

As a parent, extended family member, or friend of an active, Guard or Reserve Service member, who is just coming home or is arriving soon, you are probably both excited and nervous about the homecoming. Even if you've been through a mobilization/ deployment before, this one has been different because of the increased stressors of the time. Regardless of your experience and Service member's assignment, there will be a period of adjustment. You may find this tip sheet helpful in ensuring a successful homecoming and readjustment.

What to Expect When the Service member Comes Home:

- ✓ You have certainly missed your Service member, as they have missed you. Reestablishing relationships will take time and communication.
- ✓ It's normal for the returning Service member to "need space" upon their return.
- ✓ It's normal to feel nervous and anxious about the homecoming. Plan for homecoming day. After homecoming, allow the returning Service member to schedule the next few days or weeks.
- ✓ Expect things to be different. Take time to understand how the Service member has changed. Be prepared and flexible.
- ✓ The Service member may have seen or experienced some things that were very upsetting. Some normal reactions to these abnormal situations are fear, nervousness, irritability, fatigue, sleep disturbances, startle reactions, moodiness, trouble concentrating, feelings of numbness, and frequent thoughts of the event. Talking with others who were there and/or counselors trained in crisis stress reactions is very important. The Service member

may be facing a change in job assignment or a move. Readjustment and job transition cause stress. This may be especially true for demobilizing Guard and Reservists who are transitioning back into civilian life.

Making the Reunion Easier:

- ✓ Take time to get reacquainted. Communicate your love and concern.
- ✓ **COMMUNICATE!!** Tell each other how you feel—nervous, scared, happy, that you love and missed them. Listen to each other. The best way to get through the reacquaintance jitters and regain closeness is to talk and actively listen.
- ✓ Reassure the Service member that they are needed, and that you are happy he/she has returned safely.
- ✓ Be calm and assertive, not defensive, when discussing events that have taken place during the Service member's absence. The service member may need to hear that it wasn't the same doing these things alone, that you're glad he/she's back, and that you'd like to discuss problems and criticisms calmly.
- ✓ Prepare children of the extended family for homecoming and involve them in reunion activities.

Take Time for Yourself to Make the Reunion for Everyone Concerned Easier:

- ✓ Make time to rest. Negotiate social events and activities.
- ✓ Limit your use of alcohol. Remember alcohol was restricted during the Service member's deployment and tolerance is lowered.

- ✓ Go slowly in getting back into the swing of things. Depend on family and friends for support. You are part of the Service member's support network.

Remember...

Go slowly – don't try to make up for lost time.

Accept that your Service member may be different.

Take time to get reacquainted.

Reassure your loved ones.

Seek help for family members, if needed.

Many of these tips have cross-application to the Service member, spouse, children, extended family members, and friends. If you feel like you are having trouble coping with adjustment, it is healthy to ask for help. Many normal, healthy people occasionally need help to handle tough challenges in their lives. Contact a counseling agency or a minister, a Military Family Center, Military Chaplain, the Veterans Administration, or one of your community support groups that has been established in your area.

As an active, Guard or Reserve Servicemember who is just coming home or is arriving soon, you are probably excited and nervous about the homecoming. Even if you've been with the mobilization/deployment before, this one has been different because of the increased stressors of the time. Regardless of your experience and assignment, you have a natural period of adjustment. You may find this tip sheet helpful in ensuring a successful homecoming and readjustment.

Reuniting with your Spouse:

- ✓ It is normal to feel nervous and anxious about homecoming. Often Service members wonder whether their spouse will still: "Be proud of me?" "Love me and need me?" "Expect things from me?"
- ✓ Plan for homecoming day. After homecoming, make an agreement with your spouse on the schedule for the next few days or weeks. Where do the children, extended family members or friends fit in?
- ✓ Realize the day of homecoming is very stressful. You and your spouse may not have slept much and may be out from preparations.
- ✓ Don't be surprised if your spouse is a bit resentful of your mobilization/deployment. Often they think of the deployment as more fun and exciting than staying at home—even if you know otherwise.
- ✓ Take time to get used to each other again. Reestablishing sexual intimacy will take patience, time and good communication—some people need to be courted again.
- ✓ **COMMUNICATE!!** Tell your spouse how you feel—nervous, scared, happy, that you love and missed them. Listen to your spouse in return. The best way to get through the acquaintance jitters, regain closeness and renegotiate your roles in the family is by talking and actively listening.
- ✓ You've both been used to doing what you wanted during personal time. Feeling like you need some space is normal.
- ✓ Your fantasies and expectations about how life will be upon return may be just fantasies. Be prepared to be flexible.
- ✓ You and/or your spouse may be face a change in job assignment or a move. Readjustment and job transition cause stress. This may be especially true for demobilizing Reservists who are transitioning back to civilian life.
- ✓ Resist the temptation to go on a spending spree to celebrate the reunion. The extra money earned during deployment may be needed later for unexpected household expenses. Stick to your budget. Show your care through your time and effort.

Reuniting with Your Children:

- ✓ Children may be feeling the same confusing things you and your spouse feel—worry, fear, stress, happiness, excitement. Depending on their age, they may not understand how you could leave them if you really loved them.

- ✓ They may be unsure of what to expect from their returning parent. They may feel uncomfortable around you or think of you as a stranger.
- ✓ It's hard for children to control their excitement. Let them give and get the attention they need from you before you try to have quiet time alone with your spouse.
- ✓ Children's reactions to your return differ according to their ages. Some normal reactions you can expect, and suggestions for handling them are:
 - o **Infants:** Cry, fuss, pull away from you, cling to your spouse or the caregiver they know. Talk to them while holding, hugging, bathing, singing, feeding, playing, and relaxing with them.
 - o **Toddlers:** Be shy, clingy, not recognize you, cry, have temper tantrums, return to behaviors they had outgrown (no longer toilet trained). Give them space and warm-up time. Be gentle and fun. Sit on floor at their level and play with them.
 - o **Preschoolers:** Feel guilty for making you go away, need time to warm-up to you, intense anger, act out to get attention, be demanding. Reinforce that they are loved unconditionally, listen carefully, accept their feelings, find out new things they are interested in, play with them, control attention-getting behavior.
 - o **School Age:** Excitement, joy, talk constantly to bring you up to date, boast about you, guilt about not doing enough or being good enough. View pictures, school work, family scrapbook, praise what they did during your deployment, do not criticize.
 - o **Teenagers:** Excitement, guilt about not living up to standards, concern about adult responsibilities, feel too old or unwilling to change plans to meet you or spend extended time with you upon your return. Share what's happened during deployment, encourage them to share, do chores together, listen, respect privacy and friends, don't be judgemental.
- ✓ Reassure children and spouse and communicate your love to family.
- ✓ Children are excited and tend to act out. Accept and discuss these physical, attitudinal, mental, emotional changes.
- ✓ Get re-involved with children's school and social activities.

Single Service members/Single Parents—Reuniting with Parents, Extended Family Members and Friends:

- ✓ You have certainly missed your family and friends, and they have missed you. Let them be a part of the reunion but

balance your needs with those you love and care about. You will have a period of readjustment when you return home.

- ✓ If you are single or live with parent(s), family, or a friend, many of the above tips for a reuniting with spouses and children may apply. Changes in the house or routine may be stressful. Go slowly in trying to make the adjustment to being home again.
- ✓ Some things will have changed at home while you were gone—marriage in your family or with friends, new babies born, new neighbors, changes in relationships.
- ✓ Some things will change with the people you've lived and worked with prior to deployment. Married friends will be involved with their families. Others may return to their old friends and you may feel left out.
- ✓ Your parents and family have been very worried about you over the past months. Give them time and special attention.
- ✓ You may be facing a change in job assignment or a move, or trying to meet new people, looking for a new relationship. All these things cause stress.

Take Time for Yourself:

- ✓ You may have seen or experienced some things that were very upsetting. Some normal reactions to these abnormal situations are fear, nervousness, irritability, fatigue, sleep disturbances, startle reflexes, moodiness, trouble concentrating, feelings of numbness, and frequent thoughts of the event. Talking with others who were there and/or counselors trained in crisis interventions is very important.
- ✓ Look into ways to manage stress—diet, exercise, recreation—and definitely take care of yourself!
- ✓ Make time to rest. Negotiate the number of social events to attend.
- ✓ Limit your use of alcohol. Remember alcohol was restricted during your deployment and your tolerance is lowered.
- ✓ Depend on family, your unit, and friends for support.

Remember...

Go slowly – don't try to make up for lost time.

Accept that your partner and loved ones may be different.

Take time to get reacquainted.

Seek help, if needed.