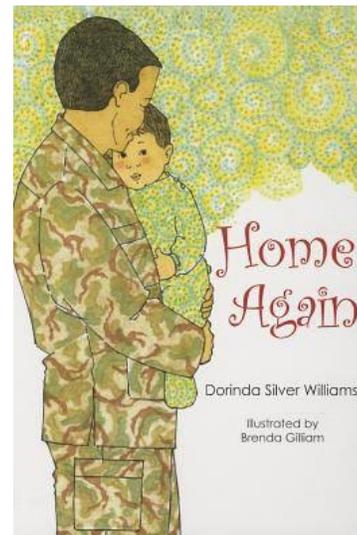


Home Again

by Dorinda Silver Williams

This is a story for children that talks about several different children and their reactions to their deployed caregiver returning home. Not every child is excited and happy to see the caregiver who has been away. There are a variety of emotions that the children feel—nervous, upset, angry, excited, and more. The story reminds children and their families that it's okay to take time to adjust to a returning caregiver, and that every child will react differently.



Discussion and Questions:

- Use a feelings-face chart to point to and label feelings as you talk about specific ones
- Walk through the book with the child and look at the pictures.
 - For infants and toddlers, engage the child in recognizing objects and people in the pictures, which will make reading a more enjoyable experience. If the child is non-verbal, they can answer questions by pointing and gesturing. If the child needs help pointing, use hand over hand assistance to find the objects/people after you give them a chance to do it independently.
 - For older toddlers and preschool children, ask questions about what might be happening in the pictures or what the characters might be feeling.

Activities:

Ages Birth to 5:

- **Pictures of a Military Caregiver**
 - It may be hard for young children to feel connected to their caregiver while they are away.
 - Use recent and past photos of the service member that are symbolic of who they are and what they enjoy doing. For example, gather pictures of the service member at work, at parties or special events, and within everyday routines.
 - Create a photo album or wall where these pictures can be displayed.
 - If using a photo album, find a small one the child can flip through with little to no assistance. If creating a photo wall, use a corkboard and hang it somewhere in the home that child can easily access. Make sure it is at their eye level, so they can look at it when they desire.
 - Encourage children to look at the pictures as often as they would like or when they are missing their caregiver or feeling sad. Children can also be prompted to share their feelings with the picture of their caregiver by actually talking to the picture.
- **Safe Place for Reuniting**
 - A child can experience a variety of emotions and behaviors when their deployed caregiver returns home.
 - Encourage the caregiver at home to create a safe space for the child at least a few days before the reunification. This space can also be called a cozy space, take-a-break space, or another label that the family prefers.
 - The space should include pillows, blankets, stuffed animals, toys, books, and simple snacks.
 - For the child's safety, ensure the space is visible.
 - Encourage the child to use the area whenever they want and particularly if they are feeling overwhelmed with strong feelings.

- The purpose and function of the this space should be shared with the returning caregiver to avoid any confusion or concern if the child appears to be hiding from them.
- The child should be allowed to remain in the space until they feel ready to leave.
- As the child feels more comfortable they may join the family or request that someone join them in their space.
- Remind the child that they can also invite their caregivers into the space to read a book, have a snack, etc. This promotes a sense of control and allows the caregiver and the child to share time together in an environment in which the child feels secure.

Ages 3-5:

- **Popsicle Stick Emotions**

- These popsicle stick emotions can be used for a variety of purposes. Have the child help make the faces according to their ability. Label the emotion on the stick and always use the same word to describe it, so the child get to used to that word. Start with simple emotions and add more as children’s comprehension develops. The popsicle sticks can be kept in a zip-lock bag, pencil box or bag.



<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/15811863690393492/>

Beginning Emotions	Additional Emotions	Complex Emotions
Happy	Worried	Frustrated
Sad	Scared	Nervous
Mad	Excited	Disappointed
Tired	Upset	Surprised

- After the popsicle stick emotions have been assembled, look through the book again and have the child help label the emotions of the children in the book and select the popsicle sticks that match the emotion. This exercise can be replicated with other books that show emotions.
- Several emotion face options can be found at the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning website: <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/strategies.html#teachingskills>
- Additional ideas for popsicle stick emotions
 - Ask the child how they are feeling today. Let them look at all the popsicle sticks and choose the one that shows how they feel.
 - Encourage the family to use the popsicle sticks throughout the day—after wake-up time, during snack, after lunch, before bedtime, etc.
 - Encourage family members to use the popsicle sticks to show how they are feeling too.
 - When a child is experiencing an intense emotion, the popsicle sticks can be displayed and the child can be asked, “How are you feeling right now?” If the child does not want to select a popsicle stick, an adult can guess which one the child might be feeling. Hold up the emotion and say, “It looks like you are feeling _____. It’s okay to feel that way. Do you want to talk about it?”
 - Practice naming the emotions in a game. Lay all the popsicle sticks out in front of the child and say. Or for a group, use several sets of emotion popsicle sticks and distribute one to each student. Then ask the child or group, “How might someone might feel if they got to eat their favorite kind of candy?” Children would identify the happy/excited/positive emotions and raise that stick. Continue asking questions of this nature several times.

- **Hopscotch Feelings**

- Draw various emotions on a standard size piece of paper. If children are capable, let them help draw the faces. If possible, have them laminated so they can be reused.
- Tape the emotion papers on the floor in a line (with some papers being offset so the children have to jump back and forth sideways). First, model how to play hopscotch. Hop from one face to the next while saying the names of the emotions. "Happy, Sad, Mad, Tired." Then allow a child to go next.
- Help the child say the emotions as needed. If the child easily masters the game, rearrange the emotions on the floor and do it again.
- This can be adapted for group settings by having the children get in a line and the whole group will say the emotions as the child hops from paper to paper.
- For older children, the game could incorporate story telling. For example, a child could roll a large foam die (or use a spinner). Then the child could take that many hops to land on a specific feeling. When the child lands, they could tell the class about a time they felt that emotion.
- For additional activities see <https://bit.ly/2KyD7Ch>