

**If you are a military stepfamily, try these tips for managing the stress and maintaining the peace in your blended family household.**

## Looking at Military Stepfamily life in 3D:

**Distance**—Frequent moves cause noncustodial parents to face long separations from their children which may increase their sense of shame and guilt.

- **Custodial parents**—Be understanding of your children/stepchildren who feel a deep sense of loss over moving. Allow them free contact with their bio-parent and friends.
- **Non-custodial parents**—Create a family long-distance plan. Include staying in touch through social media, video messaging, and a calendar highlighting upcoming visits.

**Deployments**—Deployments may force stepparents to take on the full-time parenting role before they or the children are ready.

- **Before the deployment**—Create a deployment parenting plan that includes events and an agreed-upon course of action. Remember stepparents have no legal rights and require a notarized power of attorney from the biological parent in order to seek emergency medical treatment, to register stepchildren for school, or even to sign them up for extracurricular activities.

- **During the deployment**—Update your deployed spouse on what is happening in the house while understanding they have their own stresses. Utilize the resources of your base regarding family support groups and family advocacy programs to help you while your spouse is away. Check with your chapel or local church to see what additional resources are available.

- **After the deployment**—Treat reintegration the same as you treated your first year as a new stepfamily. Take things slowly and gradually make changes. Seek help early for any family issues after deployment.

**Demands**—Military life requires conformity to rigid authority structures, discipline, and chain of command. But these can lead to a demanding attitude of rigidity in your home.

- **Adopt** attitudes of flexibility, compassion, and understanding in order to develop resiliency in your family.
- **Be careful** not to force military-grade structure on your stepchildren if you have not yet earned the right to lead through relationship.
- **Create** new traditions to help your family blend and to overcome potential rigidity. Be open to holding family meetings and allowing everyone to have input into family activities, new traditions, and problem-solving.

