



December 2010

Dear VAPT Playmates,

We hope you have all had a gratifying 2010. We want to thank you all for your allegiance to VAPT and for the hard work you do on behalf of children and families. We are glad to have you be part of our learning community AND we need you to continue to invite more colleagues to join in! (BTW - I saved \$40.00 on my membership dues by recruiting new members!)

VAPT/APT Member Benefits

Member benefits include:

- **International Journal of Play Therapy®** - complimentary subscription
- **Play Therapy magazine** - complimentary subscription
- **APT Flash** - complimentary e-news bulletins
- **Program fee discounts** - reduced conference registration, credentialing, and other fees
- **Participation in Governance and Programs**- VAPT will pay your registration fee for the Leadership Academy!

Best wishes for a beautiful holiday season,
Anne and Jessica

1. VAPT co-sponsors training

(The training website will be active for registration on January 12, 2010. VAPT will send out another announcement with the registration/payment instructions.)

Same Sky Sharing: Program Overview and Facilitation Training

Friday January 21 and Saturday, January 22, 2011

9:00 am to 4:00 pm

Presenter
Debroah Johnson, Ph.D.

Taylor Hall Room 304
James Madison University

Same Sky Sharing is a continuum of programs for parents, schools and community agencies. Same Sky Sharing includes a curriculum for children who have a parent in the military, a series of parent workshops, and training for school and community personnel on the impact of deployment on children.

The goals of Same Sky Sharing are to:

- Minimize emotional and behavioral problems that may result when children experience military separations in their families
- Increase children's abilities to identify and appropriately express their feelings and understanding about family change and transitions
- Increase children's relevant coping skills and help them identify and use support systems
- Enhance children's positive perceptions and strengths of themselves and their families

The Same Sky Sharing program, currently in the pilot testing phase, includes a procedure manual, board games and training for staff, as well as adaptations to address the needs of different ages and circumstances.

See <http://www.childrensinstitute.net/programs/same-sky-sharing>

2. Holiday Reminders

The Zero to Three organization posted the following reminders for families who may be experiencing a military separation this holiday. The content actually offers sound advice for us all and can be adapted for children of all ages. Retrieved from <http://www.zerotothree.org/about-us/funded-projects/military-families/supporting-young-children-1.html>

S is for structure and routine

The holidays can be a whirlwind of events. Visits to and from relatives, late evening gatherings, and last-minute trips to over-crowded shopping malls are just some of the activities that can throw a young child off-schedule and, ultimately, off balance. For young children missing a parent during the holidays, the comfort of knowing what to expect can be particularly important. Although a certain amount of disruption is inevitable during the holidays, parents can do their best to keep up with basic routines.

E is for expectations

The holiday season can bring with it some high, often unreasonable expectations. Families are given the message that this is a period of great "joy" when, in fact, a wide range of emotions may be experienced. Feelings may include: sadness over the service member's absence; concern for the service member's well-being; anxiety over making a "successful" holiday for the children; guilt over not being able to make up for the service member's absence; resentment over having to "go it alone" during the holidays; or even guilt over enjoying the festivities while the service member is away.

Some families may experience a sense of loneliness during the holidays. Military families, already separated from the service member, may have also relocated in recent months. Those who have not yet made friends in their new community may have a particularly rough time in a season filled with family and social gatherings. Parents and caregivers who are interested in making social connections during the holidays can become involved in playgroups, spiritual organizations, or other local community organizations. Families who are close to an installation can contact a Community Support Center for information about military family holiday events. It is important that military parents create this social support network at their own pace and not place additional pressure on themselves. A new year's resolution to engage in more social activities, for example, can be fulfilled throughout the year and make next year's holidays that much more enjoyable.

The season can be physically demanding as well. Caregivers who are already tired from the responsibilities of being a "single parent," can reach a level of exhaustion preparing for the holidays. Colds, flues and viruses, so common during the winter months, can drain a family's physical health even further. This physical strain may affect a family's overall sense of well-being, creating a cycle of illness and stress.

Parents and caregivers may experience a sense of "failure" over not being able to feel what they are "supposed to" during the holiday months. It is important that military families have appropriate expectations for themselves and for their young children and to recognize that, while the holiday season might be joyous for some, it can be draining for others. There is no right way to feel. Parents and caregivers should take great pride in knowing that they are doing the best that they can under very challenging circumstances.

A is for awareness

Babies and toddlers may pick up on the "roller coaster of emotions" experienced by their parents during the holiday season; this emotional upset is often reflected in a young child's behavior. Parents and caregivers who understand this connection between stress and behavior may have an easier time supporting their young children. Rather than focusing only on the behavior, (such as increased irritability, sleep changes, clinginess, etc) they can take a step back and try to figure out what's behind their children's behavior.

S is for Self-Care

In a hectic holiday season filled with events and obligations, it can become more challenging for parents to recognize and remember their own needs. It is so important that family members engage in activities that nourish their bodies and rejuvenate their spirits. Self-care activities may include: taking naps whenever possible; seeing supportive friends or family; gardening; reading; playing basketball; journaling; taking walks; or going to a baseball game with buddies. Parents and caregivers who support themselves are, ultimately, supporting their families by increasing their capacity to provide loving, nurturing environments for themselves and for their children.

Taking care of one's emotional health is another part of self-care. Parents or caregivers who are feeling sad or stressed are encouraged to seek support through family, friends, or professional counseling. For information about programs and services available to military families, contact Military OneSource at 1-800 342-9647.

O is for opportunity

Help infants and toddlers stay connected with their absent parent during the holidays.

The holiday season can provide a wonderful opportunity to create some additional rituals or routines that keep the military parent "present" or involved during the holidays. Some ideas may include:

N is for 'nesting'

For a very young child, the sights and sounds of the holidays can be dizzying, often leading to over-stimulation. Fortunately, the home can be made into a kind of retreat, a place where babies and toddlers can wind down from the frenzied pace of the season and settle in for the evening. Family routines and holiday rituals can become an opportunity for quiet, relaxed family time. A young child can look forward to watching the holiday candles being lit,

taking a bath, having a holiday book read, listening to quiet holiday music, kissing a picture of the absent parent, and then drifting off to bed. Parents, too, can see this “nesting” time as an opportunity to break free from daily stress, enjoy special moments with their young children, and refuel for the next day.

Parents and caregivers can find balance during the holidays by engaging in self-care, keeping up comforting routines, seeking social or professional support, and finding ways to include the active duty parent in family celebrations. Like every other day of a military separation, the holidays can be both a challenge and an opportunity for enormous emotional growth.

- The active duty parent can write and send 12 notes to the child, to be opened and read on each of the 12 days of Christmas or 8 days of Chanukah.
- The remaining parent can record her child singing his favorite holiday song and send it to the active duty parent.
- The active duty parent can create a holiday ornament, with the child’s name, to be hung on the Christmas tree. The child, in turn, can create or decorate a special ornament that says “mommy” or “daddy” in honor of the military parent and hang it on the tree as well.
- The child can decorate a paper holiday card and/or make a video-taped greeting “card” and send it to the active duty parent.
- The child can create a paper Chanukah menorah or Kwanzaa kinara and cut out the appropriate number of paper flames. This can then be sent to the active duty parent who, in turn, can glue a flame on each day that a candle is to be lit. The active duty parent can then take a picture of him or herself with the “lit” menorah or kinara and send it to back to the child.
- The active duty parent can record him or herself reading a favorite holiday book and send it home to the child. The videotaped story can become a part of a holiday, or year-round, bedtime routine.

Wishing you all a Happy New Year!



Anne and Jessica