SEPARATIONS

HAPPEN

A Booklet for 13, 14, & 15 Year Olds Whose Families are in the Military

Separations Happen

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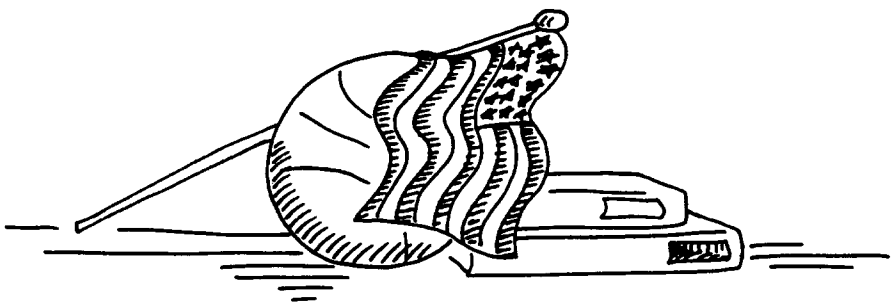

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SEPARATIONS HAPPEN is one of a series of four booklets about military separations for children and young people. These booklets were written as part of **Operation R.E.A.D.Y.** under an agreement between the Extension Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the United States Army Community and Family Support Center, Department of the Army.

All four booklets were developed with the help of active Army, Army National Guard, and Army Reserve families and Family Support personnel. We sincerely thank all those who helped us produce these publications.

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About the Booklet

When families are in the military, separations happen; for some families they happen a lot. Military separations can be awful, happy, exciting, frightening--or all of these. They can bring families closer together or pull them apart.

This is a booklet for 13, 14, & 15 year olds whose parents are in the military. It is written with lots of help from teens who've been through military separations. You'll find their ideas on how to cope with separations throughout the booklet.

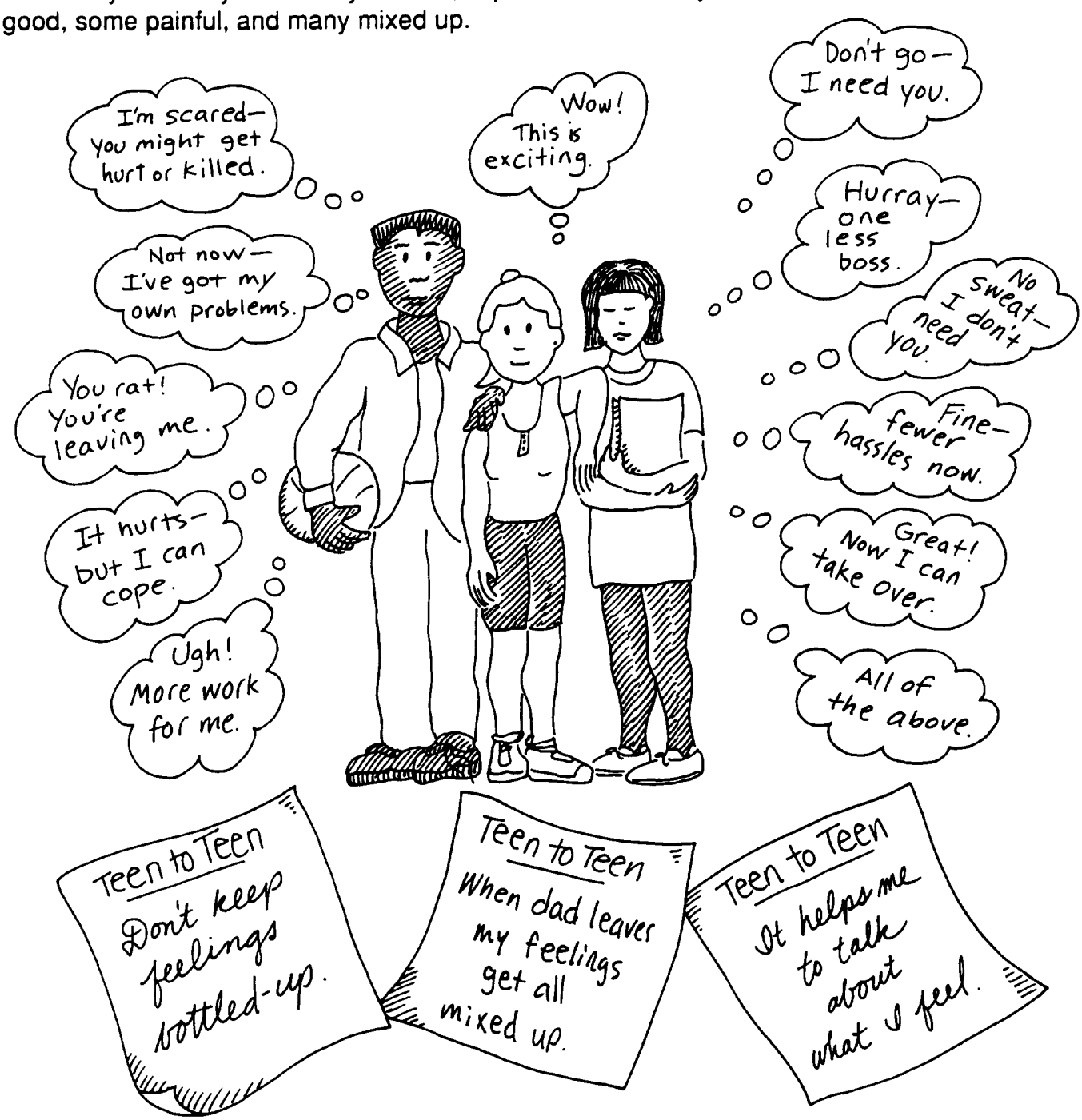
Every teen is different; every separation is different. Use this booklet in the way that fits your special situation. Skip parts that don't fit; use the parts that do.

We hope you find ideas here that will help you make your separations successful.

No one
said
it would
be easy.

Powerful Feelings

Whether your family life is easy or hard, separations are likely to cause powerful feelings, some good, some painful, and many mixed up.

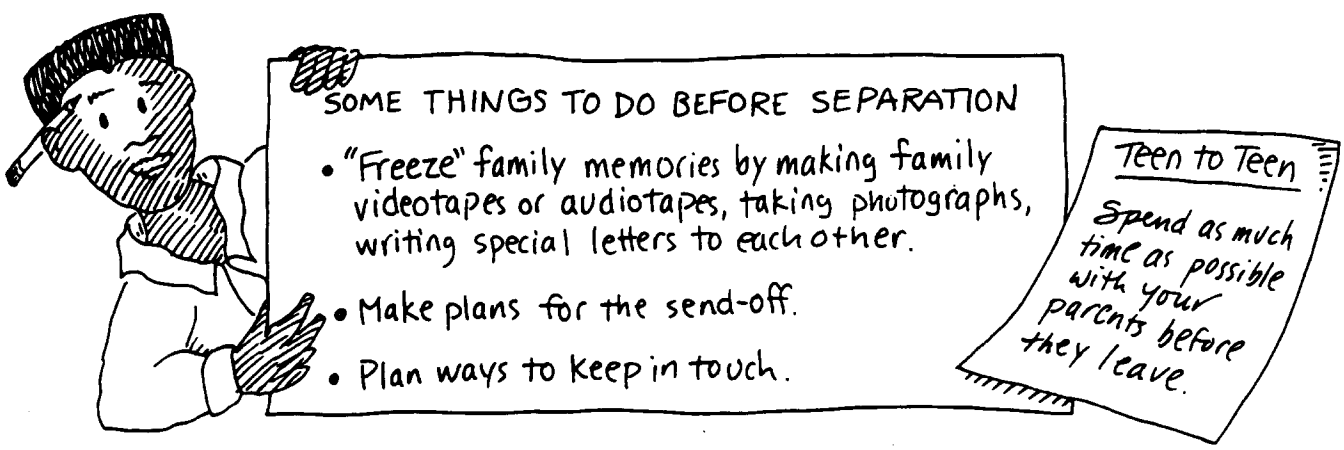


All these feelings are normal. To keep them from hurting you, talk to someone about them-- a friend, a parent, a chaplain or rabbi, a counselor or someone else you can trust.

Family Talk

It may not be easy to talk to parents but it usually pays off. Here are some things teens may want to talk about to parents before separations.

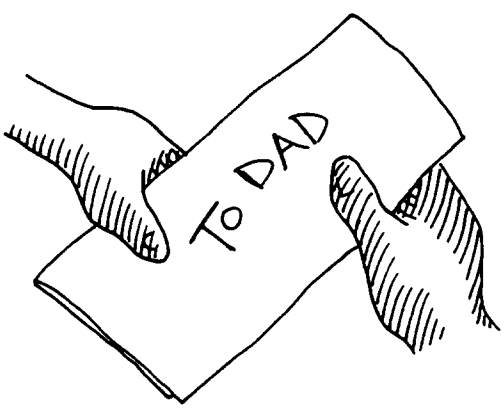
Many families find family meetings helpful. These are times to talk as a family about your life together, your joys, problems, gripes, and plans. At family meetings, you can also discuss and re-negotiate family responsibilities and rules. This separation might be a good time to start family meetings.

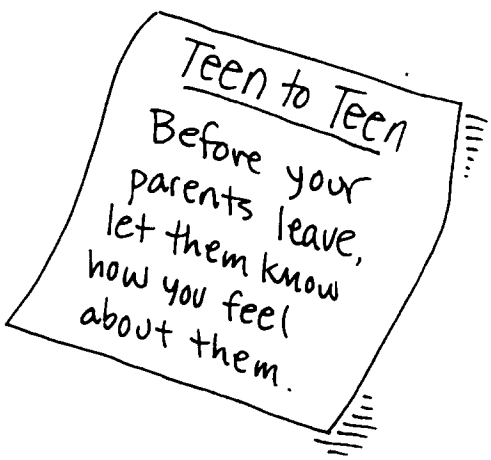


The Send-Off

Along with parties, banners, balloons, and gifts, you may want to do something more personal for the send-off. Think about giving the parent who is leaving a send-off envelope to be opened only after the send-off. Put in the envelope such things as photos, pictures you have drawn, cartoons, a send-off letter, and self-addressed stamped envelopes.

Some teens say it is easier to express their feelings to their parents through letters than it is to say these things directly. You can use the send-off letter to let your parents know what you like about them.





Family Power

Whether your family life is smooth or bumpy, chances are your family is the most important part of your life. Separations cause changes, and the good news is that you can use these changes to make your family even stronger.

Here are some things that make families strong. You can work on them even during separations.

LOVE: Members care about and appreciate each other and they show it.

COMMUNICATION: Family members talk openly together and listen to each other.

VALUES: Family members have definite and clear values and make these known to each other.

PROBLEM SOLVING: Family members face problems openly and optimistically and unite in looking for solutions.

EXPECTATIONS: Family members have high expectations of each other. Parents actively teach, guide, and discipline their children.

FUN: The family creates and nurtures family jokes and enjoys family traditions.

BONDS BEYOND THE FAMILY: The family is active in the community and has friends to lean on and help in times of trouble.

Teen to Teen

Our family has too many hassles but we keep trying.

Teen to Teen

Remember he still cares about you when he's away.

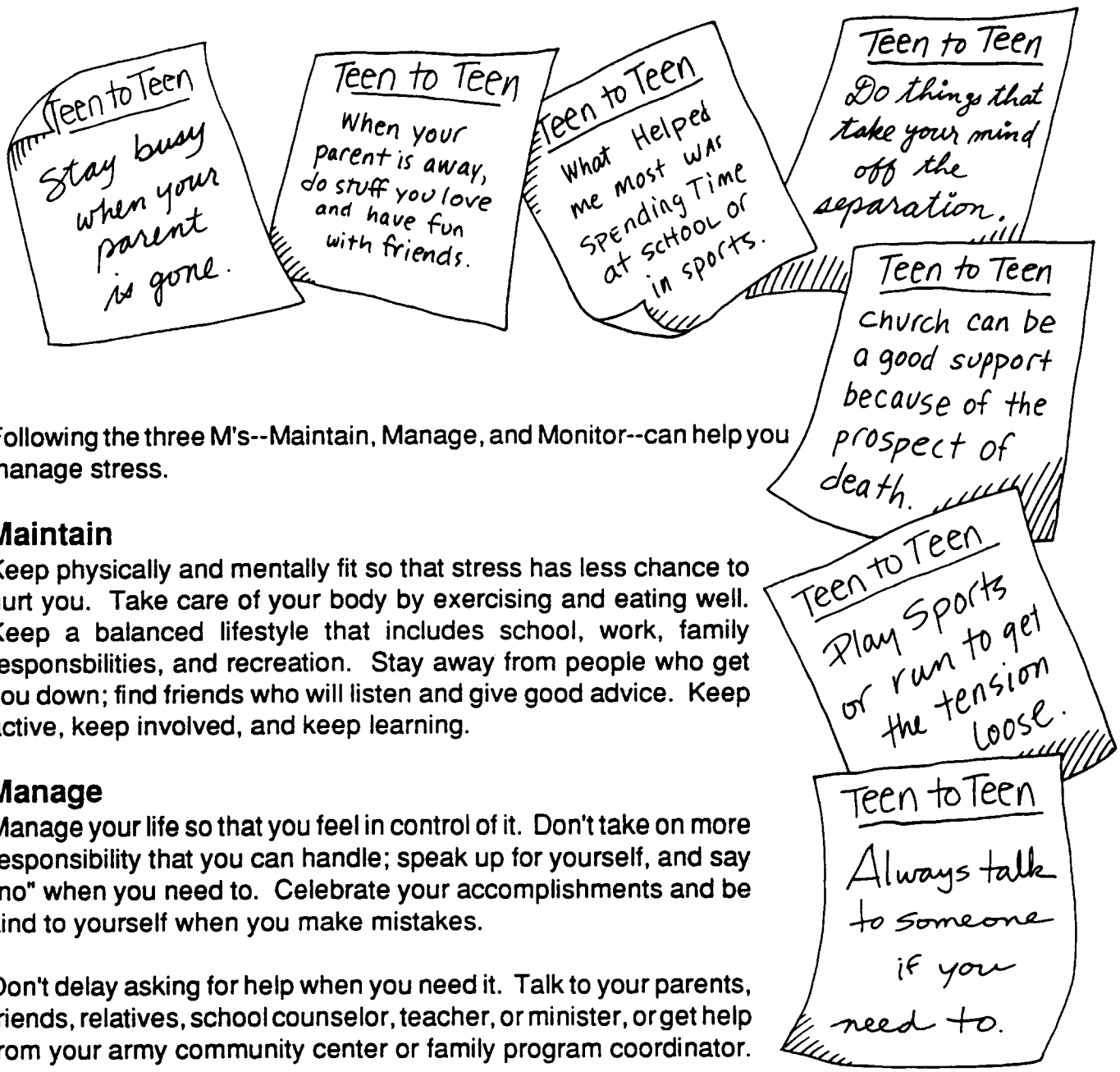
Teen to Teen

Everybody's family has ups + downs.

Coping With Separation

Any out-of-the-ordinary experience, pleasant or unpleasant, can cause stress. Military separations cause stress.

Stress is a part of everybody's life. It makes life interesting; it prompts us to solve problems, to create, and to grow. But if we don't manage stress, it can cause damaging physical, mental, and social problems.



Following the three M's--Maintain, Manage, and Monitor--can help you manage stress.

Maintain

Keep physically and mentally fit so that stress has less chance to hurt you. Take care of your body by exercising and eating well. Keep a balanced lifestyle that includes school, work, family responsbilities, and recreation. Stay away from people who get you down; find friends who will listen and give good advice. Keep active, keep involved, and keep learning.

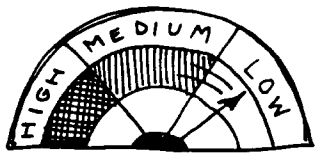
Manage

Manage your life so that you feel in control of it. Don't take on more responsibility that you can handle; speak up for yourself, and say "no" when you need to. Celebrate your accomplishments and be kind to yourself when you make mistakes.

Don't delay asking for help when you need it. Talk to your parents, friends, relatives, school counselor, teacher, or minister, or get help from your army community center or family program coordinator.

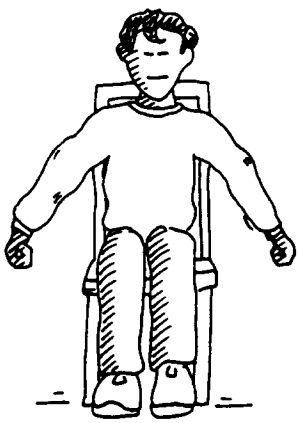
Monitor

Know yourself and your early stress warning signals. Physical signs of stress include headaches, muscle tension, stomach upsets, insomnia, fatigue, and low energy levels. Other signs of stress include anxiety, fear, forgetfulness, trouble concentrating, discouragement, and trouble relaxing. Get to know your body's early signs of stress so that you can handle the stress before it causes trouble.

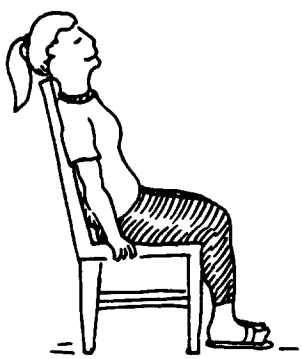


STRESSOMETER

Two Calming Exercises



* **Relaxation Exercise**. Sitting comfortably in a chair with your eyes closed, clench your right fist as hard as you can, then relax it. Let your whole arm go limp. Do it again. Then repeat with your left arm. Next, with your arms hanging relaxed at your sides, raise your eyebrows, crinkle your forehead and tense the muscles of your scalp. Relax. Tense. Relax. Do the same with your eyes and nose, then your jaw and neck, your shoulders, your chest and stomach, the muscles of your buttocks, then your thighs, your calves, your ankles, and your toes. When you finish with each part, it will be heavy, calm, totally relaxed. Sit quietly for a few minutes. Open your eyes.



* **Breathing Exercise**. Close your eyes and sit up straight. As you inhale deeply, slowly count silently to two. Hold the air in on "three", then let the air seep out, "four", "five". Hold again, "six", "seven". Repeat. Continue breathing and counting for ten minutes, then open your eyes.

Teen to Teen

When dad goes away my faith in God helps me the most.

Teen to Teen

I went to a support group at the Army Service Center. That helped.

Teen to Teen

Try not to think about things you cannot change.

Teen to Teen

When she leaves I have peace of mind because I know she's been trained for this.

Keeping in Touch

Here are some ways teens have found to keep in touch with parents during separations.

* Send written or taped letters, photos, home videos, copies of awards, artwork, school papers, cartoons, and newsclips.

* Report on daily activities. Keep a journal or calendar record of your activities, successes, celebrations, dreams, opinions, plans, goofs, disappointments, etc.

Teen to Teen
you can keep a relationship with parents by writing them and letting them know how things are going.

Teen to Teen
Let them know what you are doing so they won't be surprised when they come home.

Teen to Teen
You should write as much as possible.

Teen to Teen
My mom likes to hear about the day-to-day things I do.

Teen to Teen
I FELT BETTER WHEN I KEPT IN TOUCH.

Teen to Teen
It helps me to hear from my dad when he's gone. He's very encouraging!

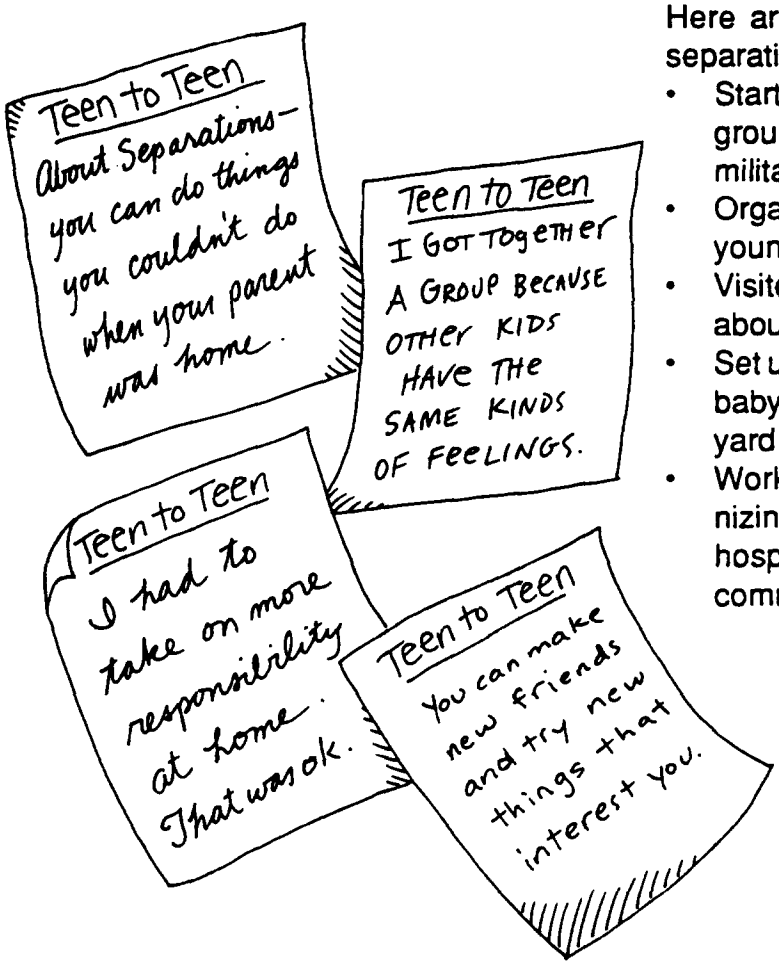
Making it Happen

Any change, like a separation, can be an opportunity. It can be a time to take on new challenges, to learn more about yourself and your family, to build your skills, and to become a more capable person.

Growing

During separations, teens can:

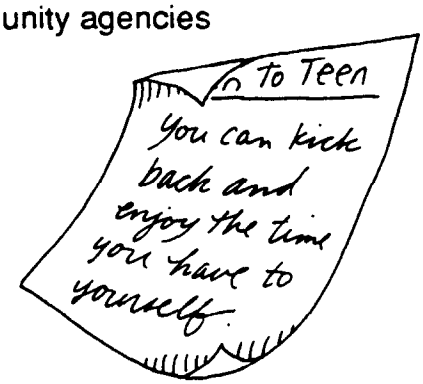
- Learn to cope with stress and separation
- Improve communication with their parents
- Learn to handle more family responsibilities
- Help their at-home family members feel less stressed and worried
- Do things for others



Helping

Here are some ways teens have helped during separations:

- Started support, discussion, and information groups for other teens whose parents are on military separations
- Organized recreation or counseling groups for younger children
- Visited elementary school classrooms to talk about military separations
- Set up teen teams to help separated families by babysitting, running errands, doing house and yard chores, etc.
- Worked to improve their communities by organizing community activities or volunteering at hospitals, senior centers, libraries, and other community agencies



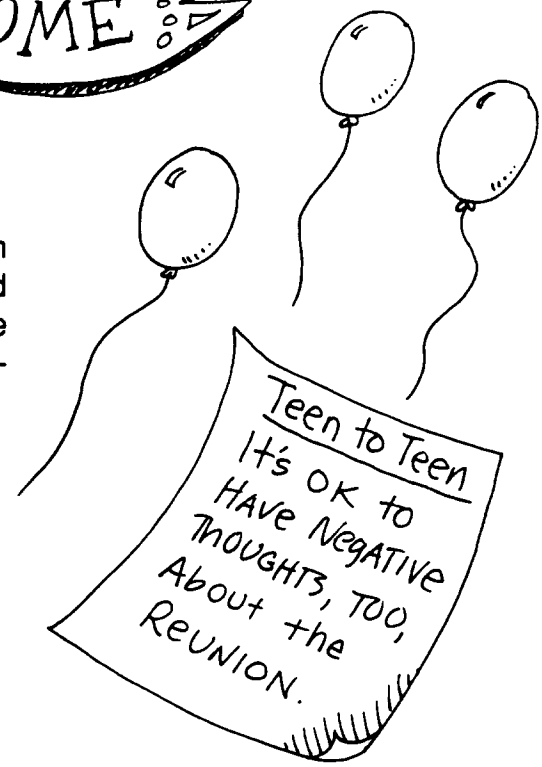
WELCOME HOME

Reunion

More Feelings

Mostly what people feel when family members return from military separations is tremendous joy, excitement and relief. But there are usually other feelings, too. Below are some of the common ways teens feel at the end of separations.

Talk to someone about your reunion feelings.



Reunions can be as Hard as Separations

While you have been separated, each family member has changed. When you come together again you will need to adjust to these changes and that takes time, patience, and a sense of humor. Your family will be different; it can be better.

The most important thing you can do to promote your family's adjustment is to talk together about you reunion joys, wants, and fears.

Here are some suggestions for making the reunion easier.

- ✔ Be patient. The longer the separation the more time you need to adjust.
- ✔ Watch out for overload. Too much activity can cause stress and conflict.
- ✔ Take your time. Make changes slowly.
- ✔ Expect surprises. People are unpredictable.
- ✔ Be realistic. Don't expect the problems that you had before separation to have disappeared.
- ✔ Don't be put off by setbacks and disappointments.
- ✔ Give everyone space. Returning parents and all other family members need time to be alone and to do things with their friends.

Teen to Teen

When he comes back don't expect things to be like they were before.

Teen to Teen

Don't feel rejected if he wants to be alone some.

Teen to Teen

Give your parents lots of time to be with just each other.

Teen to Teen

When dad came home he was happy but grouchy.

Teen to Teen

We had to get used to each other again, but we did it.

Teen to Teen

Remember — when it's over your whole family will be better.

—NOTE TO SELF—
Separations Happen,
Coming Home Happens,
and I can handle both!!

OPERATION

READY

Resources for Educating About Deployment and You