



The Project

Sesame Workshop, the nonprofit organization behind *Sesame Street*, is continuing its recent highly successful and award winning efforts to provide resources and emotional support to military families with young children. *Talk, Listen, Connect: Deployments, Homecomings, Changes* is a bilingual (English and Spanish), multimedia outreach program designed to help support military families with children between the ages of 2 and 5 experiencing deployments, multiple deployments or when a parent returns home changed due to a combat related injury.

Overall Project Goals:

- Reduce the level of anxiety children may experience during homecomings after multiple deployments.
- Help families with ways to cope with multiple deployments.
- Help young children gain an age-appropriate understanding of a parent's injury by including them and the entire family in the rehabilitation process.
- Reassure children that they are loved and secure, and together with their families, can learn new ways of being there for one another and have hope for the future.

The Need

Today, military families are demonstrating a level of heroism unlike any other period in history. Dedicated service members, their spouses, and children are experiencing new and different challenges through deployments that are both lengthier and more frequent. And while military families are strong and resilient, multiple deployments have a tremendous impact on the family, particularly in those families with young children. The inherent danger of deployed service members adds to children's stress while the parent is gone.¹ Thus, when a parent is deployed, the whole family is deployed.

Transitions from multiple deployments are even more complicated when a parent returns home with an injury. Children's lives are disrupted as the family may have to travel or relocate near treatment centers. Moreover, there is a lot of uncertainty. Parents' own level of adjustment or grief impacts their abilities to relate to their children and care for their emotional needs.² Injuries can create great strain in family functioning and changes in parenting practices. Under these circumstances, children have a greater chance of developing emotional, behavioral or cognitive problems. Military families coping with a parent who returns with an injury need the extra support to reach a "new normal". Unfortunately, there are scant developmentally appropriate resources for military families with young children to confront these issues in a way that provides security and comfort, while also engaging the entire family.

Program Components

¹ American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Military Deployment Services for Youth, Families and Service Members. (February, 2007). *The Psychological Needs of U.S. Military Service members and Their Families: A Preliminary Report*

² Ibid 1

- **Two DVDs** featuring stories about:
 1. **Deployments and Multiple Deployments**
 - Deployments: Elmo learns to adjust after he discovers his dad has to go away for an extended period of time. Also included is live action footage of military families coping with the challenges of various stages of deployment.
 - Homecomings: Elmo's dad returns home after being away for a long time, and the entire family learns how to readjust their routines. As they re-establish their connection, Elmo learns his dad must go away again, but Elmo and his family know they "can do it" together. Along with the story is live action footage of military families coping with multiple deployments.
 2. **Changes**
 - Changes: Rosita's dad sustains an injury while on the job. Rosita and her family, with help from her friend Elmo, explore ways she can express her feelings and adjust to the "new normal". Live action footage of military families is also included illustrating how families establish a new routine after a parent returns home changed.

- **Print** materials include:
 - A Special Magazine for Parents and Caregivers providing tips, strategies and activities to help comfort and reassure their children through difficult times.
 - A children's poster offering activities for children to engage in as they experience various transitions.
 - Postcards featuring the beloved *Sesame Street* characters for parents and children to stay connected.

- **Online**: all kit materials will be available for free downloading at: www.sesameworkshop.org/tlc
 - Video streaming featuring the *Talk, Listen, Connect* DVD
 - Special Magazine, children's poster and *Sesame Street* postcards
 - Facilitator Guide providing tools to facilitators to share practical and engaging tips and activities to aid families and children as they change and grow

Distribution

Distribution of 500,000 free kits to be provided by the Department of Defense through Military OneSource, the New York State Office of Mental Health (NYSOMH), USO, the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) and additional outlets.

Program Assessment

A program assessment will be conducted with spouses of military personnel who have been injured or experienced multiple deployments, and have a young child. The study will assess appeal, comprehension and utility of *Talk, Listen, Connect: Deployments, Homecomings, Changes* as well as the effectiveness of the materials in helping eligible participants cope with the stressors of injury and multiple deployments within their family.

Partners

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