

Kyle's Deployment

One of the most difficult struggles in life for a parent is the struggle that occurs when the parent is attempting to keep their child safe and the child is attempting to explore the world and find their place in it, often times not in the safest manner.

A discussion of Inside Out cannot occur without me sharing some of my own personal struggles with the concept. Today is one of those days. I just learned that my nineteen-year-old son Kyle received his deployment orders. He just graduated from National Guard basic training last week and in less than two months, his Guard unit is being deployed for six months of training and then on to Iraq for a year.

Anyway, Kyle made a decision fairly early on that he wanted to join the military. This was a surprise to me because I believed that, generally, young men and women enter the military who have some type of role model in the military. Since there was no one in my or my husband's family who was in the military, I believed my children would not have the inclination for military service. Kyle began talking about being a sniper for the Marines at around the age of sixteen. Imagine my terror, thinking of him in dangerous situations when I had spent all his life attempting to keep him safe---mostly safe from himself as he has quite a risk-taking personality.

Being a good Inside Out mother, I knew better than to try to talk him out of what he truly wanted, but secretly I'd hoped that by the time he was old enough to join the military, he would "come to his senses." Now I'd like to say here that I totally support our troops. I know there are brave men and women putting their lives on the line for our safety and the ideal of freedom around the world, but as most mothers can relate, that's OK for other children, just not mine! I'm well aware of the selfishness of that position, but it is what it is.

Over time, Kyle and I had some discussions about his future plans. He was raised in rural Pennsylvania and had been hunting with his father from the time he was three. He has a natural ability for marksmanship. He is incredibly courageous and loves a good physical challenge. With all of these attributes, I know he sounds like a poster boy for military service. Still, as his mother, I'd hoped he would change his mind.

I believe he made a concession to me when just prior to his eighteenth birthday he decided to join the National Guard, as opposed to the Marines. Part of his reasoning was that he wanted money for college but another part, in my opinion, was that he was just looking to prove himself as a man. I breathed a small sigh of relief thinking that he would be safer in the Guard. He would do his weekend a month and two weeks in the summer and have to respond to any situations in the

US requiring armed service intervention. Was I ever wrong---along came the war in Iraq. I am not making any statements here about the efficacy of this war. I do not know if we are there because of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism or oil fields. I only know that our county's young service men and women are being forever changed by their experiences there and I am afraid for my child.

Today, Kyle told me with trepidation that he received his orders and will be leaving soon for eighteen months. He seems a little apprehensive but also excited. This is what he's been trained to do. I am very proud of the young man that he has become but am terrified of the possible ramifications. How can he come back from there being the same person I know now, or worse, what if he is wounded or killed over there?

All of this is going through my mind as I am writing but I know that I have to support him. I don't want him leaving, feeling that I am not behind him 110%. What I truly want is for the war to be over, for this to be some mistake, for his unit to get stateside deployment, anything but for my child to be sent to Iraq as an infantryman on the front lines of the fighting. However, using Inside Out thinking, I have to first ask, what is within my power and control? I am not going to change the fact that Kyle is going to Iraq. Even if it were within my power to do so, he would not want to ignore his duty.

So, the only thing left on which to focus is how I can be the person I want to be in this situation that I can't control or change. What are my priorities? My first priority is to let Kyle know how very proud of him I am and that I support his decisions. After all, it is his life to do with as he sees fit. I did my part by keeping him safe these 19 years. Now, it is his turn to decide how he will live and I want to support the man he has become. Secondly, I don't want him to be worrying about how I am managing while he is away. And finally, I want him to know that I love him and will pray for his safety every day. These are all things within my control. How will I do it?

I find that whenever I am facing a particularly difficult situation, I attempt to look for the positives in it. In this situation there are many. Kyle is growing up and fighting for something in which he believes. He is developing principles that will guide his behaviors the rest of his life. His being in Iraq may help to save the lives of others. It will truly test his relationship with his girlfriend in determining whether or not they are truly committed to each other. And when I let myself think of the worst case scenario, which is him being killed there, I have come to remind myself that he will have died doing something he really wanted to do as opposed to living a long, unfulfilled life full of regret. If it comes down to it, will I be able to maintain that posture and position? I don't know, but I do know that staying focused on Inside Out thinking will assist me in managing both my worry and my grief, if necessary.