



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

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Saying goodbye to children

As you prepare for deployment, you may have many different emotions, ranging from excitement regarding a challenging assignment to guilt and sadness about leaving your family behind. For children, the main feeling is sadness; therefore, it is very important that they have help dealing with your leaving. You may have little time for goodbyes. Here are some suggestions for reminding your children that you love them and that they will be in your thoughts.

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 pick blueberries every July*), identity (*We're a fishing family*), and a way to teach values (*We adopt a family in need during the holiday season*). 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.

Involve your children.

- Let your children help you prepare for the 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.
- Give one another “comfort items” (a stuffed animal, a special rock or other small item) to hold on to during the separation.
- Take a picture of yourself with each child for him or her to keep.
- Spend individual time with each child before you leave.
- Include children in family good-byes, if possible.
 - Say goodbye instead of slipping away.
 - Keep goodbyes brief.

When both parents or single parents are going away

- ▶ Communicate with the caregiver about routines, rules, interests, comfort items, and special activities to help in the transition.
- ▶ Make a smooth transition from parent to caregiver, being as consistent as possible.
- ▶ Help the caregiver plan for special occasions, such as birthdays, if you are going to be away during that time.