



## When Dad deploys, keep buildup to a minimum

By John Rosemond McClatchy Newspapers Parenting Syndicated

A timely conversation recently started on my Web site ([rosemond.com](http://rosemond.com)) when the mother of two children, ages 2 and 4, asked how to best tell them and how much to explain concerning the fact that their daddy is soon to be deployed.

Concerning such things, I recommend abiding by two general rules: First, tell young children only what they need to know. In other words, do not, as is the tendency of all too many of today's parents, explain too much. The more explanation, especially in a situation of this precarious sort, the more likely it becomes that a child will become anxious. One might call this the KISS rule, for "Keep it Simple and Straightforward."

Second, do not give an event of this nature a lot of advance buildup. "Daddy's leaving tomorrow to be in the Army again" doesn't give time for a psychological drama to develop concerning Daddy's deployment. Treating it like a simple fact of life, something daddies and mommies sometimes do, keeps the potential for anxiety at a minimum.

While those two rules of thumb will keep the potential for emotional unrest at a minimum, they do not completely eliminate the possibility. Some children deal with anxiety by clamming up, while some deal with it by asking question after question after question.

In the first instance, gentle coaxing and reassurance are in order. In the second, it's fine for parents to say "I've answered that already" or even "I don't know." Furthermore, it's OK to say "I don't know" even if you do know but would rather not discuss that particular issue with your child.

Barb, a mom whose husband has deployed three times in the past five years, jumped in with helpful suggestions. The first time their dad left home to serve, Barb's kids were 4 and 7. She writes: "I kept the television off and didn't discuss war with the kids around. If they had questions or worries, I reminded them that he was going to be as safe as possible and that it was our job to pray for ALL the soldiers, not just Daddy. I set up individual e-mail accounts for each child as they got older, but Dad was the only one who e-mailed them. They loved that! They always got to talk to him individually whenever he called, and as long as it wasn't a school night, I'd wake them even if he called late. It was worth the loss of a few minutes of sleep."

Note that Barb also recommends sticking to the KISS rule. The e-mail accounts and phone calls lent an air of adventure to something that could otherwise have been nothing but worrisome.

On the matter of the actual parting, I thought Barb's advice was particularly spot on. "Don't make a big deal of it," she says. "Consider having Daddy say goodbye to the kids at home, and then you, and only you, go with him to the airport. It's very tough on kids when they see Mommy and Daddy crying."

On behalf of any parent out there with a soon-to-be-deployed or potentially deployable spouse, I send many thanks to Barb, wherever she is. In times like this, little acts of patriotism can make a huge difference.

Family psychologist John Rosemond can be found on the Web at [rosemond.com](http://rosemond.com).





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