



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 something you may have never faced before in your life. Someone important in your family is going to go far away for a long time, which means major changes for you and your remaining family. Your job, should you choose to accept it, 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 supplied 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): Tap into their wisdom. They will probably hold family discussions and your input is vital to the success of the mission.
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 "FLO" stands for Family Liaison Office – the people who can help you out 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 to read through this material, DO the exercises, send them to your parent when he/she is away, and collect the responses here. Your parents may be interested to see this file when your family is together again.

Good Luck!

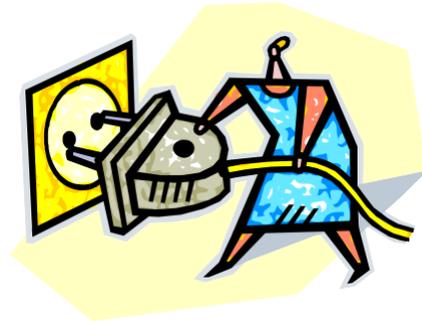
# FACING REALITY

## 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. Separation of your family could be difficult but it can also be a chance to grow together. Which outcome you get depends on how you look at it, the choices you make, and how your family prepares for the changes. It may not seem like it to you, but you actually *can* control how well you deal with the situation: the choices you make will help you become a more mature and confident person.

Some ways to make the best of a tough situation:

- Y Accept reality: There are some things you cannot change; you don't have to like it, but you do have to live with it. Whining or complaining doesn't change reality.
- Y Notice that it's not all bad: You *do* have good times mixed in with the not-so-good. You'll see that things might not be as unfair as they seem.
- Y Realize unpleasant *feelings do not define reality*: Be frustrated, sad, nervous, etc., but carry on anyway. Feelings will change in time and then you will see that the situation wasn't as bad as it felt.
- Y Play with the cards you're dealt: make the best of what you've got; being resourceful with what you have already instead of wishing for something else can help you feel more content.
- Y Look at both sides of the coin: more responsibility can be hard because it means more work, but it also means your parents know you're ready to handle it.
- Y Discover role models outside your family.
- Y Laugh. A lot. Play with your friends.
- Y Listen more than talk; when you do talk, say what you mean.
- Y Know that separation doesn't last forever.
- Y Do the right thing: You **COULD** *not* do the right thing and get away with it, no one would ever know. Except you. Hiding from yourself can get complicated really quickly; better to not get started down that road.



# FAMILY MEETING

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

Your family will probably 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 stuck 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?
- ? Why did you choose to go there? Can't you tell them you don't want to go?
- ? Will you be in danger?
- ? When will we see you again?
- ? How will we stay in touch? Your new address : \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

E-mail and number: \_\_\_\_\_

- ? 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 the whole 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? If so, when and to where?
- ? Who will take care of us?
- ? What do I do in case of an emergency?
- ? What do I do in non-emergency trouble? If they're not available, whom do I go to?
- ? 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 indicate that you need to be listened to seriously.
- Code Word:

\_\_\_\_\_



- Call them individually 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 can I help you with what you need?
- ? How will I get to after school activities?
- ? Whom do I ask for permission?
- ? What about money, allowance?
- ? How about using the car, insurance and gas money?
- ? What if I don't like the changes?
- ? Can I have friends over? What can we do and not do?
- ? 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 family stories by your Dad/Mom
- 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" U.S. postage stamps (if they can be used or are needed at post)
- Post cards and/or 4"x9" 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, 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

People of all ages use both thoughts *and* feelings to solve problems and make decisions about actions. It's important to learn to identify what you're feeling (not just what you *think* you're feeling) and to talk about it clearly, so that complicated things like decisions and problem solving will be less confusing.

You may notice that 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 teens need an understanding adult around to help them deal with not *doing* bad while they're *feeling* bad.

Some common reactions family members have when facing long separation are listed below. Don't worry if you feel these emotions – 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, supportive; and others might see your thinking about yourself as "selfish"
- "Good riddance," relief that the parent is going away
- Anxiety because of the unknowns and uncertainties
- Frustration that someone else is in control and making decisions that affect your life
- 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 to relieve pain, anger, guilt, sadness



Teens often express feelings in behaviors (actions) instead of words, especially if they're not used to talking about their feelings. If you see yourself behaving in the following ways, ask for help to put the actions into words instead. You'll feel better and your actions will be less confusing and more within your conscious control.

- Anger that's not spoken can come out as "sassing" (talking back), being disrespectful, negative, disobedient, or refusing to engage at all.
- "I don't care" attitude: When you stop caring what happens because you can't do anything about it anyway. Grades can drop; pleasing friends become much more important than pleasing family. You might start smoking, using drugs or alcohol, thinking it's "cool" and it makes you feel better, not realizing that alcohol and drugs work because they 'numb' feelings inside but don't really resolve them.
- Unspoken stress and anxiety can show up as headaches, stomach aches, trouble sleeping, restlessness, nausea, not wanting to eat or eating (even shopping!) too much.
- Denial of separation might take the form of lying to others about it, making up stories that seem a more acceptable explanation for your situation.
- Danger seeking behaviors: the thrill of doing (and surviving) risky activities that have a high potential for injury can be a way of hiding from other situations you can't control.
- Withdrawing: isolating yourself from others because it's easier to deal with your MP3, videogames, room, or books than it is to face real people and the feelings they bring up.

# Coping with Separation

## Task 4: Knowing What You Need and Telling Others

Separation can be weird; some things are the same while everything seems different now that Dad/Mom is gone. Sometimes you'll have a "bad day" and that's OK. Most teens your age will feel a mixture of feelings that 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 only want Mom other times you'll prefer to talk with your friends. 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 or essential to your life, like food. Besides important things like water, shelter etc., 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 reach out to people around you; 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 Begin with "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 drop what they're doing, pay attention, and help you figure out whatever is troubling you. *Don't choose an emergency word* (like "fire" or "danger"); use a made-up word, a favorite character's name, or any word you like as a signal.
- Y Use a "tank" indicator with your parents. Like a car gas tank indicator that points to E or F, when you're low on love, you'll need to indicate that your "love" tank is low, so that others can help fill you up. Tell your parent "I need gas" and they'll know that you need something immediately. True, this sounds corny, but it's effective, especially 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, a walk, bowling night, or other fun activity. 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 ask someone else for support (like a trusted friend, aunt, or someone on your Go-To Team).

# Mission Survival: Operation Phase

## Task 5: Basic Skills Needed For Mission Success

In this chapter we'll go over the what's and how-to's of communicating with your parent over the phone, e-mail, and even (gasp) snail mail. It's not the same as IM with your friends! These are useful skills you'll be using the rest of your life, so make the most of these practice opportunities. Suggested phone and e-mail topics (see Task 7B) are included to get your creative juices flowing.



**Conversation:** where two or more people take turns talking and listening to each other, exchanging ideas and information.

### Phone sense:

- Talk clearly and not too fast, into the mouth piece – the connection may not be the best
- It's not polite to put someone on hold for more than twenty seconds while you go do something else; better to call them back if you're distracted
- Be aware of cheaper calling times where applicable
- Leave a message if you get voice mail, don't just hang up
- You get bonus points if you call back people who've left you messages, preferably the same day
- Agree with Dad/Mom about how to handle other incoming calls while they're on the phone (i.e., if your home phone has "call waiting service"). Some parents do not like to be put on hold; others cannot be put on hold without cutting the line.

## A. “Hello? Er... uh...” Talking On The Phone

Maybe you’re OK at talking with your friends on the phone, but when it comes to talking with adults you get tongue-tied or itch to get off the phone. You’re not alone; talking with grown-ups can be intimidating, even if you may now be bigger than they are.



A few pointers about phone conversations with adults (practice now will come in handy when you are job hunting):

- Identify yourself: don’t assume the other person will recognize you just by voice
- Conversation means talking WITH not talking AT the other person.
  - Questions that have a one-word answer (e.g., yes/no) are conversation killers
  - Open-ended questions keep conversation going: e.g., “what do you think about...”
  - Over-taking the other person by talking louder is not real conversation; it’s called interrupting!
  - Don’t be afraid to tell your parents that you love them!!
- About a minute or so before you intend to end the conversation, politely indicate the close is nearing. This is particularly important if the other person is very talkative and isn’t getting your other hints. Skip giving excuses for why you have to hang up, they’re not necessary. For example, try:
  - “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?”
- Say “goodbye” at the end, don’t just hang up unless you’re intending for it to be a hostile statement.

## Conversation Topics:

You can talk about the weather, but asking Dad/Mom about him/herself usually leads to longer conversations.



- Dreams: what did you want to be/do/see when you were my age and why
- Friends: describe your buddies at post now and what you like about them
- What did you see or read today that stuck with you?
- Who was your first girl/boyfriend?
- Fill in the blanks: If I had a...., I would....
- What was your worst experience in high school?
- Do you ever procrastinate? What helps you get started on doing things you really don't want to do?
- What's a good way to tell a girl/guy that you really don't want to go out with them?
- Did you ever do something that really made your parents mad, like dent your parents' car? What happened?
- When you were my age, how did you handle peer pressure to do something you really weren't sure you wanted to do? If you could go back in time now, what would you tell yourself do differently, if anything?



## B. Letter Writing 101



*But, I can't write!* Don't worry, you're not alone. Many teens groan at the mechanics of writing or typing; it seems too much like school. No doubt about it, writing and typing take time and effort, and lots of teenagers 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 the 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.

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

- Names and addresses: of the person to whom you're writing, and yours
- Greeting: "Dear Mom"
- Opening line: "Hi 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
- Closing line: "I miss you a lot and can't wait to see you again."
- Sign off that fits the nature of the message: "Yours sincerely; Thanks again; Love and hugs," then add your name



## Special Types Of Letters And Styles:

- Thank You letters  
Although it seems a chore, it's a good idea to thank people in writing for their kind gifts or help. Even if you hated the gift, thank them for their thoughtfulness. 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 (specify the gift/favor)." If it was money or a gift certificate, say what you spent it on.
- "Dear Abby" style  
This is a style of letter writing found in newspaper and magazine gossip columns. An anonymous writer describe a problem and asks for advice, usually signing it with a name related to the problem. This can be a tongue-in-check way for teens who are encountering relationship difficulties to ask for guidance from an adult without revealing who they are. If you're really serious about remaining anonymous, you'll have to disguise all identifying data like your handwriting, address etc.
- "Camp Granada" style  
Like the famous old song (ask your parents if you don't know it), this style uses humor in your letter writing to tell about otherwise bad or boring experiences.

## C. Using e-Mail and Internet



If you have to share a computer 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 to and from only pre-selected people, e.g., [www.epals.com](http://www.epals.com). Many teens also use MySpace.com to stay in touch with friends near and far. Use the Internet Safety Pledge sheet (next page, from McGruff.org) as a starting point to discuss home internet safety with your parents.

If you do not have a computer at home, check out a local public library. Many countries have computers for public use in libraries located in urban areas; look into their rules and fees for computer and e-mail 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, 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. 13<sup>th</sup> Floor, Washington, DC 20036, [www.ncpc.org](http://www.ncpc.org)

## D. Taking Photos



A digital camera is easy to use and worry-free because you can delete any mistakes! Ask for help if you're not sure about down-loading images, printing and charging the camera, though.

If you don't have access to a digital or regular camera, ask your parents for a disposable camera as a present. You'll just have to process photos the "old fashioned" way and wait a little longer for prints, but can have a CD made to store them electronically.

Computer camera: suggested themes and background set-ups

If your family has a web-cam:

- 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
- 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
- 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!

- Stay active and involved: Plan time with your friends and time for exercise.
- 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 12 copies of the blank calendar (next page), add months and dates. Use this to remind yourself of important dates and to see how many days are left until Dad/Mom returns home. Below is an example:

MONTH: May

MONDAY	TUES	WED	THURS	FRIDAY	SAT	SUNDAY
		1 <i>Dad call, 8pm</i>	2	3	4	5
6	7	8 <i>Call Dad</i>	9	10	11	12 <i>Mother's Day</i>
13 ®	14	15 <i>Dad call, 8pm</i>	16 <i>Soc St project due®</i>	17	18 <i>Connor over?</i>	19
20	21	22	23	24 <i>call Dad 4pm</i>	25	26 <i>Colin's party 2pm</i>
27 <i>Holiday</i> ©	28	29 <i>Dad calls, 8pm</i>	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: 42!!!!*

# CALENDAR

MONTH: \_\_\_\_\_

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY

SPECIAL DATES AND DEADLINES TO REMEMBER:

## Chore chart

Most people do NOT like doing chores, but it's all part of being a family. A chart can help organize all the duties so it's clear to everyone. 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. 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 and clear table	Tu, Th, Sat	Breakfast and 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 at 7pm” won’t fly 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 it 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
- 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

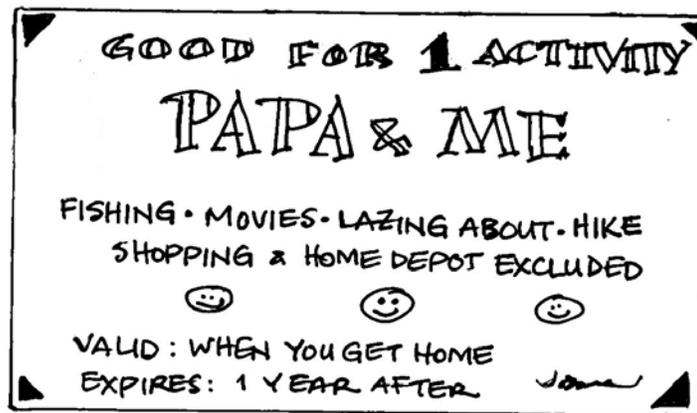
## Task 7: Exercises to Keep You and Your Family in Shape.

This chapter is full of things to do to help bridge the distance of time and geography until your parent returns. Some of them you'll do on your own, some you'll send to your parent, and others you'll do together.

### 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 "Two for One sale," or "Good for One" or "Free..." If adding an expiration date, make sure the date is long after your Dad/Mom returns home!

Ideas:

- 1 back rub
- 1 chore exchange (good for trading with siblings' chores)
- 1 whining- and-bickering-free afternoon (good for parents)
- 1 movie with popcorn
- A quiet walk with you
- Breakfast in bed
- Vacuum the house
- Wash the car
- A promise not to play loud music for two 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 picture 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 others don’t want them anymore)
- 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

Here’s a sample:

*Ride the Tube*

**I’m daring.....On the edge Gotta Get Wet**



## 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 cheer you up. You'll need to think about it for a while, then go 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 savory things to eat (non-spoiling kind)
- ./ A small comfort item you like
- ./ Photo of loved ones
- ./ Comfort note from your parents (ask them about this, below)\*
- ./ Dad and Mom's contact details
- ./ A copy of your Go-To Team list
- ./ A small pencil or pen
- ./ A small pad of paper
- ./ A tissue
- ./ A Band-Aid (symbol to remind you that things hurt but will get better)
- ./ Five quarters or 25-cent coins for phone calls (or equivalent currency for a phone call in the country where you live)
- ./ If you have one, program your favorite soothing songs on your MP3 or iPod



**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 Go To page if you need a reminder). They will instantly know to listen to you.

\* Parents: Please help your teen 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 on a particular occasion on a page, and 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 your family will enjoy and remember for a long time. In the U.S., 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.

You'll need:

- ./ Photos or messages about you and family members
- ./ Double-stick tape
- ./ Scissors
- ./ Ruler
- ./ Pen for writing
- ./ Colors for decorating
- ./ Paper (8½" x 11" – check out themed, acid-free papers at craft stores)
- ./ Your creativity



Extras:

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



Themes to scrapbook about:

- Spring Break (school's out)
- Family Holidays (e.g., Easter, Christmas, Hanukah, Kwanza, Eid, Chinese New Year)
- Vacation
- My first.... (bad haircut, earring, braces, cell phone)
- My Space... (my room, school locker, chair)
- Funniest e-mails from Dad/Mom
- Slang terms

A couple of sample pages follow to get you started.



# 10 Things I Love About Mom



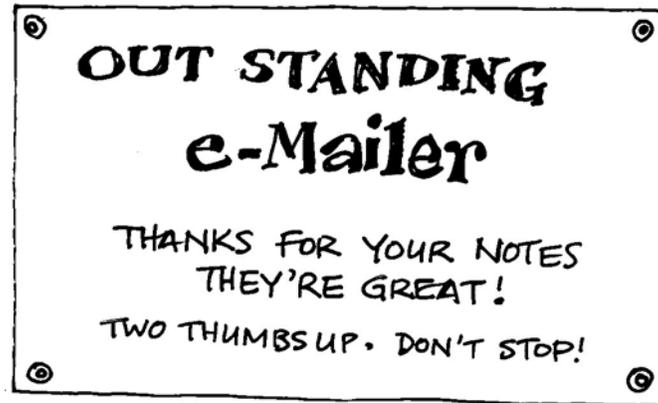
# 10 Words that Describe Dad



## Banners, Signs and Awards

Time: 30 mins. – 1 hr.

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



### 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; you're a goof-ball....)
- 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. Make a record using the table below of some of your physical changes. Trace your hand print on top, so that the table appears in the palm. For laughs, add your pet's paw print too, if you have one. In a year fill out the next column and you'll see how you've changed while Dad/Mom's been away.

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

**My Hand Print**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

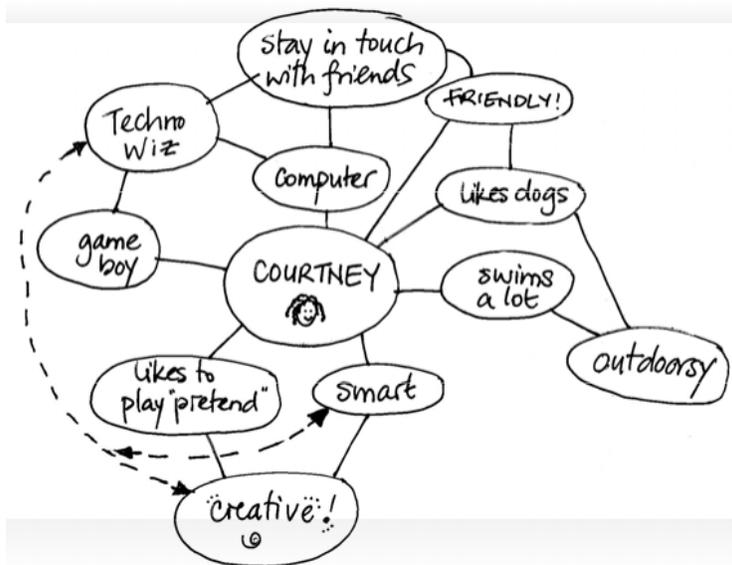
Place wrist here

## Me Map

Time: 20-40 mins.

At this stage of your life, you're finding out who you are, including what you like and who you want to be. Friends and what others think of you become really important influences in your life, and you'll be "trying on" different identities to see what fits. There can be so many different interests, tastes, experiences and dreams that sometimes your life can seem a bit disjointed. But don't worry, eventually, it'll all come together.

This exercise, called a Me Map, is a way to begin putting down the things that define you. You may have come across a similar "map" concept in your English classes at school: they're used to help develop thoughts, say, for a story. Follow the instructions below to see how the Story of You is beginning to take shape.

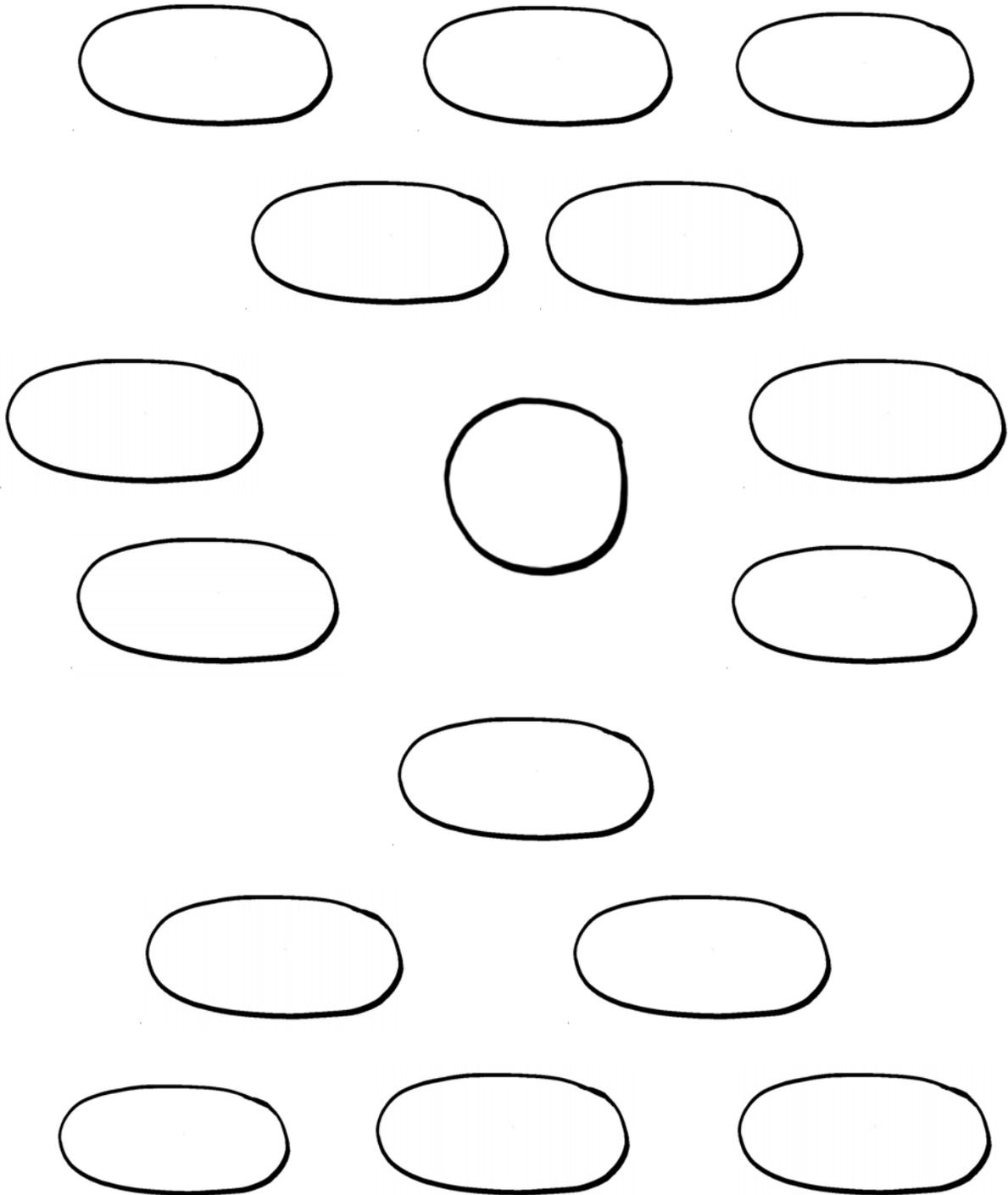


### Steps to Mapping Yourself:

1. Write your name in the middle bubble.
2. In second layer bubbles (from middle outwards): write words that describe your personality, (e.g., funny, quiet, athletic, loving, loud, active, etc.).
3. In third layer bubbles: write words that connect to the Second Layer words. For example, if you wrote "athletic" in a second bubble, third bubble words might be "like baseball" or "Shaq wannabe."
4. Draw any arrows between bubbles/words that seem to overlap to you. e.g., "creative" and "like colors" might be related to "funny" or "like to make others happy."
5. Step back; look at how interesting a person you're developing into! Send to Dad/Mom.

# ME MAP

From the Great Mind of \_\_\_\_\_



# Write About You

Time: 15 mins.+

It is all about *you* after all! Use the prompts below and write down whatever comes to your mind to discover more about yourself. You don't have to be a genius and you don't even have to use full sentences; lists will do. On a piece of paper, write down the prompt title, then write whatever free associations you have. Use your creativity to add your one-of-a-kind doodles; use different color pens, stamps and stickers. Make the pages your own. Show to your at-home parent, send them to Dad/Mom or collect them in this binder so you can look back on them later. Included is a sample page to get you started.

Ideas: Write down what comes to mind when you think of....

OK, well, have a nice life

The more things change, the more they stay the same...

He/She loves me, he/she loves me not

Buttons: Don't Push These (or I really hate it when.....)

Whatever

Jewelry

Cool Music

Why should I have to ask your permission, you're not even here

*Freedom:* What I'd do if I had more

Privacy Please

My Space

My People/ Friends

**The coolest thing I ever did was**

**MONEY**

What am I going to do when I get out of school?

Where I am, where I wish I were, and where I'll be in 5 yrs

*Hair*

**I Admire**

I define "cool" as....

*Loneliness*

Rumors

I feel really stupid when...

**My accessories**

**I wish**

My Style of Clothes and Shoes

What everyone else is doing: should I too?

When I think of going college, I....

I worry about...

Things I wish my parents understood about me





# My Favorite.....



Possession: \_\_\_\_\_

Person(s) to be 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 long-distance, over time between you and Dad/Mom at post. One of you starts out the activity and sends it to the other, who in turn, sends back a reply that can be built on, and so forth. You can keep several themes going at the same time so you can both work on the next installment of one theme while waiting for another to arrive in the mail.

### Foot Prints

Here's a fun way for you and your Dad/Mom to see each other's world from a unique perspective. Take a photo of your foot (that's right, your foot) in different places, doing different things. You'll have to sit or lie down so your foot is in the foreground of an interesting background you want to show your Dad/Mom. One time your sneaker-clad foot might be out in the driveway, shooting hoops with friends; another time your flip-flopped foot might be pool side. Send one photo at a time, so you can spread out the laughs. Your Dad/Mom can send back photos of their foot out sight-seeing, or at their desk. Print out and collect these images with their stories in this binder – you'll have quite a journey to look back on by the end of the separation!

You'll need:

- Digital camera
- Your foot, in differing foot wear (shoes, sandals, socks)
- Creativity: experiment with different angles and settings, e.g., foot running away from trick or treating.
- Send the photos one at a time with a brief caption

Suggestions: Show your foot in

- Sock, next to the fireplace at New Year's
- Barefoot on the beach, next to a crab or tide pool
- Shoe looking at a sunset
- On vacation, sightseeing
- In the shower
- Inside your car, on the dash board, going somewhere familiar
- In the rain
- Snow boot, in snow angel print
- On top of a place Dad/Mom didn't like feet to be (the coffee table, dining table?)
- Among a pile of fall leaves that you've raked
- On your bed, with view of your room beyond.



## Screen Play

Write a movie or story with your parent on-line, a 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. Don't worry too much about plot – it'll evolve over time. Be as creative as you can; your parents are sure to enjoy your imagination.



Steps: to be done via e-mail using a 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, “The setting is a ..... In the scene there’s a boy named ...;... who .... with ....”
2. You fill in the blanks. Then develop the scene more by adding two to three more sentences. Leave a trailing sentence (which Dad/Mom will finish). Send it back to Dad/Mom. For instance, using the above example, “The setting is a...dark, large room, with animal sounds in the background. In the scene there’s a boy named.... Mike Farraday. He’s a 15-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 humble urchin....”
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. Following the example above, “... urchin, not even his family is aware of Mike’s secret lair beneath the feeding trough. Only he knows the code to enter the lab where he.....” “One day, quite unexpectedly....” You can edit out parts that you don’t like or don’t “work.”
4. When the story is finished, collate the e-mails and print it out, leaving spaces for any illustrations you plan to add.

## Batting Average



If you and your Dad/Mom are both sports-minded you might enjoy these activities:

- 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!).



- Create a guessing "pool" with your extended family around an important league tournament or play-off. Ask family members (including uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, etc.) if they want to guess what the results might be for a certain game.



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).

- Ask about popular sports at post.

## Cooking up a Storm

For the budding cooks and foodies among you, share 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?
  - Do men, women, and children eat together or separately?
  - 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.)
- Make up and send some recipes using ingredients that can be found in that country.
- Send a voucher that says "Good for One Meal Cooked by Yours Truly."



● Plan on cooking a special meal just for Dad/Mom about three weeks after they return.

● Make a hometown restaurant guide. Go to a restaurant or eatery in your town that you have never eaten at before; order things that bring your total bill to less than a budgeted amount. Write Dad/Mom a brief review of the place, ranking it on a scale of 1-5 stars (or hamburgers, pizzas, any symbol that fits your style). Review other restaurants, using the same budget and rating system for comparison reasons. Compile your reviews; select your "best buy" recommendation to take your Dad/Mom to when they return.



## Animal Planet

Find out about the animals and plant life where Dad/Mom is.

Ask:

- Are there any animals near where you live?
  - Any particular animals that the country is known for?
  - Who takes care of the animals? Any vets and rangers?
  - 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?
  - Are people concerned with the environment and global warming there?
  - Do you see many trees and flowers?
  - What kind of plant do you most miss seeing?



## Getting Around

You can learn a lot about the culture where Dad/Mom lives just by looking at the different ways people get around. 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? How much is gas?
- 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 transport by themselves?
- How do kids get to school?
- How old do you have to be to drive there?



Also, if your parent drives, ask:

- Who taught you to drive? How old were you then?
- What was the first car you ever drove?
- What was the first car you ever owned?
- What's your dream car?

Tell Dad/Mom about your driving experiences so far, if any.

Plan to take him/her out for a ride when they get home, just for fun.

## How do you say snot in Arabic?

While your Dad/Mom is learning a new language, ask them to inquire into some words of interest to you so you can also learn. Every culture has its own way of expressing the following 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 (oh no): \_\_\_\_\_

Wow! (or equivalent sound): \_\_\_\_\_

Really?! (for real, 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

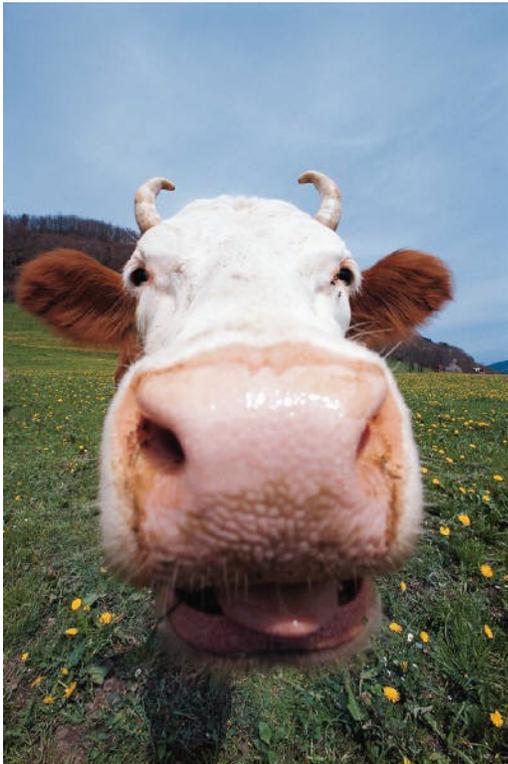
A couple of times over the separation time (about six months apart), ask your Dad/Mom what their typical day is like, over the phone. Record the responses here; interview him/her a few months after he/she comes back. It'll be interesting to note how things change.

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 one photo of a *small part of a room* of their choice at regular intervals (say, every week, bi-weekly or monthly) e.g., their bedroom or office or another place you haven't seen; the photo will be only a teeny detail of it.
- Print and trim off the border. Your job will be to fit all the photos together like a jigsaw.
- You may need to stick the pieces to a wall or large poster board, depending on how many photos you receive.

By the end of the separation, you should have a complete picture of the place where your parent has been.



## Comic Relief

Your parents are likely to be feeling somewhat stressed. 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
- Clip your Dad/Mom's favorite comic strip.

## 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 Dad/Mom Box, below) 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
- A series of short riddles (for older kids)
- Map: draw directions from starting point
- "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 yet.)

### Start a Dad/Mom Plant

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

Growing a plant that brings someone you love to mind 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, that also suits 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. By the time your family is reunited, the plant will be quite big and lovely, a living symbol of life going on during and after separation. Take a picture at regular intervals (one month, say) with a yardstick next to the plant.



#### Pointers:

- Pick long-lasting plants (so-called "evergreens." "Perennial" flowers might also work if you don't mind them going dormant over winter. "Annual" flowers will die after one season.)
- Some potted plants work well inside the house, where you might see it more often. They're also good for smaller spaces like apartments.
- If you have space, plant a small tree outside.

## 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,” and your Dad/Mom will be really happy to receive them. Since it’ll take some effort, you might need some help getting the stuff together and mailing the package. Ask a Go-To Team member for help if you don’t want to trouble your at-home parent.

**HINTS:** 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:

- Most important: a note from you
- An all-American snack item (latest flavor of Tostitos, Girl Scout cookies)
- CD/cassette of your voice
- Seasonal flower or leaf from your garden (pressed between tissue in a heavy book)
- For padding: use an interesting section from the local newspaper.



### Try themed packages:

- Movie Night box: a new DVD, microwaveable popcorn, jelly beans
- Dinner in a box: taco dinner kit; can of black frijoles, can of salsa
- High school open house: items that Dad/Mom might have seen if they’d gone to your recent school open house e.g., samples of your work, copies of awards or trophies, school calendar, newsletter, who’s running for student council, school map, music program
- Stress-buster box: some really nice smelling soap, a good paper back novel, a can of favorite soup, a soft pillow, socks.

### Rules for stuff sent through the diplomatic pouch mail:



- 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. You can pick any date that suits 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 sides	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 set-up 20 mins., later on 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 played on your parents once. 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. 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 and, 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 jar or box 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.

<b>Ate at your favorite hoagie place today: I wished u were there to eat the other half. 3/3</b>	<i>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</i>	<i>Sept 6 : HISTORY museum outing today. You look like a cave man.</i>
<i>5/2 Still no date for prom. What's wrong with me?</i>	<i>4/9 - How did you know what career to pick?</i>	<b>I ate cereal for dinner. With no milk ☺</b>

### Treasure Cache

You'll need a special place to put all the treasures that Dad/Mom will be sending you from post. It should have a lid and be about the size of a shoe box. 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.

#### Steps:

1. Find a clean container with a lid.
2. Get your paints together. (Acrylic paints dry fastest and clean up easily with water.)
3. Paint the background; let dry. Add designs in color(s) of your liking: simple shapes and 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: Stick on something sparkly using glue when the paint is dry.



### Binder Album

You can beef up this binder to contain treasures too. If possible, look in the scrap booking section of craft stores to see what interesting memorabilia holders can be added to binders, e.g., see-through envelopes of different sizes, mini voice recorders, or CD holders. Insert these extras and start adding Dad/Mom items!

#### Suggested additions:

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

## Dad/Mom T-Shirt

Time: 5 mins.

This is a wearable “container” where non-paper items Dad/Mom sent you are attached to a T-shirt – either one of yours or one of Dad/Mom’s donated for 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 works for only non-breakable, durable things like ribbons or 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 on.

You’ll need:

- Rust-proof safety pins
- See-through envelopes
- Optional: permanent marker

Steps:

1. Attach the item with a safety pin.
2. Optional: use the marker to write something about the item, e.g., name, when it was sent.
3. Dad/Mom and you sign and date the shirt at the end of the separation.



HINT: Don’t wash the T-shirt with the stuff attached!

## Dad/Mom Memory Quilt

Time: 1hr.+

Making a quilt with your family can be very satisfying as you see the quilt coming together over time. Each family member can contribute a “block” or unit of the quilt that will eventually be stitched together.



Ideas for blocks:

- Print a photo onto cloth: Dad/Mom, copy of their diplomatic passport or visa (see Resources)
  - Outline family members’ hands or feet with permanent marker
  - Sew on symbols of the separation, e.g., Dad/Mom’s agency crest, UT country outline, flags, pets, computer, and cultural symbols
- Cut out blocks of memorable pieces from favorite but too-old-to-wear T-shirts
  - Attach memorabilia to a plain block e.g., retractable ID tag/holder, key, luggage tag.

## 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. The settings, props, and plot can be as simple or elaborate as you like; you can even add your own sound track or music\*. 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
- You family and/or friends
- Creativity

Optional: If you're musically inclined, try your hand at making your own music!

Steps for each recording: (if you're filming, warn people first 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 14<sup>th</sup> 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.
  - "Here's Gran. Tell us, what are you doing right now?"
  - "What's going on in your life today?"
  - Have others answer for pets, babies, or inanimate objects.
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."



### \* Variation:

### Make a record!

Form a band with your friends or siblings; write and record your own compositions. Google "recording studios" to find a studio in your area. Save up for a recording session, or ask for it as a birthday (or other special event) present. Send the CD to Mom/Dad and all your adoring fans!

## 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 easily undone.

Take photos of:

- Dad/Mom’s favorite armchair in a new, unusual location and decorated 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, and add rubber ducky or shampoo bottle).
- Dig out an old childhood toy or blanket and photograph it doing something Dad/Mom would do: e.g., typing at the computer, stirring a pot on the stove, coaching Little League.
- Your baby sibling in Dad/Mom’s sports equipment.
- You or a sibling dressed in a completely unexpected, not-you style, e.g., dress punk or goth if you’re a conservative type; wear your clothes backwards.
- Switch clothes and hairstyles with your at-home parent or grandparent; don’t forget to accessorize!
- Your dog or cat sitting 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., all wear black beards and serious expressions.



## Mission Accomplished: Preparing for Reunion

### Task 8: Reality Check

FINALLY! There is light at the end of the separation tunnel and your family is looking forward to a happy reunion. You'll notice extra excitement in the air and busy-ness as the family gets ready; everyone wants things to be perfect. However, much as you wish it, the world is not perfect. It's especially important to have realistic expectations so you won't be terribly disappointed when Dad/Mom comes home.

### Some common expectations and pitfalls:

Expectation or Wish	Possible Pitfall	Reality
It's going to 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; frustration at others if they're not 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 tougher than us	Getting into "who had it worse" arguments or frame of mind	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 reunion, your family will need to establish a new routine (including having fun) in order to make things run smoothly.

## Other Common Teen Reactions to Homecoming:

Talk with a trusted person about your reactions: you're not "bad" just for having feelings.

- *"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.
- *"Who's in charge here anyway?"* As the family adjusts to Dad/Mom's renewed authority, there can be confusion over whom to go to for permission and decision making.
- *"But Dad said I could."* Some teens use parental confusion to their advantage: they ask the returned parent for permission to do something the at-home parent has already said 'no' to. They might get away with this, but sooner or later, they'll feel rotten inside for tricking their folks.
- *"Can you leave now so we can do this our way?"* Some kids get so frustrated with messy changes in authority structure and rules that they wish Dad/Mom would go away again. Such wishes are more about needing order and clear expectations than a true wish for separation.
- *"He/she doesn't know me anymore:"*  
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!"* Often teens feel they are too old to be told what to do; some become unwilling to change plans to accommodate their parents.
- *Hiding:* The need for privacy and individuality can lead to hiding things or information if a teen thinks the parents will disapprove of his/her tastes and friends.
- *Rebellious behaviors:* Outright disrespect and defiance. Some teens feel so criticized, controlled, disapproved of, and disrespected by their families that they act 'bad' towards their families just to assert their own identity and get their own space. Separation and reunion can stress teens who are prone to rebellion because of the extra demands placed on them.



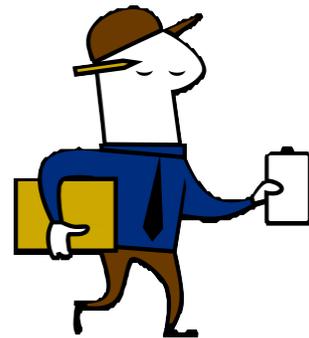
## Task 9: Prepare for Homecoming

Get your creative juices going! No need to spend a lot of money to show how excited you and your family 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 for 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 so it reflects your personal style.



#### 1-2 weeks before arrival:

- ./ Help clean the house; get rid of junk (throw or give away - don't just hide it)
  
- ./ Help get stuff for the family celebration, if needed
  
- ./ Help clean the car, pets, and other things outside the house
  
- ./ Get your hair cut, if needed.

#### 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 something special to put on your parents' pillows, e.g., a chocolate taped to a heart.

## 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 difficulties 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 OK
- ./ Send the thank you notes you wrote for Go-To Team and others who helped you

#### 2-4 weeks after reunion:

- ./ Have a Welcome Home party for larger family, Go-To Team members, and friends
- ./ Plan quiet one-on-one time 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
- ./ Un-bury 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 young too, so they might actually (*gasp*) have a clue. As you grow towards adulthood, it will become easier to see another's point of view without feeling as though your own is invalidated, but for now, communication is key in getting along with your family.



Communication includes *listening as well as talking*. Learning how to listen and talk clearly will help you get along with people and resolve problems.

A few communication clues:

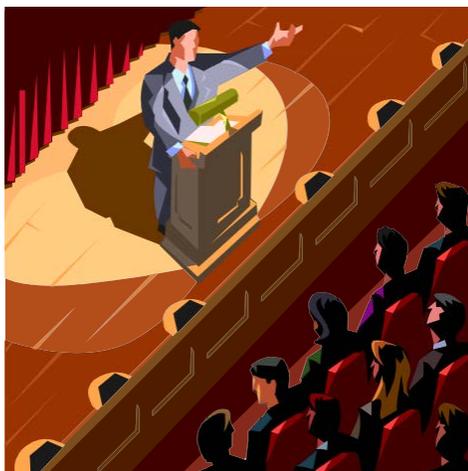
- People use more than words to communicate: a speaker's "body language" gives important clues as to the meaning of their words. "Listen" for unspoken cues like tone of voice, facial expressions, and body posture. Be mindful of what message you are sending through body language.
- When in doubt, ask for clarification. Let others ask questions of you too – if you don't know the answer it is better to say "I don't know" than to fudge.
- Emotions can really affect communication. People can get carried away by strong emotions and sometimes will say things they regret later. "Time-out's" (e.g., leave the room for five minutes, or count to twenty internally before blurting out), can help when you find your anger or frustration building, like an emotional 'reset' button allowing you to think through your feelings and the situation before you speak.

## Communication and Culture

As you enter young adulthood, watch for cultural influences on communication. Understanding them will help explain how communication patterns are formed, and how things can become misconstrued in relationships. It'll also give you a fuller picture of yourself, your parents and the world around you.

Some social norms you might notice:

- Both adults and kids change their speech depending on the age of the listener. Sometimes this means paring things down for listeners who do not have the ability to understand the full story. This can be confusing if one has been told to always tell the whole truth – it looks as though one is fibbing. However, as a young adult you'll be more able to appreciate that the necessity of adapting one's communication to the level of the listener is not the same as lying.
- Public and Private communication: People have ways of talking with others they know really well (like family) versus people they don't know as well (like a distant relative or acquaintance) that can appear "two-faced" to teens. A classic example that



leads many teens to think their parents are being two-faced is when a teen feels their parents "only criticize" their achievements in private, but then boast of these same achievements to others outside. In some cultures, the gap between what is talked about in public vice in private can be quite extreme. To a teen's eye, this kind of private versus public image discrepancy can look like hypocrisy and can be confusing for a teen trying to form an identity.

- Cultural and family norms govern attitudes, behaviors, and expectations including those related to male-female relationships, work ethic, older-to-younger etiquette, privacy, the extent of individual choice, and even the methods used to enforce these expectations in children. Take a few mental notes next time you see your parents express views on these areas and compare these to your own ideas on the same. It would be useful to talk generally with your parents about their expectations for you. For example, you may be surprised to learn of expectations regarding the type of person you're to date or marry or what kinds of things in your life they consider their "right to know" versus your expectation of privacy. If you can get beyond the notion of parental expectations being domineering, you may find they are actually useful in guiding your behavior and for telling you something about your cultural identity.

## Family Reunion Discussion:



Three to four weeks after return, it is useful for the whole family to review 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. 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:

These two things worked well for the family while Dad/Mom was gone; explain why:

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

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Dates and time for activities I do now:

Mondays: \_\_\_\_\_

Tuesdays: \_\_\_\_\_

Wednesdays: \_\_\_\_\_

Thursdays: \_\_\_\_\_

Fridays: \_\_\_\_\_

Saturdays: \_\_\_\_\_

Sundays: \_\_\_\_\_

These are the chores I do now:

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Discuss the following:

- ./ Whom do I go to for permission, money, rules, and requests?
- ./ Access and control of common use items, e.g., TV, bathroom, computer, cell phone, and car
- ./ Current methods of discipline, limits, and consequences
- ./ Expectations around having friends over: What things are acceptable and what are not?
- ./ Expectations around going out:
  - o What should happen if you go out? Curfew?
  - o What should happen if your parents go out?
  - o I am/am not willing to baby sit a younger sibling: for money or no money?
- ./ Hopes for future:
  - o What is Dad/ Mom's current posting: how long?
  - o What are the R&R or vacation plans?
- Mention any important dates or events to note: e.g. graduation, prom, exams.

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Other points I want to bring up:

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Revisit the family budget, including your summer job income, college costs, financial aid, car insurance and transportation money, and allowance.

- If you are going to live away from home, discuss expectations for help with moving, things you need to take, visiting, and circumstances under which you can return home.

# TOOLS

## People and 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, Rm. 1239,  
Washington, DC 20520  
Telephone (202) 647-1076, 1-800-440-0397; fax (202) 647-1670  
internet: [www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c14521.htm](http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c14521.htm)  
intranet: <http://hrweb.hr.state.gov/flo/index.cfm>  
e-mail: [FLOAskUT@state.gov](mailto: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, Rm. E2105  
4400 Arlington Blvd, Arlington VA. 22204-1500  
Telephone: (703) 302-7267; fax (703) 302-7452  
e-mail: [FSIOBCInfoCenter@state.gov](mailto: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) schools, housing, child care, jobs, and pet services. They offer courses for family members on various aspects of Foreign Service life, including maintaining long-distance relationships and security awareness training for youth.

### **Foreign Service Youth Foundation: (FSYF)**

P.O. Box 39185, Washington, D.C. 20016  
Telephone: (301) 404-6655  
Email: [fsyf@fsyf.org](mailto:fsyf@fsyf.org)  
Website: <http://www.fsyf.org>

FSYF has programs and books for internationally mobile youth in all U.S. Foreign Service agencies.

