



United States Department of State
Bureau of Human Resources

MISSION POSSIBLE: Surviving Family Separation



A YEAR OF MY LIFE



UNACCOMPANIED TOURS SUPPORT

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MISSION POSSIBLE: Surviving Family Separation

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MISSION POSSIBLE: Surviving Family Separation



You are about to embark on an experience you may have never before faced in your life. Some one important in your family is going to go far away for a long time, which means major changes for you and the rest of your family. Your job is to make this the best time of separation that it can be. It'll be tough, no doubt. But we think you can do it. The following are to help you with your job:

1. This manual: All the information, exercises, checklists and suggestions you'll need. You may write on, doodle across, and customize it as you wish. At the back of the manual are additional resources.
2. Your parent(s): Wisdom resides with them. Use them well. They may hold family discussions and your input is vital to the success of the separation experience.
3. Friends: You will be drawing up a team of your "Go-To People", each skilled in their special interest and knowledge of you and your family. This is *your* team; you'll need to drill them once in a while to make sure they're ready for any important duty that may arise.
4. FLO: You may not know it yet, but the Family Liaison Office or "FLO" is made up of people who can help you in times of need. Unlike other serious missions, if something should go wrong and you are caught unable to cope with the situation, FLO will not disavow any knowledge of your existence. In fact FLO will help as much as possible.

Take your time with this material, read through it, DO the exercises over the next year, send them to your parent when he/she is away, and collect the responses here. When the separation is over, you'll have a nice record of all the things you did to make it through.

Good Luck!

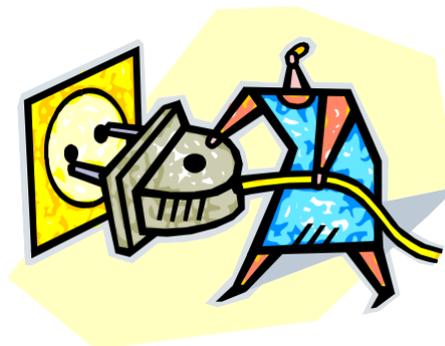
FACING REALITY

Task 1: Find out what you can control and what you can't

Your parent has been assigned to an “Unaccompanied Tour,” which means he/she is going to work in a place where the rest of the family can't go and your family will be separated for a while, maybe one year. Before this happens, your family will make plans and decisions that will turn this into a chance to grow together instead of apart. Your input will be very important from before separation even begins to after Dad/Mom returns home.

Here are some ways to make the best of a tough situation:

- Y Accept reality: There are some things you cannot control, no matter how loudly you whine or wish them away. It means that some things will be frustrating and unpleasant. That's OK – you will all learn how to live with the unhappy things in life that you don't like and this skill will help you later in life.
- Y Know that separation doesn't last forever.
- Y Notice that it's not *all* bad: You *do* have good times mixed in with the not-so-good. If you look at the facts, things might not be as unfair as they seem in the moment.
- Y Realize unpleasant feelings do not define reality: *Feeling* bad about a situation doesn't necessarily mean the situation *is* bad. Feelings will change in time and then you will see that the situation isn't as bad as it felt.
- Y Make the best of what you've got; use what you have already instead of wishing for something else – it helps you be happy with where you are.
- Y Remember there are usually two sides to a situation, even though it doesn't seem like it at the time. For example, more responsibility at home or school can be difficult because it means more work, but it also means you're growing up and are ready to handle it. Looking for the “other side” will help you see things in a more balanced way, and things will seem less unfair.
- Y Laugh. A lot. Play with your friends.
- Y Be kind: good manners go a long way in making things better.
- Y Avoid avoiding: When you feel worried about something, it's better to face it head-on instead of hiding from or putting it off. Most kids need help from others to face something worrisome, so talk to a grown up for advice.



FAMILY MEETING

Task 2: Discuss the Mission with your Family, Make a Plan Together

Your family will hold a Family Meeting (or five) to discuss what's going to happen. It's really important that your parents hear what matters to you *before* your Dad/Mom leaves. Below is a list of questions that will help you come up with some input for the meetings. Write your answers here or on another piece of paper that can be added in this binder later.



Questions about the Unaccompanied Tour:

? Where are you going? When? For how long? _____

? When will you be back? _____

? Why can't I go with you? _____

? Will you be in danger? _____

? When will we see you again? _____

? How will we stay in touch? Your new address: _____

e-mail and numbers: _____

What's the best time to call you? _____

The best time to call me is _____ (local time, which is _____ where you'll be)

What if I forget to call or to be home when you call sometimes? _____

What kinds of things interest you that we can talk about over whole the separation, (e.g. sports teams, favorite TV show, etc.?) _____

Things that I'm interested in talking about on the phone:

Questions about what will happen to us:

? Will we have to move too?

? Who will take care of us?

? What do I do in case of an emergency (fire, health, crime, lost)?

? What do I do in cases of trouble that are not emergencies (e.g., bullies, home alone)?

? What will happen to me if something happens to you?

? What happens when you come back?

? Will you be mad at me if I notice something is wrong when you come back and I tell someone about it?



Here's my list of people that I want to have as emergency contacts:

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Fill the blank list (next page) when you've decided who will be on your Go-To Team. They should be people you trust who know you and who will be able to help you easily if ever you need them.



My Go-To Team

NAME	NUMBER	E-MAIL	Notes
1			
2			
3			

- Call each Go-To Team member first to make sure they agree to support you when you need them.
- Agree on a Code Word that can be used to signal that you need immediate attention.
- Code Word: _____ = “Listen to me NOW!”
- Call each of them every once in a while just to check in.

Questions about home and school:

? What will my responsibilities be?
At _____ home?

At school? _____

For siblings, pets? _____

? How will I get to after school activities?

? Whom do I ask for permission about outings?

? What about money, allowance?

? What if I don't like the changes?

? When you're away, do I still have to do things that you want me to do but I don't like doing (like go to church, visit relatives)? _____

The most important family rule to me is _____

The family tradition I like the most is _____

Two things that are really important to me to do/keep/try while you're away are:



Other questions you want to ask family members:



Activities to do before departure:

Make a family time capsule that'll be opened when Dad/Mom returns. My contribution will be:

My suggestions for family outings or activities before Dad/Mom goes away:

Special things you might ask for:

- Recorded books in your Dad/Mom's voice
- A favorite photo of you and Dad/Mom (can be printed on objects like mouse pad, pillow case, lunch box, T-shirt, etc.)
- A special thing that reminds you of Dad/Mom: e.g., ring, locket, coin, shirt
- Can I use your favorite pillow/mug/chair while you're gone?
- Your own e-mail account if you don't already have one (parents may want to control access)
- An e-Card subscription for the family so you can send e-cards to each other.

Ideas for things you can give to Dad/Mom before he/she leaves:

- A couple books of "Forever" US postage stamps
- Post cards and/or 4x9 envelopes already addressed to you, stamped and ready to go
- Small photo of you attached to a functional item (like a key ring, ID chain, flash light, battery operated alarm clock, or mouse pad)
- Make a recording of your voice, going about the neighborhood and describing what you see at different times of the day.

GETTING READY FOR A WILD RIDE

Task 3: Identify Feelings You May Experience Before Separation

It's important to learn to identify what you're feeling (not just what you *think* you're feeling) and to talk about them clearly, so that complicated things like decisions and problem solving will be less confusing. Different people react differently to the same situation. There is no "right" or "wrong" way to react, but *what you do with your feelings* can affect you and those around you either positively or negatively. Most kids need an understanding adult around to help them deal with not *doing* bad while they're *feeling* bad.

Don't worry if you feel any of the reactions listed below - these are commonly found in families facing long separation - it doesn't mean you're a bad person. Instead, try to talk with someone you trust, and in time, the feelings will change.

- Anger at the parent for choosing to go away
- Hating the parent's job for taking him/her away
- Guilt because you don't always feel patriotic or supportive; and others might see your thinking about yourself as "selfish"
- "Good riddance": relief that the parent is going away
- Nervous because of the unknown and uncertain things of the future
- Stress because of increase in responsibilities; not feeling sure you can or want to do them.
- "Why me?": resentment that your life is complicated and changes may mean you can't do certain things your friends can do
- Tearfulness: crying a lot because of pain, worry, anger, guilt, sadness
- Afraid that Dad/Mom will be in danger and something bad will happen.





Sometimes kids express their feelings in behaviors (actions) rather than words. If you see yourself behaving in the following ways, ask a grown up to help you put the actions into words instead.

- “Sassing” (or talking back), being disrespectful, negative, disobedient, or refusing to engage at all – usually means you’re feeling angry.
- “I don’t care” attitude: This is when you stop caring what happens because you can’t do anything about it anyway. Grades can drop, and/or pleasing friends becomes more important than pleasing your family. You might start smoking, using drugs or alcohol, thinking it’s “cool,” then hiding these things from your parents.
- Physical pains like headaches or stomach aches can sometimes mean you’re feeling worried or nervous about something. Other signs include: trouble with sleeping; feeling restless and fidgety; feeling like you’re going to throw up; and, not wanting to eat, or eating too much. Tell your parents about these kinds of aches and pains, so they can help decide if you need something other than medicine.
- Lying to others about your family separation or making up stories that seem a more acceptable explanation for your situation can be a sign that you’re having trouble accepting the reality of separation.
- Routinely withdrawing from people can be a sign that you find the world an “unsafe” or hard place to be. Talk with a trusted person to sort out 1) what things are hard for you, and then 2) what things you can do so you can comfortably engage with people when you want to.

Mission Survival: Operation Phase

Coping with Separation

Task 4: Knowing What You Need and Telling Others

Separation can be a hard time. Sometimes you'll have a "bad day" and other days will be good. Most kids your age will feel a mixture of feelings that can seem confusing. One moment you might want to cuddle or cry with your favorite bear or blanket, the next minute you might think that's too babyish. Sometimes you want Mom or Dad, other times you'll prefer to talk with your friends without family around. Whatever the case, it helps if you have an idea of what you need (not just what you want) and if you can talk about it clearly.



A *need* is something that is very important to your life, like food. Besides important things like water, we humans need other humans to be with to help us feel safe, loved and useful. When one of your parents is away, it's a good idea to let people around you know what you need so that they can help fill that need for human connection.

Some things you can do to let people know when you need something (like attention, time, or a hug):

- Y Say "I think I need....." if you already know what you need.
- Y Use a code word: If you're not sure what you need, you can signal your parent using a pre-arranged word. Agree with your parent that if you say that certain word, they will pay attention to you and help you figure out whatever is troubling you. The word can be anything that's *not an emergency word* (like "fire" or "danger"). You can use a made-up word, a favorite book character's name, or any word you like as a signal.
- Y Use a "tank" indicator with your parents. Ever see the fuel indicator in a car, where the needle points to F when the gas tank is full or E when it's nearing empty? The same idea can apply to your personal "love" tank: when you're low on love, you'll need to indicate that your tank is low, so that others can help fill you up. Tell your parent "I need gas" and they'll know to give you a hug! This is handy if you're shy or too cool to ask for "mushy" things like hugs directly.
- Y Call one or two people on your Go-To Team. Once in a while, make a date for ice cream, for a walk, or a board game night, anything you want. It'll be fun and your Team member will likely feel good about being with you.
- Y If your parent is too busy to pay attention when you need it, it's usually OK to turn to someone else (like a trusted friend, aunt, or someone on your Go-To Team).

Task 5: Learn basic skills needed for mission success

In this chapter we'll cover the what's and how-to's of communicating with your parent over the phone, e-mail, and even (gasp) snail mail. These are useful skills you'll be using the rest of your life, so it's a good thing you're going to get lots of practice. Suggested phone and e-mail topics are provided in Task 7B.



Conversation (pronounced con-ver-SAY-shon): where two or more people take turns talking and listening to each other, exchanging ideas and information.

HINT: Conversation means talking **WITH** not talking **AT** your parent.

- Questions that have a one-word answer (e.g., yes/no) are conversation killers
- Ask “open-ended” questions to keep conversation going: e.g., “what do you think about...”
- Take turns at speaking and listening. Over-taking the other person by talking louder is not real conversation; it's called interrupting!
- Don't forget to tell your parents that you love them!!

Phone sense:

- Talk clearly and not too fast into the phone mouth piece
- Making noises instead of using words might be fun for you but it quickly gets boring for the listener
- Try not to scream, squeal, or whine – it hurts the listener's ears
- Remember on the phone or e-mail the other person cannot see your usual non-verbal cues, so put actions like pointing or nodding into words
- Don't put someone on hold for more than five seconds while you go do something else; it's better to call them back if you're distracted

A. "Hello? Er... uh-huh. (What do I say now?)" How to talk on the phone

Ever run out of things to say on the phone right after "Hello"? If you're like lots of other kids, you'll find pauses and ending phone conversations pretty awkward too. Here are a few pointers; practice them over the phone with your at-home parent or Go-To person until you feel comfortable with them.

How to leave/receive phone messages:

- If you're calling someone
 - Greeting: "Hi, this is Harry! May I speak to Ron, please?"
 - Leaving messages: "May I leave a message?" Slowly give your name, number, and a brief message like, "Please call me back today."

- If you're receiving a call from a voice you don't recognize:
 - Greeting: "Hello, Dursley residence. Who's calling, please?"
 - Taking a message: "He can't come to the phone right now. Do you want to leave your number?" Write down the caller's name, number and a time to call back. Put the message somewhere where it will be seen easily.
 - In general, unless you know the caller, do not reveal that you're home alone. Better to say "Dad can't talk right now...."



How to start a conversation

Step 1: Greeting: be sure to say your name:

- "Hi Harry, it's Ron."
- "Yo, man, wassup? Dingo here."

Step 2: Intro to topic: State your reason for calling if you have a specific task. If none, ask an open-ended question to begin general conversation:

- "I'm calling to ask about (specify the task)..."
- "Tell me about your (day, desk, room)."

Step 3: Continue by asking questions or making engaging sounds that let the other know you're listening:

- "uh-huh. Oh really? Then what happened?"
- "Yuk, that sounds terrible."

Possible phone topics: Asking people about themselves usually leads to longer conversations. Try one of these topics with your Dad/Mom:

- Tell me about your dreams for yourself when you were a kid: what did you want to be or do or see and why.
- Who's your best friend at post and what do you like about them?
- Are there people there who're always telling you what to do?
- What's the stupidest thing you ever did?
- Fill in the blanks: if I had a..., I would....
- Who was the worst teacher you ever had?
- Did you ever have detention?
- What do you do when you have a long book report to do and you don't want to do it? What helps you get difficult things done?



How to change the topic smoothly: *Wait 2 seconds* after the other person finishes their sentence on a topic, then use a transition phrase to introduce another topic. (If you don't allow a pause, it can seem like interrupting). Examples:

- "That makes me think of...."
- "I'm reminded of...."

How to end a conversation gracefully: If you want to say something more than "Hang up now. Good bye. Good bye. Bye. No, really, hang up now. Good bye"....

Step 1: Politely indicate the close is nearing, and hope they get the hint:

- "It's getting near the time for me to hang up..."
- "I have to get going soon. Is there anything else you wanted to say?"

Step 2: Final closing and farewell:

- "Thanks for calling/ talking with me. Bye!"

B. How to write a letter



“But, I can’t write!” Don’t worry, you’re not alone. Many kids groan at the mechanics of writing or typing. No doubt about it, writing and typing take time and effort, and lots of kids your age do find it hard to think creatively and write at the same time. Eventually it *will* get easier; the more you use the computer or pen and paper, the better your skills will be. For now, don’t give up. Try adding images, either doodling with pen or adding clip-art on computer. Use shorter sentences (even lists), and write short notes. The important thing is *that* you write to your folks, not how polished it is. Remember, you have to actually *send* the letter for it to count.

Whether you’re writing with pen and paper or typing an e-mail, there are certain features that go into a letter:

- Name and address: of both you and the person you’re writing to
- Greeting: for example, “Dear Mom”
- Opening line: “Hello on this sunny day.” “I hope things are good with you.”
- Body of text: give details on whatever you want to write about; use descriptive words (this is when you’ll see how useful adjectives and adverbs you’ve learned about can be).
- Closing line: “I miss you a lot and can’t wait to see you again.”
- Sign off in a way that fits the nature of the message: “Yours sincerely”, “Thanks again”, or “Love and hugs”. Sign your name.

Thank you letters

Although it seems a chore, it's a good idea to thank people in writing for their kind gifts or help. Not only is it good to acknowledge when someone does you a kindness, but it also increases your chances of getting presents or favors again!

- Follow the same outline above, except put in the text "Thank you for the (name the gift/favor) and for thinking of me."
- If you received money or a gift certificate, say what you spent it on.
- Send it within two weeks after the gift or favor was received – however, if you've waited too long, in the case of Thank You notes, late is better than never!
- The best thank you note is one that's done and sent! Anything you take the effort to write and send will be appreciated. Just do it.



Using e-Mail and internet

To send electronic mail, you need a computer that's hooked up to the internet. If you have this at home, make sure you ask your at-home parent for permission to use it first. Having your own e-mail account and log-on can be great, but it can lead to unwanted consequences, so check with your parents first. Some websites allow for e-mail only to and from pre-selected people, e.g. www.epals.com. Use the Internet Safety Pledge (next page, from McGruff.org) as a starting point for discussing home internet safety with your parents.

If you do not have a computer at home, check out a local public library. In the US and in many countries, public libraries located in urban areas have computers for public use. Ask about their rules and fees for usage.

McGruff's Internet Safety Pledge

Check each promise and sign your name at the bottom. Then put it by your computer so you'll always remember how to stay cyber-safe!

I PROMISE

- ./ Never to give out my name, address, phone number, school name, or any adult's credit card number to anyone online.
- ./ Never to arrange a face-to-face meeting with anyone I meet online.
- ./ Never to go into chat rooms unless my parents say it's okay.
- ./ Never to open emails from someone I don't know and never to go to links I don't recognize.
- ./ Always to tell an adult if I see anything online that makes me feel uncomfortable.

X _____
Name

Date

Keep taking a bite out of crime online at **McGruff.org!**

National Crime Prevention Council
1000 Connecticut Ave. 13th Floor, Washington, DC 20036, www.ncpc.org

C. Taking Photos



A digital camera is easy to use and worry-free because you can delete any mistakes! If you need help, ask an adult to help you with down-loading images, printing, and charging the camera.

If you don't have a digital or regular camera, ask your parents if you can have a disposable camera. You'll just have to get photos the "old fashioned" way.

Camera themes and sets to try out:

- If your family has a web-camera, set it in a different place each time you talk with Dad/Mom, just for a change of scenery
- For fun, put something funny or special in the background behind you before you take a photo
- Wear funky clothes
- Do your hair differently, see if your parent notices (Mohawk?)
- For special events, make a sign to celebrate the event, hold it up to the camera
- For web-cams: dress like a news announcer, read the day's family news, TV news-style
- Decorate your head with seasonal themes (e.g., leaves for Thanksgiving)



Task 6: Get organized!

- Listening times: Negotiate with at-home parent and siblings to pick a quiet time when you can listen to your Dad/Mom's recordings. Write down when it's your time to use the CD/cassette player (a perfect thing to put on your calendar, below).



- Calendar: Make twelve copies of the blank calendar (next page), add months and dates. Use this to remind yourself of important dates and to see how many day left until Dad/Mom returns home. There's an example below.

- Play dates: Stay active! Make sure you plan in regular times to be active outside and meet with your friends. Work hard, play hard!

MONTH: May

MONDAY	TUES	WED	THURS	FRIDAY	SAT	SUNDAY
		1 Dad call, 8pm	2	3	4	5
6	7	8 Call Dad	9	10	11	12 Mother's Day
13 ®	14	15 Dad call, 8pm	16 Soc Studies proj due	17	18 Connor over?	19
20	21	22	23	24 call Dad 4pm	25	26 Colin's party
27 Holiday ☺	28	29 Dad calls, 8pm	30	31		

Special dates to remember:

Social studies report due 5/16

Colin's birthday party 5/26; get present

Days 'til Dad comes home: 142!!!!

CALENDAR

MONTH: _____

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY

SPECIAL DATES & DEADLINES TO REMEMBER:

Chore chart:

Most kids do NOT like doing chores. Adults don't like them either but it's all part of being a family. A chart can help organize all the duties so it's clear to everyone who's doing what, and when. Make several photocopies of the blank Chore Chart (next page) for your own use; you'll need a new one for each week or month. Stick this where you'll see it everyday, e.g., on your bedroom door. Here's an example of how to remind yourself about what you have to do, when.

CHORE	WHEN	NOTE	DONE (choose a method)
Take out trash	Mon, Thurs nights	Recycling also on Thurs night	√√ (check for each time you did it)
Dishes	Mon, Wed, Fri eves	Includes emptying dishwasher and putting away dishes	25/6, 27/6 (date each time you did it)
Clean my room	Sat a.m.		★
Walk the dog	After school M-F		
Set & clear table	Tu, Th, Sat	Breakfast & dinner	

HINT: To avoid being nagged, do your chores at the right time. (Doing them without being asked will get you bonus points.) And no avoiding chores – this only increases nagging. Instead of saying “I’ll do it later,” *specify a time that fits the requirements*. For example, “I’ll do the breakfast dishes tonight” won’t work because clean dishes will be needed long before then. However, your mom might be happy with “I’ll do them at 9am.” Keep track of the time and do chores when you said you would.

- If you don't know how to do something, ask your parents to do it with you a couple of times until you get the hang of how-to's and where things go.
- Do chores with others if you can - it's more fun.
- Do the worst parts first.
- Finish the job as thoroughly as possible; half-done jobs only invite more nagging.
- Get caught doing random acts of kindness.



CHORE CHART

CHORE	WHEN	NOTE	DONE

Task 7: Fun Exercises to Keep You and Your Family in Shape

This chapter is full of things to do for and with your family until Dad/Mom returns. Some of them you'll do on your own, some you'll send away to your parent, and others you'll do together. You can show them to your At-Home parent or others, too.

7A. Stuff to make

Coupon book

Time: 30 mins.+

Make special coupons for your family based on things you can do for them. It shouldn't involve things that cost a lot of money (see ideas below). Check out the coupons that come with the Sunday newspaper comics for ideas on wording. They usually say "2 for 1 sale," or "Good for One" or "Free...". If adding an expiration date, make sure the date is long after your Dad/Mom returns home!

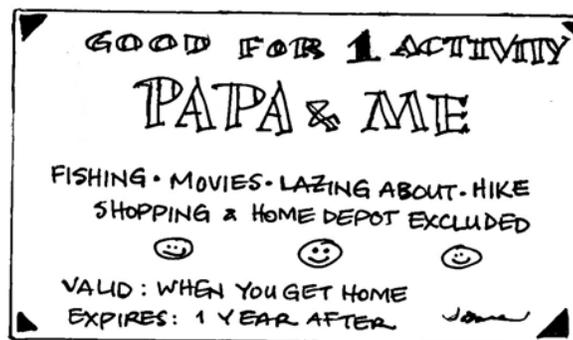
You'll need:

- ./ Colored paper
- ./ Colored pens
- ./ Scissors
- ./ Ruler
- ./ Stapler



Ideas:

- 1 chore exchange (good for trading with siblings' chores)
- 1 whining- and bickering-free afternoon (popular with parents)
- 1 movie with popcorn
- A quiet walk with you
- Breakfast in bed
- Dust the house
- Clean the car windows
- A promise not to play loud music for 2 hours (receiver chooses which hours)



Collages

Time: 30 mins. – 1 hr.

A wise man once said “A picture paints a thousand words.” A *collage* (pronounced col-AHj) is a collection of pictures arranged in a meaningful way so that they tell something about the person who made it. Try making a collage and sending it to your Dad/Mom: it’s easy! First, look for images that catch your eye, cut them out as neatly as you can, then stick them to the paper in a pleasing arrangement. You can fill in spaces with your own artistic touches, or stick the images right next to each other so there are no spaces.

You’ll need:

./ Images from:

- A variety of magazines (make sure everyone else is through with them)
- Brochures (e.g., from places you go like the dentist, mall, etc.)
- Postcards
- Postage stamps
- Rubber stamps

./ Scissors

./ Glue

./ Paper (preferably 8½” x 11” so it can be put in this binder)

./ Colors (pencils, pens, paint) for decorating

./ Black pen or pencil for writing

Themes to collage about:

- Things I like
- Food I like
- Places I go in a week (library, school, mall, etc.)
- Places I’ve been
- Being alone
- Wintertime
- Movies
- Favorite characters: book, TV, cartoons
- Toys and games



Mission Survival Kit

Time: 20 mins. to set up

Every mission needs backup tools, just in case. Make a Survival Kit for yourself with things guaranteed to bring a smile to your face when you're feeling discouraged. Since you know you best, you'll know what items will make you happy. Think about it for a while, and then collect the items. Put them in a smallish container so that you can easily take the kit with you somewhere private if needed. Waist packs work well.

(Note: if you use food items, make sure they're safely wrapped; check the kit every two months to replace them.)

Suggested items:

- ./ Two emergency favorite sweet or salty things to eat (non-spoiling kind)
- ./ A small comfort item you like (e.g., stuffed animal, favorite action figure, etc.)
- ./ Photo of loved ones
- ./ Comfort note from your parents (ask them about this, see below)*
- ./ Dad and Mom's phone numbers
- ./ A copy of your Go-To Team list
- ./ A small pencil or pen
- ./ A small pad of paper
- ./ Tissues
- ./ A Band-Aid (symbol to remind you that things hurt but will get better)
- ./ 5 x 25-cent coins for phone calls (or equivalent currency for a phone call in the country where you live)
- ./ Optional: if you have a MP3 or iPod, program your favorite comforting music and bring it along when you need quiet time.



HINT: To save effort when you're feeling down, don't forget to use your pre-arranged Code Word with your parents or Go-To Team (see your list if you need a reminder). They will instantly know to listen to you.

* Parents: Please help your child make a Separation Survival Kit by writing an encouraging message to your child and sealing it in an envelope. It'll be opened only when they're feeling low, so please pick your words carefully.

Scrapbook pages

Time: 30 mins. - as long as you like!

Stick a photo or two taken of you and your family at a particular event on a page, write a memory of that time next to the photo. Add items that remind you of that occasion like ticket stubs, dried leaves, a ribbon a present came in, or even candy wrappers (not sticky please) and *Voila!* You have a scrapbook page that you and your family will enjoy and remember for a long time. In the US, there are many craft stores that sell inexpensive scrapbook supplies, including themed paper. Or you might have relatives who already have tools you can borrow. If you live outside of the US, you might ask your parents if they can order some craft supplies for you.

You'll need:

- ./ Photos or messages about you and family members
- ./ Double-sided tape
- ./ Scissors
- ./ Ruler
- ./ Pen for writing
- ./ Colored pens and pencils for decorating
- ./ Paper (8½" x 11"; check out themed, acid-free papers at craft store)
- ./ Your creativity



Extras:

- ./ Rubber stamps
- ./ Stickers
- ./ Items related to the theme



Themes to scrapbook about:

- My heroes
- Family holidays (e.g., Spring break, Christmas, Hanukah, Kwanza, Eid, Chinese New Year, Thanksgiving)
- Vacation
- My first.... (bad haircut, earrings, braces, cell phone, etc.)
- My Space... (my room, school locker, chair)
- Funniest e-mails from Dad/Mom
- My Friends
- Funny words and slang of today

The next few pages are samples to get you started.

It's My birthday!





The Things I Love About Mom



Ten Words to describe Dad



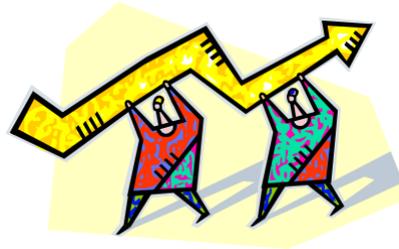
Banners, Signs, and Awards

Time: 30 mins. – 1 hr.

Have you ever received an award or seen a funny sign that made you smile? You can bring cheer to your family by making your own signs, certificates, or banners with a special message. They can be for a particular event or occasion, or for no reason at all. Use symbols (like hearts or flags), family nick-names, and inside jokes to personalize your message.

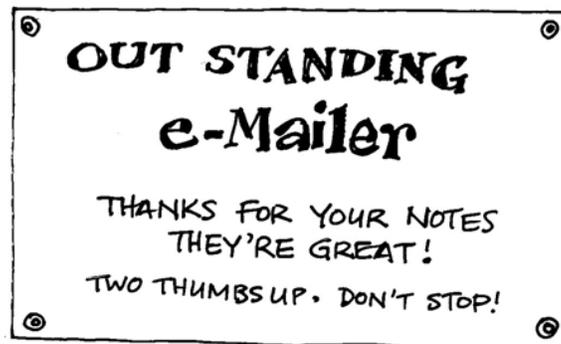
You'll need:

- ./ A big, long piece of paper (computer print-outs, or pieces taped together)
- ./ Tape
- ./ Colored markers
- ./ Your sense of humor



Ideas for Titles:

- I Love You, Mom (or Dad)
- Congratulations! You've Survived 'Til Half-Time (when half-way through with separation)
- Just Because..... (I'm thinking about you today)
- Special Award: #1, Best Mom or Dad
- Report Card: A++ Subject: Phone calling
- Smile: See Mom/Dad, I brushed my teeth
- You were great!.... (in the school play, piano recital, karate class, etc., -- cheers for siblings)



Time Markers

Time: 15 mins.

You don't really notice time going by until you see how things have grown and changed. Use this page to record some of your physical changes over time. With your wrist on the line below, trace your hand print over the chart. In six months and a year from now, retrace your print in different colors. Record a few of your physical time markers in the chart, in the intervals indicated and you'll see how you've changed while Dad/Mom's been away. (For fun, you can add your pet or favorite toy's paw print too.)

Marker	Today (date:)	6 months later (date:)	1 yr later (date:)
Weight			
Height			
Hair length			
Shoe size			
Leg length			
Hand span			

My Hand Print

Dates : _____

Place wrist here

The End of My Day

Most families do certain things to get ready for bed. Record your evening routine here:

Are you a bedtime bath or morning shower person? _____

Before I go to bed, I: (circle one)

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|-----|----|
| Brush my teeth | Yes | No |
| Comb my hair | Yes | No |
| Take medicine | Yes | No |
| Hang up my clothes or towel | Yes | No |
| Get things ready for tomorrow | Yes | No |
| Set my alarm clock | Yes | No |
| Kiss everyone goodnight | Yes | No |



I go to bed around: _____ p.m.

Lights go out about: _____ p.m.

Before I sleep I like to: _____

When it's cold, I like to wear: _____

I sleep with: _____



If we read a bedtime story, we usually _____

The best thing I like about bedtime is: _____

We sometimes sing or pray too.

Some words to bedtime prayer/ wishes: _____

The last words my parents usually say to me each night: _____

Write About You

Time: 15 mins. +

Write down whatever comes to your mind that's meaningful. You don't have to be a genius and you don't even have to use full sentences; lists will do. Below are some ideas and a sample page to get started. On a piece of paper, write down the prompt as a title, then write whatever comes to mind using these prompts. Use your creativity and add your one-of-a-kind doodles; use different color pens, stamps and stickers. Personalize the pages and send it to Dad/Mom or show to your at-home parent.

Ideas for pages:

Things that I miss

These things are different now Dad/Mom is gone

He's bugging me (or she's bugging me).

It's not fair!



You're always telling me what to do

I wish Dad/Mom were here

This is boring!

Do I have to go to Grandma's?

Things about me I want Dad/Mom to know

Contradictions in my life: "You're too young for that vs. you're old enough to know better"

If I had lots of money, I would...

My friends

The best things in the world are...

Things I hate

Do you remember when we lived in...?

Who's who in my school?





My Favorite.....



Thing to play with: _____

Person to play with: _____

Color: _____

Food: _____

Drink: _____

Thing to wear: _____

Book: _____

TV show: _____

Cartoon character: _____

Place to go: _____

Place to go when I'm feeling sad: _____

Music: _____

Sport: _____

Time of day: _____

Day of the week is _____ because _____

Way to spend an hour: _____



By: _____

Date: _____

Task 7B. Ideas for things to do with Dad/Mom: Shared Themes



The suggestions in this section can be done between you and Dad/Mom long-distance, over time. One of you starts out the activity and sends it to the other who, in turn, sends back a reply that can be added to, and so forth. Keep a couple of themes going at the same time so you can both work on the next installment of one theme while waiting for the other to arrive in the mail.

Journey of Flat Me

This idea is based on *Flat Stanley*¹, a book by Jeff Brown about the adventures of a boy who is squashed flat by a bulletin board. Here, you'll be "sent" to your Dad/Mom in the form of Flat Me. Your parent can then take "you" various places at post, and he/she can share adventures by return photos and descriptions of what Flat Me did. Collect these images and stories in this binder – you have quite a journey to look back on by the end of the separation!

You'll need:

- A photo of you; image size about 4"x3" or so
- Scissors
- Tape or glue
- index card
- envelope to send to Dad/Mom
- letter explaining what to do with Flat You

Your Dad/Mom will need:

- Imagination – they can take you anywhere!
- Digital camera to take photos of Flat You in different places
- Send photos and/or descriptions of what Flat You did or saw



Steps:

1. Cut a silhouette (pronounced SIL-o-wet = outline of the shape) of yourself from the photograph
2. Stick to lined side of index card
3. Optional: cut out silhouette again (i.e., the photo together with the card backing).
4. Write note to Dad/Mom introducing Flat (your name) and asking them to take you places from time to time. Suggest that they take a photo of you in those places and send that to you with brief description.
5. Read and laugh at sent images and stories when they arrive; collect in this binder.

¹ Brown, Jeff (1964) *Flat Stanley*, Harper & Row Publishers Inc., New York. Illustrated by Tomi Ungerer.

Once upon a time...

Write a story with your parent on-line, one paragraph at a time. This should be a continuous story about characters you both make up so you can see how they develop and change over time. Be as creative as you can; your parents are sure to enjoy your imagination. Don't worry about plot too much – it will evolve over time.



Steps: do these over e-mail using the same specific subject title (so you can find it again easily), e.g., Subject: Our Story

1. Your Dad/Mom writes a beginning sentence (or three) and sends them to you. For example, "This is a story about a boy named ..."; 'he lived in with"
2. You fill in the blanks. Add two or three more sentences. Leave a trailing sentence for Dad/Mom to finish. Send it back to Dad/Mom. Using the example above, "This is a story about a boy named.... Mike Farraday. He's a 12-year old genius who ...lives in.... a barn that converts into a secret lab... with his family, a dog and two cows. None of his neighbors suspect he is anything more than a regular little kid...."
3. Dad/Mom finishes your sentence and adds a few more beginnings of sentences; sends them back to you. You repeat Step 2, and so on. e.g., "... little kid, not even his family is aware of Mike's secret laboratory beneath the feeding trough. Only he knows the code to enter the lab where he.....", "One day, quite unexpectedly...."
4. When the story is finished, print it out, omitting all the e-mail addresses, and leaving spaces for pictures, if you want.
5. Add your own illustrations in the spaces. Collate all the pages in this binder.

Batting Average



If you and your Dad/Mom both like sports, you might enjoy these ideas.

- Pick a sport or team that your Dad/Mom likes: track the team's progress throughout the year; report the scores and games to your parent.
- If you happen to be in a summer or winter Olympics year, track certain sports or country's progress during the games.
- Use sports vocabulary to describe your own situations to your parent: e.g., what's your batting average at school; would you describe your performance as "above or below par" (remember, below par is actually better in this context!).
- Ask about what sports are played at post. Is it easy to get equipment? Do girls play different sports than boys?
- Create a guessing "pool" with your extended family around an important game tournament or play-off's: Ask family members (including uncles, aunts, cousins, grannies, etc.) if they want to guess what the results might be for a certain play-off.



Record each person's guess on a sheet of paper. Have each member contribute an inexpensive item that would be good to use/eat/drink while watching a game. Collect these things in a bucket or box. The person who gets the closest guess wins the bucket (you can suggest they use it next time they watch a game with your Dad/Mom).

Cooking up a storm

The budding cooks among you might enjoy sharing a cooking theme with your parent. Try a different one of these suggestions from time to time.

- Ask Dad/Mom about what and where they usually eat.
- Ask about local foods where Dad/Mom is:
 - Any such thing as fast food?
 - How do people eat there? With hands, chopsticks, forks, clam shells?
 - What're the most popular things to eat and drink there? What does it taste like?
 - Do men, women, and children eat together or separately?
 - How about seasonal foods for hot or cold weather, or special holidays?
 - What ingredients can be found there?
 - Any unusual foods or cooking implements?
- Ask for some recipes from that country. (Maybe even bring you back interesting cooking or eating implements.)
- What's your favorite restaurant at home? (Plan to go there together when you get back.)
- For R&R or homecoming: Make up a restaurant theme one evening. Draw up a fancy menu featuring the evening's meal and dress as a waiter to serve the meal.



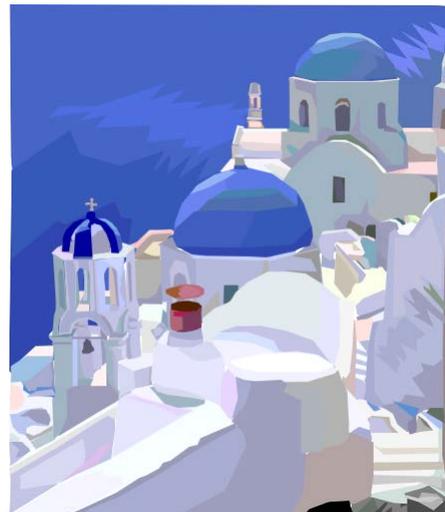
Lions and Tigers and Bears, Oh My!

Almost all kids around the world love animals. Find out about the animals and plant life where Dad/Mom lives. If you discover something unusual, you can learn more about the topic at the library or on the internet. Tell Dad/Mom what you found out.



Ask:

- ? Are there any animals near where you live?
- ? Any particular animals that the country is known for (land or sea)?
- ? Who takes care of the animals? Rangers, vets?
- ? What about the bugs? Any weird ones?
- ? Do you see or hear any birds?
- ? Do the local people keep pets there? What do they think of dogs, cats or reptiles?
- ? What does the scenery look like there? Dry, hot, dusty, rainy?
- ? Any famous buildings or natural formations?
- ? Do you see many trees and flowers?
- ? What kind of plant do you most miss seeing?



Getting Around

This theme explores types of transportation where Dad/Mom lives. Learn about the different ways people get around and ask for photos of traffic and street scenes, if possible.

Ask:

- ? How do you get to work?
- ? How do most people get around there? Walk, bus, taxi, train, bicycle, horse buggy?
- ? What are the local names for the vehicles and what do they look like?
- ? What does it cost to go on a bus around the city?
- ? What do bus stops look like?
- ? Do they drive on the left or right side of the road?
- ? Is the car steering wheel on the right or left?
- ? Are women allowed to drive there?
- ? Do children go on public transportation by themselves?
- ? How do kids get to school?



Also ask: (if your parent drives)

- ? Who taught you to drive? How old were you then?
- ? What was the first car you ever drove?
- ? Were you ever in an accident? Did you get in trouble?
- ? Did you ride a bike much when you were my age?
- ? How did you get to school?

How do you say snot in Arabic/Pashtu/?

While your Dad/Mom is learning a new language (which is called _____), ask them to find some words of interest to you so you can also learn! Every culture has its own way of expressing the following phrases which you might not find in a formal dictionary. Ask for one new word or phrase a week (with phonetic spelling as you probably can't read the local language).



Hello, Goodbye (for phone or written as well as face-to-face greeting):

Yes, No, Maybe: _____

Please, thank you: _____

Snot: _____ Toilet: _____

Bad smell: _____ Zit: _____

Oh no: _____ What?!: _____

That's cool (good, fantastic): _____

That's too bad: _____

Wow! (or equivalent sound): _____

Really?! (Is that true, I don't believe it): _____

I'll be back later: _____

Wait a minute: _____

Danger: _____

Hurry up: _____

You've got mail: _____

Welcome Home: _____

A Day in the Life of Dad/Mom

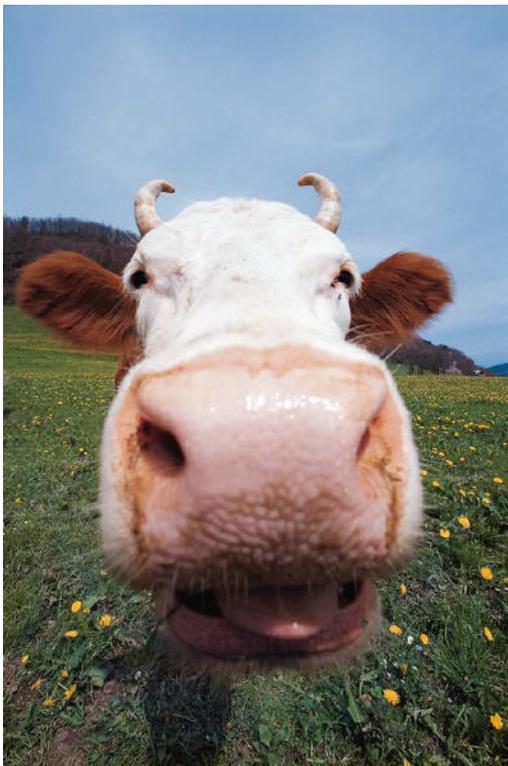
A couple of times during separation (about six months apart) ask your Dad/Mom over the phone what their typical day is like. Record the responses here; interview him/her a few months after he/she comes back. It'll be interesting to note how things change.

Question	Interview 1 date:	Interview 2 date:	Home interview date:
What time do you get up?			
What was the first thing you saw? Heard?			
What did you eat for breakfast?			
How did you get to work?			
When did you get to work?			
Where did you work?			
Who was with you?			
When was lunch break?			
What did you eat for lunch?			
How much did it cost?			
What is the exchange rate?			
Who did you see in the afternoon?			
Any after work activity?			
When did you get home?			
What did you do before bed?			
When did you go to sleep?			

Photo Jigsaw of Dad/Mom's room

- Have your Dad/Mom send a photo of a *small part a room* of their choice at regular intervals (e.g., every week, bi-weekly, or monthly). The room might be their bedroom or office or another place you haven't seen; the photo will be only a teeny detail of it.
- Print it out. Over time, your job will be to fit all the photos together like a jigsaw.
- You may need to stick the photo pieces to a wall or large poster board, depending on how many photos you receive.

By the end of the separation, you'll have a complete picture of the places where your parent has been!



Comic Relief

Your parents are likely to be under some stress. A good laugh will be welcome anytime and will help them remember the bright spots in their life, like you.

Ideas of things to send:

- Cut out particularly funny comic strips from the newspaper.
 - Look for absurd phrases, signs, or sayings around you. Write them down, take a photo or clip it out.
 - A good joke you heard
 - A goofy picture of you
 - Ask about what humor is like in the country where Dad/Mom is posted, e.g., Is it sarcastic? Puns? Slapstick?
- Ask for a cartoon from a local paper at post (with translation if necessary).

Task 7C. Stuff to Do with Family

Treasure hunt

Time: 20 mins. set up; 5-20 mins. to hunt

Your Dad/Mom may be sending small things from post that aren't really presents but are interesting tidbits unique to the country where he/she is posted. A fun way to "discover" them is to make a treasure hunt for your family that includes clues for finding the foreign tidbit. After it's found, put it in a special treasure chest or box (see task Treasure Box, in following pages) where you'll be hiding the next foreign gems. By the time Dad/Mom gets back, your family will have quite a trove!

Methods of giving clues: use one of these to lead the family to the treasure

- A series of notes/ sentences: one note is a clue to find the next note/clue.
- A series of short riddles (great for older kids): solve the riddle to find next clue.
- Map: draw directions from starting point (good for kids who can't read well); "10 paces to left of the tree," etc.
- "Warm/Cold" spoken clues: "warm" means you're getting close to the treasure; "hot" means you're really close; "cold" means you're way off base. (This method is good for siblings who can't read or follow maps yet.)



Start a Dad/Mom Plant

Time: 2 hrs. set up; 3 mins. later on

Growing a plant that reminds you of someone you love is an excellent way of remembering that person when they're not there. Discuss with your family what kind of plant reminds you all of Dad/Mom, and that will grow where you live. Pick a time for you all to plant and name it together and then take turns watering it in future. Every time you see it or water it, you'll think of Dad/Mom.



- Pick long-lasting plants. "Perennials" are flowering plants that will sleep over winter and bloom again next year. Avoid "annuals" - plants that live for only one season.
- Consider potted plants for inside the house. They also work better in apartments or townhouses with limited space.

Care packages

Time: variable

Everyone loves getting presents in the mail. Care packages are fun ways of saying “you’re special and I’m thinking about you.” Put a small box of things together knowing that your Dad/Mom will be very happy to receive it. Since it’ll take some effort and money, you’ll need some help from a grown-up to get the stuff together and to mail the package.

HINT: The best gift is a note from you! Keep packages small and light as possible. Avoid sending food that spoils within a month (mail can take a *long* time to get there). Follow the mailing rules below.

Suggested items: Dad/Mom’s favorite....

- An all-American snack item (latest flavor of Tostitos, Girl Scout cookies, etc.)
- CD/cassette of your voice
- A pressed seasonal flower or leaf from your garden
- For padding: use a favorite section from the local newspaper



Try themed packages:

- Movie night box: a new DVD, microwaveable popcorn, jelly beans.
- School open house: items your Dad/Mom would have seen if they’d been at your class open house or teacher conference, e.g., samples of your best work, school calendar, newsletter, awards.
- Seasonal decorate-your-desk box: gather unique small decorations to brighten up Dad/Mom’s desk, e.g., for Thanksgiving send handmade or store bought turkey and pilgrim decorations, a can of cranberry jelly, a note from you telling what you’re thankful for.
- Stress-buster box: Groucho Marx glasses, jokes, whoopee cushion, a squeeze toy to smooch for stress relief.

Mailing rules:



- Clearly marked return address
- No glass
- No liquid or gel
- No aerosols
- No sharp things
- Size: Box less than a combined total dimensions of 100 inches (i.e., width, length and depth added together)
- Weight: no more than 45 lbs.
- NOTE: Ask your parent if there are additional restrictions based on the country’s laws, e.g. no pork products to Muslim countries.

New Traditions

Since your family is having an odd sort of year being apart, why not make it extra fun and unique by inventing your own holidays! Just like traditional holidays, these days will be “off” from school and work, will have special tasty food, time to spend with family, and a few decorations. Coordinate with your at-home parent to pick a date that works with your family schedules.

(Note: One very special date to remember and plan for will be End of Unaccompanied Tour or Homecoming Day, when Dad/Mom finally comes home. This will be covered later, in Task 9.)



Suggestions:

New Tradition	Purpose	Eat	Do	Comment
Kids' Day	To celebrate children	Kids' favorite foods	Play, climb, read, do puzzles	
Family Heritage Day	To explore family heritage from both Mom and Dad's side	Foods from both heritages	Tell stories of families of origin; meet relatives	
Lazy Slobs Day	Every one gets to be lazy, especially caregivers	Easy food, preferably in bed	Loll about; read comics; listen to audio books	Stay in pajamas all day

* UT = Unaccompanied Tour

Memory Jar

Time: Initial 20 mins., after 3 mins.

Ever heard of a message in a bottle? This is the same idea except you won't be floating the message away from a deserted island, hoping that someone will rescue you before you run out of coconuts to eat. Instead, when you think about Dad/Mom, write that thought down in a sentence on a small bit of paper, date it, and put it in a jar or box. The sentence can be anything, like a joke you once played on your parents. Or it can be a thought, wish, dream, fear, or memory that you want to tell them about one day. If you don't want to do it by yourself, you can make it a family jar that other members can add their sentences to also. You can decorate the jar if you like.

Write a new sentence when something comes to mind (perhaps on a different kind of paper), add it to the jar. Over time, your jar will be filled with thoughts about Dad/Mom. He/she will be really glad to have this jar to read through when they return.

You'll need:

- ./ An empty, clean box or jar with lid (like a large mayonnaise or peanut butter jar with label removed).
- ./ Something to write with
- ./ A small something to write on
- ./ Optional: stickers, shells or ribbon to decorate the jar
- ./ Scissors (or tear the paper)



Here's an example plus extra spaces for you to fill in. Cut the paper apart along the lines after the page is filled and put in jar.

Ate at your favorite hoagie place today: I wished u were there to eat the other half. 3/3	Some kid at school said the Iraq war is wrong and that you're wrong for being there. Is that true? It hurt me 11/8	Sept 6: went to HISTORY museum outing today. You look like a cave man.
Alligator, will I see you later?	2/9 -- I lost a toof today.	I ate cereal for dinner. With no milk 😊

Dad/Mom Treasure Keepers

Time: 40mins.+

Treasure Box

You'll need a special place to put all the treasures that your Dad/Mom will be sending you from post. Find a container with a lid, about the size of a shoebox. Look around the house and ask your at-home parent for something you can use. Craft stores also have inexpensive plastic or wooden containers in various shapes that can be decorated.

You'll need:

- ./ A container of your choice
- ./ Acrylic paints and brushes
- ./ A paper plate (to use as a palette)
- ./ Two jars of clean water (for brush cleaning and paint mixing)
- ./ Two tuna fish cans (to put under container while painting)
- ./ A jar full of something (to weigh the inside of container so it doesn't move while painting)
- ./ paper towels and old newspapers
- ./ Optional: decorations, glue



Steps:

1. Paint a base layer of white on outside of container and lid. Leave to dry.
2. Paint background color(s) on the outside; let dry.
3. Paint a design in color(s) you like: simple shapes or patterns work really well, e.g., dots, triangles, squiggles, curly Q's, circles.
4. Add words if you like, e.g., your name, "treasures" "My Box" "Keep Out"
5. Optional: add ribbons or shiny things

Binder Album

You can beef up this binder to include treasures too. If possible, look in the scrapbooking section of craft stores to see what interesting memorabilia holders can be added to binders, e.g., see-through envelopes of different sizes, voice recorders, and CD holders. Insert these items and fill with stuff from Dad/Mom.



Suggested additions:

- Several pocket dividers
- Heavy duty see-through sheet protectors; some with divisions to hold things like coins, paper money, flowers, etc.
- Zippered pouch inserts to hold lumpy items
- Envelopes of various sizes
- 3-hole punch to add items

This is a wearable “container” where non-paper items sent by Dad/Mom are attached to a T-shirt -- either one of yours or one of Dad/Mom’s donated to the cause. (See the Resources section in the Tools chapter for some specialty companies that can print your Dad/Mom’s picture on a T-shirt.) This only works for non-breakable, durable things like ribbons and country flag pins. Small items like shells or coins can either be stitched on or put in a see-through envelope that can be pinned or stapled on.



You’ll need:

- Rust-proof safety pins
- See-through envelopes
- Optional: permanent marker; needle and thread

Steps:

1. Attach the item to the clean T-shirt with a safety pin; use a see-through envelope if necessary. Sew on bulkier items for added strength.
2. Optional: use the marker to write some thing about the item, e.g., name, when it was sent
3. At the end of the separation your entire family signs the shirt

Hint: Don’t wash the shirt with all the stuff attached!

Video or cassette about your family

Time: 20mins.+

Start a candid family video or cassette at the beginning of the separation (or before). Add a few more sentences or minutes of recording every month to the same tape. You can make the settings, props, and plot as simple or elaborate as you like. You can even add your own songs or soundtrack. Below is just one possible outline to get started. By the end of the separation, you'll have a nice story or film that you can view or listen to together when the family is reunited.



You'll need:

- A video/ camcorder and blank tape, OR
- A cassette recorder and blank tape
- Your family and/or friends
- Creativity

Steps for each recording: (warn people ahead so they can think of something to say):

1. Give the date, describe where you are and what you are doing (about to do).
 - "Today is Monday 14th November and this is Tasha reporting from the kitchen. I'm about to ask the family...."
2. Tell what has been happening in the world this day.
 - You can read or video the front page of the local newspaper.
 - Have a sibling read the news headlines as if he/she were a TV news announcer
 - Add any news about the UT country you can find.
3. Tell what's happening in your family today: briefly interview each family member, asking the same question.
 - e.g. "Hello, Grandma. Tell us what you're doing right now."
 - "What's going on in your life today?"
 - Have others make up answers for pets, babies or inanimate objects like toys.
4. Wrap up: unless your plot asks for a conclusion at the end of every recording session, you can just sign off using the same catchy phrase each time.
 - "There you have it folks. Until next time, this is Tasha Doe reporting for UT News."
 - "Stay tuned for the next exciting episode of A Day in a Life."
 - "And that's all from (your city), where the cows roam free, and cell phones drop calls."



Extreme Make-Overs

Time: 30 mins.+

This utterly nonsense activity involves “making over” one of your family’s favorite items, and sending a picture of the outcome to Dad/Mom, just to bring a smile. Funny captions can be added when you send the photos.

Note: Make-overs will not be permanent and must be easy to undo.



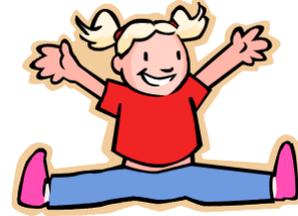
Take a photo of:

- Dad/Mom’s favorite armchair moved to a new, unusual location and decorating it with items appropriate for that setting, (e.g., if outside in the woods, dress it with a hat, umbrella, coat, and boots; if in the bathtub, dress with shower cap, drape a towel, add rubber ducky or shampoo bottle).
- Your trusty old teddy bear or blanket, doing something Dad/Mom would do: e.g., typing at the computer, stirring a pot on the stove, or coaching Little League.
- Your baby sibling dressed up in Dad/Mom’s sports equipment.
- You or a sibling dressed in a completely “not you” style, e.g., spike your hair if you’re usually a no-nonsense type; gel your hair into Mohawk; dress like a nerd.
- Switch clothes and hairstyles with your at-home parent or grandparent; don’t forget to accessorize!
- Your pet dog or cat on the couch with a newspaper or watching TV and a family member curled at his feet on the floor.
- A formal family photo with a difference:, e.g., everyone wears clothes backwards; all wear black beards.

Mission Accomplished: Preparing for Reunion

Task 8: Reality Check

FINALLY! The end of separation tunnel is nearing and your family is looking forward to a happy reunion. You might notice extra excitement in the air and busy-ness as the family gets ready; everyone wants things to be perfect. However, as much as you wish it, the world is not perfect and it's especially important to have realistic expectations about what it's going to be like so you won't be terribly disappointed.



Some common expectations and pitfalls:

Expectation or Wish	Possible Pitfall	Reality
It's gonna be great!	Disappointment with anti-climax; Dad/Mom may be too tired to show excitement	Family reunion and adjustment will have both pleasant and unpleasant times.
We'll all be so happy now	Feel guilty if you're not so happy after parent returns; or frustration at others if they're not acting happy	People have different reactions; both good and bad feelings are normal.
We'll be close again	Acting close to parent but not feeling close inside	It takes time to get used to each other again
Things will go back to the way they were before	Ignoring changes and rules; confusion over how to live with another authority figure in the house.	Things have changed; you've grown and changed. Your reunited family will need new rules that fit you today.
I'm going to make everything nice because Dad/Mom had it so tough away from us	Getting into "who had it worse" spats; taking sides.	Every one in the family suffered in different ways; no one's suffering is worse than another's.
It'll be so fun - just like when we're on R&R together, only longer.	Disappointment and frustration when boring duties and responsibilities of daily living spoil your vacation attitude.	R&R and holidays are special times when your family is focused on enjoyment, not doing the usual routine. But even having fun takes planning and effort. After the reunion, your family will need to establish a new routine (including fun) in order to make things run smoothly.

Other common kids' reactions to homecoming:

- "I won't be good enough." Some kids feel worried or guilty that they won't live up to their parents' standards.
- "When he's back, I'll be in deep trouble." Some kids dread the return because of discipline, afraid that they'll get in trouble for things left undone or not done properly.



- *Boasting* about Dad/Mom: most kids feel very proud of their parent, but sometimes it can go too far with exaggerations (making up things), or competing with other children for who's Dad/Mom is better.
- *Hello Stranger*: Some kids feel guilty or sad about feeling closer to non-family people, like a teacher or a friend's parent, than their own Dad/Mom. The awkwardness you first feel when Dad/Mom comes home can last for a few hours or a few weeks, but it usually gets better as you spend time rediscovering each other.
- *Showing-off*: Some kids insist on showing Dad/Mom everything in their room, showing new skills or toys, talking a lot, and wanting attention. It's hard to hold back the excitement! Timing is really important – so ask Dad/Mom to pick a time when they can spend time attending to you.
- "But Dad said I could." Some kids use parental confusion to their advantage: they ask the returned parent for permission to do something that the at-home parent has already said "no" to.
- "Can you leave now so we can do this our way?" Some kids get so frustrated with new changes in the family rules that they wish Dad/Mom would go away again. It's important to remember that such wishes are more about needing order and clear expectations than a wish for separation.
- "He/she don't know me no more": Disappointment when Dad/Mom gives a gift that might have suited you a year or two ago, but doesn't fit now.
- "No! I'm not gonna and you can't make me!" Some kids rebel against yet another grown up telling them what to do, even if it is Dad/Mom. Some become unwilling to change plans to accommodate their parents and treat friends with more kindness.

Task 9: Prepare for Homecoming

Get your creative juices going! No need to spend a lot of money to show how excited you are about Dad/Mom's return. Here are a few things to do over the next few weeks.

Countdown Before Dad/Mom arrives

3-4 weeks before arrival:

- ./ Help at-home parent plan a small homecoming celebration: nothing fancy, just family and a tasty meal.
- ./ Help plan a larger party for other people, to be held a couple of weeks after return; deliver invitations.
- ./ Make Welcome Home banners.
- ./ Make or write your At-Home parent a "UT survivor" badge, thank you card or note.
- ./ Write a thank you note for each Go-To Team member and anyone else who helped or encouraged you during the separation (send after arrival).
- ./ Re-collect the gathered items (memory jars, treasure box, photos etc); add finishing touches to this binder.



1-2 weeks before arrival:

- ./ Help clean the house; get rid of junk and heaps in your room (throw or give away - don't just hide them).
- ./ Help get stuff for family celebration, if needed.
- ./ Help clean the car, pets, and other things outside the house.
- ./ Get your haircut, if needed. Check the toenails too.

3 Days before arrival:

- ./ Get lots of rest; go to bed early even if you don't feel like it.
- ./ Help hang up "Welcome Home" banners and any decorations.
- ./ Plan on quiet for the first few days and evenings as a whole family again at home; minimum noise, few or no errands, no "outside" friends or calls.
- ./ Make a special surprise to put on your parents' pillows: e.g. a chocolate taped to a heart or a cut out of your handprint.

Task 10: Ending Separation: Time to Readjust

Two main keys that will help families shift to being whole again are

1. **patience**, and
2. **talking honestly** about any difficult spots that might surface.

Timing

Be patient. Give family members, including yourself, **time** to get used to each other again. Initially there may be some frustration or misunderstandings between your parents or other family members. This is normal for the situation and will get better in time as your family finds a new rhythm.



1-2 weeks after reunion:

- ./ Family time: pick something easy and casual to do together that would be fun for all
 - o Look over the Dad/Mom Treasure Keeper (see Task 7C)
 - o View Family Video or listen to Family Cassette all together (see Task 7C)
 - o Home movie night, or hot chocolate and games night
- ./ Just you and Dad/Mom: show him/her something you couldn't do before separation
- ./ Let him/her know what your routine is these days, from getting up to bed time
- ./ Let your parents sleep in; make them breakfast in bed: just toast or cereal is great
- ./ Send the thank you notes you wrote for Go-To Team and (see last page)

2-4 weeks after reunion:

- ./ Have a Welcome Home party for larger family, Go-To Team members & friends
- ./ Plan quiet one-on-one times with each parent
 - o look at your binder together (see Task 7C)
 - o give Dad/Mom the Memory Jar (see task 7C)

1 month after reunion:

- ./ Family Reunion Discussion
- ./ Unbury the family time capsule

Talking

It may seem to you that you and your parents are from different planets when you're trying to get your point across and they're not "getting" it, or not agreeing with you. It might be hard to remember in these moments that they're actually on your side -- or that they were once kids too so they might actually understand. As you grow towards teenage years and beyond, it will become easier to see another's point of view, but for now, even though it seems hard, remember communication is key in getting on with your family.



Communication (pronounced com-mew-ni-Kay-shon) includes *listening as well as talking*. Learning how to listen and to talk clearly will help you get on with people and to solve problems.

A few communication clues:

- People use more than words to communicate: Kids are usually very good at picking up unspoken cues like tone of voice, facial expressions and body posture. This "body language" gives important clues to the meaning of words.
- Questions help when things aren't clear: When in doubt, ask. Let others ask questions of you too – if you don't know the answer, say "I don't know."
- Emotions (or feelings) affect communication. People can get carried away by strong emotions and sometimes they'll end up saying things they don't mean. Kids especially say things in the heat of the moment that they regret later. When you're feeling angry or frustrated, give yourself a time-out (e.g., leave the room for five minutes, or count to twenty); then think through your feelings and the situation before you speak.
- Manners go a long way in diffusing a hairy conversation. Don't interrupt; look at the speaker when they're talking to you; try to speak kindly, even if you're angry or disagreeing.
- If you have to disagree, especially with a grown up, say "With all due respect,...." before you make your point.

Family Reunion Discussion



Three to four weeks after return, it is useful for the whole family to go over the separation and to decide together what routines make the most sense now. The family might want to change some things back to “before” and keep other systems that work better now that you’re older. Your input is very important, so be clear and honest in making your thoughts and needs known. Below is a suggested checklist of topics to cover.

Suggestions for reunion discussion:

Two things our family did that worked well while Dad/Mom was gone and why:

Two things that aren’t working well since Dad/Mom returned:

These are the dates and time for activities I do now:

Mondays: _____

Tuesdays: _____

Wednesdays: _____

Thursdays: _____

Fridays: _____

Saturdays: _____

Sundays: _____

These are the chores I do now

Discuss the following:

- ./ Who do I go to for permission, money, rules, requests?
- ./ Access and control of common use items e.g., TV, bathroom, computer, phone, video games
- ./ Internet use and rules around electronic entertainment
- ./ Current curfews, methods of discipline, limits, and consequences
- ./ Allowance
- ./ Expectations around having friends over
- ./ Expectations around going out
 - o What should happen if you go out
 - o What should happen if your parents going out
 - o I am/ am not willing to babysit a younger sibling (for money or no money?)
- ./ Hopes for future
 - o What's Dad/ Mom's current posting: how long?
 - o Any R&R or vacation plans

Other points I want to bring up:



TOOLS

People & Resources:

Your Go-To Team and others you can call on (see the list you made in Task 2)

Unaccompanied Tours Support Officer, Family Liaison Office (FLO)

U.S. Department of State, Harry S. Truman Building, Room 1239,
Washington, D.C. 20520

Telephone (202) 647-1076, 1-800-440-0397; fax (202) 647-1670

internet:

www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c14521.htm

intranet:

<http://hrweb.hr.state.gov/flo/index.html> e-

mail: FLOAskUT@state.gov

Contact FLO with any UT questions, and for information for UT families.

Overseas Briefing Center: Foreign Service Institute

(OBS/FSI) National Foreign Affairs Training Center,
Room E2105 4400 Arlington Blvd, Arlington VA. 22204-
1500

Telephone: (703) 302-7267; fax (703) 302-7452

e-mail: FSIOBCInfoCenter@state.gov

Look up information about your Dad/Mom's post and other cool places in the Overseas Briefing Center (also available on-line).

Transition Center at the Foreign Service Institute (same address as above)

Website: <http://www.state.gov/m/fsi/tc/c1932.htm>

Information about U.S. (especially Washington DC) such as schools and pet services.

They offer courses for family members on various aspects of Foreign Service life, including security awareness training for kids.

Foreign Service Youth Foundation: (FSYF)

P.O. Box 39185, Washington, D.C. 20016

Telephone: (301) 404-6655

Email: fsyf@fsyf.org

Website:

<http://www.fsyf.org>

FSYF has programs and books for youth who move around the world.