

Daddy's Home

by Heather Hummert, wife of an Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran and Purple Heart recipient

Daddy's home. Daddy's gone. Daddy's home. Daddy's gone. Daddy's home. Daddy's gone.

This is the life your child has known up until now. There have been piles of upheaval and adjustments they make with a relative ease even you can't fathom. Despite the "here today, gone tomorrow" father of military homes, our children build connections with him and love him and crave for him to be near.

Then he comes home and everything seems beautiful. But Daddy is different. He doesn't want to play trains and tea party anymore. He doesn't take them to the park or tickle them to make them laugh. And while this is breaking your heart, it's bewildering to your children.

And they think:

What did I do? Daddy doesn't love me anymore. I'm not "good enough" for Daddy. I'm scared of Daddy. Things will NEVER be good again. Sound familiar? Like the soundtrack running in your own brain? Guess what, they need reassurance too.

Will Daddy be okay again? They worry about things getting "normal" again just like you. They need reassurance that if Daddy gets the help he needs, he will be okay.

It's all YOUR fault. Daddy's angry. I didn't do anything wrong. It's MOM's fault. It's not your fault. You didn't do it. PTSD did it.

It's all MY fault. Daddy is always angry at me and I don't know what I did wrong, but him being angry MUST be my fault. It's not their fault. It's PTSD.

But how do you describe this to your teenager?

Your children definitely know what is going on and they might be angry at how your spouse treats you. Let them know how you feel gently. Explain that yes, it makes you angry too but you know Daddy can get better when he gets help. Encourage them to participate in activities that are important to them. Do not take these away as a punishment. This is the age when they really need to be learning self-discipline. Many children, when given the choice, will punish themselves harsher than you would have and the punishment will seem fairer to everyone.

Encourage children who want to do something about this to get active in politics. There may be a debate team at school or a local political campaign they want to participate in. Encourage them to be solid thinkers and to explain to the world clearly and concisely what the needs of the veteran community are. They might even do a paper in school on the subject.