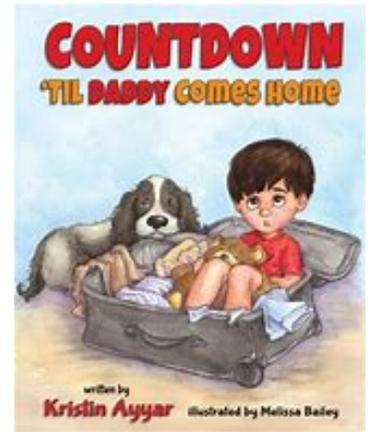


Countdown 'til Daddy Comes Home

By Kristen Ayyar

This story is about a little boy whose dad leaves home to serve in the military. The family makes a countdown calendar, sends packages, and creates a welcome home banner to help them stay connected to the dad while he is away. Finally, when the dad returns home, the little boy gets to wrestle, play catch, and share all the things he's been waiting to tell his dad.



Discussion and Questions:

- Ask the child if they have ever waited a long time when a family member was away without them.
 - How did you feel while they were away?
 - What did you do to remember them?
 - What did you miss most about them?
 - How did you feel when they came back?
- Help the child answer these questions by providing a feelings face chart, if needed.

Activities:

- **Kisses for Mommy/Daddy/Caregiver**
 - Before the service member deploys, have them present the child with a jar. The deploying caregiver should explain that together they can decorate the jar and they will fill it with their kisses before they leave. If multiple children are in the family, multiple jars can be created.
 - Using art supplies, the family should decorate the jar together. Then, with the child watching, the service member should fill the jar with chocolate chips or Hershey's Kisses while also blowing air kisses into the jar.
 - Any small snack that the child enjoys and can be eaten at least once a day (e.g., goldfish, fruit snacks, puffs, etc.) can be used. Explain to the child that when they miss their deployed caregiver, they can ask to have a "kiss" from them and choose one piece from the jar.
 - The family can choose a time each day that the child gets a "kiss" from the deployed caregiver, such as before naptime or after dinner.
 - Ensure the jar is big enough to hold enough items for the length of the deployment or encourage the home-based caregiver to discreetly fill the jar as needed.
 - The family can also make an identical snack jar for the service member who is deploying.
- **Post Card Memories**
 - Ask the child to find the page in the book with the post cards. Provide examples of real post cards and discuss reasons people might send post cards when they are visiting new places.
 - Brainstorm and list places in the community or special events where they could go to take pictures and create their own postcards to mail to their deployed caregiver. Work with the family to make postcards about some of the items on the child's list (i.e., picture of the beach).
 - Have the pictures printed and, using a ruler, draw straight lines on the back to look like a post card.
 - Invite the child to write or dictate what they want to tell their caregiver about the picture. Young children could use ink pads to decorate the back of the photo with fingerprints and stamps.
 - The finished postcards can be mailed in a regular envelope. Alternatively, the finished postcard can be addressed and then laminated. Once laminated a stamp can be added and the postcard mailed without an envelope.

- If the deployed family member cannot receive mail, the post cards can be kept in a scrapbook, photo album, or treasure box and shared with them when they return.
- **Treasure Box**
 - Ask the child to find the page in the book with the treasure box. Provide assistance, if needed.
 - Ask the child to identify the items in the boy's box and talk about why they may be in there. A child who is nonverbal or needs language support can be asked to point to items as they are named.
 - Children may have special items they want to show their deployed caregiver upon their return. By creating a box for these items, the child will have a special place to store them.
 - Provide the child with a shoe box or plastic container with a lid and encourage them to decorate it using a variety of arts and crafts supplies, drawings, and pictures.
 - Help the child brainstorm a list of objects they might want to put in the box. For example, lost teeth, souvenirs from special events, seashells, rocks, cards, etc.
 - When the deployed service member returns, the child and caregiver can spend time looking through the box together, and talking about each item in it.
- **Welcome Home Banner**
 - When a deployed caregiver is due to return, gather the family or group to discuss the word deployment and to make a banner to welcome them home.
 - Gather materials such as poster board, banner paper, paint, markers, crayons, stencils, etc.
 - If children are not able to write "Welcome Home" on the large paper, adults can write this in pencil and children can trace the letters with paint or markers.
 - Children should be encouraged to draw pictures and decorate the banner however they wish (i.e., trace their handprint). Young children can use stamp pads, or paint on their hands or feet to decorate the poster.
 - The banner can be hung up to welcome the service member home when they return. For groups in which more than one caregiver is returning, consider making multiple signs so each family member can be represented.