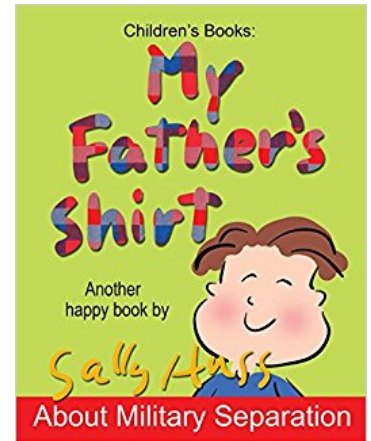


My Father's Shirt

By Sally Huss

This book tells the story of a boy admiring his dad's favorite shirt and all the things they do together while he wears it. The father is home on military leave and is going to be returning to his current military duty location. During their separation, the child is sad and lonely. When the father returns, they spend several days enjoying activities together. When it is time for him to deploy again, the dad in the story gives his son his favorite shirt. The boy expresses that even though he misses his dad, the shirt made him feel strong.



Discussion and Questions:

- Ask the children if they can describe what it means to be lonely. If they struggle, suggest that lonely is what someone feels when they miss someone close to them.
- Discuss the kinds of things that may have caused them to feel lonely before. If they are not able to answer, give suggestions such as: "Maybe you felt lonely when mommy or daddy dropped you off at day care for the first time." Remind children that feeling lonely happens to everyone, and it's okay.
- Ask the children what might make them feel better when they are lonely. If they are not able to answer, give suggestions such as: "When I'm lonely, I like to listen to music."
- Talk about the feelings of the characters.
 - How do you think he feels in this picture? Give the child choices if they have trouble answering. Example: "Are they tired or are they sad?"
 - Use a feelings face chart for children who need more help and let them point to the faces to answer.
- Does your caregiver have a favorite shirt? If so, what does it look like? (pg. 1)
- How do you feel when your caregiver leaves? Allow the child to point to a feeling using a feelings face chart if needed. (pg. 6)
- What are your favorite things to do with your caregiver while they are home?
- For young children: Where questions help children stay engaged during reading by giving them an active role of pointing and what questions help the child gain vocabulary and cognitive skills while reading.
 - Where is the shirt? Help the child point if needed and praise them for answering.
 - What are they doing in this picture? If the child cannot answer independently, answer for them. Point to the picture to show the child what you are referring to.

Activities

Ages Birth to 5:

- **Make Your Own Shirt**
 - Print off a coloring page of a shirt and write the words "My Father's/Mother's Shirt" at the top. Encourage the child to think about their military caregiver's favorite shirt or a shirt they have seen them wearing recently. It may be helpful to provide a picture of the caregiver wearing a specific shirt. Provide materials for the child (depending on their age and ability) to decorate the picture—sequins, markers, crayons, dot paint markers, stickers, etc. The final product could be framed for the caregiver or sent in a letter.
 - For very young children, allow them to use paint to decorate the coloring page. This can be done in a highchair to contain the paint to one area. An adult can put paint directly onto the child's fingers

and guide their fingers across the page as needed. Be sure to monitor the child closely to make sure they do not eat the paint.

- **Comfort Area**

- When children feel lonely and sad, it is important to support them with those feelings. One way to support a child's feelings of loneliness or sadness is to provide a comfort area.
- In individual settings, explain to the child that a special place will be created just for them. The space can be in their bedroom, the corner of the living room, a basement, a playhouse outside, or anywhere else appropriate for the child and family. Help the child gather pillows, blankets, stuffed animals, curtains, sheets, and any other soft materials that are not in use. The area could also have special items related to the deployed caregiver such as pictures or their favorite shirt.
- In a group setting, explain to all the children that they will help to create a cozy area for everyone to share. Allow them to bring a pillow or stuffed animal to group with them to leave in their cubby. Explain the limits and expectations of the cozy area. When a child goes to the cozy area they can take their pillow/stuffed animal with them. Hang pictures or provide a photo album of all the children's families in this space.
- Be sure the cozy area is used only as a comfort place. Items such as toy cars, dolls, and books may be used in the cozy area if that comforts the child. Teachers/caregivers may suggest going to the cozy area when they notice a child is experiencing intense emotions. However, children should not be sent to this area as a consequence of challenging behavior.
- For more ideas on how to create a cozy area visit: <https://bit.ly/2YRWyi4>



<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/164874036336513187/>

Ages 3 to 5:

- **Deployment Map Activity**

- Print off a map of the world, like the one shown below. Label the place where the family lives and the general area where the caregiver will be deployed, understanding that the family may not know the exact location. If the caregiver has no idea, ask them if they are able to guess or speculate. Having the right location is not the point of the activity. Communicating distance virtually is the goal.
- Draw a line connecting the two locations. Allow the child to help with the labeling and line drawing according to their ability. Explain to the child their location compared to where the caregiver is. Point to the places on the map. Help the child point too, if they have trouble. Ask children to identify where they are and where the caregiver is to help them visualize the different locations.
- If the service member is still home, they can be asked to help create the map. The caregiver may need to be reminded that having the specific location of their assignment is not necessary, as noted above. Allow the child to provide input on where the map should hang in the house. Once the map is hung, let the child know they can come and look at it when they are feeling lonely or sad.
- This activity can be adapted for a group setting by explaining to all the children that the child's caregiver is in a different location. The map could be hung in the group to serve as a comfort to the



<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/180214422567875881/>

military child when they are feeling sad. Additionally, more children and their caregivers could be included on the map if there are multiple military children in the class.

- Over time, the map could be accompanied by other items. For example, children could color flags to represent the U.S. and the country where the caregiver is deployed. A clock with each time zone could also be added.
- **Certificate of Merit**
 - Create a Certificate of Merit after reading the book. Explain to the child that this certificate is for being proud of oneself, helping family members, and becoming stronger with each challenge. Talk about what each of these things mean and provide examples to the child. Create a checklist with each of these characteristics like the one shown below. Put stars, stickers, or happy faces in the second column each time the child demonstrates the trait. When the child has a symbol next to all three, frame the certificate and give it to them.

_____’s Merit Checklist	
Being proud of yourself	😊
Helping my family members	😊
Becoming stronger	😊