more intolerant of dysfunctional behavior in their children than parents who are not suffering from depression (Conrad & Hammen, 1989). “It is highly likely that these ingredients influence each other in a downward spiral and reciprocal effects; that is, many of the children might actually be difficult and elicit criticism from and demoralization in their mother”
(Conrad & Hammen, 1989, p. 666). Because they are suffering from many of the same symptoms as their difficult children, many depressed parents may become more readily attuned to signs of depression within their children. Because they are no longer looking at their children through “rose-colored glasses” they can more easily discern behaviors that they may have previously overlooked (Conrad & Hammen, 1989).

Some couples experience a sense of relief as the military service member finally leaves for deployment, possibly because the wait and the building anticipation is over, so they can begin to move on. This initial feeling of relief may be replaced quickly with guilt and numbness as they begin to review the many responsibilities they must now face. These feelings may manifest as irritability, sleeplessness, or oversleeping (Wexler & McGrath, 1991).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reactions</th>
<th>17-20</th>
<th>21-25</th>
<th>25-30</th>
<th>Over 30</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Feelings</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worry</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical Reactions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive Eating</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced Eating</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insomnia</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Reactions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children are Very Disturbed</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wexler and McGrath (1991) found that spouses between the ages of 25 and 30 had a marked increase in worry and other negative emotional states over the other age groups (see Table 2 above).

**Recovery and stabilization.** Recovering the family’s stability after a loved one’s departure is most often the burden of the at-home parent. If adequately prepared and if sufficient help and support is available, the remaining parent will be able to stabilize the family more quickly than those who are less prepared. For the at-home parent this may include taking on the
role of both parents, acting as both mother and father, changing employment, or seeking out new
resources to cope with the stress and strain of deployment (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011).

Table 4: Reactions to Military-Induced Separations Reported by at-home Spouses (adapted from Wexler & McGrath, 1991, p. 516).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional Reactions</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Physical Reactions</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Feelings</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Headaches</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>Stomachaches</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Eating too much</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distraught</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Eating too little</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pessimistic</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Sleeping too much</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Insomnia</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abandoned</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Nervousness</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopeless</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Can’t concentrate</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Distracted</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerlessness</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Rashes / skin problems</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nightmares</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Feelings</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>More colds than usual</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrifice</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>More accident prone</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patriotic</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committed</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wexler and McGrath (1991) performed a pilot study through which they were able to
ascertain many common emotional and physical reactions to military-induced separation
reported by their spouses (See Table 3 above). In their study, the at-home spouses were asked to
report their reactions as well as the reactions of their children (if any reactions by children were
perceived). Sheppard et al. (2010) explain that “risk and resiliency factors interact and influence
parent-child relationships and interactions, thereby indirectly influencing child outcomes” (p. 604).

**Anticipation of return.** DeVoe and Ross (2012) explain that a spouse or partner may
feel a sense of relief upon hearing the news that their service member will be returning home. In
some cases, this sense of relief may instill a sense that once the service member is back home, he
or she will be able to lift some of the burden that they have been carrying during his or her
absence. Some spouses may relieve themselves of the burden early by postponing some decisions, such as those related to parenting, that are not time sensitive or do not require an immediate response (DeVoe & Ross, 2012). At-home caregivers who have had a particularly difficult time coping with the stress of deployment, or have been taking care of children, may find themselves using the service member’s return as a contingency before they will address any new issues that may arise (DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Laser & Stephens, 2011). For example, if a child displays inappropriate behavior the at-home parent may decide to address the need for discipline “after your [mother or] father gets home.”

News of a loved one’s return can also elicit feelings of worry and anxiety if the spouse or partner has made changes to the home and family during the service member’s absence (DeVoe & Ross, 2012). The spouse may begin to reevaluate the changes he or she can see within him- or herself and try to determine whether or not these changes will still align with what he or she believes his or her spouse will be expecting (Flake et al., 2009). This is a time when at-home spouses may begin to reevaluate their marriage.

**Return adjustment and renegotiation.** A military service member’s return home to his or her spouse or partner is generally characterized as a honeymoon stage in which intimate relations, joy, and a physical reconnection are formed. This honeymoon stage ends when the couple experiences their first argument (Rotter & Boveja, 1999; Laser & Stephens, 2011). This may be because an emotional reconnection takes longer than a physical reconnection.

“Many soldiers and their partners experience pride and a shared sense of accomplishment” (Basham, 2007, p. 90). The service member will be proud of all he or she was able to accomplish within the contexts of his or her mission while being away from home (Basham, 2007; Laser & Stephens, 2011). The remaining spouse or partner may be proud of all
that the family was able to accomplish during the service member’s absence (DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Laser & Stephens, 2011; Flake et al., 2009; Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011).

It often takes time before the couple begins to feel like a couple again, which may lead to feelings of tension and discomfort as they begin to get to know each other again. Eventually, the feelings of “our,” “we,” and “us” will return and tensions will start to subside (DeVoe & Ross, 2012).

**Reintegration and stabilization.** The remaining parent may become a beacon of behavior during a service member’s deployment (Jenson et al., 1996). Children who have been angry with the deployed parent for leaving may look to the at-home parent as an example of whether or not they can still be angry. Children who perceive their at-home parent is hurt or distressed by the service member may become protective, acting out against the returning service member in a show of solidarity and love for the parent who has cared for them (Jenson et al., 1996). Once the roles and routines throughout the family have been reevaluated and a new sense of normalcy has been implemented children begin to react to the relief that their at-home parent exhibits.

In cases where the service member returns home with signs of physical or psychological trauma the reintegration stage may take longer. Spouses and partners who had been looking forward to the reprieve of not having to run the household alone may find that they need to give the service member more time to adjust before being able to rely on him or her for help (DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Laser & Stephens, 2011). Devoe and Ross (2012) explain that the “at-home parent’s experience of stress may be a more accurate predictor of family functioning in families in which a deployed parent returns with a physical combat injury than the severity of the injury itself” (p. 188).
Every deployment leaves its legacy on a service member’s family. Spouses develop new strengths and resources that they have learned to rely on during their partner’s deployment. Children continue to grow and develop even during their parent’s absence. Through these changes, the family unit itself changes. “Even among highly adaptive and resilient families, the end of the deployment marks the beginning of new realities for each family member and the family system as a whole” (DeVoe & Ross, 2012, p. 188). The final stage of a military service member’s deployment is characterized by his or her reintegration back into the family system, establishing new routines and a new sense of normalcy that takes these changes and growths into consideration while incorporating this legacy into the family system’s future.
The New Military Deployment Paradigm

Military Process and Support

The military’s configuration has changed recently “to an all-voluntary force, where many service members are older and have established their own families” (Laser & Stephens, 2011, p.28). “Up to 2 million US children have been exposed to a wartime deployment of a loved one in the past 10 years” (Siegel, Davis, et. al., 2013, p. 2002).

Families are experiencing war practically in real time for the first time in the nation’s history (Siegel, Davis, et al., 2013). The media has gotten faster at interpreting and delivering pictures, videos, and stories of war efforts not only via television and newspaper, but also through the Internet, social media, cell phone use, and near instant video delivery. The ability of the military to provide their members with almost constant contact with their families back home can bring their deployed members and their families comfort. However, according to Siegel, Davis, et al. (2013) “conversations of ‘near misses,’ abrupt disruptions in phone calls, and rumors of injury and death (even in the ‘safe zone’) before confirmation” have led to an increased sense of fear in the family left behind that has not yet been experienced in previous wars (p. 2005).

Military Deployment Process

Every military deployment experienced by a service member and his or her family is different. Military deployments that order a service member to a combat zone may have an underlying sense of fear or anxiety that go beyond the fear and anxiety of a peace time deployment. However, as new threats against the United States are identified and defined, the process of deployment itself has changed.
Prior operations sent military members against specific enemies that were easily identified. Today’s frontlines are more ambiguous and the enemies are no longer easily defined. These uncertain frontlines can lead to increased risk of PTSD (Laser & Stephens, 2011). Additionally, many branches of the military are currently working to restructure their deployment process as they learn about the effects of this new type of warfare. The changes being made are not in full effect and the repercussions of such changes may not be known for years.

**Military expectations.** Deployment is not the only source of familial disruption. Military service members are often ordered to move from one installation to another with little to no notice. These changes, called a Permanent Change of Station (PCS), are anything but permanent. As Flake et al. (2009) points out, “Family moves cause school routine disruption…for the parent, frequent relocation can result in feeling detached from the assigned unit, and both military and community local support systems” (p. 276).

**Available support.** Laser and Stephens (2011) explain that families of active military service members appear to have stronger support networks and more resources available to them: “The enlisted service member family may have greater knowledge of what to expect about deployment due to the family’s proximity to the base and to other military families” (p. 28). Even with this added support, up to 50% of enlisted military families relocate temporarily “from their military installations to their hometowns to receive support from extended family and friends during deployments” (Flake et al., 2009, p. 271).

“National Guard or Reservist families may be isolated from other military families or military support” (Laser & Stephens, 2011, p. 28). However, the military does still extend support through any possible means to reservists and guard members and their families.
Esposito-Smythers et al. (2011) list a variety of programs and web sites designed to offer support, encouragement, and mental health help through psychoeducation, outreach programs, and peer-based support groups. Because Reservists and National Guard members are often paid less by the military, many of them face greater financial hardship (Laser & Stephens, 2011). However, many of these programs are either offered at no cost to the service members or can be covered by the service member’s insurance policy. The efficacy of these programs may be under question, however. As Esposito-Smythers et al., (2011) assert, the only programs proven to have a positive impact for youth with behavioral or emotional symptoms of psychosocial morbidity include psychotherapy in a traditional professional setting, which is not listed among the programs being offered by the military currently. Of the programs listed, most require more research to determine their efficacy as “there has been so systematic or published empirical evaluation of the impact of these services on youth emotional or behavioral health outcomes, or their appropriateness for military families” (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011, p. 503).

Support groups are commonly used to help military families. Within the context of the military, military spouses rather than trained mental health professionals often lead these groups. Additionally, these groups tend “to emphasize growth and education rather then psychopathology” (Jensen et al., 1996, p. 440). These groups typically exclude children, relying on the concept that providing support for the at-home parent will indirectly benefit the children by increasing the parent’s awareness and functioning (Jensen et al., 1996).

“Nationwide parents, teachers, military leaders, and health care professionals are working to provide psychosocial support to minimize the stress of military child and family” (Flake et al., 2009, p. 272). Additionally, schools are becoming a sanctuary for children coping with the deployment of a parent (Jerles, 2011). This is especially true in areas with a high military
population concentration, where many of the students will be attending school with others who are also facing familial deployment, and many of the teachers and counselors are familiar with military deployment. According to Jerles (2011), “Schools with a large population of children whose parents are deployed frequently have planned interventions” (p. 23). Children of military reservists may find themselves at a disadvantage as they often attend schools with a very low concentration of military children.

**Summary**

A child’s age, birth order, and the role the child assumes within the family system all play a large part in determining how that child may react to a parent’s deployment. In some cases, watching the at-home parent’s reaction to the deployment is the single highest indicator of how a child might react to a parent’s deployment. Families who are well supported are often able to adjust through the stages of deployment faster and more easily than families who are not well prepared. More research is needed to explore the positive outcomes of military deployment on military families and children, to distinguish whether or not newer configurations of a military family endure a deployment cycle in the same way that a traditional family does, and to determine the efficacy of civilian-centered psychotherapy on military children.

**Conclusion**

Military deployment is a process in which a service member is ordered to leave his or her home and family to carry out a mission and then return home. Although the nature of these missions and the length of time that a service member has to complete these missions may differ, each deployment process is made up of seven distinct stages. Each stage within the deployment cycle can impact the service member and each member of his or her family in different ways that, in turn, leaves an impact on the family system. The reactions of family members to the
stress of deployment may further be influenced by their ages, how other members of the family are reacting to the deployment, and their roles within the family prior to the deployment. Accompanied with this knowledge trained civilian mental health professionals will now have a clearer understanding of how they can help military family members endure the deployment of their service member.
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