

Special Ideas for Older Children and Teens (over 10)

This falls under the category of “Just something you should be aware of.” I’ve heard from a number of mothers of teens who felt they had good relationships with their kids. However, something changed about a month prior to their parent’s deployment.

The best way to describe it was that the child began to pick fights and start arguments over the smallest things. A home that might normally be running smoothly now was suffering lots of waves. Most of these arguments were between them and the deploying parent. It seemed as though he/she could do nothing right! Moodiness prevailed and it became truly frustrating. The parent wanted things to go well because he/she knew they wouldn’t be seeing each other for a long time and didn’t want to leave on uneasy terms.

Finally, one mom went to her 17-year-old son and laid it on the line. She demanded to know what accounted for his abrupt change in behavior at a time when things needed to be as upbeat as possible.

Her son blurted out, “I figured that it would be easier for both of us if we were mad at each other when he has to go!”

Oh...she had never even thought about the logic and emotion of that statement. Now it became clear that the

feelings were out and they could talk together about the deployment from here and that anger was not the way to get by.

If you have teens and pre-teens whose behavior toward the deploying parent is changing, you might consider that they are using the same logic. Often the older ones tend to internalize how they're feeling about the absences. It's difficult for the parent at home to try to reach them to help. Lots of times they worry about something that they truly don't need to and that doesn't help anything. It just adds to their stress. Here's an idea that a youth counselor at a Family Readiness Group shared with me that allows a parent to step in and help them deal with the emotions they're feeling:

113 Have the child make a list (as specific as possible) of all the things they are worried about regarding the deployment. It's a good idea to have the at-home parent sitting with them, but they shouldn't contribute to or edit any of what's being listed. Next, have the child take list #1 and divide it into two separate lists: the first is a list of things they **can** do something about, along with ideas of steps they can take. This is where a parent can help, but only to act as a sounding board or to help generate the action steps. The second list contains the things you have no control over and can do nothing about. Then encourage the child to allow themselves to let go of what's on this second list and only focus on those things they **can** control. That should take some of the burden off.

I absolutely love this next one! If you have teenage girls at home this is a must. I'm so impressed that the recruiting office was willing to take part in this.

114 “On Valentine’s Day, one of the ladies in my unit had a recruiter in the area go in uniform to her teenage daughter’s school and deliver roses from her dad. She felt so special and loved.”

115 “My teenagers like to go out to eat, so on Sunday mornings we’ll all go to IHOP® to eat pancakes. Over breakfast and coffee we read the Sunday paper and discuss the week’s events while sharing our feelings and opinions. It allows for quality time and lets us catch up after a busy week and start a new one feeling connected.”

116 Let the teenager put together a video or DVD of important events that are happening during deployment and have them do a narration.

117 Have your teenagers use their computer skills to create a family newsletter, either online or on paper. Make it one page and fill it with events from the family. Include an interview with a grandparent, movie reviews, question of the week, list of birthdays, jokes, or just thoughts of the day. Put an issue out every couple of weeks or every month.

118 Write a short letter to your child relaying some of your thoughts about the time they were born and the events of the day leading up to it, such as who was doing what, etc. Bryan has always loved to hear about how his dad was playing baseball when I had to go to the hospital, how he was born