“I wiped the tears from my eyes and wrapped my arms around my dad’s neck. He pulled my mom in and held us close to him. One last hug before he had to go. I watched him walk away, the last time I would see him for six months. My hero was leaving, and all I felt was anger and sadness.”

Those last few hugs, the last few kisses, the last few goodbyes are what many military families across the United States have experienced when seeing a loved one leave for deployment. An estimated 1.4 million servicemen and women serve as active duty members in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, or Air Force. Deployments are nothing new in the military community. However, during these times of separation, family members of those serving, especially the children, undergo many hardships. Studies show children’s reactions to separation can even lead to depression.

Families can do a number of things before and during deployment to make the time apart a little easier. Before a loved one is shipped out, spend as much time as possible together as a family. Communicate with children about thoughts and feelings and be sure they understand why Mom or Dad has to leave. Once the family member is deployed, set aside time that will be used to write letters, put together packages, and discuss feelings about the separation. And don’t be afraid to ask for help. There are many resources and people available and willing to help!

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