



Top Tips for Parents

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD THROUGH ARMED FORCES FAMILY LIFE

Life in an Armed Forces family can include change, separation, and uncertainty. It can also be rich in strength, adaptability, and close family bonds. These everyday experiences can have different impacts on babies and young children, and it is important to recognise both the challenges and the strengths within Forces family life.

Alongside the demands of change, Armed Forces families often develop strong resilience, flexibility, and close emotional connections. Simple, consistent, and nurturing approaches can help your child feel safe, loved and supported during times of transition. By offering familiar routines, warm relationships, and reassurance, you support your child's right to feel secure and understood, even when circumstances change.

1. Keeping your child's early learning setting informed

Your child's early learning setting plays an important role in supporting their wellbeing and development (this might be a nursery, playgroup, childminder, or another place where they play and learn).

- Share information about upcoming training, deployments, or changes at home, including when plans change unexpectedly.

Continued over...

A gentle note for parents

You are your child's most important source of comfort and security — even during times of change.

- Let staff know about your child's routines, comfort items, interests and what helps them feel settled and safe.
- Inform the nursery about any additional support involved, such as health visiting or other services, so support can be joined up and responsive.

If you have moved recently, sharing a little about your family's Forces background and your child's previous early learning experiences can support continuity and help staff plan effectively for your child's transition.

You may wish to ask your previous setting about a short transition record or learning journal, which can help build on your child's strengths, interests and next steps in learning.

Making use of settling in periods helps your child build trusting relationships and become familiar with their new environment. Some settings may also offer home visits, which can provide reassurance and a familiar connection.

Consistency and shared understanding between home and nursery helps reduce stress and supports young children to feel secure.

2. Making sense of separation

Separation is part of many Armed Forces families' experiences and can affect young children in different ways.

- Babies and young children may express feelings through behaviour, play or changes in emotions, rather than words.
- Emotional responses during separation and reunion are a natural part of development and vary from child to child.

Simple ways of maintaining connection such as photos, recorded messages, or a special item can help your child feel close to the parent who is away.

Sharing information with early learning and childcare staff about what is happening at home helps them respond sensitively and consistently. Using clear, honest, and age appropriate explanations supports your child to make sense of changes and feel reassured.

With time, consistency and reassurance, children learn that relationships continue and loved adults return.

3. Navigating moves and new beginnings

Frequent moves can be a feature of Forces life. Thoughtful preparation helps make transitions more manageable for both you and your child.

- Talk with your child about the new area and nursery using photos, books, stories, or simple conversations.
- Share your child's routines, interests, comfort strategies, and any worries with the new setting.
- Early years staff can explain how their curriculum or approach may be different, supporting continuity in learning and care.

A familiar toy, book or comfort item can provide reassurance in unfamiliar surroundings. Gentle, positive conversations help build confidence and support emotional wellbeing during times of change.

4. Caring for yourself

Your child's emotional wellbeing is closely connected to your own.

- Speak openly with staff if things feel difficult — they can help you access support and are there to work alongside you.

remember



★ Every Armed Forces family is different. There is no “right way” to manage change — consistency, reassurance and care are what matter most.

★ Babies and young children in Armed Forces families often show great strength and adaptability. Change and separation can still be hard, and every child experiences this differently.

★ With patience, reassurance and the support of your child’s early learning setting, your child’s rights to feel safe, valued and emotionally supported can be upheld.

- Ask about local services, parent groups or welfare support that may be helpful.
- Stay connected with friends, family, and community networks where possible.

Recognising your own wellbeing needs is an important part of supporting your child. Celebrate small achievements and strengths — Armed Forces family life can be demanding, and acknowledging positives matters.

Taking care of yourself is not selfish; it supports your child’s emotional security and wellbeing.

Useful links

- [Forces Children Scotland](#)
- [Young Minds – Transitions & Times of Change](#)
- [Families Transition Too!](#)
- [Experiencing Parental Absence](#)

THE FIRST STEPS PROJECT WAS FUNDED BY



 **THE ARMED FORCES
COVENANT FUND TRUST**
Funded by HM Government

 **Ministry of Defence**