



IMAGINE STEPPING INTO  
YOUR CHILD'S WORLD AND  
SEEING THINGS FROM HIS  
OR HER POINT OF VIEW.

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# Keeping routines while preparing to leave

Children like and need routines. Deployment often makes it necessary to change some aspects of family life, but when children know what to expect, it helps them feel safer and more secure. Here are a few ideas to help you and your children maintain routines to help everyone cope during this time.

Share information with your children.

-  Help your children find where the parent will be located on a world map.
-  When possible, explain how long the parent will be away.
  - Set up a calendar to count down the weeks until the parent returns.
  - Make a paper chain of links to count the weeks.
  - Take beans out of a jar to count down the days or weeks.
-  Take pictures of the deployed parent with each child for them to keep.
-  Keep family routines as normal as possible (bedtime stories, mealtime chores, evening walks with the dog).
-  Reassure your children that you will help them manage while the parent is gone.
-  Help your children make a list of tasks they can do to help out during deployment.
-  Remind your children that the same rules/limits apply while the parent is away.

Involve your children in the preparations.

-  Let your children help the parent prepare for deployment (roll socks in balls, count tee shirts, find a special place for their pictures).
-  If possible, allow your children to “decorate” a deployment box and fill it with special treasures for the parent who is leaving.
-  Include your children in family goodbyes, if possible.

## Family rituals

Rituals are activities that create a sense of family and feeling of bonding among family members. For example, family rituals or routines can provide a feeling of togetherness (*We belong together*), consistency (*We go to Grandma's house each Sunday*), identity (*We're a hiking family*), and a way to teach values (*We say a nightly prayer*). When children take an active part in creating and practicing rituals, they feel connected and a part of something larger in their lives. In times of uncertainty and change, rituals can be the glue that holds a family together.