



RETURN & REUNION



REUNION WITH FAMILY, FRIENDS, & COLLEAGUES

Acknowledgement

This guide was adopted from Air Combat Command. It is designed to help military members and their families prepare for what sometimes turns out to be the most challenging part of a deployment or prolonged absence, return of the military member and their reunion with family or significant other in the case of single personnel. Our thanks to Lt Col Roy T. Franklin who wrote the vast majority of this guide while Commander of the Mental Health Services Flight, Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ.



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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 five major areas: (1) reunion and the single member; (2) reunion and marriage; (3) reunion and children; (4) reunion and single parents; and finally (5) reunion and work. 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, qualifying on the M-9, reviewing checklists, 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.

Homecoming Predictions

- 1. Every deployed person and their household members will experience a feeling of anticipation as the end of the deployment approaches. This may take the form of eagerness for reunion or a dread of a return to a problematic situation or a mixture of both.**
- 2. Few get much sleep the night before homecoming. Children in the home may act out more than usual.**
- 3. These feelings may result in you and your family members being keyed-up and exhausted when the family is finally reunited.**
- 4. It may take a while for the military member to get adjusted to the local time zone, home cooking, lack of continual aircraft noise, etc. Some initial difficulty sleeping through the night is typical.**
- 5. After the end of a deployment, it is not unusual to experience a "homecoming let down/post-deployment plummet." Reality is seldom equal to how we have fantasized life after reunion would be. It makes sense to keep expectations reasonable and to be flexible.**
- 6. The military member may want to stay at home and rest while the spouse may be eager to go out socializing as a couple or get the accumulated "honey do" tasks done. Skillful compromise and reasonable give and take will be needed if arguments and hurt feelings are to be avoided.**
- 7. It is wise for the military member to express appreciation for the spouse's efforts in running the household single-handedly. It is unwise to criticize the spouse's efforts or the decisions they had to make on their own during the deployment.**
- 8. The gifts the deployed member brings home or the special welcome efforts the family and friends make for the deployed member may not result in the expected reaction. Again, it makes sense to keep expectations reasonable and to stay flexible.**
- 9. Children's reactions at homecoming may not be what the parents expected or hoped for. Very young children may not remember the deployed person and may be shy. Older children may be resentful of the time the deployed person was away from the family. Children may need time to get reacquainted. Give it time.**
- 12. If there were unresolved marital or family problems before the deployment, they will not have gotten better during the deployment. Realize it will take time and effort to resolve such problems. Be patient and keep expectations reasonable.**
- 13. If promises were made, through letters or phone calls, during the deployment, the person to whom the promises were made will probably remember and expect the promises to be kept.**

14. The deployed person may feel surprised or hurt the partner did so well on their own during the deployment. Or may feel a little jealous at how closely the children bonded with the "stay behind" parent. Such feelings are normal, but it is wisest to show the other person love and appreciation for all their efforts during the deployment.



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. If you live in the dormitory, you might have gained a new roommate during your absence. 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. Perhaps you’ve taken up diving, weightlifting, or jogging. 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 relationships 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 2 to 4 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 unit members for a

homecoming activity that is special for you and remember to call home.

One goal you may have as a single member returning from deployment is to meet someone new. Perhaps some of you are recently single again following a divorce or the end of a long-term relationship.

Some issues to consider are:

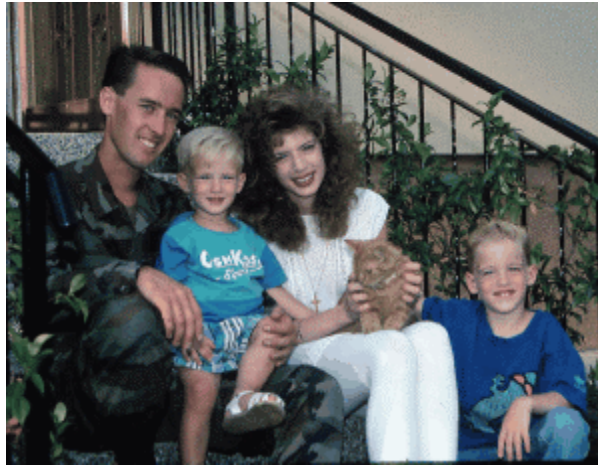
- **What kind of relationship are you looking for?**
- **What do you contribute to a relationship?**
- **What do you want in a relationship?**

Now comes the hard part. How do you actually get yourself to go out and meet new people?

How you feel about yourself affects whether or not you take the risk to go out and meet new people. You have to like yourself enough to take that risk, to go places and meet new people, male and female. Having a good self-image will enable you to take risks, survive the rejections, and, at times, overcome the stereotypes associated with being in the military.

Your return may also be a good time to focus on how you want to live upon return. If you've thought about returning to school, now is the ideal time to check out some of the educational programs, both military and civilian. The key is to focus on what makes your life full and to make plans NOW to integrate those activities into your life.

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 Marriage

Anticipation: We've discussed in other parts of this booklet how 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. Perhaps you've taken up diving, weightlifting, or jogging. 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 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. Now that your partner is coming home, you may be engaged in such activities as dieting, exercising, trying a new hairstyle, buying groceries to prepare your spouse's favorite meal, redecorating the house, and preparing the children, if any, for your spouse's return. 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 them 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 temporarily 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 respectively 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 military 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? Anyone can criticize. But remember, no one ever erected a statue to a critic! 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.

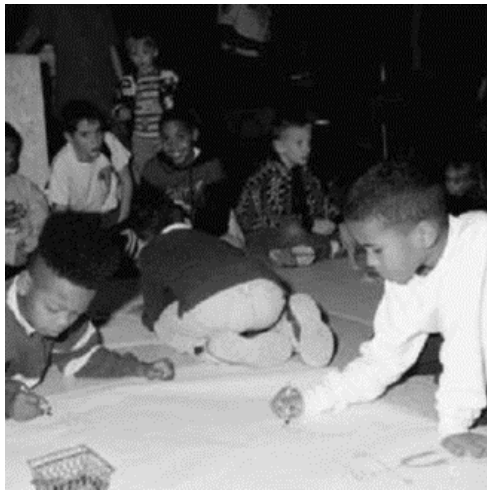
You, as the military member, have received ribbons, medals and awards for doing a good job in the military. The only appreciation you spouse receives for supporting your decision to be in the military is the appreciation she or he receives from you. Many military spouses feel that without that emotional payoff, going through deployments and other military-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 are 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 make 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 awhile. 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.



Children and Reunion

Expectations: Change is at least as stressful for children as it is for adults. The homecoming of the military 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 4 to 6 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 military parent's return based upon the child's age. So let's discuss what you can generally expect of different age children, and how you can facilitate the reunion process with your children. As you know, children are not "miniature adults," but rather developing individuals who change rapidly in their thought and behavior patterns. So, a 1 year-old and a 5 year-old 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 military parent were a stranger. The infant will likely cry when held by the military 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 military 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 military parent. It helps for the military parent to sit at eye level with your child (to look less intimidating) and talk with him/her. A gentle offer by the military 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 military 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 revolved around them (egocentric thinking). Keeping that in mind, it’s not surprising that your preschooler may think he/she somehow made the military parent go away. Or that the military 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 military 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 military 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 military parent should support the other parent's enforcement of family rules but be careful about too quickly stepping into an authoritative role. The toddler needs time to adjust to the military 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 military parent as soon as the parent gets off the plane. He/she will be inclined to try to monopolize the military 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 military parent gets home. If, on the other hand, the military parent's relationship with the school age child was strained, the child may fear the military 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 military parent to have 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 military 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.



Reunion and the Single Parent

If you're a single parent and in the military, 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.

Strategies for coping with these situations are very similar to those described in the Reunion and Children section. There are however, a few additional issues to consider. 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" or 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 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 whomever 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 smoothly. 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 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, I think you'll agree, 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 awhile. 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.

And 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 in a military unit will PCS 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.

SUCCESSFUL HOMECOMING TIPS

The following are tips for returning service members:

- 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.**

The following are tips for military 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 key to dealing with acting-out.**

Conclusion

Experience has shown that virtually all military 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 military 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 predeployment 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 happen 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 military 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 2 to 4 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 Support Center, chaplains, spouses clubs, and local churches. For those families who need more intensive professional help, counseling services are available through Mental Health Clinic; and Family Advocacy Program or through the Tricare Service Center (child therapy and family therapy not involving domestic abuse).

Any deployment during a relationship can be a

BUILDING BLOCK or a STUMBLING BLOCK

It is up to the partners involved!!