



# GOING THE DISTANCE

INFORMATION FOR  
TEENAGERS EXPERIENCING  
AN NZDF SEPARATION

**FAMILY RESOURCE PACKAGE**



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# ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

It was made for you – for teenagers, with the help of teenagers, to give you some ideas of how to cope with separation.

When you have a parent in the New Zealand Defence Force, separations can happen.

Separations can be hard.

We know that it can be really difficult when a parent goes away on a deployment. We don't want to pretend that this guide can magically make you feel better, or bring your mum or dad back sooner. But, hopefully you'll find something useful here – something that means something to you.

Every teenager is different; every separation is different. Use the information here that fits your situation, and skip the parts that don't. You can also check out the NZ Defence Force deployment website [www.homebase.mil.nz](http://www.homebase.mil.nz) for more information.

Other teenagers have told us that a resource like this is useful. Here's what they have to say.

*"It could help people deal with one of their parents going away... it helps them kind of get over it"*

*"It shows someone that they are not the only one going through it."*

*"It gives you options of how to deal with the separation."*





# THE EMOTIONAL CYCLE OF DEPLOYMENT

Having a parent deploy overseas can feel like an emotional rollercoaster at times. Feelings can go up and down. Knowing how you might feel during the deployment can help you to be ready, and cope with the emotions when they occur.

## PHASE 1: **PRE-DEPLOYMENT - BEFORE MUM OR DAD LEAVES**

This period lasts from when you find out that your parent is going until they actually leave. This can be a busy and difficult time. There might be some arguing in the family, especially because people are upset about the separation. You might also get to have some good times together before your parent deploys. The family is getting ready for the separation and starts to think about what it will be like once Mum or Dad has left.

## PHASE 2: **DEPLOYMENT – THE FIRST MONTH**

This can be a time when you feel like there is a hole in the family. Teenagers can feel lots of different emotions during this period – you might feel disoriented, overwhelmed, isolated or even glad that the pre-deployment stage is over. It's important to start recognising and expressing your feelings so that you can be better equipped to cope with them.

## PHASE 3: **MID-DEPLOYMENT**

This stage starts after the first month and finishes a month before your parent gets back – it lasts for the main chunk of the deployment. During this stage your family will make new routines and hopefully get used to the new ways of getting things done. Your family might even start to feel like you're all getting the hang of it, and feel confident that you can cope with the separation after all.

## PHASE 4: **RE-DEPLOYMENT – THE FINAL MONTH**

This is normally a time of excitement when you and your family are looking forward to the return of Mum or Dad. Communication is really important during this stage, especially so that you can get an idea of what changes to expect when your deployed parent comes home.

## PHASE 5: **POST-DEPLOYMENT**

This stage starts when your deployed parent returns home, and ends when the family 'equilibrium', or balance, is restored. It doesn't mean that things will necessarily go back to how they were before the deployment, because you will have all changed and developed during the deployment. Getting to the new 'normal' could take several weeks or months. It's normally very exciting to have your parent back, but it can take a while to get used to having them around again.







# PHASE 1: PRE-DEPLOYMENT



BEFORE THEY LEAVE

## FEELINGS – PART I

Feelings can be powerful, especially when it comes to a parent going away. Some feelings can be good, some painful, and lots of them may seem mixed up. Different people feel different things at different times. You might feel some, all, or none of the feelings listed below.

Frustrated – Not now, I've already got enough problems.

Sad – Don't go, I'll miss you!

Angry – You're leaving me!

Free – One less person to tell me what to do.

Annoyed – More work for me!

Confident – I can cope with this.

Excited – The deployment sounds exciting.

Scared – You might get hurt or killed.

How did you feel?

When I found out \_\_\_\_\_ was deploying, I felt \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
and \_\_\_\_\_

All of these feelings are normal, and it's important to recognise how you feel.

Talk to someone you can trust: a friend, a parent, or someone else you feel close to or comfortable with. Or you could write your responses down in a journal. Don't bottle feelings up or they can hurt you at a later date.

How have other NZ teenagers felt about having a parent deploy?

Here are some responses from teenagers who have been through a separation from a parent caused by a military deployment.

"I can get really sad because I don't want them to go."

"Some teenagers have had it so much that it's normal and they don't really mind."

"I felt sad and happy at the same time."



“Not all people feel bad when one of their parents leave on a deployment.”

“Sometimes I didn't really think about it until they left.”

## COMMUNICATION

It's really important to talk to your parents before the deployment. It can be hard but it's worth it. It might be good to organise a family meeting so you can all hear the same information at once.

Ask lots of questions and try to get as much information from your deploying parent as you can. It can be helpful to write down your questions before these conversations so that you don't miss out on any information. It's important that you get the facts from your parent about where they are going. Ask them what they will be doing on the deployment and why it's so important.

They might not be able to tell you everything they know (it might be confidential information), but if you can find out why the deployment is important then it can make it a bit easier to cope with having them away.

Here are some other questions that teenagers have wanted to know about before a deployment:

How will you be getting to the deployment? How will you travel home?

Are you going to be safe? What will we do if you get hurt or killed?

How dangerous is the place you are going to?

What job will you be doing on the deployment?

What are you looking forward to?

How can we communicate while you are away?

Are you scared or worried about leaving New Zealand?

Will we have enough money?

What if you change while you're deployed? What if we all change?

What will my new responsibilities be?

Will our family rules change?

You might also like to find out a bit about the country your parent is going to. Do a Google search. What's the weather like? What's it like for teenagers growing up in that country? How do you count to 10 and say 'Hi' in their main language?

Find out if people your parent is deploying with have kids your own age. Get their email address or facebook details before your parent deploys and stay in touch with them.

It's also important to talk to your parent who is remaining at home. Ask them how they are feeling. You could ask them what will change at home during the deployment. Will you need to take on new responsibilities? Will there be new family rules or routines?

Another thing to think about is whether you have a list of things you want to achieve while your parent is away. You might want to learn to cook a few meals, start playing a new sport, learn to play a particular song on an instrument, learn how to do certain jobs around the house (like doing the clothes washing or mowing the lawns), or even get a part-time job.

## THINGS TO DO BEFORE THEY GO...

Often a parent who is deploying will have some time off work before they leave. Try to plan an afternoon or day with your parent when you can hang out and do fun things together. Think about things you'll both enjoy – mountain biking, going to the movies, getting your favourite takeaways and eating them on the beach, kicking or throwing a ball around, going shopping.

You could take family photos that your parent can take with them on the deployment.

You could make plans for the send-off.

You could plan ways to keep in touch while your parent is away.

## THE SEND-OFF

Along with a party or a special dinner that your family might have, you may want to do something more personal for their send-off. Think about giving your deploying parent an envelope that they can open after they take-off. You could put photos, artwork, a send-off letter and maybe even one of their favourite snacks in the envelope.

Some teenagers say that it's easier to express their feelings to their parents through letters than it is to say it out loud. You could use the send-off letter to let your parent know what you like about them and how you feel about their deployment.

Other ideas for inclusion in a send-off letter are listed over the page.





- What you are most proud of them for.
- Your favourite memory with them and why it's such a special memory to you.
- Why you'll miss them.
- A time that they helped you.
- What you like doing with them.

## CHANGE YOUR MIND

How you think about something is really important. But it's important to know that you can change what you tell yourself about a difficult situation. The fact is that there are always two sides to anything. You can choose to focus only on how bad this separation is, and how you can't cope. Or you can accept that it's not easy, but try to see how good things can come out of this separation.

It's not about trying to brainwash yourself into thinking that the separation is easy. It's important to recognise that it is hard. But it's also important to realise that you can develop and grow even though it's hard. Let's look at a couple of examples:

You might think:

*"I don't think I can handle the extra responsibilities I'll have when my parent leaves."*

This type of thinking isn't helpful, and just makes you believe that you can't cope.

Instead you could think:

*"I'm a bit scared or nervous about the new responsibilities, but I know that I'll mature and learn how to do new things during this deployment."*

This type of thinking doesn't ignore the problem, but recognises that you can learn and grow. You can cope.

You might think:

*"It feels like my family is falling apart."*

Instead you could tell yourself:

*"This separation is really hard for my family, but we can work hard and be closer at the end of it."*

Try to write down of a few negative statements you might have about yourself during the deployment. Then try to turn them into positive thoughts which show that you can cope.

When we change what we are thinking about a situation, it can change how we feel. Changing how we feel can help us to cope with situations in a better way.





# PHASE 2: DEPLOYMENT

THE FIRST MONTH OF THE DEPLOYMENT



## FEELINGS – PART II

You might feel like you have no control over what is happening because of your parent's deployment. The truth is you do have control – you have control over how you react to the deployment and how it affects you.

We've already talked about feelings, but they're important so we want to talk about them some more. Feelings are one of the things that make us human. You're not a rock or a tree stump after all. Sometimes when we think that things have gone wrong, or are not going the way we want them to, we react in a way that can cause arguments or fights with others around us. A useful way to understand why you have a strong emotional response to something that happens is to stop, and ask yourself a few questions.

Check out this example:

*What was the event or situation that caused this feeling? (I was really tired from playing tennis that morning and I was watching TV. Mum told me to mow the lawns.)*

*How did you interpret the event? (I thought it was really unfair that I have to do a lot of extra jobs when my sister doesn't.)*

*How did you feel? (Angry and frustrated. My muscles tensed up and I felt hotter.)*

*What did you feel like doing? (Yelling, breaking something, swearing at my mum)*

*What did you do? (I yelled at my Mum and my sister, then stormed out of the room.)*

Feelings don't just happen to you. They are how you respond to a situation. It's really important to think about how you are feeling and how you respond to situations. If you can start to recognise the 'signs' of certain feelings (like muscles tensing up might mean angry) then you can do something to change how you will respond. It might be as simple as taking a deep breath, counting to ten, and thinking about how you react.

Instead, the situation about the lawns could go like this:

*I was really tired and mum asked me to mow the lawns. I thought it was really unfair that my sister didn't have to do anything. I felt my muscles tensing and could tell that I was getting angry so I took a deep breath and counted to ten. I thought about the fact that Mum has a lot to do since Dad is away. Even though I was tired, I wanted to help my mum. I said I would mow the lawns, but asked Mum if we could talk about jobs later to make sure that everyone is doing their fair share.*

## KEEP IN TOUCH

Keeping in touch with a deployed parent is really important. They may be gone for a while, but they're still a part of your life.

Where your parent has deployed to will affect how you can keep in touch with them. Some NZDF deployments will have fast internet connections so you can chat online and maybe even make video-calls. Other deployments may only have occasional access to a phone. Wherever your parent is, they'll love to hear about what is going on in your life at home.

You could send your deployed parent regular facebook updates, emails or letters telling them about what you've been doing, what's happening at school, things you are planning, celebrations, as well as funny or embarrassing moments. You could even write a few phrases in the language of the country where you parent is deployed (search online for some really good language translators).

Email and social media (like twitter or facebook) are great because they're instant, but some teenagers prefer letters because they might seem more personal. Sending a letter to your deployed parent can give you an opportunity to express how you are feeling about the deployment. Some teenagers find it easier to tell their deployed parent how they are feeling in a letter or email, instead of trying to tell them on the phone or when talking online.

You can also send 'care packages' to your deployed parent. You could send some of their favourite foods, photos of the family, or even things you have made for your parent (as long as they're not too fragile!). You could take videos of special events and send them on a CD or USB stick if they are too big to email.





# PHASE 3: MID-DEPLOYMENT

THE MIDDLE MONTHS



## ROUTINES

Family routines are important during this period because your family is trying to find a new equilibrium, or balance, without your deployed parent.

It's important to try to keep up your normal routines during this time. Familiar routines can really help during stressful situations like a deployment.

What routines do you have that are important to keep doing even when your parent is deployed? Maybe you read a book, play basketball, or run for half an hour each day. You might get takeaways for dinner once a week, visit your grandparents every fortnight, play sport or attend a religious meeting like a church service.

Think about any new routines that your family has started since the deployment. How do you feel about these? What new skills or responsibilities do you think you will gain because of the new routines?

## TAKE CARE

You're a whole person; body, mind and soul. It's really important that you take care of yourself so that the stress related to the deployment has less chance to hurt you.

Exercise and eat well. Relax and unwind by hanging out with your friends, listening to music, writing down your thoughts and feelings, or taking a long hot bath. You might want to burn off some energy playing sport, or going for a run or a bike ride. If you have spiritual beliefs, then praying and going to religious events can help a lot during stressful times. Talking to your parent at home, siblings, friends or other people (like extended family) about how you are feeling can also help.

### How do you know when you are getting stressed?

Here's what other teenagers have told us about how they recognise when they are getting stressed out.

*"I get angry."*

*"I can't focus on anything else."*

*"I just want to scream."*

*"I just don't talk to anybody. I block everybody out."*

*"Little things end up being a big deal."*

### What do teenagers do when they are feeling stressed about a parent being away?

Here's what some other teenagers have told us about what they do to deal with the stress they feel as a result of a parent being deployed.

*"Do something to relax and forget about everything."*

*"Have a rest or take a long bath."*

*"Go out with friends and hangout at the mall - just relax and stuff."*

*"Go play a sport."*

*"Do a water sport and take out my stress or frustration on the water."*

*"Go for walks or runs cause it helps to burn up energy and it relaxes me."*

*"Just write down all my feelings on a bit of paper and then screw them up."*

*"Just try and go with the flow."*

*"Get away from people and have some time by myself."*

*"Do something to take my mind off it like going on the computer."*

## GETTING SUPPORT

Sometimes you might feel like your friends don't really know how difficult it is to have a parent away on a deployment. It can be really useful to talk to someone who has been through the same thing or currently has a deployed parent. You might know someone who has a parent that goes away on long business trips a lot, or someone with a parent in the military who is deployed. Through NZDF deployment services (the 0800 numbers are at the bottom of this page) you could contact your nearest Base or Camp Social Worker or Welfare Officer. They may be able to put you in touch with another teenager who's experienced or is experiencing a similar situation to you.

It's important that you don't feel like you have to deal with the separation by yourself. There are lots of people who can help, even if it's just to have someone to talk to about how you are feeling. Talk to a close friend or family member. You might prefer to have a chat with a school counsellor or even a coach. Some teenagers prefer to talk about how they are feeling to someone they don't really know. Below are a couple of free phone numbers you can call to talk about anything if you're feeling like you need support. There are also a lot of websites that have really good information for teenagers who are finding things a bit difficult.

Youthline Phone Counselling  
0800 376 633

[www.thelowdown.co.nz](http://www.thelowdown.co.nz)

[www.youthline.org.nz](http://www.youthline.org.nz)

What's Up – help for young New Zealanders  
0800 942 878

[www.headspace.org.nz/young-people](http://www.headspace.org.nz/young-people)

NZDF Deployment Services  
North Island - 0800 OVERSEAS  
South Island - 0800 DEPLOY

[www.attitude.org.nz](http://www.attitude.org.nz)

[www.homebase.mil.nz](http://www.homebase.mil.nz)





# PHASE 4: RE-DEPLOYMENT

THE FINAL MONTH OF THE DEPLOYMENT

## Getting ready

So your Mum or Dad is coming home in a few weeks.

This last month of the deployment can be a really exciting time because your whole family is looking forward to Mum or Dad coming back from their deployment.

The last few weeks before they finally come home are really important for you to start talking as a family about what will change when Mum or Dad gets back.

This time can also be really busy. Maybe you and your family had a list of things to do while your mum or dad was away. A lot of the Re-Deployment Phase can be filled up with finishing these last-minute things before your parent gets home.

Life might have changed a bit while your parent has been deployed. You might have new routines, new skills, and maybe different relationships with the rest of the family. How do you think your deployed parent will respond to all of these changes?

It's really important during this stage of the deployment to talk to your family (and your deployed parent too, if possible) about what changes to expect when your parent returns. You might want to talk about some of these questions:

- What can we do to celebrate their homecoming?
- What do we/I want to do with them when they get home? (You might want to spend a day hanging out with your mum or dad, or plan things to do as a family.)
- How will our family routines change when Mum or Dad returns?
- Who will be responsible for the jobs or tasks at home?
- What will I be allowed to do now that I couldn't do before the deployment? (This could be something like having a later curfew.)
- How long will they be home for before they go back to work?
- Will Mum or Dad have a new job when they get back to New Zealand?
- Will we be moving? Where to? When?







# PHASE 5: POST-DEPLOYMENT

FROM THE ARRIVAL HOME TO 3 – 6 MONTHS AFTER THE RETURN

## WELCOME HOME!

When a deployed parent returns home people mostly feel happy, excited and relieved. But there are usually other feelings too. These are some common reactions that teenagers have felt at the end of the separation:

*"I made it. Are you proud of me?"*

*"At last! Now I don't have to do so much."*

*"Welcome back, I missed you a lot!"*

*"Great! But don't change anything."*

*"I'm worried – have you changed?"*

*"Will you like the way I've changed?"*

*"Not yet. We're just getting things worked out."*

*"I liked how things were when you were away."*

*"How will it be different now you're home?"*

You might feel a combination of these, something different, or have no reaction at all. It's important to recognise how you're feeling about the return of your parent and to talk to someone you trust about these feelings.

## TOGETHER AGAIN

Surprisingly, reunions can be as hard as separations. While you've been separated, each family member has changed. When you are back together again you will need to adjust to these changes – that takes time, patience, and a sense of humour!

Your family will be different, but it can often be better as a result of a deployment.

One of the most important things you can do as a family to help get used to being together again is to talk together about how everyone is feeling about the reunion. What were you really happy about? What were you afraid of? What did you want to happen?

Here are some suggestions for making the reunion easier:

- **Be patient.** The longer the separation, the more time you need to adjust.
- **Watch 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.
- **Arrange to spend some one on one time with your returned parent doing something that you both enjoy.**

# THE END...



Separations can be hard, but you made it! The time that your parent was away may have been really difficult, but hopefully you feel like you have grown, developed new skills, and managed to cope with the deployment. Think back to before your parent deployed.

- What can you do now that you couldn't do before? What skills have you learned?
- Did you set any goals before your mum or dad left? How did you go with achieving those goals?
- Were there any times during the deployment that you found really difficult? What did you do to get through those times?
- How do think you have changed? What do you like most about the changes?

Being a teenager can be really hard at times, and unfortunately, just because your parent is home again it doesn't mean that all the other things in life will magically get sorted out too! We hope that you feel like you have grown and developed from this experience and feel like you are better able to cope with the other things that life throws your way.

All we can really say from here is good luck! We hope you have found this resource useful in helping you to cope with your parent being deployed.





# NZDF DEPLOYMENT SERVICES

North Island  
0800 OVERSEAS

South Island  
0800 DEPLOY

