Love Spots
By Karen Panier

Love Spots recognizes a military family’s reliance on memories during deployment. In this story, the dad offers a novel reason for the spots on his camouflage uniform. He tells his children that each spot is a placeholder for the memories they share.

Discussion and Questions:
- You can begin the story with simply asking the child if they have ever noticed how many spots a uniform has.
- Ask your child what things they remember doing with the caregiver that makes them happy.
- Are there times that they were scared, and they had their caregiver there to make them feel better?
- Ask your child if there are things that they would like to keep close or even send to the caregiver while they are away to keep the memory close.
- Think about ways to keep any memories that have physical items, such as pictures or objects, in a box for the child to have close to them while the caregiver is away.
- Are there any physical items that could be sent with the caregiver before they leave, keeping the memory close to both the child and caregiver?
- If the service member is currently deployed, you and your child can begin to discuss activities and new memories that they want to make when the caregiver returns. In this way they can continue adding more and more spots and memories together.

Activities:
Ages Birth to 5:
- **Love Spots Pillow**
  - Materials:
    - Solid color pillow case or pillow
    - Various colors of fabric paint
    - Paint brush or sponge
  - Directions
    - Remember fabric paints may stain; remind children of this fact.
    - Allow child to select 2-4 paint colors.
    - Using a paint brush or sponge, encourage the child to randomly place spots on the pillow/pillow case, alternating between colors.
    - During the process of adding spots prompt the child to talk about how the spots remind them of their family member, and what memories they represent.
    - Let the paint to dry for at least 24 hours. When it is dry, turn the fabric inside out and use a dry iron on the back of the painted design to set the paint to the fibers of the fabric. Wait 72 hours before washing and drying the painted fabric.
    - Examples of pillows made by children can be found at [https://www.mericherry.com/2015/06/16/sew-sew-kid-made-pillows/](https://www.mericherry.com/2015/06/16/sew-sew-kid-made-pillows/)
- **Love Spots Book**
  - Before the caregiver is deployed, encourage the family to create a book together of love spots by taking pictures of the child and the service member of things or in spots that have significant meaning to them and/or express their love and special connection. For example, pictures of the child and caregiver smiling, playing on the swing, going on a walk, or dancing.
• Make two copies of each picture to create two books.
• The caregiver and the child can work together to glue the pictures to cardstock or construction paper and staple it together. Simple photo or scrap books can also be purchased at craft stores and used for this project.
• Remind the child that their caregiver will have the same book with them by while they are away.
• The book should be given to the child to look through when they desire. Caregivers of very young children, should be encouraged to share the picture book with the child often to help them remember their deployed caregiver.

**Ages 3 to 5:**

**Paper Tube Dolls**

**Materials:**
- Paper
- Scissors
- Paint
- Markers/colored pencils
- Craft glue
- Magazines
- Fabric scraps
- Corrugated cardboard
- Paper tubes of differing sizes (paper towel, toilet paper, or wrapping paper tubes)

**Procedure:**
- Children should select 2-3 tubes. Adults can cut the tubes into smaller pieces, if desired.
- Ask the child to name an emotion they might be feeling now or might feel related to the absence of their family member. Also ask the child how they might feel when their family member returns. Together create a list of different emotions; if necessary, use a feelings face chart if necessary such as the one found at [http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/modules/2006/feelingchart.pdf](http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/modules/2006/feelingchart.pdf)
- After identifying several emotions, assist the child in drawing facial expressions on the tubes, in the location where a face would be on a doll.
- Once the facial expressions are complete, encourage the child to use various materials (i.e., fabric, stickers, magazine photos) to dress or decorate the paper tube doll. These dolls can be used for pretend play and to assist the child in labeling their feelings throughout their deployment cycle.
- Ideas to take this activity further, plus pictures of paper tube dolls, can be found at [http://alittlelearningfortwo.blogspot.com/2011/03/changing-faces-toilet-roll-dolls.html](http://alittlelearningfortwo.blogspot.com/2011/03/changing-faces-toilet-roll-dolls.html)

**Hide and Seek Love Spot Puzzle**

**Materials:**
- White paper
- Paints, crayons, colored pencils, or markers
- Sponges or brushes if using paint
- Premade blank puzzle (from a craft store; A sheet of cardboard or card stock can also be used)
- Glue
- Scissors

**Procedure:**
- Encourage the child to create a camouflage design on the white paper. Children can also create a polka dot form of camouflage if they prefer.
• Glue the created camouflage to the premade puzzle, cardstock paper, or cardboard.
• If using cardboard or card stock, assist the child in creating puzzle lines on the backside that will be cut later to create individual puzzle pieces. The sizes of the pieces should vary depending on the child’s age and skills in completing puzzles. For example, they should be somewhat larger for small children.
• For each piece, ask the child to name something they love or miss about their family member. The child could also list items that remind them of their family member. Write each response on one of the pieces.
• Cut along the lines of the puzzle pieces so that the image glued to the front is cut as well. The child can complete the puzzle as is for one type of activity.
• Additionally, an adult can hide the puzzle pieces throughout the house and ask the child to find them. When a piece is found, the adult should help the child read the words or memory on the back, and talk about the memory described there. Children also can also be encouraged to think about a memory related to where they found the specific puzzle piece if appropriate (i.e., a piece found in a child’s bedroom might remind them of the songs or stories the deployed family member used to share with them).
• When all the spots are found help the child assemble the puzzle.