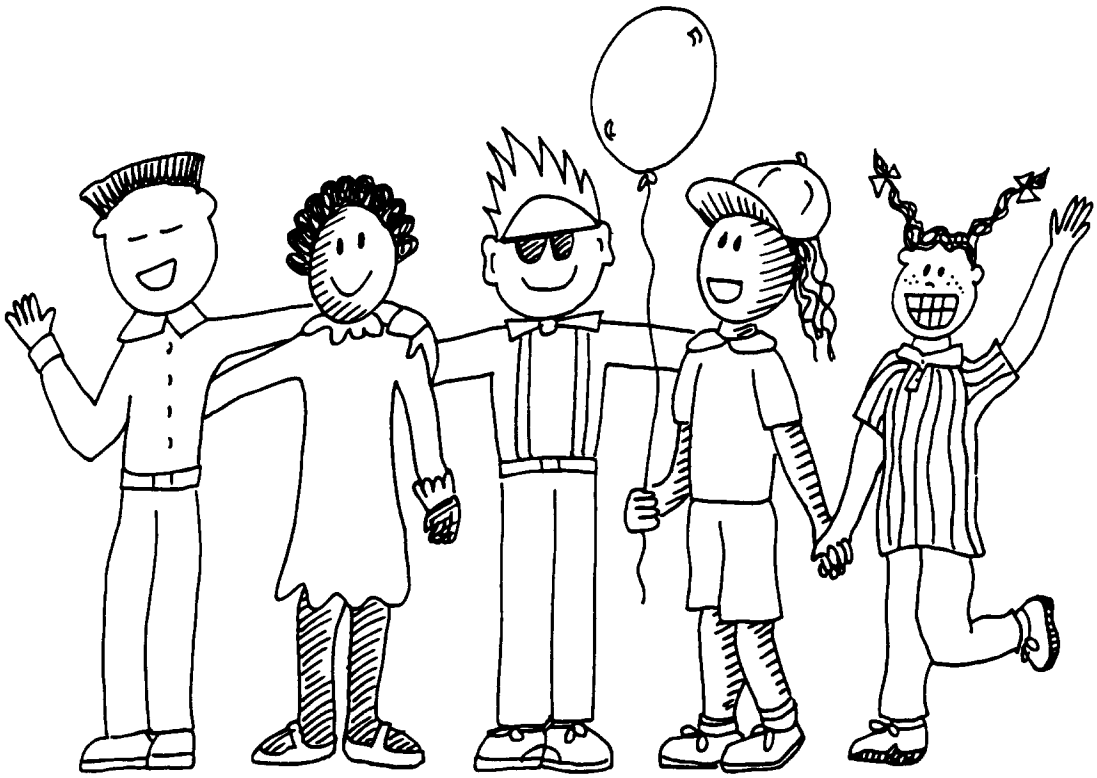
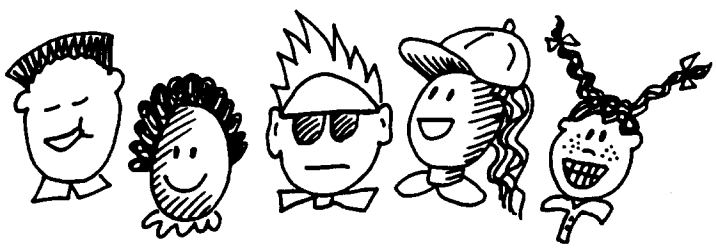


"I CAN DO THAT!"

A Booklet about Military Separation for Young People Ages Nine Thru Twelve

"I Can Do That"

A Booklet for Young People Ages Nine Through Twelve Whose Families Are In the Military



By: Jo Knox, Ph.D., and Dorothea Cudaback, Ph.D.
University of California Cooperative Extension

Artist: Lisa Krieshok

I CAN DO THAT is one of a series of four booklets about military separations for children and young people. These booklets were written as part of **Operation R.E.A.D.Y.** under an agreement between the Extension Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the United States Army Community and Family Support Center, Department of the Army.

All four booklets were developed with the help of active Army, Army National Guard, and Army Reserve families and Family Support personnel. We sincerely thank all those who helped us produce these publications.

January 1993

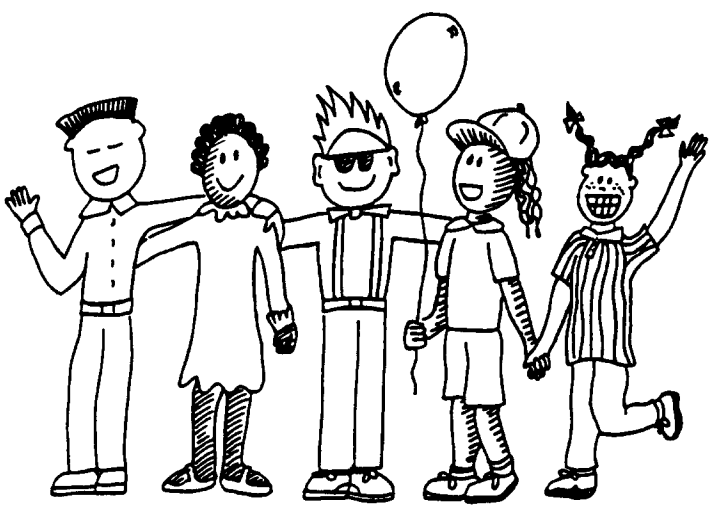
About This Booklet:

This ideas and activities booklet is written for young people with parents in the active Army, Army Reserves, or Army National Guard. Having the military as part of your life can be exciting, but it can also be tough when you have to be separated from your parents because of their military duties.

This booklet gives you some information about ways military separations can affect kids your age. It also includes some suggestions for handling a separation from one or both of your parents, staying close to your parents while they are gone, coping during the separation, and preparing for homecoming. Feel free to pick and choose the ideas or activities that are helpful to you.

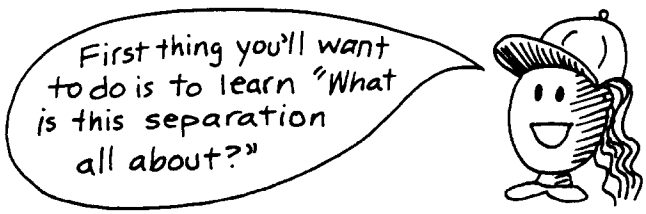
Coping with separation is a challenge. Some of the suggestions in this book come from kids, like yourself, who have been through military separations. They say:

"I CAN DO THAT!"



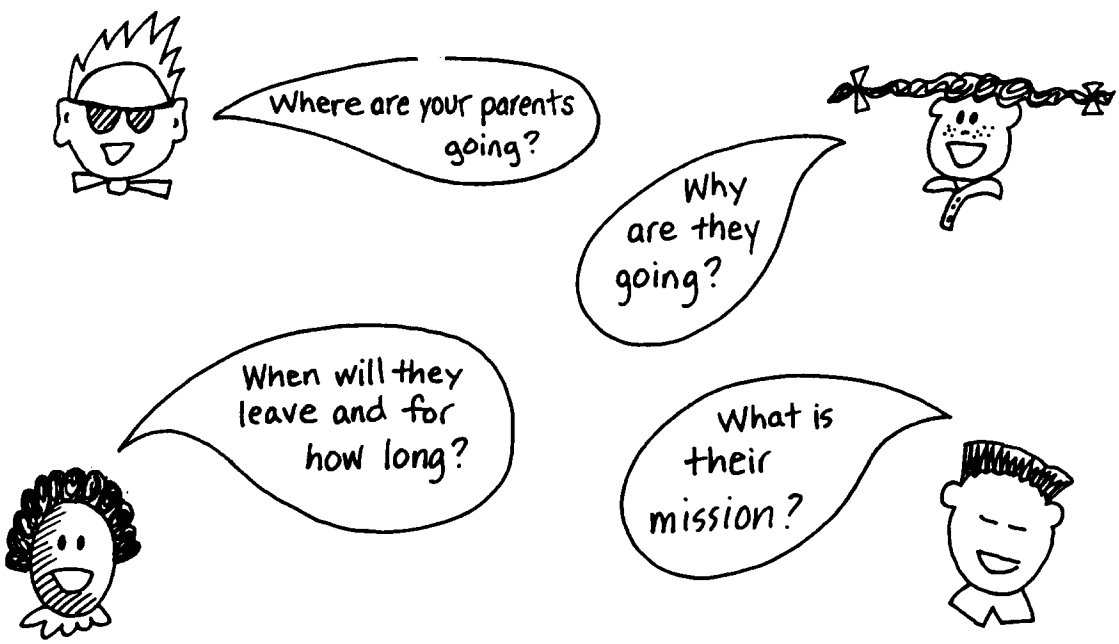
Get The Picture

Separations happen when one or both of your parents have military duties and have to leave their families to attend special training or to serve with their unit during a military crisis. Usually it's one parent who leaves. Sometimes you know several weeks in advance when your parent is leaving: sometimes you find out just before he or she leaves.



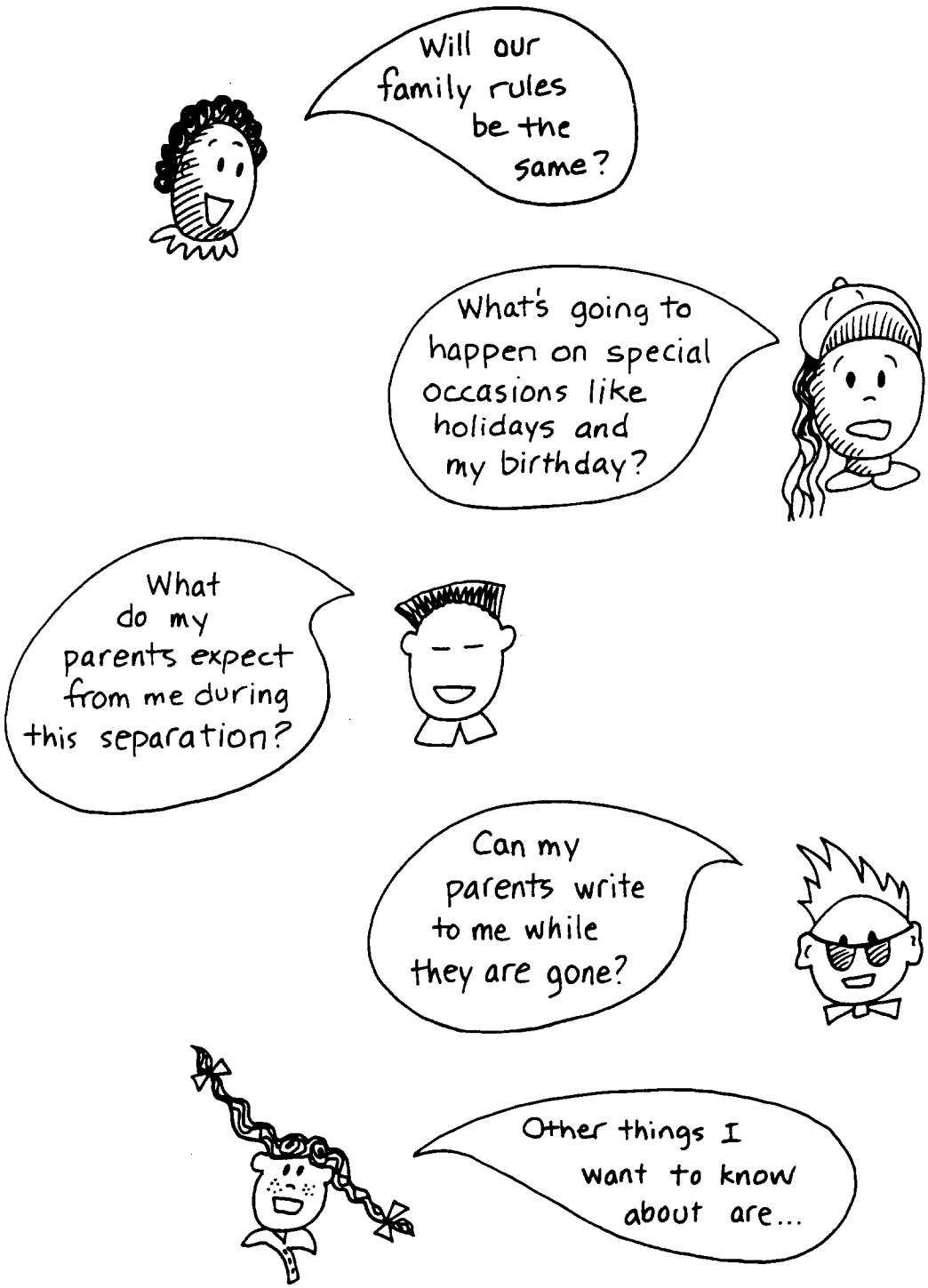
Ask your parents or an older brother or sister, "What's happening?" Sometimes parents on military duty can't tell you much about where they are going or why. If they can't answer all questions, be understanding and label them **TOP SECRET**.

Your mission is to get all the W's you can!: What, When, Where, and Why?



What About Me?

Another thing to find out is, "How will this separation affect me?" That means asking some more questions. See if you can get the answers to some of the questions on this page and any other questions you may have.



Getting Ready For the Departure

More Questions to Answer

Here are some more questions to help you plan when one or both of your parents are going away.

A Gift to Go with Your Parents

Some kids give their parents a special package to put in the suitcase or duffel bag to open after they have gone. Here are some things you might put into such a package:

pictures of you and your parents
gum (nobody ever has enough gum)
shoe polish (the kind in the can)
a handkerchief or two
writing pens and paper
needle and thread
string or fishing line
some clothes pins and safety pins
a yo yo
stamps
their favorite candy
a few favorite jokes, stories, and poems
something small and special of yours to remember you by

Goodbyes Are Hard!

Goodbyes are hard! They can be the worst thing about having parents in the military. One thing is for sure--saying goodbye is going to hurt. So, when you say "Goodbye," remember:

Families say "Goodbye" together in their own unique way.

Helping your parents say "Goodbye" is a special thing to do.

Feelings About Your Parents Being Away

Part of handling a separation when your Mom or Dad has military duties is knowing what your feelings are. It is important to be able to say how you feel. Keeping feelings bottled up makes you feel awful. Knowing your feelings and understanding how they affect you, will help you to learn how to handle them better.

Here are examples of some of the feelings that kids have when one or both of their parents leave.

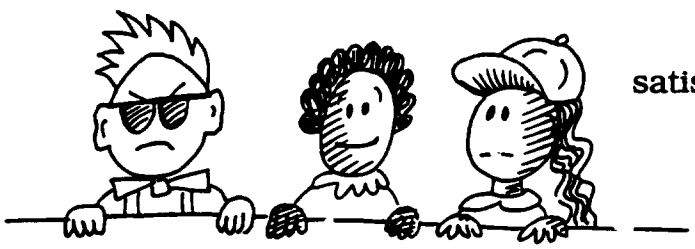
angry O.K.

confused proud

worried pleased

sad satisfied

tense excited



Sometimes you feel one way. At other times, you may have more than one feeling at the same time. You might even have opposite feelings like feeling both confused and pleased.

What are some of the feelings you have about being separated from your parents?

_____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____

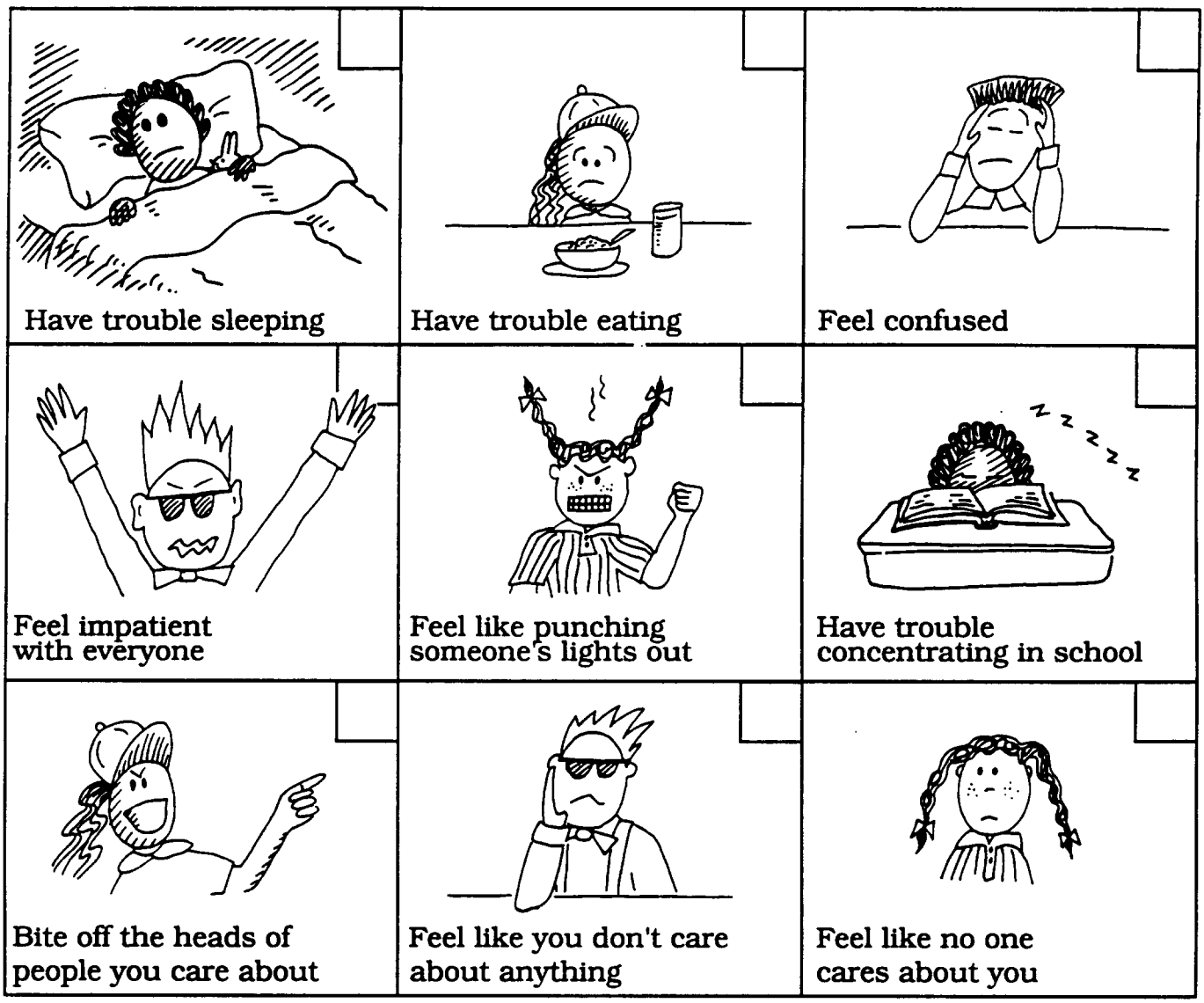
Good feelings are not a problem. It is negative feelings, especially feelings you don't talk about, that make problems for you. Sometimes when you have negative or mixed-up feelings, you might do dumb things. For example, you might say or do something which hurts someone else. Learning how to manage such feelings is all part of growing up.

Knowing when to say "Help!"

Kids who have been through separations say that you need to know when you are getting stressed out and what to do about it. Keeping an eye on your stress level means knowing when "too much" is going on.

These are some of the ways you can feel stress.

Check it off, do you ever....?



These feeling and behaviors are normal during stressful times. On the next page are some things you can do to feel better when you are stressed out.

Feelings

Here are some things you can do to handle stressed-out feelings during separations.

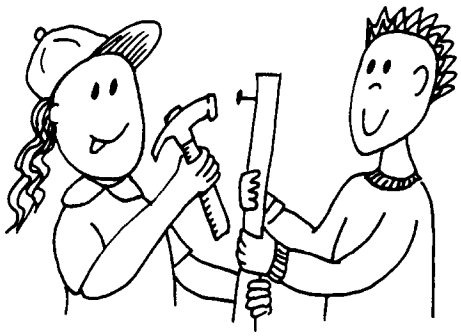
Share Your Feelings With Someone You Trust

Think about it! Separations are hard.
Talking with someone you trust:

Special people I can talk to are: _____ _____ _____

Other Ways to Chill Out

Another way to handle a separation is to keep busy and to do fun things. It's not hard to find fun things to do when you feel good. But, when you feel down, you have to work at feeling better. Here are some things you might do when you feel down.



Get Connected

- join a club
- be a volunteer
- fix, grow, or build something with a friend
- listen to music with a friend
- get a rap group going with other kids like yourself
- hug somebody you like...real hard
- invite your best friend to do something fun
- help Mom and Dad around the house

Get Your Body Going

- jog a little
- take a hike
- join a karate class
- go swimming
- play video games
- go skateboarding
- try bowling
- ride your bike
- play tennis

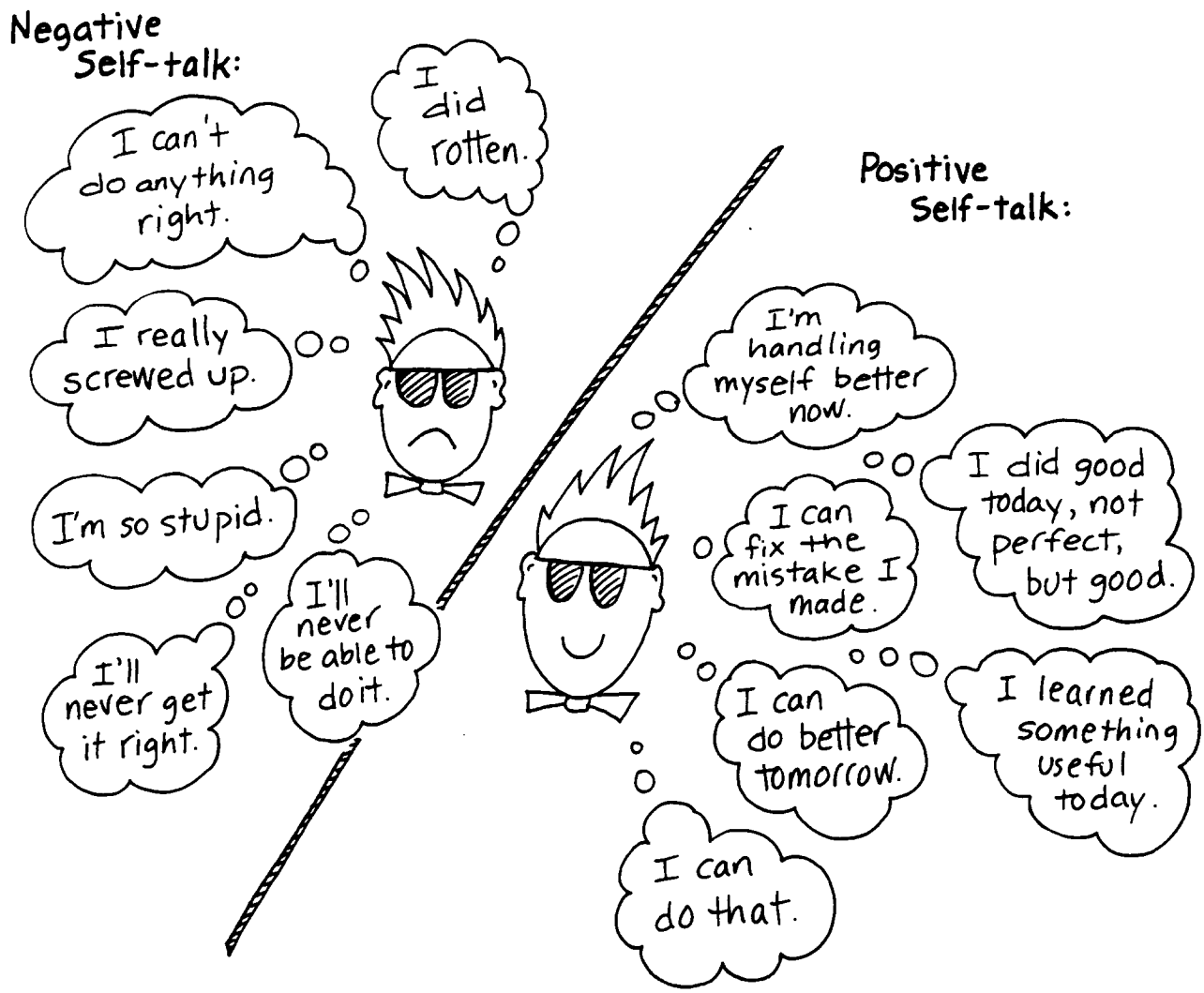
Get Your Mind Going

- watch an upbeat video
- get a joke book and tell your friend some jokes
- think about a favorite time you had with your parents and write them about it
- daydream
- lie down under a tree and watch clouds go by
- draw or paint a picture
- go to a movie

Be good to yourself. Remember to do something you enjoy. Find a way to chill out and **JUST DO IT!**

When Things Are Tough
Talk Positive and Think Positive

When the thoughts in your head all say crummy things, this is called negative self-talk. Negative self talk is a downer. It is important to describe your difficulties with positive statements and celebrate all your improvements:

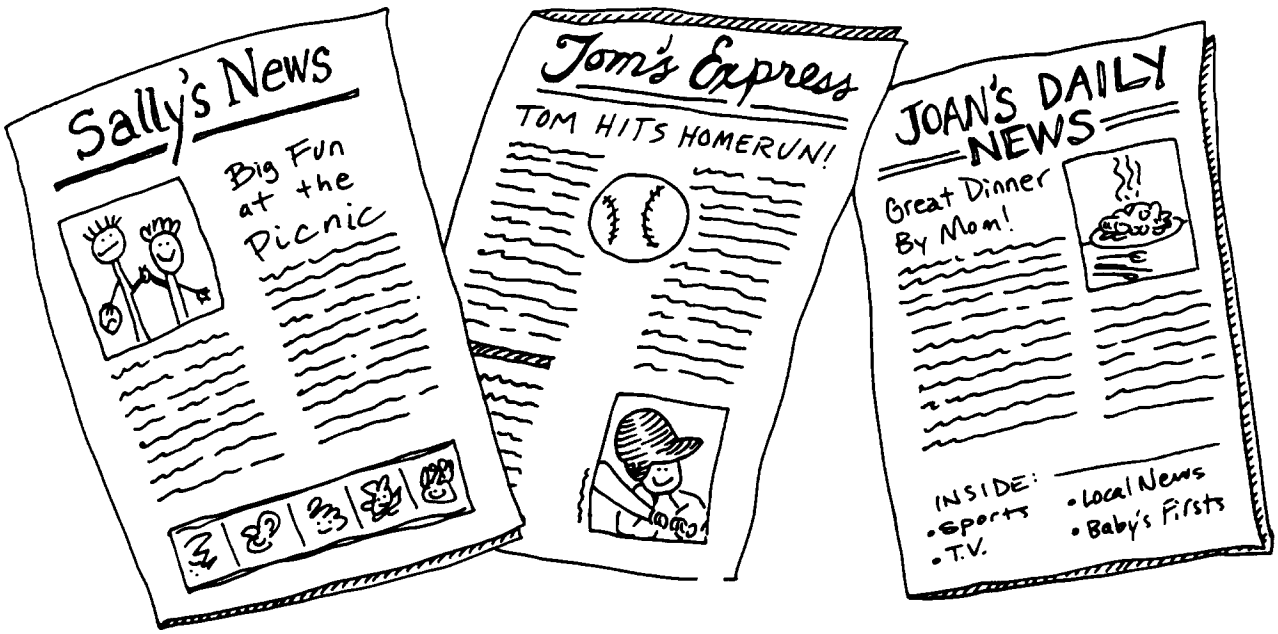


Be Positive About Yourself!

You have all it takes to handle being separated from your parent and to handle a lot of other daily challenges. Don't forget to feel good about your successes every day.

Staying Close To Your Parents Who are Away

One of the good things about separations is the stuff you can send parents, and the things they can send you. One thing is for sure, they are probably pretty lonely without you and the rest of the family. Here are some things you and your parents can do to stay in touch. You may also have some ideas of your own. Be creative.



Family Newspaper

Parents who are away like ordinary kinds of news, the everyday stuff. You can help your parents out by being the family reporter. One way to do this is to create a family newspaper, another is to tape record daily happenings and mail the cassette to your parents. You might want to do both.

You can make up a newspaper or tape interviews and stories from home to send to your parents.

- Interview different members of the family or friends
- Write up short articles about what is going on at home
- Write about news around town or about information of interest to your parents like how your baseball team is doing
- Tell about grandpa's new dentures, the baby's new shoes. Just ordinary stuff is great!
- Include pictures of family members
- Find articles from your local newspaper that your parent would find interesting
- Make up a funny story
- Draw your own comic section

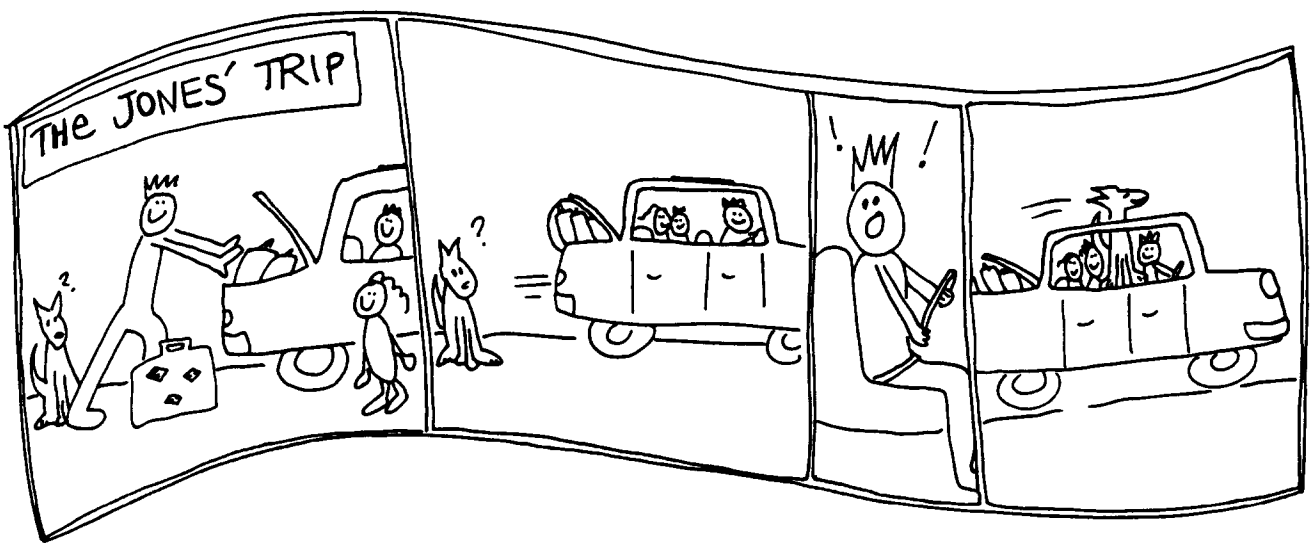
Use your imagination. It could be fun!

The Daily Record

Your parents will appreciate hearing the voices of their family members. You can tape ordinary conversations at mealtimes or at special events like birthdays and holidays. You can tape interviews with family members. Ask them funny questions, or get them to tell jokes. You can edit the tape or be the "radio announcer."

Family Cartoon Strips

You can make up a cartoon strip of your family to send to your parents.

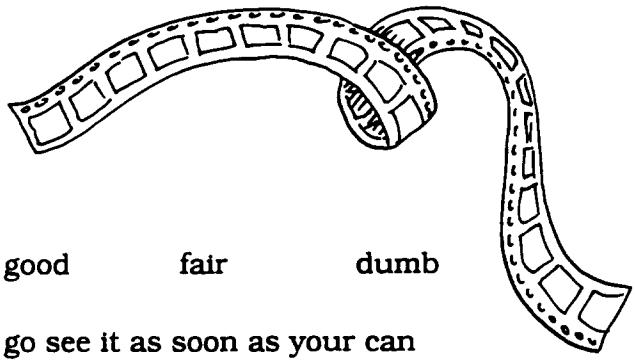


Movie and Book Reviews

A Movie Review

You can send your parents a review of a movie you've seen or a book you've read.

TO: _____ **FROM:** _____



Movie Title:

Actors:

Story was about:

Plot was: (circle one) excellent good fair dumb

You should: (circle one)

go see it as soon as your can
this film is so so--go only if you are really bored
don't <u>ever</u> go to this movie
this movie should be banned from the galaxy

Date: _____

A BOOK REVIEW

TO: _____ **FROM:** _____

Book Title:

Main Characters:

Story was about:

Plot was: (circle one) excellent good fair dumb

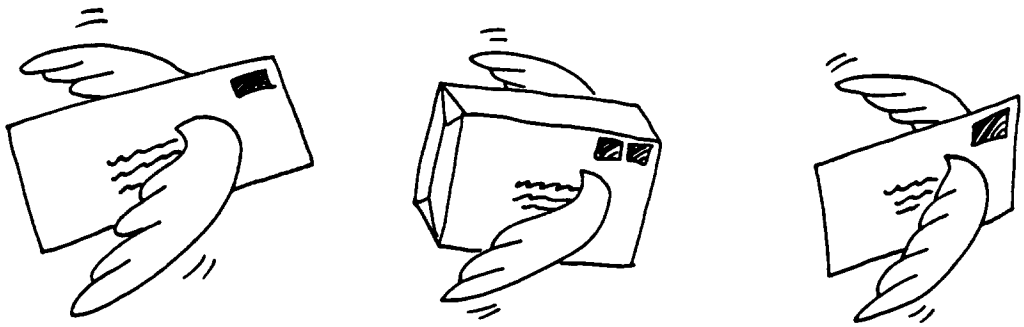
You should: (circle one)

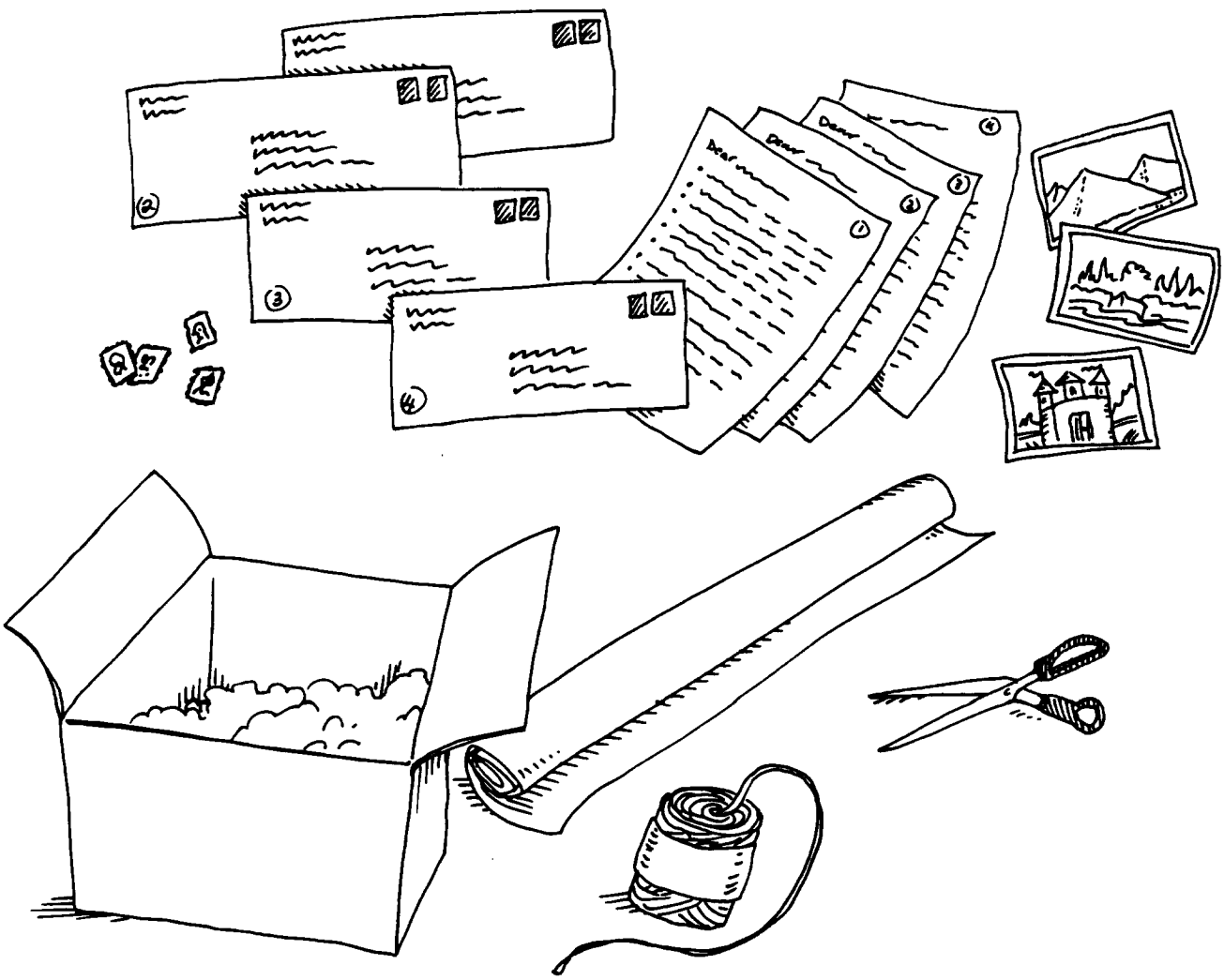
read this book soon
read this book someday
maybe you should and maybe you shouldn't
don't ever bother reading this book
this book wasted a tree

Date: _____

Make A Care Package For Your Parents

Some kids help their folks keep in touch by sending them care packages. In these you can put addressed and numbered envelopes, paper for letters, surprises, and cards. You may want to send some check-off letters like the one on the next page for your parents to complete for you. Remember that the return mail is likely to be slow.





A Checkoff Letter from Parents

Use this example or make up one of your own.

Week 1

Dear Family,

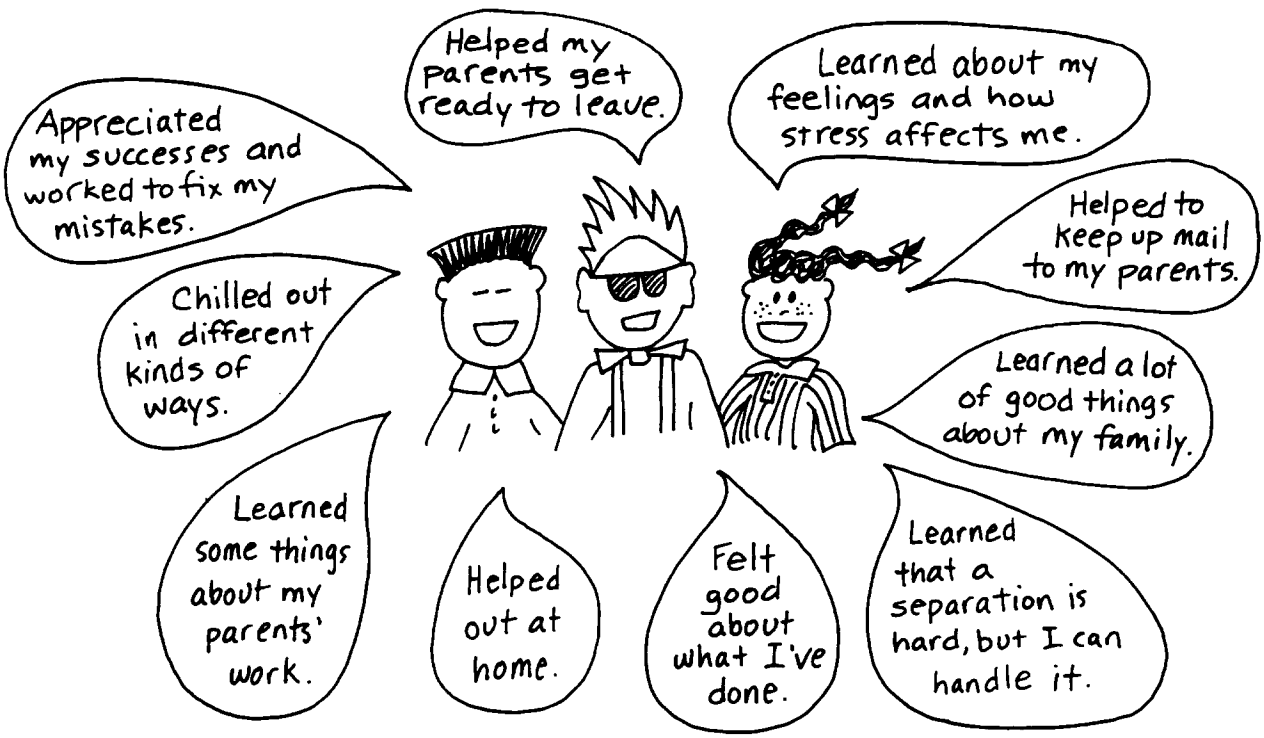
* **I am staying** O in a tent O in a hotel O in the barracks O out of trouble O other _____.
* **My trip here was** O long and hard O pleasant O so-so O boring O other _____.
* **I arrived by** O bus O tank O truck O plane O helicopter O bicycle O other _____.
* **The temperature is** O hotter than Hades O cold as the North Pole O somewhere in between O other _____.
* **I get to wear** O my own clothes O cammies O shorts O blue jeans if I am off duty O my pajamas O other _____.
* **We spend all day** O studying O moving tanks O driving trucks O exercising O doing communications O flying O setting up buildings O running the hospital O sleeping O other _____.
* **The food is** O terrific O truly awful O just like home O edible every fourth day O other _____.
* **At night it is** O cold O hot O rainy O foggy O dry O crawling with bugs.
* **We bathe** O in the shower O in our helmets O in the swamp O in a tub O not at all O other _____.
* **I forgot my** O toothbrush O socks O smile O teddybear O sense of humor O other _____.
* **Don't forget to** O do your homework O help around the house O be good to your brother/sister O write me back O other _____.
* **I think about you** O every morning O every afternoon O every evening O all the time.
* **Would you send me** _____.

Love,

Separations End

When separations end, take a little time to think about what you have accomplished during this time, what you have learned, and how you have changed. You will discover that you have met some challenges, mastered some difficulties, and done a good job.

What I've Done and Learned During This Separation



List some of the things you have learned during this separation.

_____

_____

_____

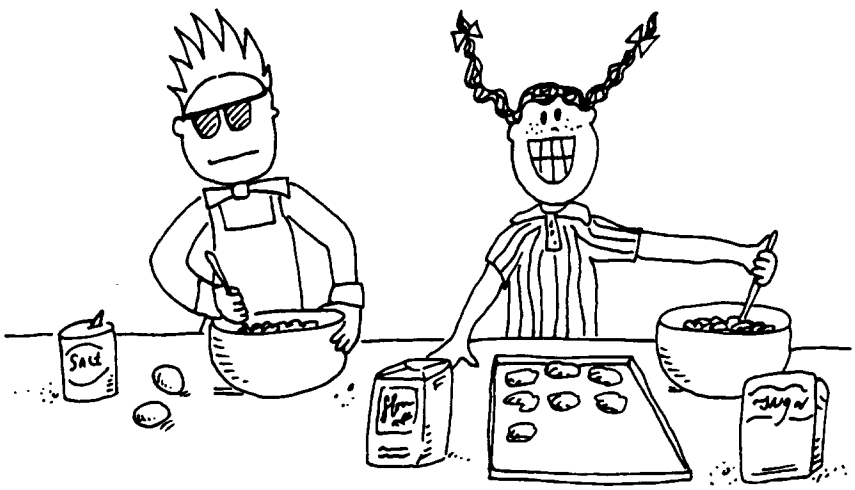
_____

_____

Getting Ready For Homecoming

There are lots of things you can do to help prepare for your parents return. You can make a banner.

You can cook something your parents and family will enjoy.



You can make "sharing" cards to give to your parents.
Here are some examples:

To:
GOOD FOR
2 HOURS OF
QUIET TIME.
Date:
Time:

To:
GOOD FOR 1
SHORT WALK
WITH ME.
Date:
Time:

To:
GOOD FOR 1
PARENTS-EVENING
OUT (without Me!)
Date:
Time:

Can you make up some other sharing cards for your parents?

A Homecoming Letter

You can give your parents a homecoming letter. Copy and use the form below or make up your own letter.

Date:

Dear _____.

WELCOME HOME

* **We are very** O glad O happy O excited O relieved that you have come home.

* **We have missed you** O enormously O a whole lot O more than we can say.

* **This letter is to tell you** O what has changed O what has stayed the same O what you need to know O why it's safe to come home.

* **The house is** O right where you left it O redecorated a whole lot O O.K., except for a window I blew out doing a science project.

* **My room is** O the cleanest you've ever seen it O hasn't been cleaned since you left O now inhabited by aliens and I am not responsible for its condition.

* **Our family** O is still the coolest O could use a maid and a butler O got a maid and butler after you left O still likes your corny jokes.

* **The car** O is still running O misses your driving expertise O went on a date with sister/brother and experienced a melt down O was driven into the lake and smells like fish.

* **Since you left, I have** O grown lazier O learned to love/hate/ignore/tolerate school O worn your sweater every day O made a new friend.

* **Now that you are home, I would very much like to** O take a walk with you O have a big hug from you O go to a movie with you O do whatever you want to do O play some ball O go fishing O other _____.

* **Maybe in the next few days, we can** O wash your sweater O hear some of your corny jokes O fix the window I blew out O get the fish smell out of the car O other _____.

LOVE,

Together Again: Homecoming and Reunion

Things to think about

Reunion, like separation, may happen with lots of notice or it may happen suddenly. Here are some things you need to know about reunions.

* Reunions take adjustment. It takes time for everyone to get to know each other again. Take your time and expect surprises during the first few weeks your family is together again.

* Reunions can be stressful. You have all grown and changed during the separation. Remember to chill out. You know how.

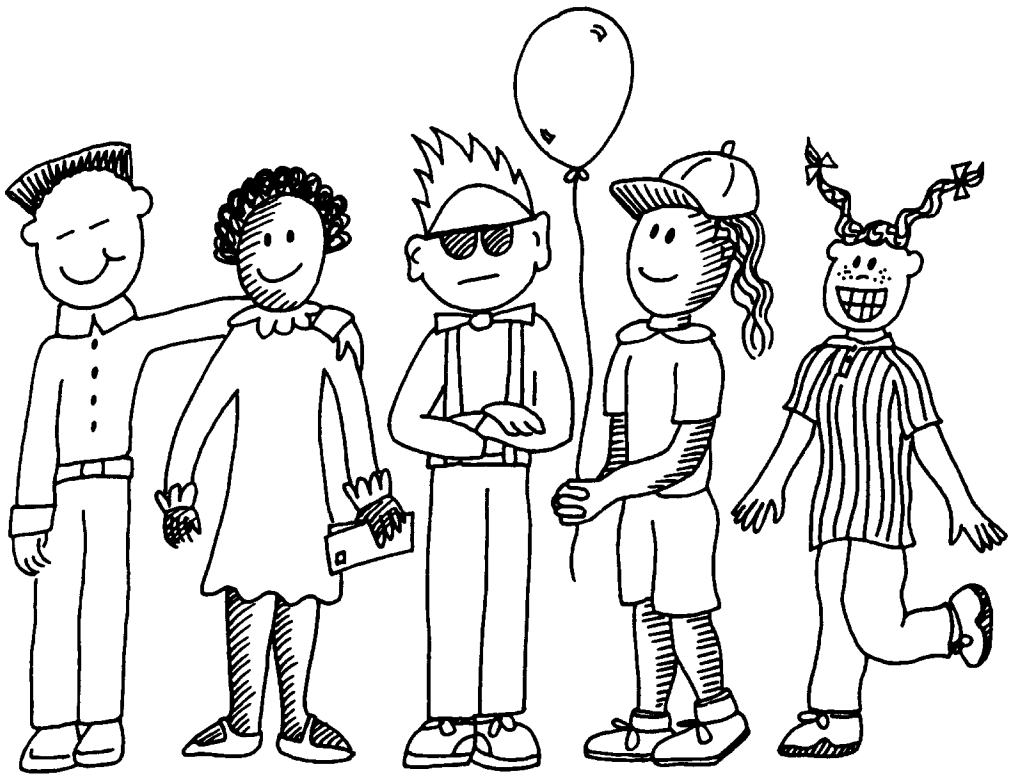
* Reunions bring out strong feelings. These feelings can be positive, negative, or mixed-up. You may feel very happy to see your parents or worried about what they will be like because you haven't seen them for so long. You may feel uneasy about being together again. That can be upsetting, but it's normal and, in time, it will pass.

* Reunions can bring misunderstandings with them. It may take you a while to feel comfortable with your returning parents again.

* Reunions involve sharing your parents with others. Remember that each family member wants time with the parent or parents who have been away.

* Reunions require time alone for parents who have been away. Be prepared to give your parents "time out."

Together Again!



I DID IT!