Children and Deployment

Please refer to the list below to help your child cope with the loss in your home.

1. Whatever you are feeling, they are feeling too. They just don't have the coping skills or maturity to express their feelings appropriately.
2. Be very clear when explaining the separation. They can handle the truth. It's the uncertainty that scares them.
3. Reassure them that you are not leaving due to anything they have done or not done, and it is not because you don't love them.
4. Your younger children will exhibit sadness, fear, and anxiety. Your older children may act like they don't care. In either case, it's important for you to talk about it a lot.

The following are suggestions to help you make the time apart easier for your child.

1. Rules in the home should stay the same!!! Don't change the rules because one parent is absent from the home.
2. Keep routines the same as much as possible. Any chores, responsibilities, hobbies, teams, or clubs your child participates in should be maintained. Alert family members and friends that you may need help transporting your child/ren to these various activities. Keeping up with them will help the child feel normal.
3. Don't compensate with money. Your child does not need a new puppy or a Playstation, or a 4-wheeler to survive this separation. He/she needs you.
4. Get involved in your Family Readiness Group. While you are being supported by the adults in the group, your child can benefit by being with other children who know what he/she is going through.
5. Track the time. One method I suggest is a paper chain. Each day of the separation you and your child/ren take a strip of paper and write one memory or one thing you miss about your loved one. When your loved one returns, imagine how touched he/she will be by the loving thoughts and memories you shared.
6. Leave behind a comfort item. If you have a shirt, hat, pillow, etc. you can live without, leave it behind for the child to keep. Holding it close and inhaling your scent will help your child feel close to you.
7. Make video/audio tapes to send to your loved one.
8. Do the disciplining at home. Do not tell your child to wait until Dad/Mom gets home to receive a consequence for poor behavior. First, a consequence needs to be immediate to be effective. Second, you give up your power in that home. Finally, your child may fear the parent's return.

9. Notify your child's principal and teacher that you will be gone. Your school will be able to provide the extra support necessary to help your child continue to succeed.
10. The more consistent and structured you can be with your child, the safer he/she will feel.
11. Develop a thick skin. Your child may say and do things that are out of character during this time. Remember, she/he is not mad at you-just at the situation.
12. Children will take their cue from you. If you approach this separation in a positive and upbeat manner, they will too. If you choose to be bitter and angry, they will model that.

I hope you find these ideas and suggestions helpful. I wish you and your families the very best and am available to assist you when you need it. You may contact me through the State Family Programs Office at 1-800-446-4645 or family@ar.ngb.army.mil.