

Communicating with Your Child's Teacher When You're Deployed

Overview

Tips for service members to help their children in school when they're deployed.

- Ways to stay in touch with your child's teacher
- Communicating with your child about schoolwork
- Tips for attending a parent-teacher conference
- Resources

It's important to communicate regularly with your child's teachers from kindergarten through high school. Schools often make this easier for parents by arranging parent-teacher meetings, and many teachers have telephone call-in times or are available before or after school for conversations about your child's progress.

Being deployed can make it hard to stay involved this way. But if you're the parent who always helps with your child's homework and stays in tune with school issues, communicating with your child's teacher while you're deployed is a must. It may take some extra energy, commitment, and creativity from both you and the teacher, but it's possible to develop ways to communicate even if you're an ocean apart. And you'll find that good communication leads to a positive home-school relationship, which will ultimately help your child succeed in school.

Ways to stay in touch with your child's teacher

With the use of communication technologies and a little advance planning, you can stay involved with your child's school life throughout your deployment.

- *Make plans before you deploy.* Be sure to meet with your child's teacher before you deploy. Make sure she understands you want to stay a part of your child's school life while you are gone. Give her your e-mail address and ask if the school has any special accommodations to help parents stay in touch, such as a website. Make sure you get the teacher's e-mail address, as well as the e-mail addresses of other teachers or therapists who may work with your child. Plan to communicate on a regular basis -- every week, for example, or to the extent your mission allows. Let the teacher know if you would like to be informed about specific issues, such as a low grade or an unexcused absence.
- *Decide on the best ways to communicate.* For many deployed parents, e-mail is the easiest way to communicate with teachers. If you are communicating with several teachers, you may want to set up an online chat. Much of your communication will depend on what technologies you have available to you when you're deployed. Before you leave, check out what you will have access to and let the teachers know how you will best be able to communicate while you're gone.

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- *Enlist the help of your spouse or your child's guardian.* Before you deploy, discuss with your spouse or your child's guardian how you can work together. Your spouse or your child's guardian can help with school attendance, homework, and communication with the teacher. If she has limited English speaking abilities, your child's school may be able to provide a translator.

This may be a new role for your spouse or your child's guardian if you normally help with homework and communicate with teachers. Give her specific information on what her role should be while you're deployed. For example, let her know what kind of help your child normally needs with homework.

- *Know what resources the school has available.* Many schools have websites that will keep you up-to-date on your child's schoolwork. If your child is in a DoD school, for example, you can get connected to GradeSpeed, which will keep you current on your child's grades and attendance. To access GradeSpeed, visit <http://dodea.gradespeed.net>.
- *Stay in touch.* If you haven't heard from your child's teacher in a while, send an e-mail to check in. Teachers can get busy and a friendly e-mail will remind your child's teacher that you want to stay involved. Try not to be concerned if you don't hear back right away. With time changes and the teacher's busy schedule, it may take a few days.
- *Send a box to school.* Ask your child's teacher what the class will be studying. If you can send something from a faraway place that relates to their work, the students will feel like the subject is real. Plus, your child will beam when the box is opened.

Communicating with your child about schoolwork

When you're deployed, talking with your child about school can be a little more strained than usual. If your child needs help with his schoolwork, you may have to come up with some creative solutions. Your child will probably not initiate a conversation about schoolwork, so you will have to make an effort to talk together regularly.

These tips will help you stay current on your child's schoolwork:

- *Ask your child about school.* It may seem obvious, but many children will not volunteer information about school to you. They may not want to concern you with their problems when you're deployed, or they may feel you won't be able to help them from so far away. Make sure the questions are specific. "What did you learn in math this week?" "How much time have you set aside to write your research paper?"
- *Set a specific time aside each week to work with your child.* If your situation allows for it, decide to "meet" on a regular basis to help your child with schoolwork. Whether you use e-mail, video-teleconferencing (VTC), voice chats, or texting,

you can help your child with specific assignments. For example, your child can send you an e-mail with his math problems and you can work on them together in a voice chat. You'll want to communicate with your spouse or your child's guardian to pick out a day and time that is convenient for everyone.

- *Understand that this may be a difficult time for your child.* Many children suffer academically when a parent deploys. Work with your child's teacher to help her work out her problems. If they seem too big to handle, it may be time to seek counseling. You, your spouse, or your child's guardian can contact your installation's Family Center or Military OneSource. Counseling services are available -- free of charge -- to help military family members deal with deployment.

Tips for attending a parent-teacher conference

Almost every school holds some form of parent-teacher conferences -- conversations you have with a teacher about your child's schoolwork. When you're deployed, it can be difficult to attend a conference. You may end up communicating by e-mail, online chats, or relaying concerns through your spouse. If you have access to video-teleconferencing (VTC) and the school is able to set it up, you may be able to attend the parent-teacher conference.

- *Ask for the teacher's support before you deploy.* When you talk with your child's teacher before you deploy, express your interest in attending the parent-teacher conference. Ask if the school has VTC capabilities, or if you can attend the conference through an online chat. Most schools will work with parents who are committed to their child's education.
- *Plan ahead.* At least a month before parent-teacher conferences begin, e-mail your child's teacher to begin planning the conference. If several teachers are involved, it can be difficult to coordinate everyone's schedule, along with your military duty.
- *If you can't attend the parent-teacher conference,* ask your spouse or your child's guardian to attend and relay your questions or concerns. It may not be ideal, but it will help you stay involved. Be specific with your questions and ask your spouse or your child's guardian to take notes.
- *Prepare for the conference.* Before the parent-teacher conference, review your child's work. Your child, your spouse, or your child's guardian may be able to send you copies. You may also be able to access your child's work through a school Website, such as the DoDEA's GradeSpeed (<http://dodea.gradespeed.net>). You may see patterns you will want to talk about with the teacher.
- *Talk to your child.* You might also ask your child what she thinks the teacher will say. This will allow you to anticipate some of the issues that might come up at the conference.

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- *Write down all your ideas and concerns.* If you are attending the conference through an online chat or VTC, your time may be limited. Your list will help you stay focused on the issues you are most concerned about.
- *Keep an open mind.* Your child may be having more trouble in school than you expected. If the teacher suggests, for example, that your child needs help with math, remember that the teacher is trying to do what's best for your child.
- *Develop an action plan.* If you're concerned about your child's academic performance or behavior, work with the teacher to develop a plan for improvement. Maybe you can set up more time to help your child by e-mail or voice chats. Maybe the teacher can recommend a tutor. Ask your spouse or your child's guardian to work with your child to find the help he needs.
- *Remember to thank the teacher.* It may have taken a lot of time and effort to make this parent-teacher conference work. Be sure to take the time to thank your child's teacher and any others who helped coordinate the conference.

Resources

DoDEA (Department of Defense Education Activity)

www.dodea.edu

If your child attends a DoD school, this site will offer additional information, as well as contacts for your child's school.

GradeSpeed

www.gradespeed.net

http://dodea.gradespeed.net (sign-in for parents of DoDEA students)

This Internet-based software allows parents of children in DoD schools to stay current on their child's school performance.

Your military support services

Each service branch sponsors information and support programs for service members and their families. You can call or visit any installation Army Community Service Center, Marine Corps Community Services, Fleet and Family Support Center, or Airman and Family Readiness Center regardless of your branch affiliation.

If you aren't near an installation, National Guard Family Assistance Centers are available in every state. The Local Community Resource Finder on the National Guard Family Program at *www.jointservicessupport.org* will identify your closest center.

Military OneSource

This free 24-hour service is available to all active duty, Guard, and Reserve members (regardless of activation status) and their families. Consultants provide

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information and make referrals on a wide range of issues. Free face-to-face counseling sessions (and their equivalent by phone or online) are also available. Call 1-800-342-9647 or go to *www.MilitaryOneSource.com* to learn more.

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