Waiting for Daddy

Rose's Story

Author: Marg Rogers
Story editor: Madeline Fussell

Personal photos: supplied by a defence family and ADF personnel
When Daddy goes on deployment we take him to the airport to say goodbye. I don't like the airport!
On the way home it is very quiet in the car.

I think about asking Mum: 'When is Daddy coming home?'

But she is looking a bit sad.
When Daddy goes on deployment

I draw pictures for him.
We put them in an envelope to post.
On the way to the post box, I whisper to Mum:

'When is Daddy coming home?'
When Daddy goes on deployment ...
I help Mum around the house and outside.
After our jobs, when Mum is looking tired, I whinge:

'But when is Daddy coming home?'

I am sure that helps her sleep.
When Daddy is on deployment he is often far, far away in another country.
Sometimes I get scared and sleep in Mummy's bed.

At other times he is a long way away in Australia.

Sometimes I get scared and sleep in Mummy's bed.

*Just in case she gets scared too.*
When Daddy is on deployment, I love talking to him on the phone.

When Grandma visits she helps me share the phone with Anthony. She says I am really good at talking, and talking and talking and talking.
When Daddy is on deployment, we go to the park with Grandma and Mum.

Faster pup!

Keep up, Rose!

Come on, Mum!
When Daddy is on deployment

he sends me a letter

and a present.

I love getting presents.
When Daddy is on deployment

Mum lets us watch the DVD where he is reading us a bedtime story.

I like hearing his voice and watching Daddy, Anthony and I on TV.
When Daddy is on deployment

and my brother and I have a fight, I always cry,

'When is Daaaaady coming hoome?'
At other times Mum says I am cross and grumpy, bumpy and lumpy.

I just want a cuddle from my Dad.
Finally, the next time I ask...

'When is Daddy coming home?', Mummy says 'In two weeks!'. Then it's 10 sleeps. Then 9, then 8, then 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, then to the airport!

I love the airport!

I suggest riding our bikes to the airport, to make it lots of fun. She says the car will be easier.

Mum has strange ideas.
Then the big day finally arrives and I can hardly believe it. Mum hasn't stopped smiling all day and Anthony is jumping around everywhere. Mum calls him 'Anthony the 'roo.'

10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, YEAH!
When Daddy is on deployment, we go back to the airport in the car to pick him up.

At the airport we wait with other families. We wait and wait and wait.
The plane lands and we wait again. I close my eyes and wait and wait.

All of a sudden, someone calls out. I open my eyes and I can see other Dads, Mums and adults arrive.
Finally, after many months, there he is.

He has lots of cuddles for Anthony and me.
We even let him cuddle Mummy.

Although they take for ever.
I tell him how old I am, just in case he forgot.
I love my Dad and he loves me.
This app explores a number of themes identified in Dr Marg Rogers’ thesis entitled ‘Young children’s understanding and experiences of parental deployment within an ADF Family’ undertaken at the University of New England (UNE). Additionally, the use of digital technology with young children is an area of increasing importance for families and educators, as demonstrated in Jo Bird’s Ph.D research at UNE. These themes and learning implications included:

- **The need for age and culturally appropriate resources**
  Marg’s Ph.D research revealed a need for age and culturally appropriate resources for young families, their educators and family workers (Rogers, 2017). Some families were told by other parents they were on their ‘own until the kids go to school’, expressing their frustrations at the lack of age-appropriate material for children under school age (Rogers, 2017, p. 252). Parents reported this was both discouraging and depressing because they were trying to parent through stressful and emotional times throughout the deployment cycle and needed additional support.

- **The powerful effect of narrative**
  While families expressed their desire for age appropriate storybooks, parents also identified digital apps as an effective resource for young children from military families. Due to the absence of such apps in Australia, some families were utilising US apps but found the content culturally very different. Despite this, they recognised the powerful effect of the narrative on influencing their child’s understanding of deployment through their use of the app because they were drawn to the characters and their experiences of parental separation (Rogers, 2017). Young children enjoy listening to stories and engaging with the characters (Fellowes and Oakley, 2014).

- **The need for apps that encourage creativity**
  In early childhood, play is valued as the way children learn (Wood, 2013). With the increase of iPads and tablets, apps are appearing in the educational section of the App Store that do not allow for children’s creativity and imaginative play. Selecting apps that allow children to be creative and engage in imaginative play allows children to mix their interest of technologies with activities that encourage learning (Bird, in press).

- **Adult involvement in children’s app use**
  Jo’s PhD research indicated children benefit from adult interaction while using technologies (Bird, in press). Adults can assist by explaining concepts, extending children’s learning and building social and language skills. While adults sometimes find it difficult to understand children’s app play, just being there demonstrates to the child their engagement with technologies is valued (Bird, in press).
What the literature and research says (eBook)

This book explores a number of themes identified in the author’s PhD thesis entitled ‘Young children’s understanding and experiences of parental deployment within an ADF Family’ undertaken at the University of New England. These themes included:

- **Physical reactions to deployment (e.g. sleep issues)**
Hollingsworth (2011) describes reactions to parental deployment as common and can include externalising behaviour, including sleep issues and toileting regressions. Lester and Flake (2013) list sleep issues as a major impact on family life and marriages in military families experiencing deployment and as they are often signs of emotional stress, according to Friedberg and Brelsford (2011). Parental sleep deprivation can also be exacerbated as they parent alone with children whose sleep is also disturbed. Babies and toddlers often miss the absent parent most at bedtime when they are overtired and it may take them longer to settle as they do not have the words to express their feelings of grief and loss due to the absence of someone so important to them (Linke, 2007).

- **Emotional reactions to deployment (e.g. whining, teariness, clingyness)**
Mogil et al. (2010) describe the difficulty of losing a parent as a provider of emotional support during military deployment. Rogers-Baber (2017) outlines that relationships within the family are vital to helping each other and the child emotionally through the ups and downs of the deployment cycle. Connell (2013) underlines the importance of this support by stating, ‘Relationships within families are generally the most important element of children’s emotional worlds’ (p.25). Effective support may be more difficult to provide due to increased stress levels of at-home partners and spouses during deployment, as Hollingsworth (2011) reports, so it is important for parents to get additional support.

- **Barriers to understanding the concepts of deployment (e.g. concepts of time)**
Paris, DeVoe, Ross, and Acker (2010) outline the difficulties that the developmental capabilities of the young child place on their ability to understand the arrivals and departures of the deployed parent. Concepts of time are difficult for young children and waiting can seem like eternity when you do not have a real sense of time (Linke, 2007), some of which can be eased by the use of family narratives (Baber, 2016).

- **Support for the family (e.g. Grandparents)**
Wellard (2012) believes grandparents can be helpful in creating well-being and as a preventative to loneliness for children. Additionally, the relationship can fortify families in times of stress, and assist in building resilience in children (Henderson, Hayslip, Sanders, & Louden, 2009). Building networks of support around families is important in helping all family members cope with stress. Where biological family members are not available, friends and neighbours can become affective kin and provide protective factors (Rogers-Baber, 2017).

- **Communication (e.g. use of phone, parcels, letters) and technology (e.g. use of DVD recording)**
This book shows an array of communication and technology in order to maintain the relationships within the family, despite a parent’s absence, shown to be effective for keeping family members relationships fresh and strong (Rogers, 2017). The Department of Defence (2014) highlights the importance of regular communication using creativity and variety in order to keep the relationships fresh and avoid misunderstandings from thoughts of isolation and neglect.

In Australia, there are a number of websites that may give you more information and support through the Defence Community Organisation, Early Childhood Australia and local, state and national health and community services.
Reference List


Bird, J. (in press). “This is pretend. We are just playing”: Exploring young children’s imaginative play with working and non-working technologies and educators’ provision of these devices in early childhood settings. School of Education. University of New England.


Wellard, S. (2012). Older people as grandparents: how public policy needs to broaden its view of older people and the role they play within families. Quality in Ageing and Older Adults, 13(4), 257-263.


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**Marg Rogers** is a lecturer and researcher in Early Childhood education at the University of New England. She has qualifications and professional experience in Early Childhood, creative arts education and communication education. In both her current and previous work roles, her passion in education has always been in supporting families to help them do the best job they can through authentic community and education partnerships. As a part of this research project, Marg has had the privilege to meet with some defence families and discuss many of the issues they face. Marg hopes these apps will help children, parents and educators have a starting point to discuss these issues further. Her PhD researched ‘Young Children’s Understanding and Experiences within an Australian Defence Force Family’. Her other current research area is in the use of technology within early childhood services.

**Madeline Fussell** was the person contacted by the family reflected in this book and thus this project has held special meaning for her. As a primary trained and Early Childhood educator, Madeline has 31 years teaching experience, the most recent as a lecturer at the University of New England teaching pre-service primary and early childhood teachers. Madeline’s own childhood with a father who battled PTSD and her learning through her own two sons’, and their friends’ military careers has been a driving force to see further community understanding of veterans’ needs, and their families, developed.
From the author:

For my sister, who taught me so many important things, including how to milk goats and read.

For my next sister, for her joyful, loving heart, generous nature and love of bushwalking.

For my other sister, for her friendship, wisdom, her open listening heart and wit. Your passion to travel the world is infectious.
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