



TIPS FOR DADS on Deployment

Part FOUR¹

During Deployment: Staying Involved with Your Wife or Coparent



In the first month or so after you deploy, your wife and other family members will experience many of the same emotions as you—plus a few more. Some will be continuations of emotions experienced during the pre-deployment phase. Others will be new. They may feel sad, angry, relieved, afraid, lonely, and overwhelmed—sometimes all at the same time. Staying involved through regular and clear communications will help everyone deal with these often conflicting emotions.

In this Spotlight, we offer tips to help you stay involved with your wife/coparent and your children's other caregivers. Some of these tips also apply to communicating with your kids. We will explore additional tips for staying involved with your kids in Part Five.

¹ This is the fourth in a series of six National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse Spotlights, which provide tips for dads on deployment. The series is authored by Armin Brott, a former Marine, fatherhood author (Ask Mr. Dad), and host of the radio show Positive Parenting for Military Families. The series was developed with assistance from Nigel Vann (Fathers Incorporated).

COMMUNICATION GROUND RULES



PHONE CALLS



VIDEO CHATS



LETTERS



EMAILS



GIFTS

Technology can help you stay in touch, but it and military life will likely present uncertainties during any deployment. The following ground rules should help you deal with and adjust to these challenges.

✓ Create a schedule

When possible, schedule frequent short calls.

- Create a schedule for calls but remind your family members that competing job priorities could interfere with the schedule.
- Don't make promises you won't be able to keep in terms of frequency or method of communicating.
 - Will communicating every day or every other day work? Or is once a week more realistic?
 - Will you call on the phone? Have a video chat? Send emails? Use regular mail?

✓ Be patient

Sending or receiving communications can be problematic, especially in the early stages of a deployment before communications systems are set up. Prepare your family for the possibility of these situations:

- Power outages or no electricity at all.
- Limited or nonexistent landline or cell phone service, long lines to use computers or phones, or erratic postal service.
- Security restrictions that limit what you're allowed to talk about.
- A mission may require you to go dark for a while, without being able to let anyone know in advance.

✓ Begin calls with the most important topics

You never know when something might interrupt your call.

- Open with "I love you." Everything else is details.

✓ Avoid very serious conversations

Especially avoid those conversations that pertain to your relationships—unless you or your family absolutely have to.

- Avoid making critical decisions during the conversation. Attempting to do so leaves too much room for miscommunication. If you get cut off in the middle of a discussion, you'll be brooding for days.
- Some things may be better left unsaid. For example, talking about a serious problem that you can't do anything about could distract you from your mission. And that's not good for you or anyone around you.

✓ Read the emails and letters you write a couple of times

- Make sure you've said what you want to say.
- Avoid saying anything you may regret later.

✓ Think about security

- To protect the safety of the mission and your family, don't post any sensitive information on the internet—even on your own blog or website.
- Be particularly careful not to mention personal information about yourself, your wife or coparent, your kids, where they live, where you're currently deployed, when you're coming back, or anything about your mission.

Harness the Power of Video Technology But Know Its Limits

- Nothing replaces the experience of seeing your family light up when they open gifts from you or seeing how your children are growing.
- However, video communications can also cause the family to feel difficult emotions such as fear and sorrow. So, if that is a concern, nonvisual communications (audio calls or emails with photos) might be the better way to go.



KEEPING RELATIONSHIPS STRONG

The more your coparent and other caregivers can support and encourage the steps you take to stay in touch with your children, the closer and stronger the family relationship will be. However, they will have some stressful days, so it won't hurt to indicate how much you value what they are doing to help you and the kids stay connected.

✓ Don't compare and don't criticize

You may be dealing with life-threatening situations every day. Meanwhile, back at home, your coparent is probably experiencing some pretty intense battles too.

- It's easy to second-guess someone when you're not living in their world. Your coparent probably has the good sense not to tell you how to do your job, so show them the same courtesy.

✓ Support your coparent

Your coparent needs to know you understand that life isn't easy at home right now.

- They also need to know you think they're doing a great job and that you support them 100 percent. So, tell them often how much you appreciate everything they're doing.

✓ Encourage your coparent to seek support

You automatically receive a lot of emotional and social support from the other men in your unit. Each of you knows exactly what everyone else is going through, and sometimes just knowing you're not alone can be quite reassuring. Your coparent can probably benefit from a similar support network.

- Fortunately, every unit has a family support organization where wives and coparents can get together with others who share their experience.
 - These groups offer all kinds of support from a safe place to vent frustrations to help with babysitting.
- If your coparent isn't taking advantage of the local family support organization, encourage them to do so.
 - One of the benefits of getting together with others is having a chance to compare emotions.
 - If your coparent is worried that their feelings are abnormal, wrong, or a sign of weakness, seeing that others are feeling the same way can be reassuring.
- Taking a break from all the deployment and military talk by finding support outside the unit and away from the base could also be helpful.
 - There may be local meet-up groups or religious and community organizations where there are people who share common interests.



Encourage your coparent to keep a positive outlook

But be very careful how you do this. Telling a person who's overwhelmed, lonely, sad, and depressed to "cheer up" or "look at the bright side" won't go over well.

- It's better to say, "it won't always be this way" or "we will get through this."



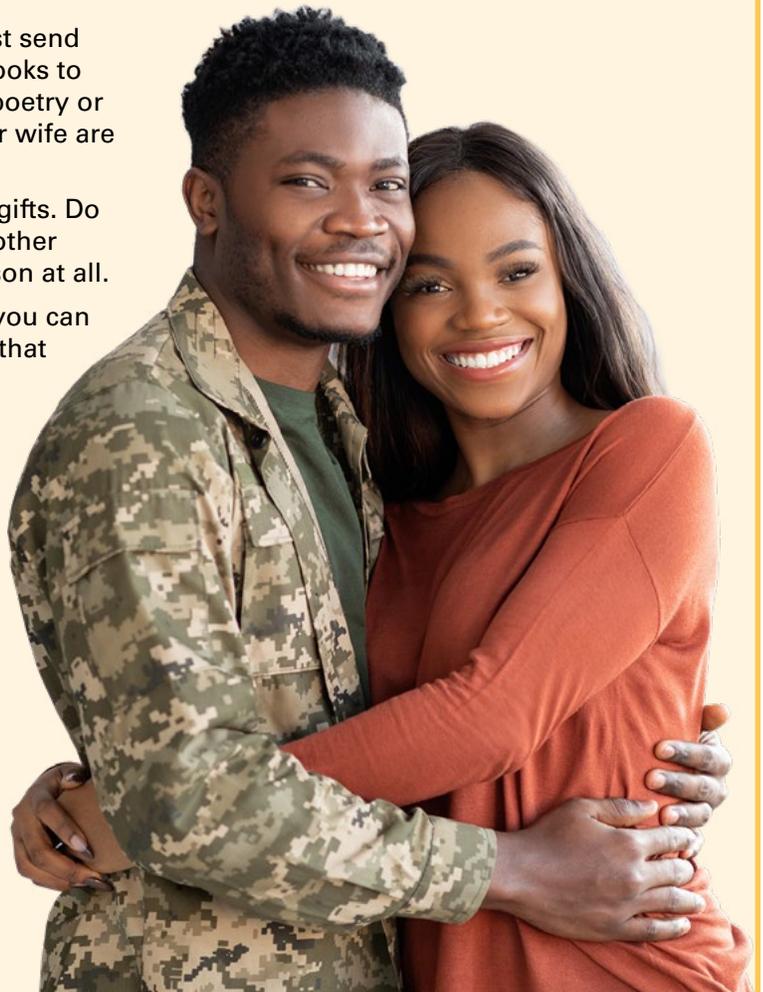
Encourage your coparent to find some time for themselves

Downtime in our society is an underrated activity. And a little bit of self-care goes a long way.

- Taking a couple of hours off to enjoy a yoga class or just a long walk alone could energize your coparent for the rest of the week.

NURTURE YOUR ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP

- When you're paying so much attention to keeping your relationship with your children strong, it's easy to forget that your relationship with your wife or partner needs care and nurturing as well. For example:
 - If you're making videos, don't just send recordings of yourself reading books to your kids. Go ahead and record poetry or a chapter of a novel you and your wife are interested in.
 - Send ecards, jewelry, other little gifts. Do this for birthdays, holidays, and other special occasions—or for no reason at all.
 - Remind her in as many ways as you can think of and as often as possible that you love her and miss her.
 - Send some love notes (in sealed envelopes) to your children and ask them to hide the envelopes where mom will find them.



IF SHE'S GOING TO HAVE YOUR BABY WHILE YOU'RE AWAY

You want to be there, your coparent wants you to be there, but Uncle Sam needs you somewhere else right now. Despite the distance, though, you can do many things to stay connected.

- Make sure she knows every possible way to contact you just in case she needs to reach you quickly.
- Talk to your Commanding Officer about whether you can take a few days off. The military offers some paternity leave, although each branch has different policies, and you may have to wait until you return from deployment.
 - The good news is that paternity leave won't count against your regular 30 days of leave. The bad news is that the needs of the military trump your need for leave, so it's not guaranteed.
 - However, just having made the effort shows your coparent that you're committed to her and the baby, and it will boost her faith in you.
- Check into whether you can set up a real-time phone or video conference for the baby's delivery.
 - Although watching your baby's delivery is not the same as being there, your virtual presence will count for a lot. Also, having your schedule mesh with the timing of your baby's arrival involves some luck, but the timing has worked in some cases.
- If this is your first baby together, read as much as you can about the stages of pregnancy to learn about how your baby is developing and what your coparent is experiencing.
 - Ask her to send keepsakes to help you stay in the loop. An ultrasound picture or a recording of your baby's heartbeat is priceless.
 - When you get close to the baby's due date, read a book that covers childbirth and infancy. You want to understand as much as you can about what's happening with your coparent and your baby.
 - Don't forget to think about your own emotions and thoughts too. You may not be able to see or hold your baby, but fatherhood will change you too, and it's nice to understand how.

AFTER THE BABY IS BORN:

- Ask your coparent to talk to the baby about you. And, of course, ask for photos of the new baby.
- Send home a T-shirt you've worn. Babies learn a lot about their world through smell, so having your T-shirt may help your baby recognize you when you come home.
- Send more presents, flowers, and a spa-day gift certificate.
- Ask friends to help your coparent. Let them know the specific type of help that is needed.
 - Most people define help as holding the baby for a few minutes, cooing, and then giving the baby back.
 - Tell friends your coparent needs help with specific things, such as laundry, shopping, meal preparation, or keeping up with other household chores.



RESOURCES/FURTHER READING

- **Brott, Armin A.** (2009). The military father: A hands-on guide for deployed dads
<https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/military-father-hands-guide-deployed-dads>
- **Brott, A. A. & Rudick, J. A.** (2021). The expectant father: Facts, tips, and advice for dads-to-be. (5th ed.). <https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/expectant-father-facts-tips-and-advice-dads-be-second-edition>
- **The National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families** (2012)
[Tips for understanding military couple relationships after deployment](#)
- **MilitarySpot.com** (2011)
[Paternity leave in the military](#)
- **Sesame Street** (2022)
[What to do during a military deployment](#) is a resource developed by Sesame Street, which provides tips for caregivers while dad is away and videos to watch with the kids.

FAMILY SUPPORT RESOURCES

As indicated in *Before You Deploy: Prepare Yourself — and Your Family* (Part Three of this series of tips for dads on deployment), your coparent and other caregivers should be able to obtain information and support from one or more of the following:

- **Army Community Services**
<https://www.armymwr.com/programs-and-services/personal-assistance>
- **Navy Fleet and Family Support Center**
https://www.cnic.navy.mil/ffr/family_readiness/fleet_and_family_support_program.html/
- **Marine Corps Community Services**
<https://usmc-mccs.org/>
<https://www.nmcrs.org/>
- **Airforce Key Spouse Depository**
<https://www.afpc.af.mil/Airman-and-Family/Key-Spouse-Program/www.airforcesmallbiz.af.mil/>
- **Airman and Family Readiness Center**
<https://www.myairforcebenefits.us.af.mil/Benefit-Library/Federal-Benefits/Deployment-and-Mobilization-Support> (Each Air Force base also has its own Airman and Family Readiness Center and website.)
- **Military OneSource**
<https://www.militaryonesource.mil>