



## When to Seek Help for a Child



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Parents are usually the first to recognize when a child is having a problem with emotions or behavior. When children have had challenges with their emotions and behavior before deployment, deployment can sometimes make these problems worse.

For many parents, the decision to seek professional help can be difficult and painful. Remember: there is nothing wrong with getting help! The first step is to gently try to talk with the child. An honest, open talk about feelings can often help. It may also help to talk with the child's doctor, teachers, clergy members, or other adults who know the child well. However, all of these strategies are sometimes not enough to prevent a child from having problems during the deployment. Here are some signs that a child may need additional, professional support:

#### **Preschoolers**

- Severe worry or anxiety, as shown by regularly refusing to go to daycare/school, to sleep, or take part in activities that are normal for the child's age.
- Hyperactivity; fidgeting; constant movement beyond regular playing.
- Frequent nightmares.
- Frequent, unexplainable temper tantrums.

#### **Elementary Age Children**

- Marked drop in school performance.
- Poor grades in school despite trying hard.
- More difficulties at school and/or with peers.
- Severe worry or anxiety, as shown by regularly refusing to go to school, to sleep, or take part in activities that are normal for the child's age.
- Hyperactivity; fidgeting; constant movement beyond regular playing.
- Frequent disobedience or aggression (longer than six months), and opposition to authority figures.

#### **Pre-Adolescents and Adolescents**

- Marked change in school performance.
- Inability to cope with problems and daily activities.
- Marked changes in sleeping and/or eating habits.
- Frequent physical complaints.
- Sexual acting out.
- Depression shown by negative mood and attitude over time, often with poor appetite, difficulty sleeping or thoughts of death.
- Abuse of alcohol and/or drugs.
- Intense aversion to becoming overweight (even though weight may be normal), vomiting, or reduced food intake.
- Frequent nightmares.
- Threats of self harm or harm to others.
- Self injury or self-destructive behavior, like cutting on arms or legs.
- Frequent outbursts of anger, aggression.
- Threats to run away.
- Aggressive (or non-aggressive) violation of rights of others (opposition to authority, truancy, thefts, or vandalism).
- Strange thoughts, beliefs, feelings, or unusual behaviors.
- If these problems continue over an extended period and especially if other people involved in the child's life are concerned, talking with a psychologist or psychiatrist or other professional specifically trained to work with children and adolescents can be helpful.



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### Where to Find Help for a Child

If you're worried about your child's emotions or behavior, you can start by talking to:

- **Friends.**
- **Family members.**
- **A spiritual or religious counselor.**
- **The school counselor.**
- **The child's pediatrician or family doctor.** If you think your child needs professional help, here are some options to find a qualified therapist or counselor for your child:
  - Military Hospital or Medical Center.
  - Military One Source.
  - TRICARE.
  - Veteran's Administration.
  - Employee Assistance Program through an employer.
  - Local medical society, local psychological society.
  - Local mental health association.
  - County mental health department.
  - Local hospitals or medical centers with behavioral health services.
  - Department of Psychology in nearby university.
  - National advocacy organizations (National Alliance for the Mentally Ill; Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health; National Mental Health Association).
  - National professional organizations (American Psychological Association; American Academy of Pediatrics; American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry; American Psychiatric Association).

