



**US Army Corps of Engineers
BUILDING STRONG®**

“Coming Home Handbook”

For Returning Team Members and their Families

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Introduction

Perhaps you've been deployed several weeks or months and separated from your family, friends, colleagues, and your familiar social environment. Now the day is quickly approaching when you'll get on that "freedom bird" headed for home! You've no doubt been anticipating getting back home. Or perhaps you've been managing the home front single-handedly while waiting for your spouse to return from a deployment. Have you considered that just as you and those with whom you live and work were required to make adjustments prior to the deployment, additional adjustments will likely be necessary once the deployment is over? The purpose of this information is to help you do just that--smoothly transition back into your home, work, and social life.

In an effort to pave the way to your household's successful reunion, we'll look at several major areas dealing with reunion. As we review these areas, you are encouraged to take the "shopping cart approach." That is, when you go shopping, you don't take everything in the store off the shelf and put the items into your shopping cart. You only take what you need at that time. Similarly, some of this information will be relevant to you and perhaps some won't. Take what's useful to you and strive to apply it to your life.

Throughout this booklet you'll find a major recurring theme about settling back into your home, work, and social environments: **Go slow.** Why? Because like deployment, reunion is a process, not an event. What does that mean? When you or your family member deployed, it probably wasn't after a morning notification followed by a same-day departure. Rather, you and your family went through a preparation process over several weeks. This involved attending pre-deployment meetings, receiving immunizations, packing bags, and so on. It also involved the "stay behind" spouse, friend or neighbor learning how to temporarily take over some of the deployed person's responsibilities, such as child care, vehicle maintenance, pet care, lawn care, checkbook balancing, etc.

As you were trying to take care of numerous projects and responsibilities prior to the deployment, you may have experienced some tension in your relationships at home as well as at work. Perhaps you were at times irritable with your spouse, children or colleagues. At the same time, you may have noticed some resentment toward the deploying person for leaving, even though the deployment was necessary. Young children may be unable to understand why mom or dad must go away, no matter how carefully the need is explained. The person preparing to deploy may have felt guilty about leaving their family and colleagues with all those additional responsibilities. In any event, such unpleasant emotions as tension and irritability may have served a purpose as you prepared for the deployment: to create some temporary emotional distance, making it easier for you and those you care about to say farewell.

Again, just as deployment was a process that required time and effort, the process of reunion will also require time and effort.

The Five Phases of Reunion



Reunion is a period of happiness, celebration, togetherness, sharing, and courting — all the things it takes to get to know each other again and begin coming together as a family unit.

Pre-entry

Pre-entry occurs during the first few days before your reunion. During this time the deployee is working long hours to ensure equipment has been turned in and that their work is caught up before arriving home. The family/spouse is probably working to ensure that everything is ready for the deployee's arrival. Things to expect in this phase are:

- Fantasies
- Excitement
- Work
- Planning
- Thoughts

Reunion

Reunion is the immediate meeting and the first few days after the deployee's arrival. This is the time of courtship, relearning, intimacy, and a happy time or honeymoon. This is not the time to address problems. It is a time for understanding. Things to expect in this phase are:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Physical changes | <input type="checkbox"/> Intimacy and sex |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Courting again | <input type="checkbox"/> Tiredness- readiness for relaxation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social events | <input type="checkbox"/> Inclusion of children |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Immediate excitement | <input type="checkbox"/> Allowing time and space |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pride in each other | |

Disruption

As problems surface, expectations of a normal family life go down. This is the time the problems come up. If there was a good reunion, these problems will eloquently or diplomatically surface. Things to expect in this phase are:

- Independence
- Differences
- Routine
- Finances
- Control
- Thoughts
- Trust
- Jealousy
- Hard times stories
- Gifts
- Decision making
- Unresolved problems/issues
- Children issues (Issues/Changes/Growth)

Communication

Communication is a time of renegotiating new routines, reconnecting, redefining family roles, acceptance of control, and decision making. New rules will be established. Things to expect in this phase are:

- Renegotiation
- Trust
- Reconnection
- Acceptance
- Explanation of new rules

Normal

Back to the normal family routine of sharing, growing, and experiencing the ups and downs, happiness, and sadness of a family. Things to expect in this phase are:

- Acceptance of change
- Personal growth
- Establishment of routines

Feelings and Behaviors that Affect the Family Post-Deployment

Any combination of these FEELINGS	Could lead to any of these BEHAVIORS
PARENTS:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Fear of infidelity * Let down (fantasy of reunion doesn't live up to expectations) * Anger at absence * Jealousy of child's preference for other parent * Both feel <i>I had it worse</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Questioning, suspiciousness, incidence of spouse abuse * Withdraw or try to take power back through physical violence * Difficulties compromising, often wants other to <i>take care of me</i> * Verbal altercations
PRESCHOOL CHILDREN:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Joy, excitement * Wants reassurance * Anger causes desire to punish or retaliate against returning parent * May be afraid of returning parent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * May have made something for returning parent, wants recognition * Clingy * Oppositional/avoidant behavior * Attention seeking behavior, competes with other parent and siblings
ELEMENTARY CHILDREN:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Joy, excitement * Remaining anger * Anxiety over changing roles in family * Competition with dad for masculine role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * May have made something for returning parent and wants recognition * Attention seeking behavior after things have settled * May act out anger * May attempt to initially split parents
ADOLESCENT CHILDREN:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Anger * Relief * Resentment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Defiance * Behavior problems * School problems

Reunion and Marriage

Anticipation

During the deployment, you've changed in subtle ways, as have your family and friends. If you are the deployed person, you've functioned in living and working environments that may be very different than anything you'd previously experienced. You've rubbed shoulders with a "different world" and stretched your comfort zone. As a result, you'll go home an enriched but somewhat changed person.

If you are the "stay behind" spouse, you have also probably grown during the deployment. You have taken on new responsibilities and developed confidence that you can "keep the ship afloat" in your spouse's absence. Out of necessity, you have learned to cope without your spouse. At the same time, you are probably looking forward once again to the familiar pattern of sharing family and household responsibilities with your spouse.

Both you and your spouse are probably thinking a lot about what it will be like to get home. Maybe you're finding it more difficult to concentrate on work as your thoughts continue to drift to reunion. While you're excited about reunion, perhaps you're also a bit worried about some "unfinished business" in your relationship. After all, whatever challenges existed in your relationship before the deployment will not have magically resolved during the deployment. Maybe there are other lingering doubts and fears. Sometimes, for example, as partners prepare to reunite, they both wonder about the possibility of infidelity. Over all, though, you're probably very excited about once again spending time together as a family and sharing private time with your spouse.

Changes at Home

Although you'll be excited about reunion, and the whole family will probably be thrilled with the return of the deployed person, everyone may experience a range of thoughts and feelings. Perhaps the deployed person will be a bit worried about how well he or she will fit back in. At the same time, family members might also be concerned about how the deployed person will treat them. They may wonder if their accomplishments will be appreciated or resented. They may be concerned that the deployed person will violate the "go slow" principle and attempt to immediately "take over" everything. These concerns are a normal part of the reunion process and typically require little more than some time and patience to sort out. The "stay behind" spouse probably had to change some procedures while the deployed person was gone. If it was the deployed person's responsibility to mow the lawn, take out the trash, vacuum the carpet, or pay the bills, someone else in the family had to assume those responsibilities. Other changes in family procedures may have taken place in response to evolving family needs. In any event, the deployed person should remember to go slow when adjusting to reunion with their family. Integrating back into the family is a process, not an event that can simply happen at the front door of your home by your announcing, in essence, "I'm home and I'm in charge." To take that approach is to invite arguments and hurt feelings.

One of the first changes that the newly returned person is likely to notice is that their partner has become more confident in his/her ability to cope with whatever hand life deals. Notice how this makes you feel. Are you proud of him/her? Hopefully so. Be sure to express your appreciation for his/her valiant efforts to independently cope with the complexities of family life in your absence. Do you feel a little threatened? Not sure exactly where and how you fit into the family now? These are very normal concerns.

Trust/Fidelity

How would you characterize the trust level in your relationship when the deployment occurred? To what extent did you trust your partner to handle finances? What was your trust level in terms of your partner maintaining sexual fidelity? What do you think his/her trust level in you was in these and other key areas? Worries about a partner's unfaithfulness are much more common than the occurrence of infidelity. It is wise to assume you've both been faithful to one another unless you have strong evidence, not merely suspicion, to indicate your spouse has been unfaithful. After all, accusations of infidelity are very serious and strike at the very core of a relationship.

If your marital relationship was an overall satisfactory one before the deployment, it's unlikely that any infidelity has taken place. When infidelity does occur, deployment notwithstanding, it is almost always a sign of much deeper relationship problems. Accordingly, these underlying issues must be addressed, perhaps with the help of a professional counselor, for the marriage to become healthier. If problems are left unresolved, acts of infidelity may become a devastating pattern in the relationship.

Communication

Homecoming is the time we resume communicating "face to face" again. What will you and your partner talk about? Are you open to talking about changes that have occurred in each of your lives as positive experiences that can promote growth in your relationship? Are you willing to really listen? Your partner may want to tell you many things that happened while you were away. Even though you may have been fortunate enough to have frequent phone contact, letters, and perhaps e-mail and video teleconferences, your partner needs your undivided attention, face to face.

If you are the deployed member, how will you respond to the way your partner has handled things in your absence? What about decisions he/she made that you question? Will you second-guess your partner, or will you recognize that he/she was operating in a stressful environment and made the best decisions he/she was capable of making? It is helpful to remember that you were not there and you do not know all the factors that went into decision-making. If you choose to criticize your spouse, what do you hope to accomplish? If you choose to criticize of your partner's judgment, you'll be doing damage to your spouse's self-esteem and ultimately to your relationship. So, it's in everyone's best interest for you to accept the decisions your spouse made, acknowledge that he/she made them under difficult circumstances, and move on.

As we've previously discussed, you can expect your partner has developed heightened self-confidence, especially in the area of operating the household. Hopefully you're proud of him/her and will openly express that. In any event, although your partner may be anxious to return many responsibilities to you, this is area that you'll need to negotiate, and maybe transition some roles and responsibilities gradually.

As an example, if you usually managed the family finances before, but your partner has been doing so in your absence, you'll need to get a thorough understanding of what has transpired. As finances can be an emotionally laden area, communication will shut down if you become critical, judgmental, or angry. In short, you and your spouse will need to negotiate a mutually satisfactory "transition plan" for you to reassume your roles within the household. Also, remain open to the possibility that the previous "division of labor" may need to be modified. Use the reunion as an opportunity to take a fresh look at things and make a fresh start in those areas where it makes sense.

You, as the deployed member, have received accolades for doing a good job in the Corps. The only appreciation you spouse receives for supporting your decision to deploy is the appreciation she or he

receives from you. Many spouses feel that without that emotional payoff, going through deployments and other related disruptions of family life is just not worth it.

Avoid getting into the "who had it worse" game. The truth of the matter is that the separation was difficult for both of you. But it was probably more difficult for the family member who stayed at home, shouldering responsibility for the entire household and often worrying about the safety of the deployed member.

Intimacy/Sexuality

Intimacy and sex is not the same thing. Hopefully you and your partner have maintained a solid sense of intimacy or "emotional connection" during the deployment through frequent communications. What you have not been able to maintain, as you and your partner are no doubt acutely aware, is the sexual component of your relationship. Since sex tends to be prominent in the thinking of both spouses during deployment, it tends to become a key focus of reunion. Given sexuality is a highly personal aspect of your personal and marital lives, you need to deal with this area with patience.

Although sexual intimacy can resume instantly, and this may well be your mutual desire, the level of overall emotional intimacy and comfort with one another that you experienced before the deployment may take awhile to regain. Keep in mind that for over several months you've only been able to communicate with each other, at best, a few minutes a day, and that you've had no face-to-face contact. Again, go slow.

Considering you've both experienced personal growth while separated, it makes sense to take some time to get to know each other again, not unlike two friends who haven't seen each other for a while. Build upon the intimacy you shared. Recognize you and your partner are "out of practice" in terms of sexual contact. As a result, it's not highly unusual after lengthy separations for temporary awkwardness to arise. Also, you may feel a bit uncomfortable together initially. If you have such experiences, do not make too much of them, as doing so only heightens anxiety, which in turn can set you up for a negative cycle of sexual problems. Simply relax, take your time, and let your sexual relationship resume in a way that is gratifying for both of you.

Reunion and Single Parent

If you're a single parent, you may be experiencing some unique concerns about reuniting with your children. More specifically, if you're a custodial parent, have you thought about how your children have bonded with their caregiver during your absence and how that will impact your relationship with your children as well as with the caregiver? If, on the other hand, someone else has primary custody of your child, you may wonder how your child will respond to you since you have likely missed "regular" visits with him/her.

If you're a custodial parent, then your children probably have been living with someone else for several months. Accordingly, to the extent this has been a fulfilling relationship, the bond between this caregiver and your children has strengthened. Your children's increased loyalty to their caregiver may be painful for you in that you may initially feel unneeded or even jealous. Again, go *slow*.

Focus on communicating both with the caregiver and your children, and recognize that you and your children will need to adapt to living with each other again. Your children have been living with someone

else who probably had different rules and procedures compared to your own household. Give yourself and your children adequate time to "shift gears." The adjustment period, which may take several weeks, can at times be awkward. You can smooth the transition process by first of all actively involving the caregiver with the transition. To force young children to suddenly separate from the caregiver can be emotionally traumatic. Secondly, since your children have lived with different family rules and procedures, take time to compare with them the rules of your home. As you're doing this, seek your children's inputs regarding how they would prefer life at home to be. They need to feel included in the process of reestablishing the structure and "flavor" of your home environment.

If you are a non-custodial parent, your children's living conditions were probably not impacted by your deployment. Your visits with your children have, however, been curtailed. As you reestablish these visits, remember you and your children have grown and you will need to take time to get reacquainted.

Reunion and the Single Member

As a single person, you may have someone living in your home or apartment in your absence. Alternatively, you may have "moth balled" your home or perhaps you moved out prior to deploying and will need to find a new residence when you return. Regardless of your living situation, one of your first tasks will be to "put your house in order." Once you've done that, you'll be ready to focus on reestablishing your family and social ties.

As you anxiously anticipate going home, recognize that you've probably changed in subtle ways. You've made new friends. You've functioned in living and working environments that may be very different than anything you'd previously experienced. You've rubbed shoulders with a "different world" and stretched your comfort zone. As a result, you'll go home an enriched, but a somewhat changed person. If you have a "significant other" in your life, this person may have also changed in your absence. And change inevitably creates stress. As you adapt to the changes which may be required in your relationship, you may experience over the short-term some worry, frustration, anger, confusion, appetite disturbance, fatigue, mood swings, or sleep difficulties. Usually such difficulties don't last longer than two to four weeks. If they continue, consult your physician or mental health professional for assistance.

Regardless of whether or not you have a significant other in your life, there are no doubt people whom you consider to be family. What does family mean to you? Is family restricted to biological relatives or do you also think of close friends as family? Will someone whom you consider family be there to greet you at the airport? Will you be going home to visit your family of origin? If so, how do you feel about seeing them? What will you talk about? How will you respond to changes that may be taking place in your family? Perhaps a sibling is going through a divorce, or a grandparent has become seriously ill. Be prepared for changes.

You may feel that nothing is going the way you planned and hoped. It is still vital that you make plans, especially for the first few days of your return. If you do not have friends or family who live in the local area, make plans with other returning members for a homecoming activity that is special for you and remember to call home.

Beyond practical issues, have you considered what impact the deployment will have on your social relationships and living habits? Many people with whom you've become friendly on the deployment may now be much less available to you, particularly if they're married and are busy getting reacquainted with their families. This can promote feelings of loneliness and even mild depression. At the same time, you

can keep yourself busy by actively reconnecting with old friends and acquaintances back home. And like everyone else who comes back from deployment, it makes sense to keep expectations reasonable and to be patient. Within a few weeks, your life should be back to a predictable and comfortable pattern again.

Reunion and Work

Like other areas of your life, your work environment may be somewhat different when you return. You may be worried about changes that have taken place and how you'll fit back into the organizational picture. Someone else has assumed your role, or at least "taken up the slack," in your absence. If you were a supervisor, decisions have been made by whoever fulfilled your role that you now will have to "live with." You'll also experience a change of pace and activity in your workday. That is, you'll be required to shift from your deployment schedule and activities back into "business as usual."

If you'll apply the same ideas we've discussed throughout this booklet to your work situation, your readjustment should go relatively smooth. Once again, focus on *going slow*. Specifically, talk with colleagues and supervisors to learn of changes and the rationale for those changes. Just as you were encouraged not to question your spouse's judgment in the decisions she or he reached, do not be overly critical of your fellow workers and your supervisory chain. Just as in the situation in your family environment, you were not there at the time and you do not know everything that went into the decision-making process. In any event, what can you realistically do other than accept decisions that have been made and move on? You can't change the past.

In addition to coming to grips with decisions which have been made in your work environment, be prepared for the possibility that some colleagues may harbor a degree of *resentment*. Why? One reason could be that *from their perspective*, they've assumed an arduous workload due to your absence. Now that you've been gone for several weeks or months, perhaps you're going to take at least a couple of weeks off work just when they want you to come back and start "pulling your weight" again! *From your perspective* it makes perfect sense that you're entitled to some time off. You've worked long hours, to include weekends and holidays. You've endured the challenges associated with functioning in a deployed environment and you've been away from your family and friends. The issue here is not whose perception is "right" and whose perception is "wrong." The issue is simply that you need to be prepared for the possibility that you may encounter some resentment when you return to work.

If you encounter resentment, how will you deal with it? One response, and a very tempting one, would be to "give them a piece of your mind" about how unfair they are being. This might temporarily relieve your hurt and anger as you "set them straight." However, the impact on your audience would probably be an increase in resentment. Remember that your co-workers' perception and experience of your deployment is very different than yours. At any rate, a more helpful response could be something like this: *"You're entitled to your point of view. If I were in your position, I might see it that way too. I appreciate the work you did to cover for all of us who were deployed. I'm glad to get back into a familiar daily work routine and to be able to have dinner with my family each night and sleep in my own bed again."*

There is another potential source of co-worker resentment, or at least irritation, amongst your colleagues you would be wise to avoid. Specifically, you may be tempted to entertain your co-workers with "deployment war stories." To a point, your colleagues will likely be interested in hearing about your experiences, especially if they ask. Once they've reached their "saturation point," however, and that point will be different for each individual, it's time to shift the conversation to another topic. Make sure you are just as interested in hearing about what interesting things they have been doing during your deployment.

Even though there's a limit to how much your colleagues want to hear about your deployment experiences, you'll no doubt want to reflect on your experiences for a while. When you're sitting in your duty section perhaps feeling a little "underwhelmed" as you look back on the "good old days," remember your deployment was another time and place and you need to live in the "here and now." Your challenge, in short, is to size up the post deployment work environment and develop a way to smoothly transition back into your work environment.

Finally, another work environment challenge you may encounter when you return to the workplace is staff turnover. As you know, in any period of several weeks or months, some folks will go away and others will arrive. In terms of the newcomers, you and they are an "unknown quantity" to each other. For that reason, you'll need to establish your credibility with them and vice versa. This is especially true if you are in a supervisory role. Also, you'll need to learn to work together effectively as a new team.

Reunion and Children

Expectations

Change is at least as stressful for children as it is for adults. The homecoming of the deployed member is a major change for the children in the household. They have grown physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually during the deployment. Children are not skilled at coping with their stress in large part because they have little life experience. As a result, they may temporarily act out or regress to a less mature stage of behavior as a part of their reaction. In any event, there will be a readjustment period-- typically four to six weeks--for the entire family. You can greatly enhance your family's reunion by developing realistic expectations of how your child will respond to the deployed parent's return based upon the child's age. As you know, children are not "miniature adults," but rather developing individuals who change rapidly in their thought and behavior patterns. So, 1 year-olds and 5 year-olds will respond very differently to your returning.

Infants (Birth to 1 year)

An infant has not yet developed much of an ability to remember people and events. Accordingly, as painful as this might be for you to consider, do not expect baby to recognize the parent who has returned from a long deployment. Instead, expect him/her to initially react as if the returning parent were a stranger. The infant will likely cry when held by the deployed parent, pull away, fuss, and cling to the person who was his/her primary caregiver during the deployment. Once again, "go slow." The baby will "warm up" to the returning parent at his/her own pace. The newly returned parent should gently get involved in holding, hugging, bathing, feeding, playing with, and otherwise caring for the baby. The key is to be patient and let your baby's reactions be your guide in terms of what pace to proceed in getting acquainted.

Toddlers (1 - 3 years)

A typical toddler response would be to hide from the newly returned parent, to cling to his/her primary caregiver, cry, and perhaps regress to soiling if he/she is potty trained. Again, give your child space and time to warm up to the returned parent. It helps for the deployed parent to sit at eye level with your child (to look less intimidating) and talk with him/her. A gentle offer by the returning parent to play with the toddler may be helpful, but do not force the issue. Doing so will only intensify your child's discomfort

and resistance. Also, it may have helped the child to more clearly remember the deployed parent if the stay behind caregiver frequently showed him/her pictures of the deployed member and said "Daddy" or "Mommy" as the case may be. This is true because for children at this age, the old adage "out of sight, out of mind" aptly applies.

Preschoolers (3 - 5 years)

Children in this age range tend to think as though the world revolves around them (egocentric thinking). Keeping that in mind, it's not surprising that your preschooler may think he/she somehow made the deployed parent go away. Or that the deployed parent left because he or she no longer cared about the child. If this is the case with your preschooler, he or she may feel guilty or abandoned. As a result, your child may express intense anger as a way of keeping the returning parent at a distance, thereby "protecting" himself/herself from further disappointment. Your preschooler is also likely to do some limit testing (see if familiar rules still apply). To promote the reunion process, wise parents will accept the child's feelings, not act overly concerned, and focus on rewarding positive behaviors. It is good for the returning parent to talk with the toddler about his or her areas of interest, be it storybooks, toys, or whatever and give the preschooler some undivided attention. Meanwhile, the deployed parent should support the other parent's enforcement of family rules and be careful about too quickly stepping into an authoritative role. The preschooler needs time to adjust to the returning parent once again being an active participant in his/her life.

School Age (5 - 12 years)

Children in this age range are likely to give returning parents a very warm reception if the parent-child relationship was strong before the separation. The school age child may excitedly run to the deployed parent as soon as the parent gets off the plane. He/she will be inclined to try to monopolize the deployed parent's attention and "talk your ear off" during the drive home and then want to showoff scrapbooks, hobby items, or school projects when the deployed parent gets home. If, on the other hand, the deployed parent's relationship with the school age child was strained, the child may fear the parent will punish him/her for all the child's misbehavior during the deployment. Such a thought process may lead the child to at first be shy or withdrawn around the newly returned parent. At any rate, it is best for the deployed parent to have a friendly interest in what the child has done during the time of deployment and praise him/her for his/her efforts and accomplishments.

Adolescent (13 - 18 years)

As you already know if you're the parent of an adolescent, they can have mood swings that go up and down like a roller coaster. One moment they are solving problems in a reasonable and logical way and the next may be reacting in a purely emotional and childlike fashion. So your adolescent's reaction to your return may be characterized by mixed emotions. Like the school age child, your adolescent will likely be very excited to see the deployed parent again, if the relationship was amicable prior to the deployment. Sometimes, however, adolescents are reticent to publicly express their emotions and may be more concerned about acting "cool" in front of their peers. Adolescents tend to be very sensitive about being unfavorably judged or criticized. With this in mind, be sure to make time to discuss with your adolescent what is going on in his/her life as well as what you've experienced. As with sons and daughters of any age, it's critical to give your adolescent some of each parent's undivided pleasant attention.

Tips for Parents

Talk with your children before the deployed parent comes home as much as you did when the parent was preparing to leave.

Tell your child's teacher about the return of the deployed parent.

Know that children's behavior will greatly depend on how their parents renegotiate, compromise, and communicate.

Take care to avoid abruptly shifting love and attention from the children to the returning spouse.

Help children understand that they have changed while the parent was away and that the parent has changed too. Assure them that even though the parent may look or act differently than the child remembers, the returning parent is their same father or mother who left and that he or she loves them.

Contact your Family Readiness Coordinator for assistance in addressing the special challenges of wartime deployment reunions and reintegration.

Understand that children may experience a variety of feelings:

- * **Happy** that they will be seeing the parent again.
- * **Afraid** that the parent will not like the way they have changed or that the parent will leave again.
- * **Excited** about being able to share some of their favorite activities again.
- * **Proud** that their parent is doing an important job for our country.
- * **Jealous** of the time and attention taken from them and given to the returning parent.
- * **Worried** that not all these feelings are normal.

Know that children may not respond to discipline from the returning parent because of loyalty to the parent who remained behind. Children may test the limits of the family rules to find out how things may have changed with the return of the deployed parent.

Go slowly and let the children set the pace in accepting the parent back. Plan some special time for just the child and the returning parent to get reacquainted.

Remember that all children are different and will adjust in different ways.

Take care of yourselves and your relationship so that you are available for your children.

Be sensitive to children's need for time.

Expect some negative feelings and reactions.

Avoid discipline extremes.

Involve children in reunion celebrations.

Find ways to express your love.

Communicating With Children

Take personal time with each child, such as arranging a “date” with each child.

Keep the child’s age and communication abilities in mind.

Start with a clean slate; past wrongs do not count.

Praise the child for what he or she has accomplished while you were away.

Acknowledge the child’s feelings; allow the child to talk about feelings.

Do not criticize.

Talk! Talk! Talk! Listen!

How to Know When to Seek Support or Attend Parenting Classes

You as the parent are feeling and showing more anger or frustration than usual and lack empathy toward the child.

You find yourself warning and re-warning the child about the same behavior.

You are spending more time acknowledging negative behavior than positive behavior.

You continue to provide choices after the child has become resistant.

Behavioral problems become difficult for you to handle.

Your usual methods of managing are not working.

Your child becomes a danger to him- or herself or others.

Tips for Children

Make a special card or sign to welcome your parent home.

Write a letter to your returning parent and tell of the ways you have changed.

Ask how he or she has changed.

Share your parent’s time with other family members.

Be patient if things seem uneasy at first. Everyone will need to adjust.

Successful Homecoming Tips

Tips for the Returning Member

1. Plan on spending some time with the entire family doing family things, but be flexible if teens have other plans.
2. Show interest and pleasure in how your family members have grown and mastered new skills in your absence and let them know you are proud of them. Comment on positive changes.
3. Expect it will take a little time to become re-acquainted with your spouse. Be sure to tell them just how much you care about them. Make an effort to do the little romantic things--a single rose, a card, etc. shows them they are in your thoughts.
4. Resist the temptation to criticize. Remember that your spouse has been doing her or his best to run the household single-handedly and care for the children while you were gone. Give them credit for their efforts, even if their way of doing things is different from yours.
5. Take time to understand how your family may have changed during the separation. Go easy on child discipline--get to know what new rules your spouse may have set before you jump into enforcing the household rules.
6. Don't be surprised if some family members are a bit resentful of your deployment. Others often think of the deployment as more fun and exciting than staying at home, even if you know otherwise.
7. Infants and small children may be shy or even fearful around you at first. Be patient and give them time to become reacquainted.
8. Resist the temptation to go on a spending spree to celebrate your return. The extra money saved during deployment may be needed later for unexpected household expenses.
9. Most importantly, make time to talk with your loved ones. Your spouse and each child need individual time and attention from you. Remember, focus on the positives and avoid criticism.

Tips for Spouses

1. Do something special to welcome your spouse home--help the children make a welcome banner, make your spouse's favorite dessert, etc., but be understanding and flexible if your spouse is too tired to notice.
2. Give your spouse time to adjust to being home. Don't tightly schedule activities for them. Don't expect them to take on all their old chores right away. Understand that your spouse may need time to adjust to a different time zone, a change in food, etc.
3. Plan on some family togetherness time. Suggest a picnic or a special family meal. Time together helps the returning spouse to get back into the rhythm of family life.

4. Be patient and tolerant with your spouse. He or she may not do things exactly as before. New experiences during deployment may bring changes to attitude and outlook. Your spouse may have some initial discomfort adjusting, but this doesn't mean your spouse is unhappy with you or the family.
5. Stick to your household budget. Don't spend money you don't have on celebrating your spouse's return. Show you care through your time and effort, not by how much you spend.
6. Don't be surprised if your spouse is a little hurt by how well you were able to run the household and manage the children without them. Let them know that your preference is to share family and household responsibilities with them no matter how well you did on your own.
7. Stay involved with your children's school activities and interests. Don't neglect the children's need for attention as you are becoming reacquainted with your spouse.
8. Stay involved in your own activities and interests, but be flexible about making time for your spouse.
9. Don't be surprised if children test the limits of the family rules when your spouse returns. It's normal for children to want to find out how things may have changed by acting up a bit. Consistent enforcement of family rules and even-handed discipline are keys to dealing with acting-out.

Tips for Good Communication

1. 93 percent of all communication is nonverbal.
2. *Communication* is words, tone of voice, timing, pace, body language, symbols, and effective listening. Communication is a two-way street.
3. *Effective listening* involves paying close attention, never interrupting, and asking questions that show you understand.
4. *Skillful responses* are positive feedback (focus on the problem, not the person) and negative feedback (focus on the person, not the problem).
5. Good face-to-face communication includes being clear and precise, appropriate eye contact, receptive body language, and the appropriate voice tone.
6. “You” statements, lecturing, giving orders, giving too much advice, making fun of others, and not listening are roadblocks to effective communication.
7. “I” statements, reflective feelings, and being assertive (expressing your feelings and opinions honestly, openly, and without attacking others) are keys to effective communication.
8. When someone is angry, stay calm, talk in a quiet voice, acknowledge his or her feelings, and stay on task.

Tips for Resolving Conflict

1. Accept the fact that conflict will always exist. Tension and stress are the basis of most marital conflict.
2. Learn to focus on one issue at a time during a discussion and think before speaking. Keeping a cool head goes a long way toward solving problems.
3. During a confrontation, allow the other person equal time to speak his or her mind. An argument is essentially a debate and a debate cannot be successful unless both sides get a chance to express their views. *There should be no winners and no losers.*
4. When the spouse is talking, *listen* to what he or she has to say.
5. Use a team approach to problem-solving. Collaborative management is more effective. Remember, two people working as a team can get a lot more done than two adversaries can.
6. Do not run away from a confrontation either physically or by using alcohol or drugs. For help with tough problems, contact the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), USACE chaplain, a local mental health counselor, or your Family Readiness Coordinator.
7. Eliminate verbal weapons such as “I do not love you” or “You do not love me.” Such tactics amount to emotional blackmail and can only foster resentment and anger.
8. Never say “I told you so.” Help your partner save face if you should win. Remember that a problem solved is a win for both.
9. Do not try to settle a big issue in one sitting. Take your time and try to resolve the conflict one step at a time.
10. Never argue in bed! Use a neutral room and affirm your love often.
11. When angry, avoid comparing your spouse with someone else or bringing up past situations. Stick to the issues at hand and remember that you are dealing only with the person in front of you.
12. Do not hit below the belt. “Beltline” remarks often concern something in your spouse’s appearance that he or she is sensitive about.
13. Learn to be autonomous. Both you and your spouse will have to learn to do things by yourselves on occasion.
14. Realize that marriages and relationships do not always work out to be peaches and cream. *Marriage takes two people working together to make a winning team!*

Common Reactions to Trauma

Below are common reactions to trauma that the returning member may experience. Many of these reactions will go away on their own with time, but if the member still has these reactions after several months it may be necessary to see outside treatment.

Physical Reactions

- Trouble sleeping, overly tired
- Upset stomach, trouble eating
- Headaches and sweating when thinking of the war
- Rapid heartbeat or breathing
- Existing health problems become worse

Mental and Emotional Reactions

- Bad dreams, nightmares
- Flashbacks or frequent unwanted memories
- Anger
- Feeling nervous, helpless, or fearful
- Feeling guilty, self-blame, shame
- Feeling sad, rejected, or abandoned
- Agitated, easily upset, irritated, or annoyed
- Feeling hopeless about the future
- Experiencing shock, being numb, unable to feel happy

Behavioral Reactions

- Trouble concentrating
- Being jumpy or easily startled
- Being on guard, always alert, concerned too much about safety and security
- Avoiding people or places related to the trauma
- Too much drinking, smoking, or drug use
- Lack of exercise, poor diet, or health care

- Problems during regular tasks at work
- Aggressive driving habits

Mental Health

It is important to be aware of potential mental health problems that could occur after deployment. Three of the most common problems will be covered in detail, but if you would like more information or need help locating assistance please contact your Family Readiness Coordinator.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that can occur after going through a traumatic event. During this type of event, you think that your life or others' lives are in danger. You may feel afraid or feel that you have no control over what is happening. Anyone who has gone through a life-threatening event can develop PTSD. These events can include:

- Combat or military exposure
- Sexual or physical assault
- Serious accidents, such as a car wreck
- Natural disasters, such as a fire, tornado, hurricane, flood, or earthquake

After the event, you may feel scared, confused, or angry. If these feelings don't go away or they get worse, you may have PTSD. These symptoms may disrupt your life, making it hard to continue with your daily activities. Symptoms of PTSD may include:

- Reliving the event (also called re-experiencing symptoms)
- Avoiding situations that remind you of the event
- Feeling numb
- Feeling keyed up (also called hyper arousal)
- Drinking or drug problems
- Feelings of hopelessness, shame, or despair
- Employment problems
- Relationships problems including divorce and violence

If you or your spouse are experiencing any these symptoms it is recommended that you seek help. This information and more can be found on the VA website at www.ptsd.va.gov .

Traumatic Brain Injury

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), traumatic brain injury (TBI) is a serious public health problem in the United States. TBI is caused by a bump or blow to the head, but not all blows or jolts to the head result in a TBI. The severity of a TBI may range from mild, i.e., a brief change in mental status or consciousness to severe, i.e., an extended period of unconsciousness or amnesia after the injury. The majority of TBIs that occur each year are concussions or other forms of mild TBI known as MTBI. Symptoms of MBTI include:

- Persistent headache
- Confusion
- Pain
- Cognitive and/or memory problems
- Fatigue
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Mood changes
- Sensory problems such as changes in vision or hearing (post-concussion syndrome)

It is important to be aware of the symptoms of MTBI and seek medical treatment if symptoms persist. For more information on TBI please visit: http://cdc.gov/TraumaticBrainInjury/tbi_concussion.html

Suicide Prevention: Warning Signs & Risk Factors

Although no one likes to think about the worst, it is important to be aware of what is going on around you. In order to prevent a potentially serious situation, it is important for everyone to be prepared. The following section covers common warning signs and risk factors that everyone should be familiar with, which may lead to suicide.

Warning Signs:

When a returning member presents with any combination of the following, the chain of command should be more vigilant. It is advised that help should be secured for the returning member.

- Giving away property or disregard for what happens to one's property
- Withdrawal from friends and activities

- Problems with girlfriend (boyfriend), spouse, or close family member
- Acting bizarre or unusual (based on your knowledge of the person)
- Experiencing financial problems
- Experiencing legal problems (e.g. lawsuits or criminal charges)

When a returning member presents with any one of these concerns, the returning member should be seen immediately by a helping provider.

- Talking or hinting about suicide
- Formulating a plan to include acquiring the means to kill oneself
- Having a desire to die
- Obsession with death (music, poetry, artwork)
- Themes of death in letters and notes
- Finalizing personal affairs
- Giving away personal possessions

Risk Factors:

Risk factors are those things that increase the probability that difficulties could result in serious adverse behavioral or physical health. The risk factors only raise the risk of an individual being suicidal it does not mean they are suicidal. These risk factors are often associated with suicidal behavior include:

- Relationship problems (loss of girlfriend/boyfriend, divorce, etc.)
- History of previous suicide attempts
- Substance abuse
- History of depression or other mental illness
- Family history of suicide or violence
- Work related problems
- Transitions (retirement, PCS, discharge, etc.)
- A serious medical problem

- Significant loss (death of loved one, loss due to natural disasters, etc.)
- Current/pending disciplinary or legal action
- Setbacks (academic, career, or personal)
- Severe, prolonged, and/or perceived unmanageable stress
- A sense of powerlessness, helplessness, and/or hopelessness

Suicidal Risk Highest When:

- The person sees **no way out** and fears things may get worse
- The predominant emotions are **hopelessness and helplessness**
- **Thinking is constricted** with a tendency to perceive his or her situation as all bad
- Judgment is impaired by use of **alcohol or other substances**

For more information on suicide prevention, please visit:

<http://phc.amedd.army.mil/topics/healthyliving/bh/Pages/SuicidePreventionEducation.aspx>

Conclusion

Experience has shown that virtually all members returning from deployment, and their household members, experience at least a little uneasiness as they readjust to their normal environment. Changes, some more subtle than others, have taken place during the deployment for the deployed member, their family, and their friends and colleagues. To successfully cope with change requires that we make corresponding adjustments in attitude, thought, and behavior.

As you transition back to your pre-deployment environment, whenever you begin to feel angry or frustrated, ask yourself, "How realistic are my expectations in this situation?" "Am I giving myself, and others, enough time and space to adjust?" "Am I trying to force readjustment rather than being patient and allowing it to happen at a comfortable pace?"

Remember that readjusting to home life and work life is a process, not an event. As the deployed member reintegrates into her or his family, work, and social environments, it makes sense to allow oneself and others the appropriate time and space.

In so doing, you will probably find that in a few weeks everything is back to a comfortable pattern again. In the unlikely event, however, that after two to four weeks you are consistently feeling sad, having marital difficulties, problems with sleep or appetite, difficulty in concentration, using alcohol excessively, or any other form of significant discomfort, please seek assistance.

There are numerous sources of help for families that are adjusting to reunion after deployment. They include the Family Readiness Coordinator, pastors, and local churches. For those families who need more intensive professional help, counseling services are available through Mental Health Clinics, the Employee Assistance Program, and other local social service agencies.

Any deployment during a relationship can be a **BUILDING BLOCK** or a **STUMBLING BLOCK**. It is up to the partners involved!!

Appendix: Resources and Information

This appendix contains additional resources to assist you in finding information that you may need. Each cited resource has a brief explanation of the information it provides. This list is not exhaustive. However, many of the sites have additional references that you may find helpful.

USACE Family Readiness Website

www.usace.army.mil/FamilyReadiness/ This is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Family Readiness webpage that contains a wide variety of family readiness information and additional links.

Army OneSource

www.myarmyonesource.com/ This site is full of information for soldiers and families, including information regarding casualty and survivor support. While it is geared toward soldiers and their families, it has a lot of good information pertinent for DA civilians and families as well.

Military OneSource

www.militaryonesource.com/ Similar to the previous site only with a military-wide focus.

Red Cross

www.redcross.com/ This site contains descriptions of all of the services offered by the Red Cross including emergency assistance and contact information for your local chapter.

National Military Family Association

<http://www.militaryfamily.org/> The National Military Family Association is a non-governmental organization with a number of helpful programs and good information for families including medical and survivor benefits.

Army Knowledge On-line

www.us.army.mil Army Knowledge On-line web site provides extensive information as well as email accounts. Family members may be hosted for guest e-mail accounts, which are highly recommended. It also has an instant messaging ability.

Civilian Personnel On-line

www.CPOL.army.mil This is the primary civilian personnel web site with extensive information for DA civilian employees including benefits.

TRICARE

www.tricare.mil Gives information about TRICARE benefits for soldiers, retirees, and their families.

Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS)

www.tricare.mil/DEERS This site provides information on the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) including information about change of status, updating DEERS, and much more.

Defense Finance and Accounting Services

www.dfas.mil The Defense Finance and Accounting Service web site gives information on military, civilian, retiree, and travel pay and allowances.

My Army Benefits

<http://myarmybenefits.us.army.mil> This one-stop-shop for military has a wealth of information including casualty and survivor, medical, family benefits, and much more.

National Association of Child Care Referral Agencies

www.naccrra.org The National Association of Child Care Referral Agencies is an advocacy association that provides information, support for families, and child care referral. The support they offer includes help when families experience emergencies and trauma. Their services are for both military and civilian families.

Department of Labor

<http://www.dol.gov/owcp/dfec/reg-library.htm> The Department of Labor web site on Workman's Compensation has extensive information on services and benefits including forms, laws, rules, and how to file and track claims.