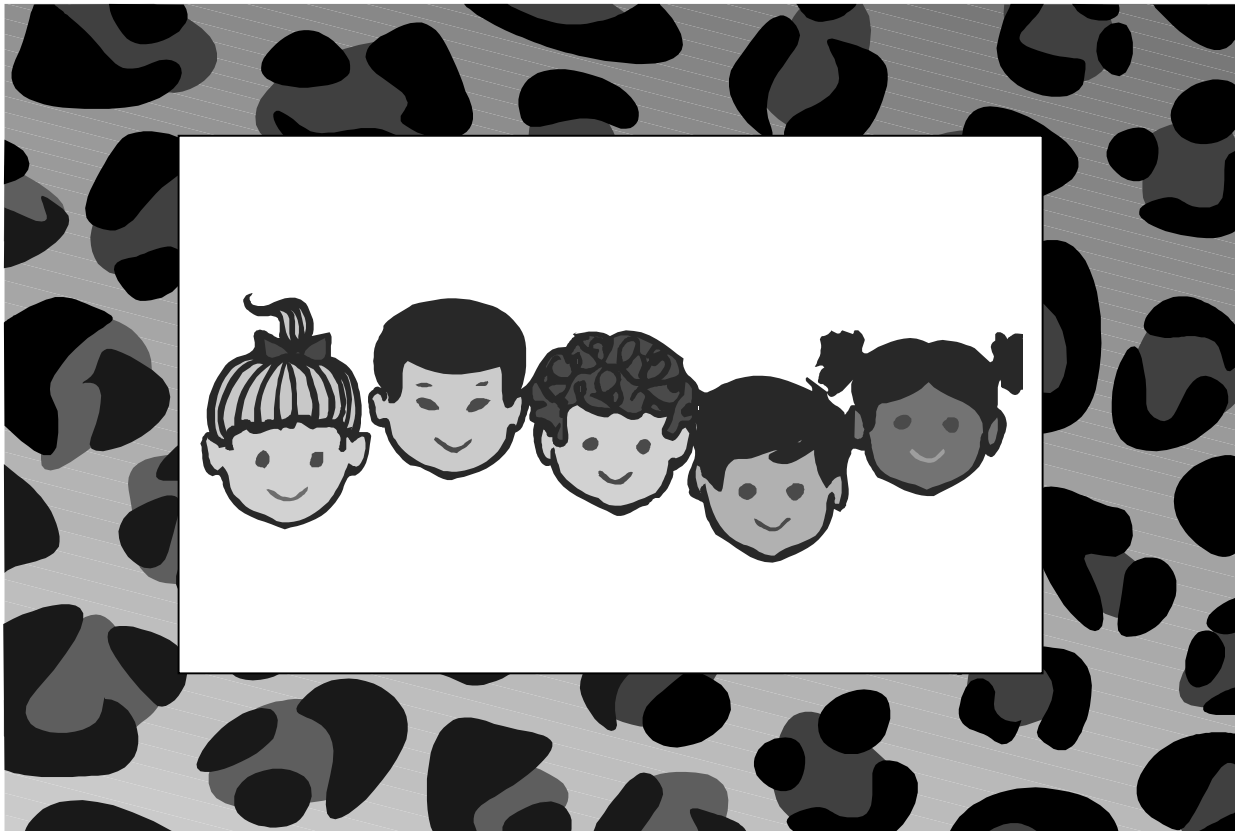


C.O.D.E "M" TROOPS

A Support Group for Children of Deported Mmilitary
By Janet M. Bender



INTRODUCTION

With recent terrorist events in the news and U.S. military involvement in conflict overseas, children are naturally curious and sometimes deeply concerned for their own safety and the safety of their loved ones. Parents, teachers and other caregivers, often find themselves at a loss as to how to explain these tragic and frightening situations to children without inflicting unnecessary trauma.

This unit of activities is designed to provide just enough information and support to gently guide children of deployed military to a place of relative comfort and security. In today's world, we cannot guarantee safety to anyone, but we can help children build upon their own inner strengths and develop confidence that the caring adults in their lives will do their best to keep them safe and secure. The additional component of educating children with basic geographical and practical information about the location and work of the military helps remove the mystery often associated with the departure of a loved one to places unknown.

CODE "M" Troops are small groups of children who meet with their counselor for six weeks to explore feelings, express concerns, and learn strategies for helping themselves and their troop friends cope with the absence of a loved one. Through discussion, art activities and group support, these children find answers to their questions and comfort in the knowledge that they are not alone in the circumstances they face.

Janet M. Bender, M.Ed.

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CODE "M" Troops

SESSION 1: What is War?

Objectives:

1. Give students age appropriate information about reasons for military deployment.
2. Gather information from students about their commonalities relative to deployment of a friend or family member.

Materials:

Computer with PowerPoint capabilities. Floppy disc or downloaded copy of "What is War?" presentation. (Optional: If this is to be your only session with students, you may want to use one or more worksheets following the PPT slide presentation. If students will continue in a group, they will do activities weekly.)

Procedure:

Show presentation and lead discussion with students as indicated on slides. (Choose activity sheet/s if desired for students to complete and discuss.)

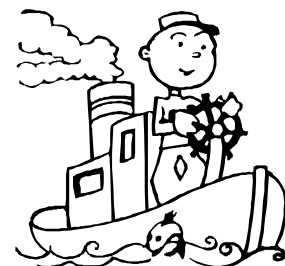
Code "M" Strategy 1: " I understand that my family member is working in the military to protect and defend our country."

Closure:

Invite interested students to join troop and continue in small group for five more sessions. *(Some students may not need or desire further support. Be sure to get parent/guardian permission for group participation.)

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SESSION 2: All in the Same Boat



Objectives:

1. Students will meet other students with the common situation of having a family member who is deployed.
2. Students will express their feelings about deployment of family member.
3. Students will connect in memory with family member by drawing a picture of him/her at work.

Materials:

Activity sheet, crayons and pencils for each student in group. Cut outs of military vehicles (plane, ship, sub, tank, helicopter, etc.)

Procedure:

Ask each group member to introduce him/herself and tell his/her favorite lunch food. After all have a turn, review names and food choices aloud. Give volunteers a chance to name all group members and their favorite foods.

Ask and let each child answer:

1. Who in your family is in the military?
2. What branch? (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, Special Forces)
3. Where is your family member now?

Let each student choose a military vehicle, plane, etc. (or draw and cut out their own) to represent their loved one. Write "Jon's Dad" etc. on the symbol and display on a bulletin board or display in the hall while the person is away.

Give out activity sheet that follows and have students complete and discuss.

Code "M" Strategy 2: " I can share my feelings with others who understand and care about me."

Session 2: Activity Sheet **Name** _____

Draw a picture of your family member at work.



Fill in the blanks.

On the day _____ left, I felt _____

because _____

The hardest thing about having my _____ away

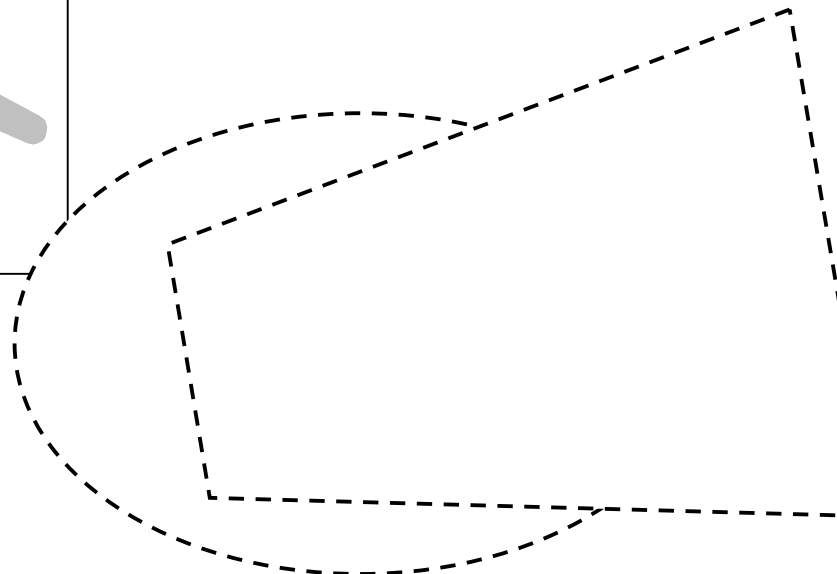
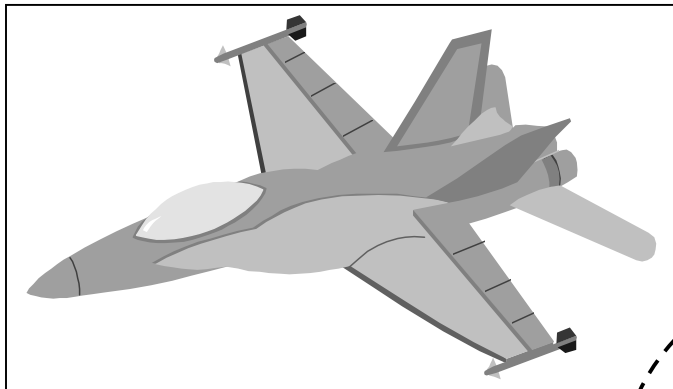
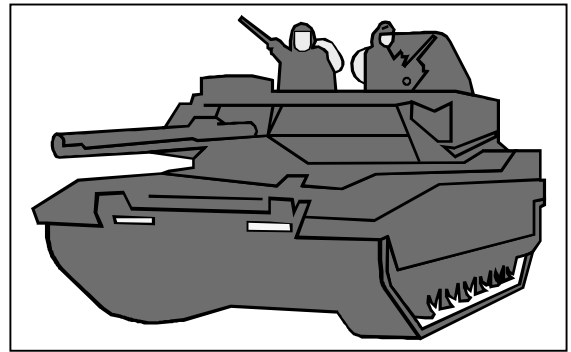
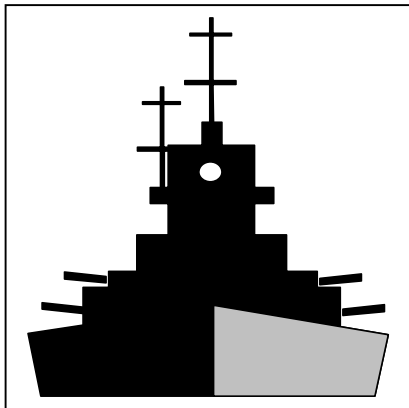
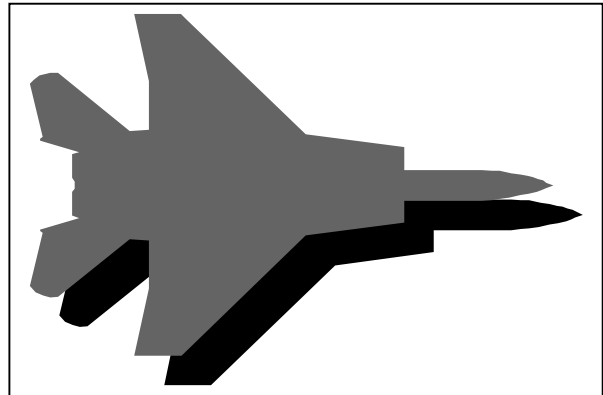
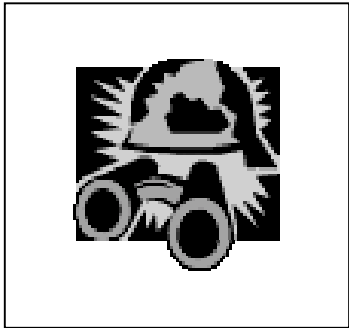
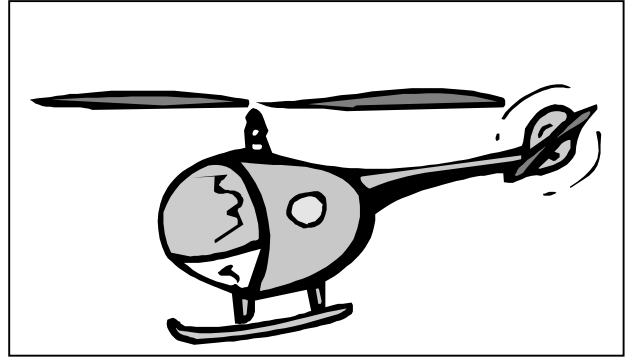
from home is _____

_____.

Closure: Let troop decide on a special sign or handshake to say goodbye until next week.

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Military Symbols





SESSION 3: Far Away but Close in Thought

Objectives:

1. Identify and locate deployment destinations on map.
2. Make memory bracelets or necklaces to wear in family member's absence.

Materials:

World map or globe. Red, white and blue craft beads and leather laces or elastic craft string.

Discussion:

Where is your family member?
How did he/she get there? (boat, plane, etc.)



Why did your family member go there? (Refer back to PowerPoint presentation from session 1 if necessary to clarify objectives of the military.

Procedure:

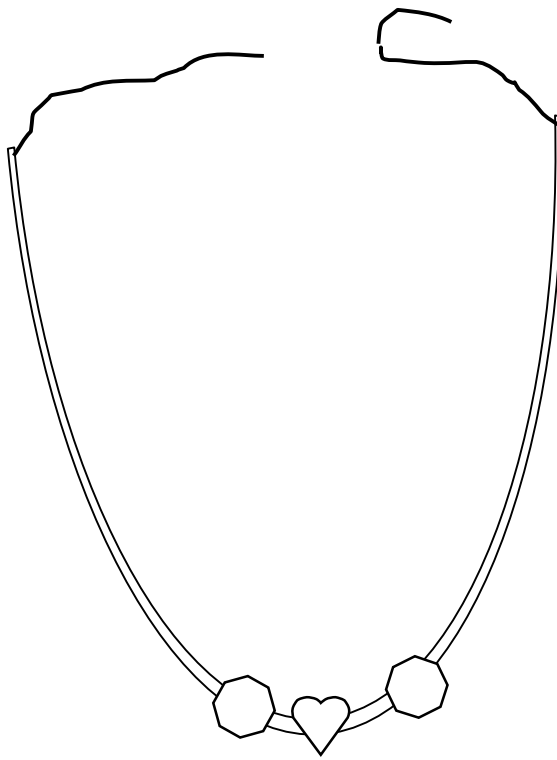
As students answer questions above, locate on world map the countries where their family member is serving.

Give out craft materials and let students string beads in pattern of their choice. Tell students that sometimes it helps to keep their loved one close in thought by wearing a bracelet or necklace in their honor. If you use leather to make bracelets, they can be tied on wrists and worn all the time until their loved one returns.

Code "M" Strategy: " I can keep my loved one close in thought."

Closure: Special handshake, etc.

Patriotic Crafts
Bead Bracelets or Necklaces



SESSION 4: My Support System Name _____

Objective:

1. Identify remaining sources of strength and support including their own inner strength.

Materials: Copy of this activity sheet for each child.

Circle or write the words that describe the person who is caring for you while your parent/loved one is away from home.

helpful	funny	hard working	nice
brave	loving	understanding	busy
tired	generous	_____	_____

Who are some people you can talk to about important things?

What is something your caregiver does to help you? _____

You can also help take care of yourself. Fill in the blanks below by writing about your strengths. I am _____.

I help out at home by _____.

I show courage or bravery when _____.

_____.

At school I _____.

I help take care of myself when I _____.

Code "M" Strategy: "I can depend on myself and my caregiver to meet my needs and keep me safe."

SESSION 5: Coping with Change Name _____

Objectives:

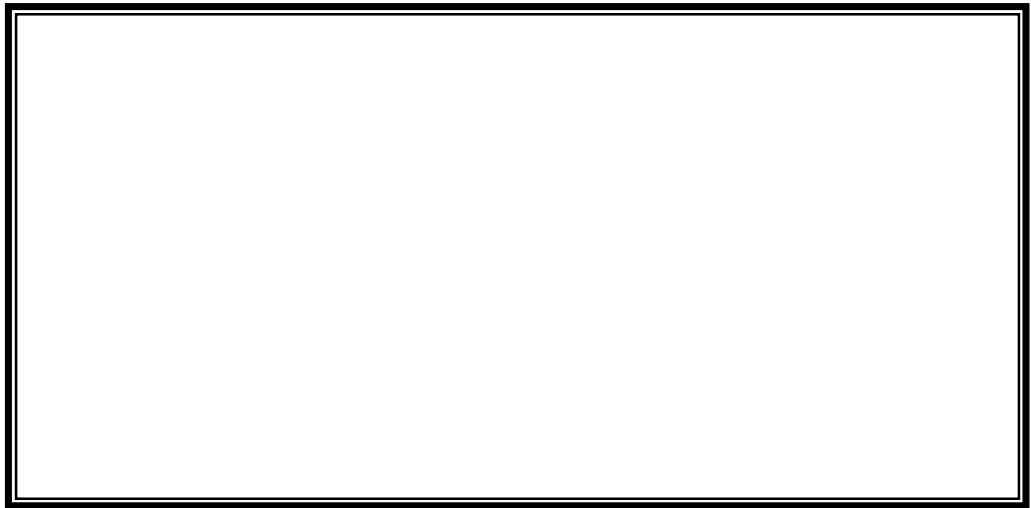
1. Child will recognize differences and similarities in his/her everyday life since deployment occurred.
2. Child will accept temporary increase in responsibility due to absence of family member.

Materials: Activity sheet, crayons, pencils.

When my family member is away, these things are different.

Some things that stay the same are:

Draw a picture of you being more responsible since your family member left. Share.



Code "M" Strategy: "Change may be difficult, but I can handle it."

Closure as usual.

SESSION 6: The Power of Positive Thoughts Name _____

Objectives:

1. Students will identify ways to cope with worrisome thoughts and feelings including expressing their feelings, having fun, and relaxing.

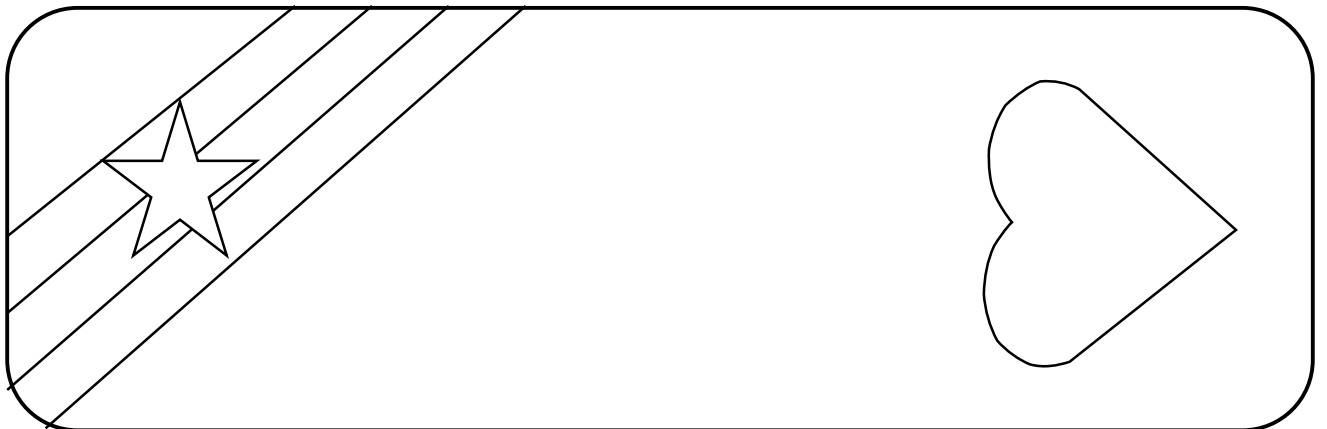
Fill in the blanks. Discuss.

Sometimes I worry about _____

When I begin to worry, I can _____
_____ to help me feel better.
(Think of hobbies and recreational activities that you enjoy.)

This is what I do to relax. _____
(Suggested ideas: listening to music, reading, sports, deep breathing, art, etc.)

From all we have learned in Code "M" Troops, create a positive slogan to write on your bookmark and repeat to yourself often. Color your bookmark with markers and cut it out to use while your family member is away.



***C.O.DE "M" Troops: A Support Group for Children of Deployed
Military***

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