



You're Not Alone

Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. Have participants sit in a circle.
2. Explain to the group that this is a brainstorming activity about different kinds of resources or strategies for coping with a variety of issues related to caring for a grandchild while a son or daughter is deployed or “downrange.” There are four main areas to consider (see p.2). In each of these areas the group will brainstorm and give each other ideas for how to either support each other, to give support, or to get the support they need.
3. Tell the group that as the activity begins, the first person takes the end of the string and holds it. He or she says one idea for the *support web topic* and then throws the yard across the circle to someone else, while holding on to the string. Now, the next person shares his or her idea and holds on to the string. When finished, he or she holds the string and throws the yarn across the circle to someone else, who then holds the string and passes it across to the next person.
4. As the game goes on, the group will build a web connecting them to each other and their ideas. As more people contribute ideas the web becomes more dense and interconnected.
5. When the group has had a chance to brainstorm for a time and build a strong web of support, the facilitator tosses the balloon out onto the web and tells the group that the balloon is representing their grandchild/ren while the web is the support to hold the “child” through the deployment.

Process:

Often, when the balloon is tossed onto the web, the group will begin pulling and adjusting the web to compensate for gaps and to keep the balloon bouncing above the web. This cooperation can serve as a metaphor for the importance of a community working together, and about how being connected to people and resources is a great way to cope with a challenging time in life. Such couples face not only the fact that their child is away at war, but caring for their grandchildren as well. This lesson will support couples in coping successfully with the increase in family responsibilities, with helping their grandchildren during deployment, and taking care of their own relationship. The stress of having a son or daughter deployed while carrying the responsibility of caring for the

Group Size: All

Time Needed: 30-45 minutes

Goal: To help couples who are caring for grandchildren identify support systems

Audience: Grandparents who are caring for the children of deployed soldiers

Special Considerations: This is a good activity to follow the *Resource Sheet*.

Resources Needed:

- ✓ A skein of yarn
- ✓ An inflated balloon

children of that son or daughter can be an isolating experience for a couple. A couple may be looking forward to a quieter lifestyle and find themselves caring for young children or teenagers.

Conclude:

Encourage the couples to think about what the group said during the activity and pick a couple of supports mentioned to follow up on under each topic.

Support Web Topic

The Couple Relationship

1. What supports do you need as a couple?
2. What do you need from each other?
3. What do you need for your relationship to stay strong?

Examples: Time alone together; getting a babysitter once a month; making sure we still do the things we like to do; hobbies and interests; getting together with friends; being involved in faith-based activities and practices; time alone for each spouse; talking about how we're doing.

Taking Care of Grandchildren

1. What supports do you need as caretakers of your grandchild/ren?
2. Who else can help?
3. What sorts of supports can you put in place for them?
4. How can you keep them connected to their deployed parent?
5. What resources does the NG/Army offer?

Examples: Getting to know their friends and supporting those relationships; getting to know teachers or being involved in the school in some way; encourage them to talk about their feelings; facilitating skype or telephone calls with their parent; help them keep a scrap book or diary of events to share with their parent when they come home; Military and Family Life Consultant Program educational materials; Family Readiness Group.

Staying Connected to your Deployed Son or Daughter

1. What supports do you need to help your deployed son or daughter?
2. How can you stay connected to him or her?
3. Are there things you can do to help him or her stay connected to their child?
4. What resources does the army offer to help you stay in touch?

Examples: Getting advice and guidance from the family readiness group about what the soldier needs during deployment; consider volunteering to support other families of deployed soldiers; learn how to skype; have lots of pictures of the soldier around the house for the children to see; learn as much as you can about where your soldier is and what their mission is; ask other people to think about or pray for your deployed child; display a flag; tie yellow ribbons around the trees in your yard.

Preparing for the Soldier's Homecoming

1. What supports will help you get ready for the soldier's homecoming?
2. What expectations will you have?
3. How can you help prepare the children for the return of their soldier parent?
4. What resources does the Army have to help with this transition?
5. What can you do to help smooth the adjustment for both the children and the soldier?
6. How will you celebrate?

Examples: Making use of the FRG and other NG resources to see how other families have handled homecoming; spend time talking with the kids about what will be the same and what will be different; enlist other family members in planning ways to support the soldier; bring family and friends to the welcome home ceremony; learn about PTSD and what soldiers need to adjust to being home; connect with the VA to get a personal contact to pass along to the soldier if needed; communicate with the rear-deployed chaplain to get advice and support.