

HOMECOMING AND REUNION



OPERATION
READY
Resources for Educating About Deployment and You



Children's Reaction to Soldier's Return

Reactions	Techniques
Birth to 1 Year	
Cries Fusses Pulls away from you Clings to spouse or caregiver Has problems with elimination Changes their sleeping and eating habits Does not recognize you	Hold the baby, and hug him/her a lot Bathe and change your baby; feed and play with him/her Relax and be patient; he/she will warm up to you after a while
1 to 3 Years	
Shyness Clinging Does not recognize you Cries Has temper tantrums Regresses—no longer toilet trained	Don't force holding, hugging, kissing. Give them space. Give them time to warm up. Be gentle and fun. Sit at their level.
3 to 5 Years	
Demonstrates anger Acts out to get your attention; needs proof that you're real Is demanding Feels guilty for making the parent go away Talks a lot to bring you up to date	Listen to them. Accept their feelings. Play with them. Reinforce that you love them. Find out the new things on TV, at preschool, books.
5 to 12 Years	
Isn't good enough Dreads your return because of discipline Boasts about Army and parent	Review pictures, schoolwork, activities, scrap books. Praise what they have done. Try not to criticize.
13 to 18 Years	
Is excited Feels guilty because they don't live up to standards Is concerned about rules and responsibilities Feels too old or is unwilling to change plans to accommodate parent Is rebellious	Share what has happened with you. Listen with undivided attention. Don't be judgmental. Respect privacy and friends. Don't tease about fashion, music.

Reunion Stress

Whether you are a single or a married soldier, a single-parent soldier, a spouse, or a child, you will face certain stressors associated with reunion. Below are some of the normal stressors you may face, along with some hints to help you adjust to the changes in your life.

Stressors

- # Emotional letdown
- # Restlessness or sleeplessness
- # No one understands what I have been through.
- # Was my spouse faithful?
- # Did my spouse miss me?
- # My friends seem different.
- # I didn't expect things to change.
- # Other people's concerns seem petty.
- # I feel like a stranger at home.
- # How will the children react?
- # Will the role I have filled change?
- # Were my children treated well by their guardian?
- # Can I make up for lost time?
- # Did I handle things the right way?
- # When will things feel normal again?
- # I am concerned about finances.
- # I am concerned about future deployments.
- # The children appear confused and uncertain.

Helpful Hints

- # Accept that things may be different.
- # Talk about your experiences.
- # Go slowly—don't try to make up for lost time.
- # Spend quality time with your children.
- # Reassure your children. Change often frightens them.
- # Curb your desire to take control or to spend money.
- # Accept that your partner may be different.
- # Intimate relationships may be awkward at first.
- # Take time to get reacquainted.
- # Forget your fantasies. Reality may be quite different.
- # Take time to readjust.
- # Communicate with your partner and your family.

Stress Symptoms

The following stress danger signals focus on the medical and physical symptoms common to tension stress. Your physician can best determine your medical condition, but these guidelines will provide you with a general indication of your stress level. Check those signals that you have noticed:

- # General irritability, hyperexcitability, depression
- # Pounding of the heart
- # Dryness of mouth and throat
- # Impulsive behavior, emotional instability
- # Overpowering urge to cry or run
- # Inability to concentrate, flight of thoughts
- # Feelings of unreality, weakness, dizziness, fatigue
- # Floating anxiety, being afraid and not knowing why
- # Emotional tension and alertness
- # Trembling, nervous tics, easily startled
- # High-pitched, nervous laughter
- # Stuttering, other speech difficulties
- # Bruxism, or grinding of the teeth
- # Insomnia
- # Hyperactivity, increased tendency to move about
- # Excessive sweating
- # Frequent need to urinate
- # Diarrhea, indigestion, queasiness, vomiting
- # Migraine headaches
- # Pain in neck or lower back
- # Loss of appetite or excessive appetite
- # Increased use of prescribed drugs
- # Alcohol or drug abuse
- # Nightmares
- # Accident proneness

The more signs that are present, the stronger the likelihood that there is a serious problem. See your physician if you are concerned about these symptoms.

Reunion Stress-Coping Strategies

Most military families find that reunions are at least as stressful as separations. This seems to be true for couples with children, couples without children, single parents, and single soldiers coming back to friends and family. Following are some coping strategies that may help:

Expect to have a few doubts and worries.

- # Your partner may think you don't need them anymore.
- # Anxiety is a natural and normal part of reunion.

Forget your fantasies.

- # Give up any fantasies or expectations you may have about what reunion day should be.
- # Take it easy, and let things happen naturally.

Don't expect things to be exactly the way they were before the separation.

- # You've changed; your spouse has changed, and your children have changed.
- # Don't get upset by things that are done differently.

Tips on helping children adjust:

- # Children can get angry about their parent being gone.
- # Toddlers and preschoolers may act like the returning parent is a stranger. They might not understand about "duty" or "mission."
- # Elementary school children and teenagers may understand but show anger or fear by "acting out."
- # Get reacquainted, and take things slowly.
- # Children are resilient.

Accept and share your feelings.

- # Talk a lot about your feelings, and let your partner talk, too.
- # Really listen. Make sure you fully understand what your partner is saying before you respond.
- # Communication is the key.

See things from the other person's point of view.

- # An awareness that the soldier no longer feels a part of things helps us to understand why they can be upset by even the smallest changes.
- # Recognition of the pride a partner feels in the way he/she handled everything alone will help the soldier to understand the importance of accepting changes made during separation.
- # Children are people too. Try to understand how they feel. Change and uncertainty is often very frightening for them, so be patient.

Adjustments for Families

Directions: Take a few minutes to look at the following questions. Write out your answers in the space provided. You will have an opportunity to discuss your answers in your group afterwards.

1. How will it feel to have your soldier back in the house? Be honest about the good and the not-so-good aspects.

2. How do you think your children will react?

3. How will your soldier's return affect your work schedule, cooking habits, cleaning habits, free time, and general way of doing things?

4. Have you developed new interests or friendships? Will these change when your soldier returns?

5. What do you think will be the biggest change in your life when your soldier returns?

Sources of Support and Assistance for Army Soldiers and Families

1. *Army Community Service (ACS)*: ACS is principle source of family readiness for the Army on or near installations. It is staffed by paid professionals and volunteers. Among the services provided are Financial Management Assistance; Exceptional Family Members Program; Child Support Services; Family Advocacy; Relocation Services; and Information, Referral, and Follow-up.
2. *Army National Guard and U.S. Army Reserve Family Program Coordinator Offices*: Although not staffed at ACS levels, these offices provide information and referral services on all of the above-listed services, both military and civilian, for the families of Reserve Component members who normally reside away from Army installations.
3. *Family Assistance Center (FAC)*: FACs may be established on and off Army installations during periods of lengthy deployment. FACs provide assistance and information and referral on such matters as ID cards and DEERS, health care, legal matters, financial counseling and assistance, and family support.
4. *Rear Detachment*: A military unit may create a rear detachment when it deploys for extended periods of time. It is the primary point of contact for family members who have questions or who need assistance prior to and during separations.
5. *Family Readiness Group (FRG)*: The FRG is organized to provide mutual support for a unit's family members. It is affiliated with a specific military unit, ARNG Armory, or USAR Center. The FRG forms the third component of the Army's family support system during deployment. It operates during periods of normal operations as well, in close coordination with the affiliated unit and, if convenient, with ACS or the Reserve Family Program Coordinator's office.
6. *Installation Chaplain*: A good source for confidential counseling, community contacts, and family support programs.

