



LESSON PLAN

Walking in Their Shoes

Topic: **Understanding the Military, Deployment Experience**

Grade Level: **Middle School** | Subject: **Language Arts** | Time: **50 minutes**

OBJECTIVE(S):

Students will explore the challenges of military life and deployment, discuss strategies for coping, and participate in a discussion designed to promote empathy.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- *There'll Always Be Baseball* video on MilitaryKidsConnect.org
- Printouts of Deployment Daily entries for small-group discussion
- "Deployment Daily" Handouts
- "Deployment Daily Small-Group Discussion" Worksheet
- Go to "Related Materials" in online version of this lesson plan to access all required links: www.militarykidsconnect.org/p/lp/mid

OTHER RESOURCES REQUIRED:

- Computer with classroom display and Internet access

LESSON

Suggested Activity Set-up and Discussion (7 minutes)

- Teacher sets up lesson by defining deployment and how it affects families
 - Defines deployment: a service member has to be relocated for his or her job. For example, during times of war, service members might be deployed to an area of conflict.
 - Explains that when parents deploy, kids might experience a variety of feelings – like sadness, worry, fear, anger, or anxiety.
 - Explains that it's hard to understand how a kid might feel if you're not "walking in his or her shoes."
 - Tells class that they will be watching a video about how one kid coped with his dad's deployment and return from war.

Video (4:15 minutes)

- Cue the video for *There'll Always Be Baseball*

Teacher-Led Large-Group Discussion (10 minutes)

- How would you feel if your parent was deployed for a long while? What would you miss about your deployed parent? How would you deal with your parent being away for months at a time?
- Teacher introduces students to the Deployment Daily entries written by military kids who are going through deployment and are facing challenges. Each entry has a problem and some suggested tips for handling the problem.

Small-Group Activity (20 minutes)

- Students break into small groups
- Teacher distributes one Deployment Daily entry to each group, along with the "Deployment Daily Small-Group Discussion" Worksheet
- Students read the Deployment Daily entries and complete the worksheet
- One representative from each group reports on the group discussion and possible solutions

Tips

- Encourage students to visit the Deployment Daily section of the MilitaryKidsConnect.org website during their free time to read about other issues military kids might face.

From www.MilitaryKidsConnect.org – A Department of Defense website for military youth coping with deployment.

WORKSHEET

Deployment Daily Small Group Discussion

Assignment: Read the Deployment Daily entry your teacher gave you. Put yourself in the main character's shoes and, as a group, discuss the following questions:

1. When does your Deployment Daily story take place? Before, during, or after deployment?
2. Who has deployed or who is deploying?
3. Describe the kid's specific worry/concern/dilemma/situation.
4. What emotions do you think the military kid felt about the situation?
5. What would you do in this situation? How would you cope?
6. Has anything similar ever happened to you?

DEPLOYMENT DAILY HANDOUT

Another Deployment

“Here we go again...”

Well, I thought this deployment stuff was all over. Much to my surprise, it is not. He was deployed AGAIN! This is the third time he was deployed, and each time it was for a year. I was 10 years old when he was first deployed; now I'm 14. He's been gone a lot. I am getting tired of saying goodbye. It's funny; I always think that it is not going to bother me each time, but it does. The hardest part is getting prepared for him to leave when you were just getting used to him being home. I feel like I live in two worlds, one with him home and one with him away. I must say I don't worry as much about him going because he always comes home just fine. But in the back of my mind, I wonder what will happen this time.

There is one difference about his leaving now. My family and I don't spend as much time focusing on the goodbye. The first time, we spent lots of time preparing for the goodbye to make it meaningful to everyone. Now we just say goodbye as if he was leaving on a trip. My brother and sisters and I don't need explanations about what is going to happen when he is gone. We know that we will have more responsibilities, but we always have more chores when he is gone.

Anyway, he will be back.

Helpful Tips

Even though you've been through this before, you might still have feelings about it. Refresh yourself on these tips as you prepare for your parent to leave:

- Do some activities together before your parent leaves. This will help you have good memories about your time together. New technology may be available now that you didn't have last time. Check out the **What's Up** page for high-tech ways that you can document the good times with your parent.
- Write down anything that you would like to say before your parent goes so you don't forget.
- Don't be surprised if you have different feelings this time because every time your parent leaves is different. You are older and the same feelings may come up for different reasons. Maybe last time you were disappointed because he missed your birthday, but this time you are disappointed because he won't be at your high school graduation.
- Be sure to ask if new questions occur to you before your parent leaves this time. Not knowing can cause lots of anxiety.

DEPLOYMENT DAILY HANDOUT

I'm Stressed!

"I'm having a panic attack!"

You probably don't want to hear this, but missing a parent when they go away is normal. As a military kid, you are probably very familiar with missing your parent when they are deployed. What you may NOT know is that for some kids all the worrying and changes around their parent's deployment can create significant anxiety. You might find it helpful to know that the common symptoms of anxiety are excessive worry, trouble sleeping, not being able to think, and/or feeling irritable. For some kids, a lot of anxiety all at one time might feel like a panic attack.

Anxiety may increase, depending on the thoughts you have. Thinking about the safety of your parent when they go away is a common source of anxiety for military kids. Anxiety can be worse if there are uncertainties, such as when they will come home, where they are going, and how you will keep in touch. Experiencing high levels of anxiety may prevent you from going to school and keeping in touch with your friends. Before he or she leaves, you may not want to be separated from your parent. You may feel like being with him or her every moment of the day. If your parent has returned from a deployment, you may constantly worry that you will be separated again on a re-deployment.

Try some of the tips below to help you reduce your anxiety related to the changes you are anticipating when your parent is deployed. If you really feel distressed, it would definitely be helpful to talk to your parent.

Helpful Tips

- Exercise, exercise, exercise! Believe it or not, exercise can reduce your anxiety and help you relax.
- Try not to drink anything that is caffeinated, including soda, energy drinks, coffee, or tea. Caffeine actually increases feelings of anxiety.
- Listen to a guided imagery to relax. Mobile applications, the Internet, and music stores will all have ones you can choose from.
- Practice calm breathing when you get stressed. There's an app for that: **Breath2Relax** is created by the same Department of Defense (DoD) organization that created this MilitaryKidsConnect.org website.
- Try expressing your frustrations to someone you trust or by journaling.
- Build your confidence in yourself by writing three positive thoughts about yourself every day. Try to come up with new positive thoughts each day.

DEPLOYMENT DAILY HANDOUT

Reaching Out

“I was really surprised how much it helped to tell my teacher at school.”

The first time my dad deployed, I was in fifth grade. He had just joined up with the National Guard. None of my friends even knew what the National Guard was. They didn't believe me when I told them he was going to Afghanistan. I quit talking about it after a while. But I think someone told my teacher because one day, she told me to come in during lunch. I was going crazy trying to figure out what I did wrong. But she just wanted to tell me that she'd heard my dad was deployed and asked me how I was doing with him being gone. It was kind of weird talking to her, but she was really nice. I'd missed a couple of days when we went to see my dad off, and I told her that was why my book talk was late. She was really cool – she said if I'd told her what was going on, she wouldn't have taken off points for being late. Wish I would've told her sooner.

Now I'm in eighth grade, and he's going again. My mom and dad and I talked it over, and we decided to do things differently this time. Even before my dad left, he and my mom asked for a teacher meeting. They were mega clear that I couldn't slack off or try to get away with things, but they did want my teachers to know what was going on this time. My parents told me to pick two of my friends, and we had this family field trip where my friends went with us to the National Guard Armory. It was a blast – we got to see soldiers drilling and even checked out a Humvee. At least now my friends believe me. My football coach at school used to be in the Marines, and every couple of weeks I eat lunch with him and some other kids. He tells some wild stories.

It's hard not having anyone who understands what you're going through when your dad leaves on deployment. But I'm glad that we figured out how to find people at school who at least now know what's up.

Helpful Tips

- Talk it over with your parent, but consider telling a few people at school that your parent is deploying. You decide who best to tell, but make sure to tell at least one adult.
- You need your friends to “get it” if they're not military so that they can be there for you. But remember that it's up to YOU to find ways to educate them about the military. Maybe invite them to watch some of our **4Real or Perspectives videos**.
- Ask your military parent to come to your school and talk to your class, team, or club about military deployments and working in a foreign country.

DEPLOYMENT DAILY HANDOUT

The Deployment's Bad Enough, But a Move, Too?

"These people don't have a clue around here."

TJ's mom had to TDY for 4 months of training, so TJ went to live with his dad. He liked going to his dad's on weekends; he'd been thinking he'd like to live with dad, but this was different. For one thing, he didn't have a choice. His parents decided it for him. Plus, his dad lived in this tiny little town on the edge of nowhere. The only thing those people knew about helicopters was that they made lots of noise. They wouldn't know a Huey or an Apache if it landed right on top of them. TJ missed his friends, his school, and his neighborhood. He missed being around people who knew what he was talking about. He told this one kid that his mom was TDY, and the kid thought that was her name.

An often unseen part of deployments and off-installation training is that kids have to move. You live with your military mom, like TJ; when she's gone, so are you. If you're a military kid, moving happens. But this is different. You're not moving with your parent, but somewhere new without them. It feels like you're on your own. You might be moving off base into a civilian community where no one knows much about the military. There's a statistic that says only 1% of Americans are connected directly to the military. That means, if you meet 100 new people, only 1 is going to know much about the military firsthand. On top of these new worries, you still have all the same old moving hassles to handle – missing old friends, trying to fit in at your new school, finding all your stuff, and learning your way around. It's easy to think the new people you're around "don't have a clue" and to stay kind of mad and resentful about how unfair life is. Instead, you can step up and do something about it.

Helpful Tips

- It's OK to look back – stay in touch with people who you know love you, such as your parent, your old friends, and even past teachers, coaches, or staff that you really liked. This is called your "support network," and it's up to you to keep it going and to let them know how you're doing.
- You've got to look forward, too. The new place is only going to be as good as you try to make it. Don't tackle it all at once – target one thing at a time. Consider finding ways to educate your new friends about the military and deployments. Send them this link: **Military Youth Coping with Separation**.
- Take a positive action to help someone else. By looking outside of ourselves and helping someone else with a problem, our own problems often look different. For service project ideas, check out these **4Real videos**: *Video Class*, *Bear Hug*, *Super Volunteer*, or *Holiday Cheer*.

DEPLOYMENT DAILY HANDOUT

Life Feels Out of Control

"Beware of BERSERK kid!"

Little Sister: "My sister has really been acting weird since my dad was deployed. I never know what to expect. Sometimes she seems normal, but other times she starts yelling at me or ignoring me. My mom gets the same kind of treatment, especially when mom asks her to do something around the house. I think this craziness started right after my dad left to go to Afghanistan. Before he left, she spent lots of time with him and seemed okay when she said goodbye. Since then, she has been really moody. I stay away from her when she is in one of her moods. Mom told me she is having a hard time because dad is gone. I guess I can understand, but he is my dad, too, and I'm not acting crazy."

Big Sister: "I really miss my dad. One minute I'm okay with him being gone, but then I'm not. My mom and sister just annoy me all the time. I don't think they understand what I am going through. I worry all the time that something will happen to dad. They just seem to be going on as if nothing is different. At school I've been keeping to myself because I feel as if I'm going to cry all the time. Most of my friends don't have a clue what is happening. My feelings seem out of my control, and it's making me crazy."

Helpful Tips

Change can be hard. Change that is out of our control is even harder. Having your parent leave because he or she has been deployed is definitely a change over which you have no control. Emotional reactions to such change can be anger, crying unexpectedly, withdrawing from others, and yelling for unknown reasons. Here are some ways to regain control in your life:

- Focus on the parts of your life where you do have control. You will likely find that you have control of many areas in your life. Having choices can be helpful. Here are some choices you might have control over.
 - What you choose to do in your free time
 - What clothes you like to wear
 - What video game or TV show you enjoy
- Use creative outlets to help you take a break from the feelings that feel out of control. Some of these would include:
 - Taking a fun art class
 - Joining a club at school (e.g., chess, debate team)
 - Learning how to play a musical instrument like a piano or trombone
- If all the change and worrying about your parent is making you feel too out of control, you might need to talk to someone. Either on your own or with your parent's help, you might find a trusted adult to talk with about your feelings and thoughts.

DEPLOYMENT DAILY HANDOUT

There's Some Good Stuff About Being a Military Kid

"Mom's gone for now, so I have to handle things on my own."

My name is Larissa, and my mom's in the Navy. It seems like my mom is gone more than she's home, so I've had to grow up a lot on my own. My dad is always there for me, but I've figured out over the years that most things are up to me. I used to get mad and feel all sorry for myself. OK, I guess sometimes I still do. But I've also noticed something that's kind of cool. Yeah, there're some really lousy parts to growing up in the military – don't even get me started on that topic. But when I look around and compare myself to my friends, I am way more mature and responsible. Not that I'm a teacher's pet or perfect or anything. I mean, I can trash my room and put off doing homework like a pro. And I've done a few things of which I'm not exactly proud. It's just that not having my mom around, and wanting to make her proud of me when she is here, has made me care more about who I am and how I act.

We had this assignment in English last week where we had to list 10 of our "accomplishments." Mr. Walker said that accomplishments weren't just things like "head cheerleader" or "honor society member." Accomplishments are also "skills and strengths that are unique to each of us" Here's what I came up with for me:

1. I can cook lots of different recipes and meals.
2. I know how to change the oil in our car.
3. I'm on the A-B Honor Roll.
4. I can handle my little brother's temper tantrums without giving in or losing my cool.
5. I'm the starting goalie on our junior varsity soccer team.
6. I write poetry.
7. I know how to do the laundry without turning everything pink.
8. Even though I did smoke pot once or twice in eighth grade, I don't do drugs.
9. I'm great at math.
10. I don't make fun of people.

Larissa's Tips

- Notice all the things that you do right – make a list of your skills and strengths that are unique about YOU.
- Give equal time in your thinking to all the ways in which having a military parent makes you stronger.
- Take a chance and post your poetry on the **Message Board**.

DEPLOYMENT DAILY HANDOUT

Dad's Back, But Now What?

"I had lots to tell him, but I couldn't."

So, your parent is home from being deployed. In all the TV news or "Coming Home" reality TV shows, the moment when a parent joins his family, everyone seems to be happy. Usually, all you see is a parent giving his kids a big hug with smiles on all their faces. Some of the kids or parents are crying tears of joy. But what happens next?

Well, you all get in the car and go home. You may have a coming home party for your dad. Then everything is supposed to be "normal." Except, it's not what you expect. You missed him so much when he was gone, but now it feels different. While he was away, you wished you could hang out with him, tell him about your last basketball game, share with him your latest new clothes, or go out for pizza together. But now that he is here, you really don't know what to say to him. You have been separated for such a long time and so much has happened. You may not feel as close to him as you did before. It makes you wonder if something is wrong with you. It seems strange that you want to be close to him, but instead it feels better just to be apart. It is hard for you to imagine that you don't even want to share stuff with him. Before, it would have been easy to tell him about how you were doing, but now where do you start?

Helpful Tips

- Try writing a list of all the things you want to tell your parent, and share one item on your list each day. If you do not want to say it in person, try emailing.
- Go to our **Message Board** and post a question, "It's hard to talk to my dad since he came home. What do I do?" You might be surprised to find out that many military kids have the same experience when their parents return from deployment.

DEPLOYMENT DAILY HANDOUT

Keeping a Distance

“Why should I get close to him? He’s just going to leave again.”

Your dad is home from a deployment. Part of you is happy, but a bigger part of you is thinking, “So what?!?” You may be thinking, “What if he has to go away again?” or “He already went away twice; who’s to say he won’t go again?” You are not sure you want to have much to do with him because you are afraid he will leave you again.

All your reactions make sense. It’s a hard situation when someone you love comes home after a long time away and then may leave again. Pulling away isn’t a sign that you don’t love him. Rather, it may be a way to protect yourself from having feelings like anger, sadness, or disappointment because you DO love him. Showing our love for someone is sometimes especially hard if you know they might leave. It is often easier to “keep your distance” so that it won’t hurt so much the next time they leave. If you find yourself in this uncomfortable situation, here are some tips that might help you figure out all those mixed-up feelings.

Helpful Tips

- It’s up to you if you want to take the risk of getting close again with your parent, even if you’re worried that he or she will leave again. Sometimes, just understanding what is going on “inside” can help you make sense of your feelings.
- Try to remember a time when you did something with your parent that was fun. Maybe it was going out for a burger, watching a movie you both liked, or riding bikes together. Suggest that you do one of those activities together sometime soon. Maybe even set a date so you can be sure to do it. Afterward, you might feel one step closer. AND you both had fun!
- This tip may be harder because it will require you to talk to your parent about your fear of him or her leaving again. But I bet your dad or mom also feels worried that they may have to go away again. If you both share your experience, you may both feel better in the end. If you want to practice what you will tell your parent, pick someone you trust to listen to what you will say.