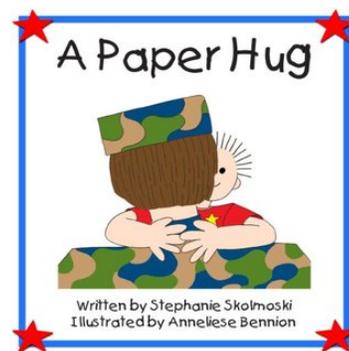


A Paper Hug

By: Stephanie Skolmoski

In this story, a boy's father in the military is preparing to be deployed. The boy and his mom pack a special box for his dad before he leaves. The boy decides to make a hug with paper hands and a string as long as his arms. This way his dad can carry it with him wherever he goes. The father is grateful to have the paper hug while he is away.



Discussion and Questions:

- Explain what a deployment is if children are unfamiliar with the term. Help children identify times in their lives when a family member has had to be away from them. Discuss how this made them feel and provide a feelings chart if necessary.
- Find books or images from the internet of service members performing their jobs.
- What would you put in a surprise package for your family member?
- What would you want to receive in a surprise package from someone else?
- How does it feel when you get a hug from someone you love?

Activities:

- **All About Me**
 - In the story, the child found pictures to help his caregiver remember the family while they are away. When reading these pages, begin to talk with the child about memories they have of their family and service member.
 - Discuss how memories can bring up many emotions and feelings. This could include laughter, feelings of love, smiles, or even tears. Encourage the child to think of different memories they have about their family.
 - For the classroom, ask caregivers to send in pictures of the family to create 'All about me' posters that will be posted in the classroom. To be sensitive of children who may be adopted or in foster care, request pictures that are both older and more recent.
 - For home settings, families can find pictures that represent the memories they discussed. The poster can then be hung in the home to help everyone remember the memories while the service member is away. An identical poster can be sent to the service member so they can think about the memories while they are away.
- **Care Packages**
 - While looking at the pages in the book related to the care package the child assembled, ask children what this box of items might be and if they ever received a care package. If the children don't know what a care package is, offer a definition.
 - Have children make a list of people they know, and they would want to make a care package for and what they want to put in it. If the child is nonverbal, show them pictures of family members, friends, or teachers to help them choose.
 - If the child does not know a service member, ask them to think about someone they know who lives far away from home and might enjoy a care package. The goal is for the child to identify people they know who may be lonely and/or away from home. Do not force the child to respond.
 - Have the child identify one person from their list to receive the first care package. This activity can be repeated over time so the child can send a care package to several people from their list over time.

- Help the child brainstorm items they want to include in the care package (e.g., Chapstick, books and magazines, notebooks, pens, photographs, hygiene products, hard candy, trail mix, etc.). Help them find those items in their home or make a list for the store. Encourage the child to create artwork, write letters, or take photos to send in the care package too.
- Package all the items in a shoe box to send to the person they chose.
- **Hugging Game**
 - Sometimes people feel the need for a hug, especially from the people they love. Other people only feel the need for a high five, fist bump, or a smile. In this game, allow a family to decide the level of touch they will use (e.g., hug, fist bump, high five, hand squeeze). Do not force anyone to touch if they do not want to; instead they could give each other a smile. This game can also be played in a group setting using high fives, fist bumps, or foot taps.
 - Arrange the family or group so that one person is on one side of a large room and the rest of the family or group is on the other with cleared space for people to run back and forth to one another.
 - The one person on the far side of the room is the “hugger” (high fiver, fist bumper, etc.). Their job is to pick a family/group member, run to them, and give them a great big hug/high five/first bump depending on what level of touch was decided upon previously.
 - Encourage the “hugger” to try to make their family/group laugh while they run over by waving their arms, dancing, walking in a goofy way, or making silly faces to show how excited they are that their family/group member is on their way over.
 - Very young children and those who may not be able to walk, may need help taking a turn. Children can also be pushed in a stroller or wheelchair.
 - When the two people meet, encourage them to share one thing they appreciate about each other. Then switch roles and repeat until all members have had an opportunity to be the “hugger.”
- **Paper Hugs**
 - Using paper, scissors, tape, pencils/pens/crayons/markers, and yarn/string/curling ribbon families can create paper hugs to share with one another before the service member leaves.
 - Assist each child in tracing their hands onto a piece of paper. Children can then decorate their handprints however they like and can dictate a message to be written on them by another adult. For very young children whose hands may be difficult to trace, consider using a stamp pad and then stamping the child’s hand onto paper.
 - When the child is finished decorating and sharing a message for their family member, cut out the hands. Older children should be encouraged to cut their handprints out independently. Very young children’s hands may be difficult to cut due to their size. The paper can be cut to a smaller size and shape surrounding the hand instead of cutting along the outline.
 - Next measure the length of the child’s wingspan using yarn, string, or curling ribbon and cut the length of yarn/string/curling ribbon. Tape each end of the yarn/string/curling ribbon to the palms of the decorated hands.
 - In a home setting, other family members should repeat the process to make their own paper hug.
 - When the paper hugs are finished, families can practice using the paper hugs together.
 - Remind the child that the paper hugs can be used while they are apart from one another to help them feel closer.