

Keep Your Child Moving During the Winter Months

With the onset of the colder winter months, many parents are finding that their children have excess energy and no place in which to burn it.

As the weather cools down it can be difficult for families and kids to get outside and enjoy the fresh air. Although the weather can sometimes put a damper on outside activities, it is important for parents and children to remain active. Children can have a lot of energy to spare if they aren't given opportunities to burn some of it.

Check into various winter sports as a way to keep moving. Some winter days are still nice enough to make



a trip to the park. Even a brisk 20-minute walk can be stimulating, and it is better than sitting and watching television.

Parents can create an indoor playground without spending money. Move the furniture in a spare bedroom, or even clean out one side of the garage to create some extra space. Children can play hopscotch, jump rope or take part in a number of other quiet indoor activities.

Young children can take advantage of garage space by creating a mini racetrack so they can ride their tricycles and bicycles. Make sure the kids wear bike helmets to ensure safety.

Parents also may want to check out the local YMCA and see if swimming classes or other sports are offered.

Many libraries and video stores offer video tapes and DVD's that will get kids moving with aerobics or movement especially suited for children. Mom and dad can participate as well and make it a family activity or, just put on some music and dance!

Sometimes winter can seem endless, but by using your imagination and checking out what activities are offered in your community, you're sure to have a healthy and active season.

By Trisha Gedon
Agricultural
Communications
Services



What's Inside:

Parents and Children Coping with Military Deployment	2
Reconnecting with the Kids	3
Obesity in Children: Reducing the Risk	4

Parents and Children Coping with Military Deployment

Many Oklahoma families have been impacted through military service around the globe. Getting ready for deployment can be stressful for everyone in the family. It can be stressful and confusing for small children.

There are several ways military parents can help their children get ready for their departure. Making a memory box for the child can be comforting. The enclosed items can help the child feel close to their mom or dad even when the parent is far away.

The memory box can contain any number of items that are special to the child. It's important to let the child help select the items that go into their box. It can include a favorite stuffed animal, a special rock, a small book of photos, a key chain, anything that's special. The parent can make one for themselves, too. After they're deployed, the parent can send their child souvenirs, letters, pictures, etc. that can be added to the child's memory box.

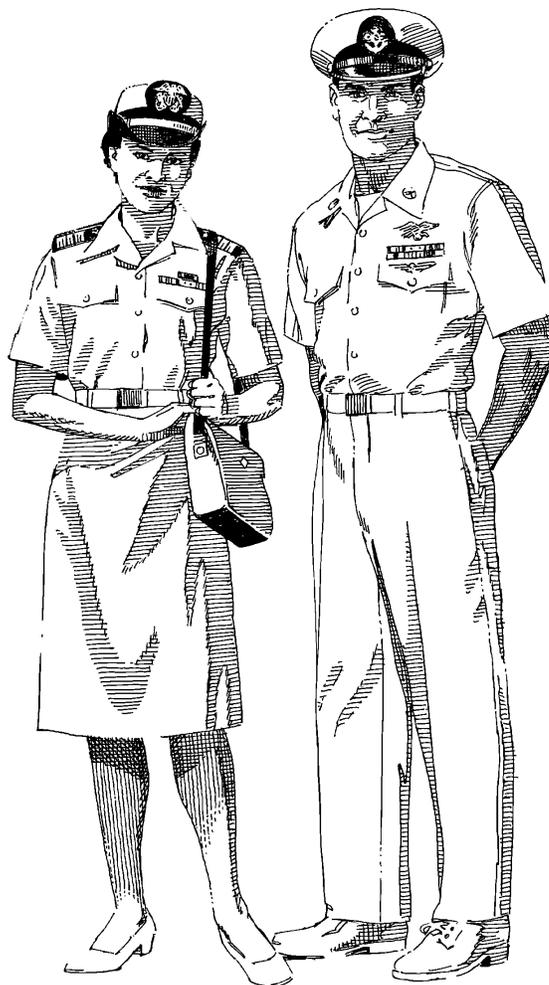
It is also important to help children understand how long a parent will be gone. Set up a calendar together and number the days until the parent's anticipated return. Parents and children can also make a paper chain and take one link off each day or take beans out of a jar to mark the passage of days.

Maintaining the family's normal routine helps make the child feel safe and more secure. Any family rituals, such as nightly bedtime stories or mealtime chores, create a sense of family, builds a feeling of connection, develops predictability, and instills values.

A tape recording of bedtimes stories, songs, or other messages can give children a soothing way to reconnect across the distance. Also, take photos of daily activities to send each other.

Being upfront about the deployment is helpful to children. Facts take away the fear of the unknown. Parents should share some details about the deployment. Children are comforted knowing what the parent will be doing, where the parent is going, what will change, and what will stay the same.

Keep an open line of communication that invites children to express their feelings and ask questions. Answer questions simply and use language appropriate for the child's age. Let them know their feelings are important and normal. For younger children, drawing pictures and make believe play can give the child a way to express their feelings.



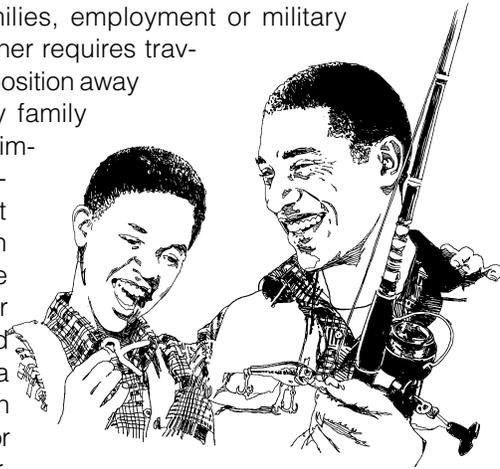
Asking the children to help the parent prepare for deployment helps the child feel less fearful. It gives them a chance to think about and talk about what is happening. They can help pack and do simple things like roll socks in balls, count tee shirts, or find a special place for their picture.

A Healthy Parenting Tool Kit provides tips and resources for balancing family and military life. This information is available on-line at www.mfrc-dodgol.org/healthyparenting, or email mfrcrequest@calib.com or call (703) 602-4964.

Source: Step Into Your Child's World. Healthy Parenting ToolKit. University of Missouri and Lincoln University, in collaboration with USDA, D.O.D. and Virginia Tech.

Reconnecting with the Kids

In some families, employment or military service of a partner requires traveling or taking a position away from the primary family residence. It is important that parents explain what is going to happen before they leave the household for any extended time. Even a simple explanation can be difficult for a child to understand.



Each child reacts a little differently in a stressful situation. It depends on age, temperament, and personality. Knowing the social and emotional developmental stages of children can help better understand a child's reaction and deal appropriately with the situation.

Infants

Infants may fuss, cry, and pull away. Even a short absence can cause an infant not to recognize the returning parent. For that reason, a child may cling to the adult that has always been present and treat the other person as a stranger.

The parent can slowly regain the child's confidence. Talk to him or her and perhaps the child will recognize your voice. Repeat the actions you perform when you are at home. Be patient.

Toddlers and Preschoolers

When an adult returns the child may demand personal attention and want to be with that person constantly.

Children at this age like to help adults and have conversations with them, be praised, and feel independent.

Toddlers may feel guilty for making the parent go away. They may experience separation anxiety. A child may play games with the returning adult by offering the adult a toy and then failing to release it. Toddlers and preschoolers will whine and be fussy. The returning parent may have to prove he or she is really the parent.

Elementary School Children (Ages 6-8)

These children may dread the return of the absent parent. They know things are different when the adult returns. A reaction may be the child demanding lots of attention. They may complain of stomach cramps and headaches, be shy, or act out their anger. They may be competitive, blaming, and moody, or they may talk a lot to gain approval and attention.

Preteens (Ages 9-11)

Preteens begin to pull away from parents and show more interest in friends as they get older. They are impatient and will begin to challenge the rules and limits set by adults. They may be very bossy and competitive. They strive for unreasonable independence but may crave periods alone. They may not want anything to do with the returning parent, or they may challenge the parent to the limits, or they may talk constantly to gain approval.

Teens

Teenagers may be concerned about new responsibilities and rules when the parent returns home. They may refrain from communicating with adults or challenge adults' knowledge. Some teens crave to be alone. They want to be independent and resent being told what to do. These children may become excited about the returning adult. Many teens set self-imposed standards that cannot be lived up to. They tend to misdirect anger, which could cause trouble in school or the community.

Getting to know your children again

When a parent returns from a lengthy absence, rebuilding trust and closeness takes time. Remember that children want to be close again but they don't always know exactly what to do. Here are some ways you can help them.

- Take it easy and let things happen naturally. Don't force your children to hug or play with you. Give your children "warm up" time to readjust to you at their own pace.
- Arrange a special time with each child to reconnect (have a picnic, play a game, go to the video arcade, etc.).
- Show an interest in the everyday events of your children's lives. Find out what new interest they developed.
- Praise your children for helping out while you were away. Give each child a "bravery medal" for being brave.
- Discuss your feelings about returning and encourage your children to do the same.
- Listen sensitively to your children. Let them know you are interested and ready to hear all they have to say.
- Discipline your children with care and love.
- Seek help from the Family Center in your installation, or other local child and family guidance services, if needed.

Source: Herringshaw, D. Reconnecting with the kids. Ohio State University Extension fact sheet.

Obesity in Children: Reducing the Risk

By Youmasu J. Siewe, Ph.D., MPH, State Extension Specialist for Health Education, Family Development

The dramatic increase in obesity in the U.S. estimated at 30% is now affecting children at an alarming rate. About 15% of children and teenagers age 6-19 are overweight. This is triple the rate in 1980. Over 10% of younger children between the ages of 2 to 5 are overweight, up from 7% in 1994, according to a recent National Health and Nutrition Survey.

A significant concern is that these children are most likely to grow up to be overweight adults, thus putting them at a greater risk of developing serious health problems later in life. These can include diabetes, heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, some types of cancer and other social problems associated with obesity.

A child must be heavier than 85% of other children who are the same age and height to be considered having a weight problem. Health care providers use height/weight charts and other methods to determine if a child is overweight or not. Weight problems are hard to fix, so it is important to reduce the risk in the first place.

Remember, children's eating habits are influenced by their parents' buying and eating habits. Teaching good eating and exercise habits to children at an early age and making it a family routine helps reduce the risk for serious health problems later in life.

Adapted from: American Obesity Association: Childhood Obesity." *American Obesity Association*. 16 March 2003.; <http://www.obesity.org/subs/childhood/>

Tips to help children maintain a healthy body weight:

- Offer healthy diets. No more than 30% of all the calories children eat should be fat calories. Ask your healthcare provider or a dietitian about the right kinds of foods for children. They also need lots of fiber from fruits, vegetables, and grains.
- Limit TV or playing video games. Encourage kids to do something active, like riding a bicycle, playing ball, or tag.
- Limit the consumption of sodas and other sugar-added drinks. Plenty of fresh drinking water is good for children.
- Do not make a child eat when he or she is not hungry.
- Do not expect or force children to finish every drink or meal that is served.
- Avoid using food or desserts to comfort or to reward children.
- Limit eating at fast food restaurants to about once a week.
- Spend time being active with children. Go on family walks and play outdoor games several times a week.

Debbie Richardson

Debbie Richardson, Assistant Child Development Specialist. Please contact us if you need larger print or other accommodations, 405-744-6231, drricha@okstate.edu

This and other resources are available at www.fcs.okstate.edu

Oklahoma State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture, State and Local Governments cooperating. Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service offers its programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, disability, or status as a veteran, and is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

Oklahoma State University, in compliance with Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 11246 as amended, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and other federal laws and regulations, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, disability, or status as a veteran in any of its policies, practices or procedures. This includes but is not limited to admissions, employment, financial aid, and educational services. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Sam E. Curl, Director of Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Dean of the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and has been prepared and distributed at a cost of \$12.40 for 125 copies.



Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service
139 Ag Hall
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, OK 74078

PRSRT STD
US Postage
Paid
Stillwater OK
Permit No 191