

## Worksheet:

# We are Family

### About this activity

These activities use soft toys to encourage children to open up about how they are feeling, as well as bringing them comfort and helping them to feel safe and secure. Soft toys can become trusted companions to children and help them to manage fear and separation anxiety, and to feel connected to people they care about.

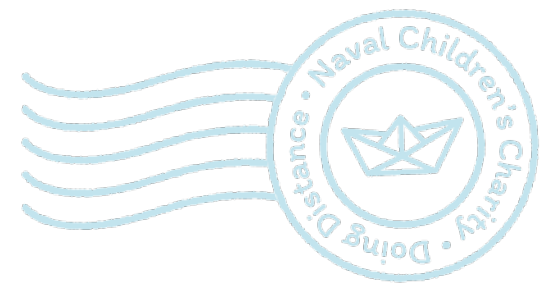


### Outcomes

- ✓ To create a strong symbol for family unity
- ✓ To enable a child to manage separation anxiety and night-time fears
- ✓ To use sensory connections to soothe (e.g. scent, touch)

### What you will need

- ✓ A soft toy per family member. You may already have toys or teddies, but if not, it can be a lovely experience to choose these together with the child. Children often like to choose animals that are reflective of their personality and how they want to be seen.



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## A symbol of unity

- 1 Encourage the family to give a name to their teddies/soft toys, one that represents their family.

*'We decided to call Daddy's bear Big Courage and our ones are called Tiny Courage.'*

*'We called our bears Sailors, so we can all be sailors like Mummy'*



- **Sailor Bear** (available from the Naval Children's Charity on request - 1 per family member)

- 2 Put the soft toys in a prime location in the home so that they are visible to everyone and they see the strength of the family unit - both those that live in this setting and those who live elsewhere.
- 3 On a piece of paper or a postcard, family members could write or draw a message to those who are not with them. This message or picture could be propped up on or close to the toy or teddy for a photo, which could then be sent home to them digitally, if technology allows. This will help build a sense of connection; the child can also be in these photos if they want.

## Managing separation and anxiety worries

- 1 It may be that the child you are supporting is worried whenever they need to separate from family members, or about family members from whom they're already separated.

*'Someone at school told me there's a war, what if mummy isn't safe on her ship?'*

*'I'm stressed about my exams, I wish I could speak to Dad about it'*

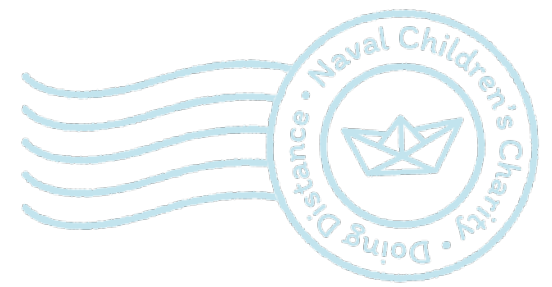
*'I've not heard from my step-mum in weeks because of no comms'. I just want to know that she is okay.'*

*'I wish I could play football with my brother since he has been on ship, I haven't been able to play'*

*'I get to see my Dad on the weekends but I hate it when he goes to work for the week.'*

*'Where's my Daddy gone? When is he coming back? It doesn't feel like home when he is not here!'*

- 2 The soft toys can be given to each child as a way of keeping them connected to the family unit, reminding them that they are not alone.



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- 3 With younger children, the bears can also be used as a puppet to chat to the other bears, encouraging an open dialogue about the child's concerns.

*'Little Sailor was telling Big Sailor about something that really helped on the days when he was most scared...'*

- 4 The child can keep their small toy or teddy close to them, clipping it on their rucksack, or taking it to bed. Or if an adult must leave them for a short or longer time frame, the small one can go with the adult to keep them safe. Allow the child to be in control and come up with what they think is best. If a soft toy from the family does need to leave, encourage the adult to take a photo of them with the toy and send it back to the child so they can manage their separation anxiety.



## Bedtime worries

- 1 Encourage the child to speak to their soft toy at bedtime, sharing whatever is on their mind by saying it quietly out loud into the ear of a cuddly toy, before cuddling it or tucking it in next to them. This is a gentle way of finding out what is worrying them and can help aid restful sleep when separation has potentially made bedtimes trickier. For a teenager, you could use a more direct 'face your fears' approach. For example, you may like to ask them what one worry they would most like to describe and think through, so that it does not interfere with their sleep.
- 2 These are just a few ideas that we hope can help with separation and maintaining a sense of connection. Even teenagers, who may consider themselves too grown-up for soft toys, can value these soothing associations, although your approach may need to differ.
- 3 The bears could also be used as a way for the service person to speak about their deployments by taking the bear with them. Sometimes it is easier to speak about what you're doing in a fun way through the bear, especially when you can't share lots of information or have communication with home. By keeping a diary/log that is centred around the bear, children may feel like they are listening to a story about your journey when you come home but through the bear. "Here's Sailor Bear on a run ashore in Gibraltar with the monkeys!" This could also help submariner families who have very little to no communication with home.

If the child doesn't want to engage in these teddy bear activities or doesn't make an attachment, that is okay; it is important that you follow the child's lead in the moment. You can always suggest it again another day. Above all, try not to take it personally if one day they dismissively throw it across the room.

