

Homefront

KEEPING YOUR FAMILY STRONG THROUGHOUT DEPLOYMENT

5
THINGS
YOU & YOUR
SPOUSE
MUST DO NOW

You
can
do this

Your step-by-step
guide to deployment

Do's and don'ts
of healthy
communication

How to
prep for
homecoming

Easy
5-minute
workouts

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Homefront

KEEPING YOUR FAMILY STRONG
THROUGHOUT DEPLOYMENT

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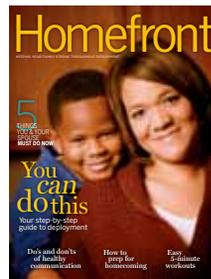
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YRRP



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ON THE COVER

Sondra and Ian Owens, wife
and son of Chief Master
Sergeant Hershel Owens, of
the 118th Airlift Wing,
Tennessee Air National Guard.
PHOTO BY JOHN CHISSON

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Lieutenant General
Harry M. Wyatt III



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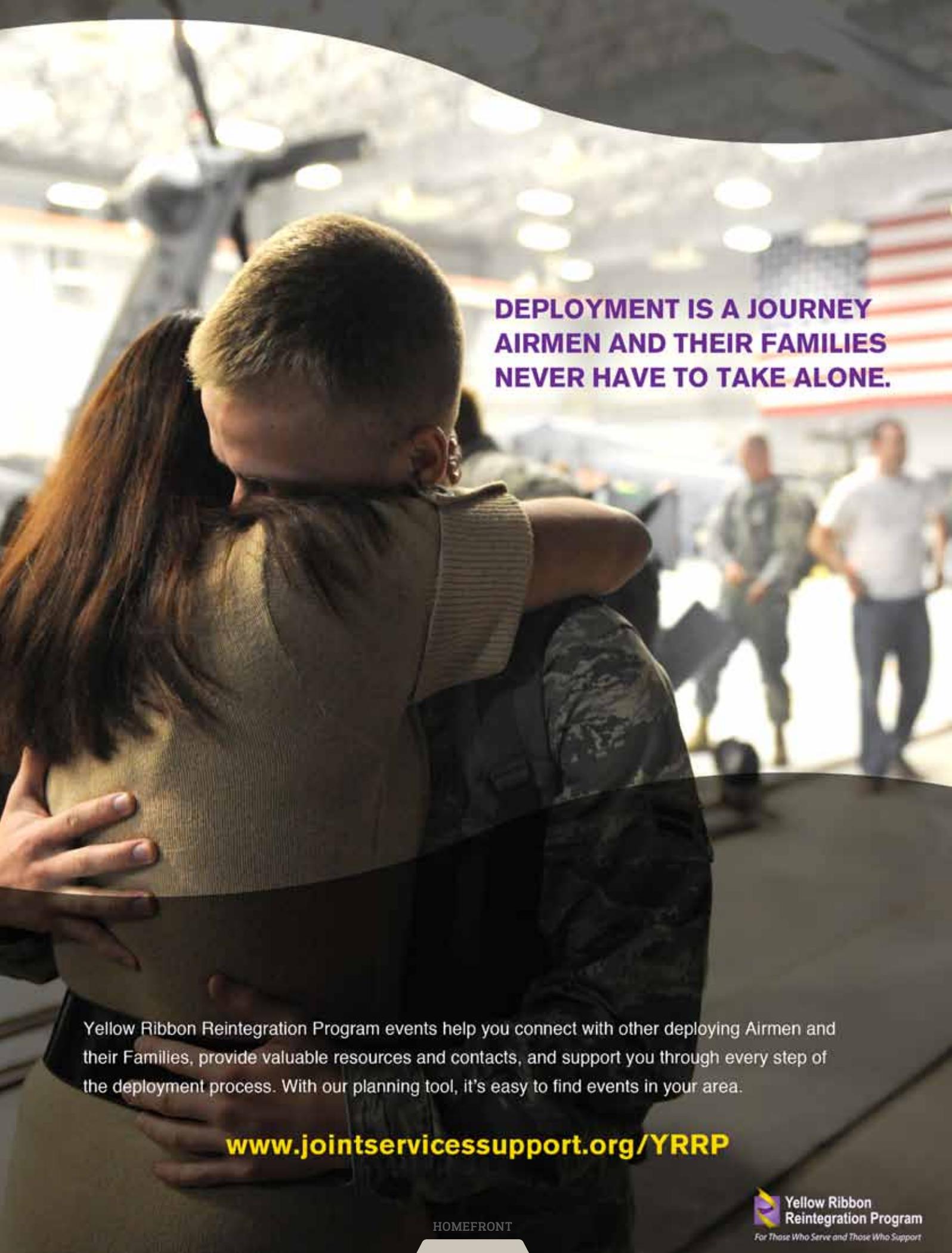
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Success story:
Holding it all
together

A man in a military uniform is hugging a woman from behind. They are in an airfield with other people and an American flag in the background. The scene is lit with warm, golden light.

**DEPLOYMENT IS A JOURNEY
AIRMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES
NEVER HAVE TO TAKE ALONE.**

Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program events help you connect with other deploying Airmen and their Families, provide valuable resources and contacts, and support you through every step of the deployment process. With our planning tool, it's easy to find events in your area.

www.jointservicessupport.org/YRRP

HOMEFRONT

 **Yellow Ribbon
Reintegration Program**
For Those Who Serve and Those Who Support

Dear Families,

Families and loved ones are the source of strength for today's Combat Airmen and an integral part of the Air National Guard's success before, during and after deployments in support of our nation's defense and security. My wife, Nancy, and I recognize that those who remain behind are making tremendous sacrifices as military spouses, family members or friends of a deployed Air National Guard member. We applaud your commitment to your Airmen during their time of service and extend our heartfelt thanks for your sacrifices in support of their deployment.

The strength of our nation is measured not only by our success on the battlefield, but also by our ability to support those families who have made so many sacrifices. Never before in the history of the Air National Guard has so much been asked of our families. They are the source of strength that holds our members together during good times and bad—often without fanfare or recognition.

The Air National Guard takes great care to prepare its Airmen to deploy, which is why Nancy and I believe that we have a duty to ensure our family members and loved ones are just as prepared for that Airman's deployment. No one should embark on a deployment or see a loved one deploy without first knowing the benefits, resources and contacts available to help navigate the deployment cycle. This is why we wholeheartedly support the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program.

The Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program is a legislatively mandated program designed to help Guard and Reserve members, their families and their friends connect with their local support community before, during and after deployments. It is a combination of tools and contacts to assist with the member's personal, financial, medical and business affairs throughout the entire deployment cycle and reintegration process.

Reintegration programs are a key ingredient in the family's success in rebonding. The Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program will provide you with points of contact for valuable resources in your community, coping strategies on how to deal with your loved one's separation, and valuable information about benefits and entitlements. Most importantly, it will provide an opportunity to connect with other families who share the same experiences, and information to help your loved one reintegrate into civilian life after deployment.



"We applaud your commitment to your Airmen during their time of service and extend our heartfelt thanks for your sacrifices in support of their deployment."

Nancy and I believe in the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program and are pleased to introduce *Homefront* magazine. This new product is designed to help military families and loved ones stay up-to-date with various deployment-related programs and subjects. Whether our Airmen are home or deployed, it is important for their families and loved ones to stay connected, learn from others and gain the support they need.

Homefront is designed to convey our nation's gratitude for the sacrifices made by the entire Air Guard team—including those who do not wear the uniform but whose sacrifice is just as important. In many ways, our families and loved ones have the toughest job, and we thank them for all they do for the Air National Guard and our nation.

Bud Nancy

Lt. Gen. & Mrs. Harry M. Wyatt III
Director, Air National Guard

THEIR COMMITMENT KNOWS NO BOUNDS NEITHER SHOULD OURS

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PREPARING YOUR FAMILY AND YOURSELF

Pre-Deployment

5 Things to Do Before Departure

Keeping the homefront strong is essential to your success, your relationship's success and your Airman's deployment. As soon your Airman gets deployment orders, it's time to get busy so you'll be ready once he or she departs. Here's some guidance. BY LIESL MARELLI

1 Be the rock Nothing will make the deployment easier for your Airman than knowing you're OK at home. Resiliency is key. Preparing for deployment can be stressful, but managing that stress in a healthy manner and providing mutual support will form a bond that will take you through the deployment and make reintegration easier. During the Pre-deployment phase, identify the adjustments you'll need to make and discuss how to help each other make them. Family Readiness Groups/Key Spouse Program, chaplains and your state's military family life consultant are there to help. Even if you live in a different state from your spouse's unit, every state wants to help make this transition easier for you, because your happiness affects your Airman.

2 Stay active Maintaining a full schedule will help time pass. This includes keeping physically fit and planning your days well in advance with hobbies, work, family events or meetings with other deployed spouses. A busy calendar might seem overwhelming at times, but an empty one will make the days harder and make the hours between emails and calls seem endless. Create a list of your favorite hobbies so when there's a lull in your calendar, you can check it for reminders of simple activities like a jog in the park or catching a movie with a friend.

3 Review financial and legal issues Your Airman will have the opportunity to prepare important documents with the JAG Corps, such as a power of attorney (POA), living will and will. Discuss these together. What documents are important for you to have access to while your Airman is gone? Will you want a specialized POA or an all-encompassing POA? Most financial institutions will ask for copies of this if

you're trying to handle accounts bearing your spouse's name. Keep these documents handy. As for a living will and a will, discuss what they mean and how your family will be affected in the unlikely event they must be used. (Also, see our story on wills on page 17.) Thinking about worst-case scenarios is tough, but having the paperwork completed will help you if the situation arises.

4 Check on TRICARE If you haven't already enrolled in TRICARE, now is the time to get started. To find out which health-care you're eligible for, visit Tricare.mil or Tricare.mil/mybenefit. Your Airman will go through many briefings before, during and after the deployment, and this topic will be one of them. You can read up about your benefits at Tricare.mil/briefings. Contact your state's ANG Airman and Family Readiness Office to learn more.

5 Identify support networks In the military, wingmen are essential. This is true for spouses as well. There are many sources of support—your parents, neighbors, friends, extended family or a military support network. Military spouses sometimes get the most comfort from others who've gone through deployments before or are going through the same deployment. Not close to people in your Airman's unit? Don't worry. You'll have a lot of opportunities to meet other spouses at events before, during and after the deployment. If you live too far away to attend, ask your Family Support Group to refer you to a closer group. Even if it's in a different branch of service, most of the experiences will be the same. If you are a veteran deployment spouse, reach out to new military spouses who could benefit from your experiences. If you encounter problems with the Pre-deployment phase, ask for help to keep small problems from escalating.

RESOURCES

MilitaryOneSource.mil
or Join on [f](#)
(800) 342-9647

OperationHomefront.net
or Join on [f](#)
VeteransUnited.com/spouse
or Join on [f](#)

Facebook.com/WingmanProject

MilitaryChild.org
(254) 953-1923

www.AFCrossroads.com

RealWarriors.net/GuardReserve

NationalResourceDirectory.gov

MilitaryHomefront.dod.mil

StrongBondsNgb.org

BlueStarFam.org

www.WoundedWarrior.af.mil

 **Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program**

JointServicesSupport.org/YRRP
or Join on [f](#)

YellowRibbon.mil

Never Alone

A deployed Airman isn't the only family member at risk. The at-home spouse may battle loneliness, depression, fear and resentment. The solution? A support network: people and tools that can help you get through it with sanity intact. Here's some good advice. **BY JEFF WALTER**



Understand the process

Knowledge brings peace of mind. "The great thing we have is that I have a really good working understanding of the process—the things they're going through," says Staff Sergeant Matt Martindell, an Airman based at Rosecrans Air National Guard Base in St. Joseph, MO. Martindell's wife, Technical Sergeant Nicole Martindell, also a Guard member, returned in early December from a five-month deployment to Baghdad. In her absence, Matt was responsible for maintaining the household and caring for their 3-year-old son, Aiden.

Understanding the military system, Matt says, "Helps me to not wonder: What the heck is this for? And what the heck is that for? And why do they do this? And why do they do that? It kind of makes sense."

One tool for building understanding is the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program, the Department of Defense (DoD) initiative that connects Guard and Reserve members and their families with a wide range of local resources throughout the deployment cycle. Retreat weekends and other events provide

essential information on healthcare, educational and training opportunities, and financial and legal benefits. Federal agencies including the Small Business Administration and the Departments of Labor and Veterans Affairs partner with DoD to keep volunteers and their families in the know. Pamphlets and videos are available to help parents explain deployment to their children. For Aiden, a simple explanation sufficed: Mommy is going to be far, far away, guarding the planes, just as she does here at home.

Stay in constant touch

Constant communication should run in many directions before, during and after a deployment. Honesty and openness up front help build trust and confidence. Once the Airman has deployed, the spouse at home should be available to talk with the Airman on a regular basis. Such communication needs go both ways, of course.

"Nicole is my wife, but she's also my best friend. I can open up to her," Matt says. "Having those extra lines of communica-

tion—even though she's half a world away—it's almost like she's available to calm me down or say the right words any time I need it."

For Nicole in Iraq, being in touch with her husband, son and other family members provided a much-needed sense of normalcy.

The Martindells employed the Internet, Skype, iPhones and other tools that provided them with the next best thing to having Mommy home. Matt and Aiden were able to send text messages, videos and pictures via Nicole's iTunes account, ensuring that she could share key moments in her son's development. And they could watch her, too.

"The whole age of 3 is so magical," Matt says. "Everything's different: his aptitude to do things, his ability to process and respond. His problem-solving abilities are just unbelievable compared to before. And we've been able to keep Nicole involved with that. At his age, Aiden doesn't like to talk on the phone, but holding a phone to his ear is completely different from being able to see Mommy on the computer or on

the phone."

These tools also keep the family on the same page regarding the everyday happenings in life—Aiden's strep throat, for example, or Matt's father's illness.

"The best thing that can help with ... this whole process of deployment is communication," Matt says. "Communication skills between you and your loved ones, your support group—that's what really pushes you through."

Nicole added: "Stay as connected ... as you can. If you're feeling down and sad, don't let it build up until it blows up. Talk about it as it comes up, before it gets worse."

Keep the kids involved

Trying to keep kids positive about the absence of a parent is crucial. Beyond simple communication, it's important that children feel a part of the process.

Matt got Aiden involved early in Nicole's deployment. Father and son began a countdown system in which they would take a nickel out of a jar and put it in a piggy bank each day as her deployment grew closer: An empty jar would mean time for Mommy to come home. It soon became apparent, however, that an exact return date would be impossible to know, so they switched to a more flexible system based on milestones, such as holidays and changes in the weather.

As the Iraq drawback began, Matt and Aiden prepared for the lack of common amenities

PARENT OF AN AIRMAN?

Deployments can be tough on you, too, but remember that many of the same resources available for the Airman's spouse are also available for you. It's important to reach out and ask for help, since you may experience the same stressors as the spouse.

Try and get involved with the Family Support Squadron and other support groups provided by the Air Guard and the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program. Simply being a part of a group can help provide comfort. And stay involved with your son or daughter's family. If you're nearby, offering your help around the house or with daily chores will give them emotional support, which in turn might ease your worries. —CHRISTIAN ANDERSON

where Nicole was going by assembling care packages. Aiden played a key role in this, offering his input on what he knew his mother would like. He and Matt would go to the post office together to mail the package, and once Nicole received it, she would take a photo of herself with her bounty and then email the picture back home or post it on her Facebook page. That fed the youngster's sense of contribution to an important cause.

Call in the reinforcements

If you are fortunate, immediate family or in-laws live nearby. If not, it becomes even more important to have strong relationships with trusted friends, neighbors or others in the community who can help ease logistical and emotional burdens.

For the Martindells, the presence of family in the immediate area has been indispensable. Matt works at the base full time, sometimes pulling around-the-clock duty, as he did when the Missouri River flooded over the summer and the entire 139th Airlift Wing had to be relocated, and as he does on unit training assembly weekends.

Other special needs arise, too. Aiden's day care, which is structured like a private school, is not always available, and little boys do get sick. At such times, it's the in-laws to the rescue. Nicole's parents, sister and grandmother have been generous with everything from child care to housekeeping, advice and all-around

Instrument of help

Staff Sergeant Matt Martindell is a believer in the benefits of getting to know your family life consultant. At Rosecrans, that's Phil Pringle, whose actual title is wing director of psychological health and who helps people in many different ways.

Pringle is "like a Swiss Army knife," Matt says. "His experience includes consoling people after tragedies and so forth. He's involved in the Yellow Ribbon program, which helps prepare people for deployment, acquaints them with benefits and what to expect, and gives spouses as much information [as possible] on dealing with various issues. He is a go-to guy. You can talk to him about anything, and he will put you in touch with the right people."

emotional support.

"They treat me like I'm their son," Matt says. "They're there for me any second that I need anything. Despite the distance and the fact that they all have their own stuff going on, they were a permanent fixture helping around the house. I couldn't have made it without them."

Find group support

There's strength in numbers, and a formal family support group brings together people with a common cause and common concerns. Meetings and social gatherings allow adults to share fellowship, experiences, advice and empathy—and occasionally much more.

Matt's Family Support Squadron has met twice since Nicole's deployment. Although he was unable to attend the first meeting because of a schedule conflict, he made the second. The group went out to dinner, the children played with one another, and there were activities to help the homefront spouses prepare for the

integration of their loved ones.

Being left at home "is kind of like being marooned," Matt says, "but luckily for me, I have her family here as my immediate support group. Some people don't have those luxuries. This has been a pretty active support group" over the years.

Past deployments have coincided with ice storms and other crises, so group members have mobilized to remove limbs from each other's yards, clear snow from driveways and perform other essential functions, such as helping one Airman's spouse move.

Even though Matt's group was primarily women, "They were going through a lot of the same things as he was," Nicole points out. And if he hadn't heard from her in a day or two, he could call one of them to see if they had heard anything.

Believe in your partner

For the Martindells, trust is a key part of the support network.

Says Matt: "You have to have faith: in yourself and your spouse. It's not a great situation for marriages, and if you don't trust in your spouse, it's gonna cause problems, like 'Why didn't she call today?' That's something you can't worry about. You can't let that seed of mistrust or fear eat you up.

"Stay positive. When your loved ones are in harm's way, you have to keep a positive frame of mind." ❑



RESOURCES

Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program

Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program promotes the well-being of National Guard and Reserve members and their families by connecting them with resources throughout the deployment cycle, including reintegration.

JointServicesSupport.org/YRRP

Do's and Don'ts for Talking With Loved Ones

The first discussions about deployment with children, extended family and friends aren't easy. The first step is knowing what—and what not—to say. Melissa Christiansen and her husband, Technical Sergeant Brian Christiansen, North Carolina National Guard, offer excellent tips on avoiding common conversation mistakes when discussing deployment with your loved ones. BY CAMILLE BRELAND

Do!

Don't.

Set the tone

Finding the right place and time to announce the deployment can make future talks easier during the preparation process. For immediate family members, tell them as soon as possible after the deployment orders have been received—but do it in person. Tell them in a comfortable location like the living room. It's best to set the meeting during a time when everyone can be focused, such as after work or on a weekend.

Reassure them you'll all stay in touch

The Internet, cell phones, Skype and Facebook have completely changed the way Airmen can communicate with loved ones while overseas. Most bases have a reliable Internet connection. The Christiansens also bought a special printer that automatically printed photos Brian would send from his cell phone in Afghanistan. Nearly every day, Melissa and their son would check the printer for new photos, and they created an album.

Be honest

Your loved ones know you're tough—you're married to a service member, right? So, you don't have to pretend that everything is OK if you're feeling overwhelmed or need help preparing. Be candid if you want their assistance while your spouse is away. Friends and extended family can ease the burden by taking on duties like babysitting a few times a month, getting your car serviced when necessary and helping out with errands.

Set boundaries

Sometimes extended family members or overzealous friends can walk a fine line between trying to be helpful and impeding on your family's personal matters. If a co-worker or aunt offers to drop by for a visit and brings casseroles multiple times a week during the deployment, try to tell that person that you really appreciate the gestures but that sometimes it helps your family to have fewer visitors. Ensuring that everyone is on the same page will prevent any hurt feelings or resentment in the long run.

Linger on the "what ifs"

Everyone knows the dangers of a deployment. Even if you know your spouse's missions will take them far outside the wire, don't discuss the details with others. What they should know is that the safety of Airmen and all service members is the top priority of the Air National Guard and U.S. Department of Defense. "There are times you have to exaggerate the truth," says Brian Christiansen, who deployed to Afghanistan from March to August 2011.

Fly solo

Deployments often bring families and communities together with stronger bonds and friendships. Just as your Airman needs their unit for support, your family will also need a group of people to rely on, whether they're family members, neighbors, other military spouses or the local Family Readiness Group/Key Spouse Program. Don't hesitate to seek assistance from others.

Say too much

It's easy to forget about operational security when casually speaking to your family or closest friends—or posting on Facebook—but remember to not share any information about troop movements or mission details. Also, tell your kids not to post the dates their deploying parent is leaving or returning on any social networking site, blog or email. Also, understand and explain to loved ones that there may be times when your spouse is unable to share information about missions.

Let your Airman leave on bad terms

Whether your Airman is talking to their employer or grandmother or you, it's important for them to be conscientious of others' feelings and point of view. You can help by getting your Airman not to leave with unresolved issues—especially between the two of you—because these conflicts will still be there, and often exaggerated, when the Airman returns. Remember, your relationship with your Airman will affect your family as well, so it makes it a lot easier for everyone if there are no problems left lingering.

Be Prepared Financially

Work with your Airman to ensure that the family's budget and savings are ready for the changes ahead

BY J.J. MONTANARO, CFP, USAA FINANCIAL PLANNER

When deployment orders arrive, they quickly come to dominate your family's entire world for the following days, weeks or months till departure. Life for all of you is about to change, and you must be prepared physically, mentally and, equally important, financially. Good preparation can make the difference between the deployment being a financial footnote and a financial catastrophe.

Assessing the Situation

Figure out how the deployment will affect your family financially, and build a "deployment budget." A key factor of this budget is income, and yours is likely to change when your spouse deploys. Two major questions you'll need to answer are: **How much will your income change? And, in what direction?**

Have your spouse ask his or her employer how income will be affected during the absence. On the military front, the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) website (dfas.mil) can help your spouse assess Active Duty pay and allowances. When determining your income, it's important to include the military allowances to which your spouse may be entitled, including Basic Allowance for Housing (grade- and ZIP-code-based), Family Separation Allowance (\$250/month), Hostile Fire Pay (\$225/month) and Hardship Duty Pay (\$50-\$150/month). The allowances noted above along with your Airman's base pay (not to exceed the highest rate for enlisted pay) are tax-free while the Airman is in a designated combat zone.

Along with a change in income, deployment will probably also change your expenses. How does your spouse's deployment income stack up against deployment expenses? If the total Active Duty income exceeds normal civilian pay, it could mean that deployment becomes an opportunity to pay down debt, build an emergency fund, save for retirement or accomplish other goals. On the other hand, if the deployment is going to leave you with a shortfall, it's time to look for opportunities to reduce what the two of you will be spending.

Beyond tax savings, you might be able to save in other areas, such as putting the Airman's car in storage to reduce auto insurance costs, reducing interest rates on existing debt or terminating leases (more on that later). Talk to everyone you regularly pay money to and see what type of adjustments can be made while your spouse is away.

\$250

Family separation allowance

\$225

Hostile fire pay

\$50-\$150

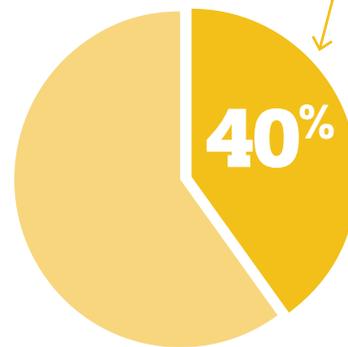
Hardship duty pay



Basic housing allowance (varies)

All tax-free

HAVE A BUDGET



DON'T HAVE A WILL



33 percent



RESOURCES

Military pay tables
[DFAS.mil/militarymembers](https://dfas.mil/militarymembers)

<https://mypay.dfas.mil/mypay.aspx>

Link to calculator
DefenseTravel.dod.mil/site/bah.cfm

Caring for Loved Ones

FAMILIES THAT
HAVE NO LIFE
INSURANCE

30%

40%

WOULD HAVE
TROUBLE PAYING
LIVING EXPENSES
IMMEDIATELY
WITHOUT INCOME
FROM THE PRIMARY
BREADWINNER

One principle of financial planning is hoping for the best but preparing for the worst. With a pending deployment, this has specific implications. First, if you're a family with many financial obligations, you should evaluate your overall life insurance coverage. While the military provides up to \$400,000 in coverage through the Servicemembers Group Life Insurance (SGLI) program, this may not be enough for your specific situation.

There are many life insurance calculators online, including at VA.gov and USAA.com, that can tailor your insurance coverage estimate to your specific situation. If the unthinkable should happen, will you want to pay off your mortgage and other debts, fund your child's college education or receive supplemental income? The calculators allow you to build a scenario according to your preferences. **If you find your requirements outweigh your coverage, then it's time to acquire additional insurance.** It takes time to set this coverage up, so begin the process as soon as possible.

Typically, term life insurance provides a cost-effective way to cover most shortfalls. An

annual renewable term policy is one in which you pay a premium for one year of coverage and get a guarantee that you can continue coverage for a specified time period or up to a certain age (albeit at higher premiums). A level term policy guarantees coverage over a set period of time (for example, 20 years), with premiums staying constant. Regardless of the policy, it's important to make sure that it doesn't exclude coverage for acts of war or aviation incidents.

Also, although this can be difficult to think about now, you should have your spouse **make sure estate-planning documents are up-to-date.** This should be part of the deployment process, but in more complex situations, a civilian attorney may be necessary. These documents ensure that the Airman's wishes are carried out and decisions made according to those wishes, whether they're gone or just unable to make those decisions. Key documents include wills, trusts, powers of attorney (healthcare and aforementioned financial) and a letter of instruction that is not a legal document but that details your spouse's various accounts, contacts and wishes.

Understanding Legal Protections

Deployment—and military service in general—can throw your finances for a loop. As long ago as the Civil War, our government knew this and passed legislation to protect those who serve. The modern version—the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA)—affords military members a number of important protections:

INTEREST RATE CAP

The SCRA limits the interest on pre-service obligations to 6 percent. This applies to debt your spouse acquired before he or she was deployed, including car loans, mortgages and credit cards. To take advantage of this protection, ask your spouse to simply inform the creditor in writing and provide a copy of the military orders.

RESIDENTIAL LEASE TERMINATION

A service member may terminate a residential lease any time after entry into active

service. This includes leases signed with a dependent and applies to deployments of more than 90 days. This can be an important provision for single service members or those who have housing outlays that aren't feasible given the realities of their soon-to-arrive Active Duty paycheck.

AUTO LEASE TERMINATION

Similar to the ability to terminate residential leases, the law allows the service member to terminate an automobile lease if the deployment is to last at least 180 days. Why pay hundreds of dollars per month for an idle auto? And your family will save even more since you won't need auto insurance for that vehicle after the lease is terminated.

It's important to understand and use the SCRA's many and varied protections. This law can help you to turn your deployment budget from red to black, avoid headaches and protect your family.

6%

The max interest rate
on pre-service debt
per SCRA rules



RESOURCES

Go to **AmericanBar.org** and type "SCRA" in the search field.

Keeping the Financial Wheels Turning

Your spouse's absence presents obvious financial challenges. These challenges can be summed up in one word: continuity. However, there are ways to maintain continuity despite the physical distance a deployment creates.

If paying the bills was your spouse's responsibility, and taking it over feels overwhelming to you, consider online bill pay. It's easy nowadays and can be a great help for deployed military families. If you're not doing this yet, consider signing up with your financial institution now. Also, consider setting up automatic payments for your regularly scheduled bills. This will ensure they get paid if your day-to-day affairs keep you too busy to handle it.

And when it comes to paying the bills, you'll need to know what you have to work with. You can view your spouse's military "paystub," called a Leave and Earnings Statement or "LES," online by visiting the military's myPay website (MyPay.gov). Typically, you'll be able to see what will be deposited and all the details about a week in advance. To sign in, you'll need your spouse to set up a limited access account for you by visiting the Personal Settings Page "limited access option" on the myPay main menu.

Online bill pay and automatic payments will go a long way toward ensuring a financially smooth deployment. And, because something unexpected may pop up, it's important to set up your accounts and prepare for that possibility. It could be as simple as ensuring your checking and other financial accounts are joint accounts with your spouse.

A final component of continuity is making sure you have a complete understanding of all of your family's financial matters, where documents are located and what needs to be done. With your spouse, put together a comprehensive list of banking, investment, insurance accounts, websites, passwords, points of contact and instructions.

SAVINGS DEPOSIT PROGRAM INTEREST RATE

10%

0.14%

AVERAGE SAVINGS ACCOUNT RATE

via BankRate.com

Making the Most of the Situation

While deployment presents an opportunity for your spouse to serve our country, it also presents many opportunities to serve your family financially.

After an Airman has been in a combat zone for 30 days, he or she can sign up for the Department of Defense savings account called the Savings Deposit Program (SDP). The account pays a very attractive 10 percent interest rate and is compounded quarterly. Your spouse can put up to \$10,000 in the SDP but must sign up with the finance office when he or she hits the ground overseas. Contributions are limited to net available pay, so it could take a few months to get to \$10,000. But this is a great

way to build an emergency fund or set aside some money for other short-term goals. Remember that the account stops earning interest 90 days post-deployment and gets closed out 120 days after the deployment ends.

If you're focused on saving for retirement, deployment presents a number of opportunities. First, there's the military's version of a 401(k), the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP). Normally, contributions to this type of plan are limited to \$17,000 for those under age 50. However, contributions made with tax-exempt combat pay do not count toward this limit. Still, these tax-exempt contributions, along with those made with

taxable income, are limited to a calendar year total of \$50,000. Also, this April, the Roth version of the TSP will be available. Finally, remember that even though you may not have to pay tax on combat zone income, it does qualify as income for purposes of funding an IRA or a Roth IRA. One last note: Since the Airman's taxable income may decrease substantially during a deployment, it can be an ideal time to consider converting traditional IRAs or employer plans to Roth IRAs.

With some careful planning and preparation, you can ensure your family not only survives but thrives during this deployment from a financial perspective. 

Handling a single Airman's finances? A checklist.

- Have a letter of instruction detailing agreed-upon responsibilities?** Ensure that everyone is on the same sheet of music as to who is doing what.
- Are you the agent on a power of attorney?** A broad general durable power of attorney authorizes you to conduct most financial transactions on behalf of the Airman, while a special or limited power of attorney provides authorization for a specific action, e.g., selling a car or completing a tax return.
- Have access to accounts?** You'll need checks, account numbers, passwords and access to online bill pay, as well as a comprehensive listing of accounts, bills (mortgages, utilities, credit cards, etc.), payment instructions, due dates and addresses.
- Have copies of military orders?** This could be helpful in the event that protections are being sought under the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA).
- Know how to contact an Airman's military chain of command?** If pay problems, legal issues or other challenges arise, you should have points of contact, phone numbers, email addresses and even unit websites handy.
- Need to see the paystub?** The Airman can establish a myPay Limited Access Account that allows you to view pay and tax statements.
- Have caretaker information for home or other properties?** Get the details of what needs to be done, whether it's periodically starting the car, tending the lawn, making sure Fido is cared for or running the faucets during cold weather.
- Has your Airman notified creditors of the deployment?** This will allow them to take advantage of the interest rate cap provided by the SCRA.



RESOURCES

[DFAS.mil/militarymembers/payentitlements/sdp.html](https://dfas.mil/militarymembers/payentitlements/sdp.html)

Health Coverage Reminders

Make sure you're enrolled in TRICARE before your Airman leaves

When your Airman is about to deploy, your family can get heavily discounted medical coverage through TRICARE, the Department of Defense's healthcare program. But following the correct procedures is critical; otherwise, you could wind up with a gap in coverage. With help from First Sergeant (Ret.) Joan Kivior, Family Readiness Specialist with the Kentucky National Guard, here are a few key tips.

1 MAKE SURE YOU'RE IN DEERS. Double-check that your spouse has you in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) correctly, which is necessary for you to be covered. If you aren't sure if you or your children were properly enrolled, call your local ANG Airman and Family Readiness Office. Also, make sure your family gets their ID cards if they don't have them already. All eligible family members at least 10 years old must obtain one at a DEERS office, and your Airman will need to be with you. To get an ID card, the family member must present a birth certificate and Social Security card. As a spouse, you must also bring a driver's license and marriage license. (Other documents may be needed, too, so call the nearest DEERS office to make sure.) Children can be enrolled in DEERS for up to 60 days without proper documentation, but don't wait to get that done. Also, Airmen can still provide healthcare for their children from previous marriages. Let's say Sergeant Joe Smith got remarried and his new spouse has children who live in their household but he didn't adopt them—they can be covered as well.

Top 3 TRICARE benefits

- Saves Airmen and their families money
- Instant availability to quality healthcare coverage
- No pre-existing conditions

2 DON'T FORGET DENTAL COVERAGE. Dental care is covered under a separate plan. Although it's called TRICARE Dental, it's run by United Concordia, and your spouse must apply for coverage. You can get an application online at TRICAREdentalProgram.com, or ask your ANG Airman and Family Readiness Office. With the plan, there are monthly premiums and copays. Your family will pay \$28 a month, plus copays, while your Airman is deployed. When they complete deployment, the premium immediately goes back to \$72 a month.

3 CONSIDER CHEAPER PRESCRIPTION OPTIONS. Both TRICARE Standard and Prime Remote cover prescription drugs. At retail pharmacies, generic drugs will cost \$5, brand-name drugs will cost \$12, and any drug not listed on the pharmacy's formulary will cost \$25. (Make sure your pharmacy participates in the TRICARE program.) But your family may want to consider prescriptions by mail order, which could be even cheaper. Under that option, you'll get a 90-day supply at the same price as the 30-day supply that retailers give. Also, mail-order generic drugs are free. To apply, call (877) 363-1303.

4 ADJUST COVERAGE IF NEEDED. Overall, TRICARE offers considerably reduced rates with copays, and there are no deductibles or premiums while your Airman is deployed. TRICARE has two options: Standard and Prime Remote. TRICARE Standard covers 80 percent of the expenses; your family can see any doctor, anywhere, anytime, as long as the physician takes TRICARE. TRICARE Prime Remote covers 100 percent, but you must choose and go to one doctor, who must be in the TRICARE network and be willing to take new patients (you'll need to check before applying). You will use that primary care manager for all family healthcare. Airmen are automatically enrolled in the TRICARE Standard plan when they get their orders; if your family wants TRICARE Prime Remote, your spouse must apply. Also, remember that the entire family gets an additional 180 days of coverage starting the last day of your Airman's deployment (as listed in block 12b on the DD 214).

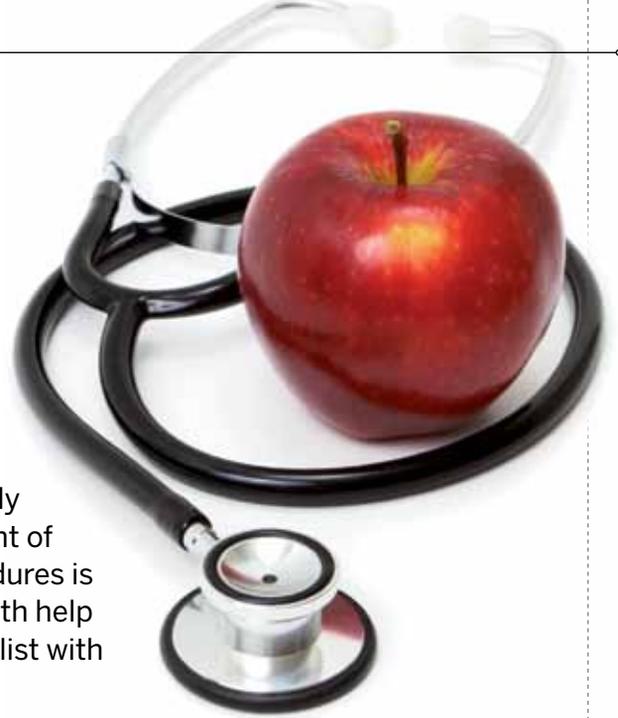
5 SEEK ASSISTANCE. Navigating the TRICARE system can be challenging, so be sure to ask for help when needed. "In my department—Family Readiness—we like to say, 'One call does it all,'" Kivior says. "We make every effort to solve any problem related to TRICARE, and even if we do not have the direct answer, we have air personnel that we can send them to who will. In most cases, the fix is simple and we hold their hand each step of the way."



TRICARE RESOURCES

North **(877) 874-2273**
South **(800) 444-5445**
West **(888) 874-9378**

Members can also find their region by searching TRICARE.mil



The Importance of a Will

Of all the necessary steps you must take to prepare for your spouse's deployment, none is more important than obtaining a legal will. It's a hard topic to discuss, but being prepared will give you and your family the comfort of knowing that if something were to go wrong, you'd be ready. Attorney David Thompson of Neal & Harwell law firm in Nashville, TN, gave us some pointers to streamline the process. **BY CHRISTIAN ANDERSON**



Contact an attorney

The first step in drafting a will is to get in touch with an attorney. Since your spouse is in the military and deploying for a federal mission, you probably have access to an attorney through the JAG Corps. They provide legal services to members of the Armed Forces for free, so they should be able to help you get the ball rolling.

One thing to remember is that the laws dealing with wills, trusts and powers of attorney are generally state-specific, so you'll need to be sure you have forms that comply with your state's law.

"You should definitely seek out a will in the state you reside in," Thompson says. "This will make sure that you have the proper legal representation."

Organize your wealth

The next step is to consider all of your assets, debts and a beneficiary. You'll need to have these pieces in place in order for your legal representative to finalize the will. Anything of value to you and your spouse should be considered part of the will. Be sure to review all of your possessions to make sure that everything is accounted for.

Another thing to consider is that if you have children, it would be prudent to name their guardian—most likely you—in the will.

Consider the types of wills

Three of the most common options are a will, a living will and a power of attorney. A will covers your property and how those assets will be distributed in case of a death. A living will allows you to make decisions for your spouse in case the Airman is incapacitated and cannot legally make decisions on their own. A power of attorney will allow you to make decisions regarding legal and financial matters for your spouse while they are deployed.

If you're already taking the time and going through the motions to get any aforementioned documents, it shouldn't be much more of an additional cost to get the others.

Keep it in a safe place

Whether you get your will for free or pay for it through a civilian attorney, the actual document has great significance. More often than not, if you should need your will during an emergency, you will most likely need the original copy. It's not as critical to be able to access the will in an emergency because probate proceedings usually take a while to get started, but on the other hand, you will need to access a living will or power of attorney immediately in case of a catastrophic accident, injury or worse.

A safe-deposit box or lockbox will do the trick, but also make several copies to give to friends and family. That way, if you aren't able to acquire yours, they might be able to get you the copy until you can reach the original.

Tell friends and family

Tell your family and friends about your will and, more important, where you keep it, just in case you will not be able to access it in an emergency.

Keep it current

It's important to have a will, but if it's outdated, it might be worth only as much as the paper it's printed on. Things to consider when updating a will: Since your last will, have you a) purchased a new house; b) had children; c) moved to another state; d) gotten married? If you've done any of these, you'll need to revise the will. Keeping it updated is almost as important as having it.

"It's very dependent upon the circumstances of the individual person," Thompson says, "but generally, if there are any life-changing events, you will need to contact your attorney to update your will."

This article is for informational purposes only and is not a form of legal representation. Contact a lawyer for your personal needs.



Emotional Challenges?

Turn to a chaplain. Regardless of religious preference, You can rely on chaplains for pre-deployment advice on matters personal, practical and spiritual. Lieutenant Colonel Merrill Muller, who has two Army Commendation Medals and is the wing chaplain for the 185th Air Refueling Wing in Iowa, talks about how chaplains can help. **BY DAN ALAIMO**

Why should an Airman's spouse or significant other meet with a chaplain?

The chaplain has been trained in how to support the family and how to help them sort through the issues that arise as a result of deployment and other events. The chaplains are not there to get them to practice a religion, but to help them sort out the issues of life. Deployment brings a lot of those issues to the forefront.

What are some of the biggest emotional challenges a spouse faces?

For the wives, one of their biggest emotional challenges is the fear of the unknown. They trust their husbands for protection and comfort, and don't know where to go for that. For some husbands, it is fear of the nurturing responsibilities. They're afraid they're not going to be capable of taking care of the children. There are emotional challenges for both spouses because in a family, you usually have a division of responsibilities, and those divisions occur naturally based on what each spouse is comfortable with. When you face doing something you are not comfortable with, the emotional aspect can be very disturbing, almost to the point of inaction.

What can the spouse do to prepare for those challenges?

Talk about the division of labor, then write a list of how to address the different issues that might come up. For example, knowing who to call to get the car fixed or how to address bill payments. In the Air National Guard, if you have children at home, you are required to have a family care plan filed with your unit commanders. This would cover what is in place to take care of a family when a member deploys. That kind of preparation is the best thing that they can do to face emotional issues.

What are some signs a spouse might notice about their family that could be red flags?

One of the most important is school behaviors. Most of the time, when a child has an emotional problem over a deployment, they don't understand how to express their sadness. So they will start acting out in school, and communication with teachers becomes very important to catch that. Often kids won't show that at home, because they want to be strong for their parents. In preparation for deployment, many parents will say to the kids, "You've got to be strong while Daddy or Mommy is gone." That heaps inappropriate responsibility and fear on that kid. Instead, say, "You need to care for and support your mom while I'm gone."

Are there any special concerns when both spouses are members of the military?

When both are in the military, the Air National Guard requires you to have a guardianship in place for any kids, because there is no guarantee that you won't both be deployed at the same time. You have to have that level of provision for your kids in place at all times because today, a person can be deployed in a matter of hours.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

MilitaryHomefront.dod.mil
RealWarriors.net/guardreserve
BlueStarFam.org/
Facebook.com/
MilitarySpouseCentral
LoveThinks.com
StrongBondsNgb.org

STAYING CLOSE DESPITE THE DISTANCE

Communication

What's Your Communication Style?

For the most part, we all fit into one of four different communication styles: **Action, Process, People and Idea.**

It's helpful to know how you and your spouse fit into these styles. With this understanding, you might be less confused, less frustrated and more in tune—especially when communication is limited to phone or email.

Use the guide at right to identify how you communicate. For example, "Action" individuals are focused on results and objectives. They can be a little too frank and impatient to get to the point. But, "Action" individuals are also able to make tough decisions.

THEY TALK ABOUT

- ↳ Results
- ↳ Objectives
- ↳ Performance

THEY ARE

- ↳ Direct
- ↳ Impatient

Action

THEY TALK ABOUT

- ↳ Facts
- ↳ Procedures
- ↳ Planning

THEY ARE

- ↳ Factual
- ↳ Systemic

Process

THEY TALK ABOUT

- ↳ Concepts
- ↳ Possibilities
- ↳ Issues

THEY ARE

- ↳ Imaginative
- ↳ Unrealistic

Idea

THEY TALK ABOUT

- ↳ People
- ↳ Feelings
- ↳ Communication

THEY ARE

- ↳ Warm
- ↳ Spontaneous

People

What to Discuss

Communication between you and your spouse is critical to getting ready for deployment. "It's a hectic time, and there are a lot of things to pull together at the last minute," says Beverly Keating, Airman and Family Readiness Program manager in New York. "Communication is vital." Here are some topics you and your partner need to discuss. **BY MEGAN PACELLA**



The coming changes

Before the Airman deploys, go over how you'll deal with typical household needs such as vehicle maintenance, insurance issues, childcare, home repairs and finances. Kim Evans, director of psychological health for the 146th Air Lift Wing in California, also recommends talking about the military paperwork and deployment information that the spouse on the homefront will need in case of an emergency.

Aside from logistical changes, you should also expect the demeanor of your spouse to change.

"Your Guard member may seem preoccupied or distant while trying to get all of their things in order in preparation for deployment," Keating says. "They have their military requirements to take care of, while at the same time, take care of their personal things. The best way for you to help is to remember that it's a stressful time for everyone. Be patient and take things slow."

How you'll communicate later

If you wait to figure out communication issues until your spouse is deployed, you'll most likely run into serious difficulties. When an Airman is deployed, there is often an 11- to 12-hour time difference separating the

family. Before they leave, determine when and how often you will communicate.

"If you are married to someone who isn't very communicative in general, it can be really hard during deployment," Evans says. "Try to talk about what to expect beforehand. If your husband is deploying and he only wants to be in touch once a week, make sure you can find some common ground."

Determine whether you will talk on Skype, through email or by phone. Most important, set up a time for regular communication.

Care packages and gifts

Ask your Airman what they would like in the mail. Ask your friends, family and neighbors to contribute items to each care package to provide your loved one with comfort from home.

If receiving gifts is important to you, let your Airman know now. Your loved one can leave gifts behind in a hidden spot, or arrange to have a gift delivered on a particular date.

TALK ABOUT THE DANGER?

When an Airman deploys, it's inevitable that the people closest to them will be worrying about the worst-case scenario. Although some families don't want to discuss the possibility of injury or death, others need to talk about their anxiety. "If you're going to discuss it, do so early on and have everyone on the same page rather than waiting until the last minute," Keating says. That way, she says, "everyone can get their thoughts and wishes out in the open, and have a better understanding of them."

The children

Certain questions related to your kids should be addressed before deployment and with both parents involved. How will you discuss deployment with your children? Will you need extra help with childcare? Who will inform your child's school of the separation? What about house rules and chores?

Work together to find trusted childcare services, friends or family members to provide extra help. Decide the best way to talk about the dangers of deployment with your children and take care of their emotions. Work together to prepare your child's school for the potential behavioral changes that could ensue.

"Make sure the children are included in deployment conversations when appropriate," Keating advises. "Get assistance from professionals if you aren't comfortable with having the conversation about deployment, or if you feel unprepared to handle emotions or questions."



NOT SURE WHAT TO PUT IN YOUR AIRMAN'S CARE PACKAGE? HERE ARE A FEW SUGGESTIONS:

- Handwritten letters
- Original artwork from your child
- Books or magazines
- Photographs of the family
- Brochures for future vacation destinations
- Handheld video games
- Toiletries
- Socks
- Puzzles (crossword, Sudoku, brain teasers)

Couples, Stay on the Same Wavelength

One of the biggest challenges you'll face as a spouse is communicating with your Airman while they're gone. And that's on top of the stress of added household responsibilities and worrying about your spouse's safety. Knowing how to address these issues is important. Chaplain (Major) Colin Smith of Joint Base Andrews in Maryland shares suggestions for avoiding the potential pitfalls. **BY RACHEL GLADSTONE**

Do!

Don't.

Use all the tools at your disposal

Nowadays there are many ways to communicate with your deployed spouse. Modern approaches such as cell phones, email and Skype will certainly be useful, but it's also a great idea to try some good, old-fashioned letter writing. Everyone loves receiving handwritten correspondence. Include your kids in the process by helping them draft a letter of their own that can include artwork and photos.

Plan "business meetings"

Choose a mutually agreed-upon time to discuss bills and other nonemergency issues, so you don't fall into discussing them during every call. Planning ahead helps both parties prepare to put their "business hats" on. Say something like, "Next call, let's talk about the bills. This call, I just want to tell you how much I love you and miss you."

Give verbal cues

It's natural to need to vent from time to time, since holding down the fort at home can be challenging. If you need to express your frustrations and can't wait for a "business call," give your partner a heads-up by saying something like: "I know you can't fix this, but ..." and then share the problem. By stating up front that you "need to vent a little bit," you won't catch them off guard, making for a smoother conversation.

Accentuate the positive

Even if the challenges are overwhelming at times, try to focus on the positive things happening at home. It's natural for your partner to want to jump in and fix things, but they can't when deployed, which can cause frustration for everyone and leave your spouse feeling useless. It will help your relationship and your communication if you can keep things in perspective and find ways to control your anxiety.

Push your luck

Ending a call or email on an angry note will leave you wishing you had thought things through, so know when to call a "timeout." Try framing things in a positive way by saying something like, "We weren't able to work through everything now, but we'll have more time later." It's better for all concerned to revisit the problem on your next call, after you've both had time to process things and cool off.

Let it all hang out

Try not to call your spouse when you're feeling overly emotional, as your attitude could inject anxiety into the conversation. If your nerves are raw or you're exhausted, it's probably not a good time to talk. Wait until you feel calmer. The same goes for email: Wait, stop and think before sending. If it's a planned call, say: "I really want to talk to you, but I'm not sure I'm at my best right now. Can we talk tomorrow at the same time?"

Incite jealousy

Keep things appropriate so you don't create unnecessary worry or jealousy for your spouse. But informing them when someone is coming over to help with household chores is a good idea, even if it's someone you both know; it's important to keep your partner in the loop.

Forget to engage in active listening

Empathize with Airmen by reflecting their situation back to them. This shows you understand the day-to-day struggles they're facing. Say something like, "I hear you and what you're going through. I'm so proud of you."



BE PREPARED

Meagan Novak, the fiancée of Tech Sergeant Ryan Pinney of the 161 Air Refueling Wing, Arizona, explains why planning ahead before receiving a call from your spouse can make your conversation more productive.

"The hardest thing when Ryan's away is that I can't call him, which means I have to wait for him to call me. And when he does call, he could be calling at 3 a.m. my time, and we usually only have 10 minutes to talk. I find the calls are much better if I plan ahead, so I can share the most important stuff and see how he's doing."



Don't Take It the Wrong Way

Long-distance contact can cause confusion. Here's how to avert disaster.

BY CAMILLE BRELAND

Thanks to computers, the Internet and social media, it's easier than ever for couples to stay in touch during a deployment. Unfortunately, these tools come with pitfalls—namely, the potential for miscommunication. The reason? You can't see in-person cues like facial expressions and tone of voice, so it's easy to misinterpret someone's meaning. In nonmilitary relationships, such confusion can often be cleared up quickly by a phone call. But for couples in a deployment, a missed signal can wreak havoc. Here are a few ideas for making sure you're on the same page.

Communicate about communicating

One of the most important—and often overlooked—tasks couples should tackle before the Airman deploys is discussing how they'll stay in touch—and how often. It's important to discuss how often they will be in touch and by what methods (email, instant messaging, etc.). Otherwise, confusion can ensue regarding expectations of frequency, time of day and duration of contact. Also, even after your plan is in place, try to keep in mind that your deployed spouse may not always be able to stick to the plan due to the needs of the mission or connectivity problems, and try to remember that it's not personal.

Tell it like it is

In all forms of written communication during a deployment, try to be as direct as possible. Emotion, tone and context can be very hard to interpret through any form of text,

because it lacks the nonverbal cues of in-person discussion, such as body language, eye contact and shifts in tone. For example, sarcasm, irony and sometimes just a simple question or comment can be misconstrued when it's in writing. So, when emailing, instant messaging, texting or even writing letters during deployment, try to be as straightforward as possible in your language.

Count to 10 before you send

If you're upset with your spouse or significant other about something and you write about it in a message to that person, wait a while before you send it. Then reread it and ask yourself if it needs to be toned down. It's too easy to be harsh or say things you don't mean, and once you press "send," you can't take it back. It's best to wait until you've thought things through and calmed down. Also, try to start out your message with describing what you're feeling. That way,

the Airman won't have to wonder, or worse, fill in the blank for themselves, creating yet more miscommunication.

Share with care

Communicating honestly is essential to maintaining a strong total-family bond. However, being honest and open doesn't always mean you should say everything you're thinking or discuss every detail about household events. For example, many spouses at home find that it's better to not tell the Airman about the more complicated problems that arise in the house until they are solved, since there's little or nothing the Airman can do about it anyway. Examples would include a leaking roof or the car needing a major repair. Since it might only stress out the Airman to hear about a problem that they can't tackle, it is often best to save that information till after it's fixed—or after the Airman returns home.

TIPS FOR AVOIDING ONLINE MISFIRES



Speak at a normal volume. Don't whisper or talk too loud. Very high-pitched or low-pitched voices can get distorted on Skype. Also, be aware that facial expressions and subtle body gestures can also be distorted—and therefore missed—on Skype.



Try to be as concise and direct in your messages as possible. Email is notorious for not properly translating attitude, emotion, intention and even humor.



Don't use Facebook or other social media to discuss important family issues and problems. These matters are not for public viewing, and they can be misinterpreted. Save them for one-on-one communication methods, and use social media for the lighter side.

Romance at a Distance

Thoughtful touches that will keep your relationship strong BY STEPHANIE INMAN

Because of the hectic life of an at-home spouse or significant other, it may be difficult to find time to nurture a relationship with a deployed Airman. But putting in a little effort can go a long way. After speaking with Betty Gaskins, Airman & Family Readiness Program manager for the 164th Airlift Wing, Tennessee National Guard, we've outlined a few ideas for keeping your romantic relationship alive.



Coordinate a proper send-off

A deployment can be nerve-wracking for an Airman, especially the first one. So before the departure, prepare some inspirational notes and messages to hide in their bag. Not only will it be a nice surprise for them on the plane or after landing, it will also emphasize that you are there for support.

Relay pictures from back home

Homesickness is common among deployed Airmen. Send images of life at home to make them feel included and remind them of the life waiting for them when they return. Add extra sentiment by photographing yourself at a memorable location, like a restaurant you both love.

Set aside a date night

Establishing one night a week as a "date night" will help maintain quality time from afar. While a couple may communicate regularly throughout a deployment, the conversations can often become routine. A weekly date night can add some flavor. Discuss a movie that you've both seen recently. Read the same chapter from a book and talk about it. Plan future dates to go on when the Airman has returned.



USE YOUR NETWORK

Don't forget to rely on friends and family when setting up romantic or thoughtful gestures. It can be difficult to arrange everything yourself, especially if you are overseas, and they can help you keep the relationship alive.

Celebrate the special occasions

Remember to send something for birthdays, holidays and anniversaries. Being away from family is challenging, and whenever you honor a special occasion, it demonstrates that you place value in the relationship. So go the extra mile—celebrate special memories such as your first date or first vacation together with a card, ready-to-make cake or other military-friendly gift.

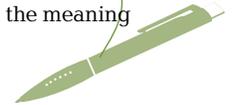
Get personal with a package

Deployment life is often monotonous. Break up that day-to-day routine by sending a care package or gift. And no matter what it is, add a personal touch. Your partner will be thrilled to receive a token of your relationship. Include a list of the top 10 most treasured moments you have shared together and why they're your favorites. Record a sweet message on video. "Burn a couple of CDs with some of the couple's favorite songs over the years," Gaskins says. The importance isn't in what you send, but the meaning attached to it.



Share a bit of yourself

Even apart, you and your Airman can grow closer and build a stronger relationship. Don't be afraid to open up and share some intimate details of what you're feeling. Rediscover each other—your hopes, dreams and desires. "Keep a daily journal—possibly about things they are grateful for or things they love about their partner," says Gaskins. Then mail it back and forth. The journal can act as a tangible link between you, and also as an outlet to take your relationship to a deeper and more emotional level.



Maintaining Your Family Unit

Stick to routines, make more memories and don't neglect yourself BY MEGAN PACELLA

Your family dynamic is about to shift dramatically—there's no getting around that. Roles will be reversed and burdens may be heavy, leaving you with responsibilities (such as finances or childcare) that you've never handled before. "It can change pretty much everything, because the spouse that's left behind is now the point person for all things," explains Kim Evans, director of psychological health, 146th Air Lift Wing, California. "But there are things you can do to prepare for the changes." How to keep your family close through it all? Evans helped outline a few helpful approaches.



Maintain a consistent lifestyle

Now is not the time for major life-changing decisions—especially if you have children. If possible, try to stay in the same house and keep a similar family schedule.

A consistent schedule will minimize behavioral problems in children and give them reassurance that the deployed parent will do their best to come home. It's extremely important to keep your children close and don't allow them to pull away from you.

"Make sure that everyone stays connected and is watching for changes in your children, so you don't lose one of the kids along the way," Evans urges.

Talk it out

It is common for family members left behind to keep quiet about their feelings. While it can be scary to express your feelings or hear that your child is scared or angry, don't shut down commu-

nication. If you're having trouble communicating as a family, consider seeing a family counselor who can help you deal with your emotions.

Share your life

As soon as your loved one deploys, make an extra effort to remain close to neighbors, parents and siblings, and don't be afraid to ask for help. "It's especially important to keep family close during major holidays," Evans explains. "To sit at home alone during any holiday is incredibly difficult if you don't have anyone to support you."

Be selfish at times

It's easy to put your own needs on the back burner. After all, your Airman is away and your family needs your attention. But it's more important than ever to meet your own needs. Ask a friend to babysit for a night, and

take yourself to dinner or a movie. Make regular doctor's and dentist's appointments to keep yourself healthy. Find time to take a walk or exercise. By taking care of yourself, you are reducing the possibility of resenting your Airman for leaving you alone.

"Don't feel guilty about doing things for yourself," Evans says. "The difference between deployment versus single parenting is that you have to take care of everything for your family—but you also have the constant thought in the back of your head that your spouse is deployed to the war zone. That drains your energy."

Make a list of things you can do to restore your energy, and talk to a friend or family member about helping you make it happen.

"The biggest piece of advice I have from my experience is to take care of yourself so that you can take care of everyone else—including your Airman," Evans adds. "You really do deserve that."

Kid to kid

MilitaryOneSource.com advises parents to encourage younger kids to talk to older children who have been through this. They could be other family members or from other military families. The advice those younger kids get from their peers may help them in a way that an adult can't.

Help Your Child Stay Connected

These activities can keep the bond with the deployed parent strong BY RACHEL LATHAM

Keeping your children in touch with the deployed parent is one key to maintaining a strong family unit during the separation. It also facilitates a sense of continuity. Along with traditional methods like the phone and email, there are plenty of fun, creative and effective approaches to this.

"You need to listen to your children," says Jessica Clark-Woinarowicz, state youth coordinator with the North Dakota National Guard. Thinking about that now and preparing ahead will benefit both the Airman and the child.

"Find specific ways for the children to communicate with the deployed spouse," she adds. "Getting kids to express themselves is very important."

The methods vary by age, so here is a breakdown of some good ways to keep the kids and the Airman connected with each other.

Babies and toddlers

- Record your baby's voice—laughter, first words—and send the recordings to your spouse. Also, ask your spouse to make recordings for the child—reading a children's story, for example—and to send those recordings to you.
- Keep a photo album of the baby's development, making sure to include milestones like first time crawling, first steps discovering new things. Along with keeping the Airman involved, this may also help minimize any surprise factor or disappointment about how much the baby has grown when the Airman returns.

Elementary school

- Kids of this age do well with tangible items—things they can hold or hug. DaddyDolls.com creates custom dolls bearing the image of the deployed parent. You simply send in a photo of the Airman, and DaddyDolls.com creates a doll and sends it to you. This gives children an ever-present visual reminder of the parent and something they can snuggle with.
- Children may wonder or ask what time of day it is where their parent is stationed. Set up two side-by-side-clocks in your home—one set to your local time, and the other set to the deployed parent's local time. Then you can show the child, or kids can check for themselves whenever they like. Plus, it helps them feel more connected to the parent.
- A diary is a wonderful tool and can be used in many creative ways. For example, you can mail a diary back and forth, with the Airman and the child taking turns writing an entry. Good topics would include day-to-day experiences that each of them is going through. They can also write a story together. It can work like this: Someone writes chapter one, then mails it to the other, who writes chapter two, and so on

until the book is finished. They can also use the diary to draw and share pictures.

Middle school and high school

Kids of this age need to stay connected too. Here, the computer is a very effective tool, since they're probably already using it regularly. Email, of course, is a simple, reliable method and works well. Social networks such as Facebook are also an excellent tool, because they offer so many ways to communicate, including real-time chatting and photo sharing. You might also consider encouraging your child to get involved with camps and other support groups and activities especially for military kids. Ask your family support group about this, or check www.operationmilitarykids.org.

All ages

Skype is a free computer program you can download from the Internet that enables free live voice and video conversations. It's a favorite among deploying military families. Try having the children prepare questions and topics ahead of time. This will help them use the time spent online most efficiently, and can help them remember what they want to say and ask.

A Few More Tips

- Have the Airman write letters to your children that offer encouragement, advice or messages of love. Give them to your child when you sense that they need support.
- Every few months, give older children a small trinket from their deployed parent to remind them that they are cherished.
- Carry photographs of your Airman with you in the car, on the dinner table and next to your child's bed. Don't let your family forget that your Airman is always present.

—MEGAN PACELLA



Tackling Kids' Tough Questions

Honest communication can help children cope

BY AMY STUMPF

One of the most difficult tasks a military parent will ever face is breaking the news about an upcoming deployment to their children. Depending on their age and your family's particular situation, they may already possess a general understanding of what deployment means. Even so, there are bound to be some tough questions. How you and your spouse respond to those questions can have a direct impact on your child's ability to cope with the inevitable stress that accompanies deployment. With preparation, patience and honesty, you can help your family through this difficult time—growing closer and stronger in the process.

Where are you going, and how long will you be gone?

Although reactions certainly vary from child to child, most initial questions will center on the basic details of when a parent must leave, where they're going and for how long.

"Let children be your guide as far as the details of the deployment or the environment their loved one will be in," says Beth Sandeen, youth services program coordinator for the North Dakota National Guard. A mother of two, Sandeen has seen her husband deployed twice. "Some younger children will not be able to handle or understand the details you might give an older child. Be honest and give them the security that they can trust what you tell them. Also, keep in mind the exposure they are going to have outside the home, such as at school or daycare. You don't want them to hear something from the media or community before you've had the chance to prepare them."

As state youth coordinator with the North Dakota National Guard, Jessica Clark-Woinarowicz agrees. "Parents should share as much information as they can with their children, while staying age-appropriate and keeping within OPSEC [operational-security] guidelines," she says.

She also cautions parents against delaying the news or holding back information. "Many parents want to wait to tell their children. They think this is a way to protect them. In reality, telling your child sooner gives them the opportunity to cope with their own feelings. It also gives the family an opportunity to discuss the upcoming changes. Another reason parents should tell them sooner rather than later is because children can often sense when they are not being told the truth. They know when parents are keeping things from them, and they often paint a picture far worse than reality."

Is it dangerous? What if you get hurt or killed?

While the concept of death is not easy to face, parents must be willing to discuss the issue openly and honestly.

"My husband told the kids that he was going to a part of the world that is dangerous but reassured them that he was not going in unprepared," Sandeen says. "He talked a lot about all the training and preparation that goes into his job, and I think that comforted them. He compared it to a football game—you practice and practice until you're ready.

"Another thing that helps is knowing that all of the Soldiers really care about each other and their families," she adds. "They're all

watching each other's back and working together to get home safely."

Of course, it's important that you don't make promises you can't keep. "Try to stay positive and reassure your kids without making false promises," Clark-Woinarowicz says. "And don't diminish the way they're feeling. It's normal to be afraid, and kids need to know that they can come to you with their concerns."

How will things change at home?

As much as we would like to reassure our children that nothing will change for them, that's simply not the case. After talking with your spouse, sit down with your child to develop a plan for handling schedules and household responsibilities, while sticking to routines as much as possible.

Rituals such as story time and playdates take on added importance during deployment, providing a much-needed sense of security and comfort for little ones. Older children and teens may express concerns about money and important events, such as high school graduation or prom. Again, listen carefully to your child and validate his feelings.

"Help children understand that change is a part of life," Sandeen says. "Don't expect things to remain the same when the parent is deployed or that it will go back to the way it was once the parent returns. These kinds of expectations lead to disappointments more often than not. Instead, create a 'new normal' for your family, and involve your children in what that should look like."

Sandeen also stresses the importance of educating other caregivers. Teachers, coaches and spiritual leaders should be aware of what your child is going through so they can provide appropriate support.

"Teachers can be a great resource for both you and

your child," she says. "Be up front, help them understand what's going on at home and enlist their help in monitoring



Silver linings

Make no mistake: Deployment is a trying time for all involved. But there are positives for children that can come from the experience. One of the biggest potential benefits is that "it gives children the opportunity to learn that even when a parent is physically absent, they can still be a presence in their lives," says Jessica Borelli, a clinical child psychologist in California.

This can help them later in life to maintain strong relationships even when parted by a separation (such as college or jobs). As a parent, you can encourage this by reminding the child how much the parent loves them and how strong the family is to be overcoming this challenge.

Children will also likely become more mature and learn to value family time as precious. This independence and maturity can be encouraged when parents vocalize how wonderful it is when everyone is together and by making special family time together. Having time to make memories together, without the distraction of television or electronics, can reinforce the value of that family time.

Children who have been through deployment may also learn how to be more flexible with daily life. The military changes things often, and the ability to move through that successfully will help them learn about change at a young age.

—RACHEL LATHAM

your child's behavior. Connections are vital—whether they are with the deployed parent, the core family that is left, the extended family, the church or the community. Get kids involved in sports, school, church, whatever. Family support groups are also great, giving them the chance to talk with other military children."

Will I be able to talk with you?

Much has changed in recent years to help military families stay in touch with deployed service members. A wide range of communication methods is now available, from emails to video conferencing, as well as old-fashioned letters and care packages.

Of course, there may be times when the service member is unable to communicate because of mission requirements. And not all families have ready access to the Internet. Don't be afraid to ask friends, neighbors or even local schools for assistance in staying connected.

Also keep in mind that the deployed parent is hungry for any news from home. Encourage your children to keep a running list of achievements and milestones. They might even create a scrapbook to share upon their loved one's return.

"No detail is too small," Sandeen says. "As you get busy with the day's routine, it's easy to forget little accomplishments like getting an 'A' on a spelling test. But those are the kinds of connections that keep families close."

What if I get scared?

Some level of fear and anxiety is to be expected, and it's important for parents to realize that stress affects children just as it does adults. Encourage open communication, and be available to listen when they need to talk. Young

children may not be able to voice their concerns, but they may be able to express themselves through play or by drawing a picture.

Moodiness, irritability and other emotional reactions are normal. Be patient and calm, and provide plenty of reassurance and support when your child acts out. Talk about your own strategies for dealing with stress, and help children discover what works best for them.

However, it's also important for parents and other caregivers to watch for warning signs, including aggressive or withdrawn behavior; changes in eating/sleeping habits; unexplained physical symptoms, such as headaches/stomachaches; unhealthy friend choices; changes in grades or anxiety at school; regressive behavior, such as thumb-sucking/bed-wetting; and the use of drugs or alcohol. (See the story on page 28 for more on red flags.)

"A good rule of thumb is that if certain unhealthy behavioral changes last longer than two weeks, you may need to seek help," Clark-Woinarowicz says. (Although the degree of severity can also be a factor in how long you may want to wait.) "It's tough because you're going through your own emotions, but remember that you're not alone. Support is available."

And don't be afraid to take time for yourself, as well.

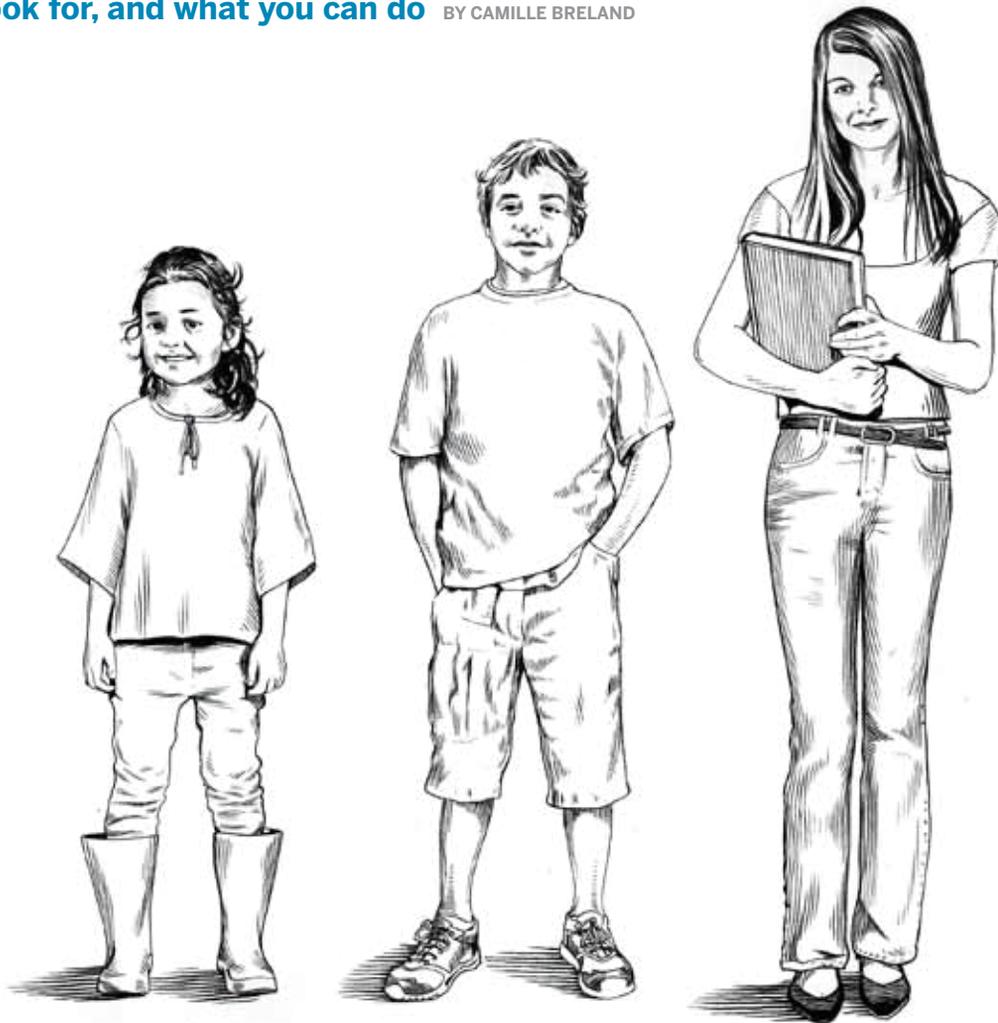
"A healthy parent makes a healthy child," Sandeen says. "If you are worn down or stressed, your children will be stressed, too. It's OK to take a break for yourself. It doesn't make you a bad parent—it makes you a better one."

"There are no easy answers to kids' tough questions," she adds. "But as long as they feel loved and secure, everything else will come in time."

When Kids Aren't Themselves

The warning signs to look for, and what you can do BY CAMILLE BRELAND

A deployment can affect the spouse and children in very different ways. Children cope with distress through emotional or behavioral expressions that vary depending on their age, says Dr. Jessica Borelli, a clinical psychologist and director of Military Spouses Standing Together, an organization for families dealing with deployment. One child may exhibit signs of depression, while another might become aggressive in school and at home. It's critical for parents to understand the typical changes that could occur in their child's personality as a result of a deployment. "If parents aren't tuned in to what's going on with their child, and aren't thinking with every misbehavior or unusual fear, 'Is this tied to deployment?' then they could be missing something," Borelli explains. Below she provides examples of typical effects of deployment on children and advice on what you can do to help.



STRESS INDICATORS

AGES 3 TO 6

More clinginess, more temper tantrums, nightmares/night terrors, bed-wetting or "accidents" during the day (for children who were previously potty-trained), refusal to go to school

AGES 7 TO 12

Refusal to go to school, difficulties with peers at school, increased resistance to completing homework or schoolwork, physical complaints (such as stomachaches or headaches), difficulty sleeping, nightmares/night terrors, oppositional behavior toward parents

AGES 13 TO 18

Disengagement from family, increased verbal or physical aggression, use of alcohol or drugs, promiscuity, self-injurious behavior (cutting, burning), social withdrawal (too much time alone in one's room), changes in eating (significant weight loss/gain) *

* Note: Many of these behaviors in teenagers are serious and should be addressed immediately. If you notice these changes in your teenager, contact a mental health professional or counselor through MilitaryOneSource.mil and discuss the behaviors with your teen.

HOW PARENTS CAN HELP

1 CONTINUAL COMMUNICATION

This is crucial to emotional stability during a deployment. The parent at home should frequently be gauging a child's feelings and emotions, and talking about the deployed spouse. By openly discussing their thoughts and feelings, parents and children can build trust between one another and alleviate emotional stress. Also, families and the deployed Airman should try to communicate with one another as much as possible. With the great improvements in technology in the past decade, military families have many more outlets for communication, such as online video chatting, email, social media, text messages and more. These technologies, in addition to sending care packages and letters through traditional mail, will help families feel connected despite the physical separation. "An ideal circumstance is that children would have a sense that their relationship with

their deployed parent continues even when the parent is gone," Borelli says.

2 FOCUSING ON YOURSELF

Helping to maintain your own mental and emotional balance will translate into a better state of mind for your child. "Kids are so sensitive to the dynamics that are going on in their immediate environment, particularly to how their parents are doing emotionally," Borelli says. Bottom line: If you're unhappy, your child is probably unhappy. Borelli says to avoid the temptation to suppress your own feelings in an effort to conceal any sadness from your children. While you may think you're being strong in front of your child, you're actually missing an opportunity to show them how you deal with distress and anxiety—a missed chance for them to learn by example the right way.

Parents at home may talk to their child about how they not only miss the deployed spouse, but also think about how great it will be when that parent comes home. Talk with your child about

fun things you would like to do as a family after the deployment; create a wish list of activities. Borelli says this communicates several important messages to the child: 1) It's normal to feel upset when someone you love deploys; 2) There are things you can do to manage that distress (like having a good cry, getting your anger out in an acceptable way or focusing on positive moments to come); 3) It's OK for the child to talk about the distress they are experiencing.

3 CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

Every Air National Guard unit has a family readiness group (FRG)—a team of other military spouses and volunteers who provide support to military families. Contact your FRG through your spouse's unit to connect with other families going through a deployment or to attend FRG events.

MilitaryOneSource.mil, a free website for military families, offers extensive information and resources on maintaining relationships during deployments. The site also lists ways to reach

a mental health professional or counselor and a suicide prevention hotline.

4 KEEPING A POSITIVE OUTLOOK

Deployments can often make families realize the importance of their relationships, the value of their time together and the extent of their love for one another. Borelli suggests talking about these positive factors of a deployment with children to help them maintain a positive and realistic viewpoint—that a deployment is not forever, their deployed parent still loves them, they can still have a relationship and, though the Airman is physically absent, that parent can still be present in the child's life. By maintaining a positive outlook, parents can help their child become better equipped to handle similar situations in the future. "In the long run, this might make children of deployed parents more resilient when dealing with long absences, because they may be better at feeling connected to the people in their lives even when they're physically separated," Borelli says.



Keeping busy

When Lieutenant Colonel Deanna Miller (107th Airlift Wing, New York) saw her husband, Lieutenant Colonel Greg Miller, get deployed to Afghanistan last summer, she tried to maintain as normal a routine as possible with her 5-year-old son, Johnathan, to prevent any significant emotional issues during the separation. "[Johnathan] missed his dad, and he would be sad on some days, but I was always positive about it. If he was sad, we would talk about Daddy or make him a card or something to make it positive. We mailed him letters every day. We sent him schoolwork and care packages to maintain that connection. I kept [Johnathan] very busy, and we talked about Daddy all the time, keeping him part of our normal, everyday routine."

KNOW WHEN TO GET PROFESSIONAL HELP

Dr. Jessica Borelli says parents should make a decision to seek professional advice based on these factors:



SEVERITY

What constitutes severity changes based on the type of problem, but something that significantly interferes with a child's ability to function (playing, going to school, socializing) is considered severe.

DURATION AND COURSE

If the problem just started and it isn't causing significant interference in the child's daily life, you can wait to see if it improves. If it's causing only mild interference but persists for a longer time (a few months), you should seek professional guidance.

SETTINGS

Find out whether the behaviors are occurring in multiple settings, such as home and school. If so, there is more cause for concern and it's time to consult a professional. Even if not all of these criteria are met, go with your instinct, Borelli says. If you're concerned about your child, seek professional advice. Plus, even if your child isn't at risk for severe problems, seeing a therapist can provide additional support during this stressful deployment period.

A Tie That Binds

This bracelet project will bring your Airman and kids closer

BY CHRISTIAN ANDERSON

A survival bracelet, which your Airman and child can make together before the deployment, is more than just a craft—it looks cool on the wrist, serves as a physical reminder of the loved one and can even help the Airman in a pinch. In an emergency, the bracelet can be used for fishing line, boot laces, cord for tying down a tent or tarp, or as a tourniquet.



MATERIALS NEEDED:

- ↳ Scissors or knife
- ↳ Lighter or matches
- ↳ Tape measure
- ↳ 10 feet of 550 paracord

1 Cut 2 meters of cord, melt both ends with a lighter and fold the cord in half. Wrap the cord around your wrist, pull the ends through the loop and tie an overhand knot with the ends. Make sure there is room between the cord and your wrist by placing a finger in the gap. (If using two colors, cut 1 meter of cord from each different colored strand.)

2 Lay the remaining cord in front of you horizontally.

Place the base cord, with the loop at the top, over the middle of the strand of cord to form a T.

3 Make a cobra knot. To start, take the cord on the right and bring it over the top of the T to form a Z.

4 Take the left cord and thread it down through the loop on the left side of the base cord. Go under the base cord and up inside the loop on the right. Be sure to pull the cord snug.

5 Make sure the overhand knot fits through the small loop at the top of the base cord. Next, starting on the left, reverse the process by making an S this time.

6 To finish reversing the step, bring the right cord down through the loop right of the base cord. Go under the base cord and up inside the loop on the left. Pull tight.

7 Keep making cobra knots until you are about

one-quarter of an inch from the stopper knot.

8 Check the fit on your wrist by pushing the stopper knot through the loop at the apex. Adjust the fit by moving the knot up or down. The bracelet should be snug, but not tight. Trim the tag ends, melt them with a lighter and you're done!

↳ **Search online for how to make a "celtic knot" and "cobra knot."**



1



2



3



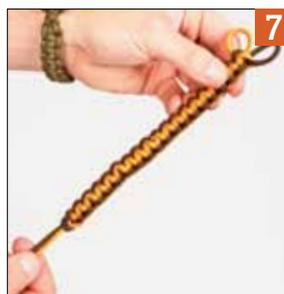
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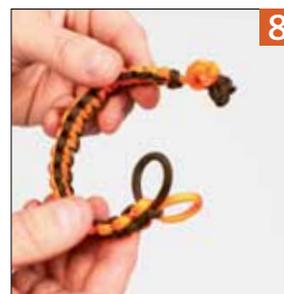
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6



7



8

(WARNING: PARENTAL SUPERVISION IS DEFINITELY NEEDED FOR THIS.)

KEEPING BODY AND SPIRIT STRONG

Your Health

Elements of Total Fitness

Total Fitness is an approach to instilling a culture of resiliency and community among Airmen, their families and the civilians who are part of the Air National Guard's mission. What is resiliency? It's the ability to not just survive, but thrive in an environment of stress and adversity. It's based on five basic areas of fitness: physical, emotional, social, spiritual and family. **BY BRENDAN MCNALLY**



Social When you're living someplace far from your family and friends, instead of letting yourself sink into lonely isolation, you need to stay engaged with the world around you. Volunteer, take a class, join a team or a book club. Always dreamed of writing a book? Find a writing group, and make it happen. The support networks and structures for the spouses of deploying military members are designed for and available to both men and women.



Physical Naturally, it all starts with physical fitness. Having a fit, resilient body is the best way to get a fit, resilient mind and positive outlook on life. If you can go to the gym four or five times a week, great. But if you can't, take walks, mow the yard or do 10 minutes of strength training every morning. You'll be amazed at how fast you'll start seeing results.



Spiritual We're a nation of many religious beliefs, but we're one people. Spiritual fitness could therefore be defined less by religion than by having a sense of purpose and meaning. You can find your spirituality in a religious service but also in a nature walk or yoga class. It's a matter of connecting with that place inside or outside of you where there is peace.



RESOURCES FOR
TOTAL FITNESS



**Yellow Ribbon
Reintegration Program**

JointServicesSupport.org/YRRP

YellowRibbon.mil

AMC.af.mil/caf

MilitaryFamily.org

DCOE.health.mil



Emotional There was a time when military spouses were expected to adopt the same "stiff upper lip" in dealing with emotions as the service member. That has its place, of course, but it is also important to encourage a wide range of emotional expression in yourself and your family; happiness, sadness, joy, silliness. Don't be afraid to laugh or cry. And when you need to reach out for help, don't be afraid to do so.



Family Being a military spouse, you have your civilian family and your military family. Sometimes your military family can be a lot easier to deal with because, for the most part, they all know the drill. But what is important is to stay engaged. Even if your family members aren't great at keeping in touch, write them anyway, let them know what's going on. You never know who the gems will turn out to be.

Get Fit in 5 Minutes

Use this circuit to eliminate stress and cut 5 pounds in 14 days

BY STAFF SERGEANT KEN WEICHERT
MASTER FITNESS TRAINER IN THE TENNESSEE
ARMY NATIONAL GUARD, SIX-TIME SOLDIER OF
THE YEAR AND VETERAN OF OPERATION IRAQI
FREEDOM AND DESERT STORM

Looking for a workout to fit your busy life? Do you find it hard to stay fit when you are taking care of the kids, working long hours and cleaning the house? What if your workout solution took only five minutes?

Get Fit in Five Minutes is a simple circuit that targets every muscle in your body in that short time span, so you can give yourself a fat-burning boost any day, any time.

Using exercises from the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program Fit Kit, you can cut 5 pounds in 14 days. In addition to getting in great shape, you can use this workout to eliminate stress. Now, all you have to do is just do it!



SQUAT WITH STANDING ABDUCTION

TARGET
legs and hips

EQUIPMENT
Xertube

Stand with your legs shoulder-width apart and hands level with your shoulders. Keeping your chest up, inhale as you lower your body as if sitting in a chair. Align your knees over

the middle of your feet and stand up. Shift your balance to your left foot and extend your right leg six to 12 inches to the right. Set your foot down and complete your repetitions before switching legs.

OBJECTIVES PER LEG

Basic: 1–10 repetitions

Intermediate: 11–20 repetitions

Advanced: 21–30 repetitions

SINGLE-ARM BENT OVER ROW

TARGET
back and arms

EQUIPMENT
Ultra Toner

Stand with one foot in front and one foot behind your body. Place one end of the Ultra Toner under your front foot. Hinge forward from your hips, keeping your back straight. Exhale as you pull your arm into a 90-degree angle. Inhale as you straighten your arm.

OBJECTIVES PER ARM

Basic: 1–10 repetitions

Intermediate: 11–20 repetitions

Advanced: 21–30 repetitions

UPRIGHT ROW

TARGET
deltoids

EQUIPMENT
Ultra Toner

Grasp one handle with both hands and position both of your feet through the opening of the other end. Stretch the tubing slightly and stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent, toes pointing forward. Position your arms in front of you, elbows slightly bent and palms facing toward you. Leading with your elbows, raise your hands to your neck. Return to the start position and repeat. Exhale through your mouth as you raise your arms and inhale through your nose as you return to the start position.

OBJECTIVES

Basic: 1–10 repetitions

Intermediate: 11–20 repetitions

Advanced: 21–30 repetitions

**HERE'S HOW
IT WORKS**6 MINUTES OF WARM-UP
EXERCISES (CALISTHENICS)6 EXERCISES
FROM THE FIT KIT

3 SETS EACH



3 TIMES A WEEK

**GET FIT IN
5 MINUTES:
7-DAY
WORKOUT**

If you have more time, incorporate the routine into a more extensive regimen.

MONDAY

Perform the entire program at your designated level

TUESDAY

Treadmill Interval Running Drill x 2–3 miles

Crunches x 2–3 minutes

WEDNESDAY

Perform the entire program at your designated level

THURSDAY

Rest

FRIDAY

Treadmill Interval Running Drill x 2–3 miles

Crunches x 2–3 minutes

SATURDAY

Perform the entire program at your designated level

SUNDAY

Rest

NUTRITION ADVICE: To help lose body fat, try reducing your intake of white breads, pastas, cheese and sugar. Try to incorporate additional colorful vegetables such as spinach, cucumbers and bell peppers. Cut out soda and sugary drinks. Eat “good” fat such as almonds, olive oil and avocado instead of fried foods. (But consult your physician before making any changes to your diet or exercise plan.)

**QUADRUPED HIP AND LEG EXTENSION**

TARGET
legs and rear end

EQUIPMENT
Xertube

Begin by placing the center of the Xertube over the bottom of your right foot. Hold the handles and place your elbows on the ground under your shoulders, forearms facing down. Place your knees below your hips

and wrists below your shoulders. Keep your back straight, shoulder blades flat and eyes looking straight down. Exhale as you extend your right leg behind you. Do not arch your back during the leg extension. Inhale and return to the start position. Complete your repetitions before switching legs.

OBJECTIVES PER LEG

Basic: 1–10 repetitions

Intermediate: 11–20 repetitions

Advanced: 21–30 repetitions

**PLANK WITH KNEE FLEXION**

TARGET
abdominals

EQUIPMENT
None

Start in a push up position with your feet six to 12 inches apart, hands on the floor under your shoulders. Maintain balance and exhale as you bring one knee toward your chest. Inhale as you return your leg to the start position. Moving both knees toward your chest once equals one repetition.

OBJECTIVES

Basic: 1–10 repetitions

Intermediate: 11–20 repetitions

Advanced: 21–30 repetitions

**GLUTE BRIDGE**

TARGET
legs and rear end

EQUIPMENT
None

Lie face up on the floor with your knees bent 90 degrees. Position your feet hip-width across, feet flat on the floor. Lift your hips toward the ceiling until your back and thighs form a straight line, keeping only your shoulders and feet on the ground. Hold, then lower your hips within a few inches of the floor without touching and repeat. Breathe naturally, and challenge yourself by performing a marching movement once you raise your hips.

OBJECTIVES

Basic: 1–10 repetitions

Intermediate: 11–20 repetitions

Advanced: 21–30 repetitions

Get Fit With Your Family

If you have kids, finding time to exercise is difficult even in normal times. During deployment, it's especially challenging. Here's an idea: Try exercising with your kids. Below are a few activities you can do together that don't take much time, can be done almost anywhere, and are simple and fun. You'll reap amazing rewards for yourself, and at the same time show your child the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. Best of all, the time together can strengthen the bond between you. **BY CHRISTIAN ANDERSON**

TAKE A STROLL

Walking is one of the easiest ways to exercise, because you can do it virtually anywhere, any time. Its many benefits include boosting your metabolism, raising your heart rate and helping prevent osteoporosis by strengthening bones and joints. Plus, you don't have to buy any special equipment—just a pair of decent shoes. If you have an infant, put them in a stroller and take them with you. If your child is older, walk with them to a playmate's house or to the park instead of driving. Even if you have only a few minutes, a brisk walk can do wonders for you both.

HAVE A BALL

Whether it's a basketball, football, baseball or any ball, take in some sports with your child. A game of catch or basketball can work up a sweat

and improve your child's hand-eye coordination and athleticism. As an added bonus, playing sports together builds a sense of teamwork between you, which is good for communication.

PLAY A GAME

An easy way to be active and have fun with your child is to play tag or hide and seek. These games raise your child's heart rate and give kids a chance to burn off excess energy. And since they don't require any equipment, you can head right out the front door for a quick game.

ENJOY NATURE

Use your surroundings and natural environment to entertain your kids while you explore. Taking a hike, walking through a park, visiting a zoo or aquarium and even touring a historic site are all excellent ways to ensure children get exercise. Just walking through a zoo can burn several hundred calories in as little as two hours. Check your local tourism council for options, and you're bound to find endless possibilities.

HIT THE FLOOR

There are plenty of exercises you can do at home that don't require any equipment.

Pushups, sit-ups, lunges and stretching can all be performed anywhere in your house.

Try and make it a game with your child to see who can do more reps of an exercise.

And don't be afraid to pop in your favorite exercise tape or DVD. Whether it's yoga or an aerobics program, children often gravitate toward visually based activities, so they might enjoy tackling the program with you.

GET SOME WHEELS

Hop on a bike or strap on a pair of inline skates. These two forms of exercise are a great way to burn calories in a short period of time and will allow you and your child to cover a lot more ground than if you were walking or running. Just remember to wear helmets.



Keep kids moving!

- Approximately **17 percent** of Americans ages 2-19 years old are overweight or obese.
- Since 1980, obesity among children and adolescents has **almost tripled**.
- Obese children are more likely to have high blood pressure, high cholesterol and Type 2 diabetes—**risk factors for cardiovascular disease**.
- Obese children are more likely to become **obese adults** than are physically fit kids.
- The CDC recommends your child get as much as **60 minutes** of physical exercise every day.

Statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



Ideas for Easing the Pressure

Stress. It's virtually impossible to go through a deployment without experiencing it. Contributing factors for military spouses include loneliness, deployment duration, added responsibility at home and on the job and disrupted sleep patterns. Those can't be helped, but we checked in with Chaplain (Lieutenant Colonel) J.D. Moore of the Virginia National Guard for a few tips on how to deal with the anxiety. **BY LIESL MARELLI**

Have an outlet

Find someone you can confide in and vent to without judgment or repercussions. Unit chaplains are a great option—they will provide friendly, unbiased ears. Or try speaking with a friend or family member who will listen to your concerns. Express your stress in a private conversation with the right audience—that means no public blogging or lashing out. Get whatever is burdening you off your chest, and let it go so you can keep your mind on the important task at hand: keeping the homefront running smoothly for your family.

Keep fit

Make friends with the gym. In fact, make it one of your best friends. Never underestimate the positive mental and physical effects of a tough workout. Squeezing in a workout before your family gets up is an easy way to begin the day on an upbeat note. Or try some easy exercise after your family

is in bed to burn off stress and frustration. (And if that's not possible, read our story on the previous page.) Troops often return from deployments with a fitness level they've never attained before, so try and do the same for yourself while the Airman is gone. Workouts are as creative as your mind allows. A bonus: Getting back the body you had years ago will make your significant other smile.

Laugh often

Milton Berle once said, "Laughter is an instant vacation." He was on to something. Research at the Mayo Clinic has shown that laughter not only reduces stress but induces positive physical changes such as increasing your body's intake of oxygen-rich air, stimulating your heart and lungs, increasing endorphins, stimulating circulation and aiding in muscular relaxation. Joke with friends, and laugh off stress whenever you can.

Stay social

Spending time with friends makes the deployment go by a lot faster. Confide in them, work out with them, hang out with them. Make care packages together to send to your loved one. Every Airman needs a Wingman, so you should have one too. Also, if you notice that a friend or acquaintance has become withdrawn, include that person in your activities. When you take care of your friends, you take care of yourself.

Eat healthy

A good diet might be hard to come by when you're running the household alone, but opt for the healthiest options available. High-fat, nutritionally deficient food will deplete your energy and hurt your physical health, thus compromising your emotional health. Select healthy food so you are more inclined to work out, stay social and tackle your chores.



How to de-stress before bed

So you've had a long day, and you're up to your neck in stress. Instead of lying in bed, staring at the ceiling and worrying, try these simple steps to get a good night's rest.

- **Take a warm shower or bath** Warm water has a relaxing effect on the body, and works wonders on aches and pains.
- **Listen to soothing music** Soft, slow tunes can encourage slumber because a steady, rhythmic beat can lower your heart rate.
- **Meditate** Taking some quiet time to collect your thoughts can help soothe and calm you.
- **Turn off the TV** Your bed is for sleeping, not catching up on reruns. Scientists have proved that TV can disrupt your sleeping patterns.
- **Drink a cup of hot decaf tea** Tea with chamomile or valerian root can help reduce restlessness.



The Impacts of Stress

Left unchecked, chronic strain can lead to serious physical and psychological problems BY BRENDAN MCNALLY

While your spouse is on deployment, you're carrying a lot on your shoulders—family, household, bills and other problems, all while worrying about your Airman. It's natural that you're feeling stressed. But unless you get a handle on it, the stress can start taking its toll on your health.

When it comes to coping with stress, Meridan Zerner, a wellness lecturer with the Cooper Clinic in Dallas, suggests what might seem an unlikely model for people: the zebra. "Zebras don't get ulcers," she says. "For a zebra, stressful situations rarely last more than a few minutes."

Zerner says that there are two basic kinds of stress: acute and chronic. "Acute stress is what the zebra experiences when the lion jumps out of the bushes. Physiologically, what happens in moments of stress is the body releases two hormones, adrenaline and cortisol, into the bloodstream, allowing us to react in the way that's known as "fight or flight."

Like zebras and other animals, our bodies were engineered to deal with stress, but only in brief increments. "Twenty minutes is about it," Zerner says. We are not physiologically designed to deal with stress over long, continuous periods of time. The kind of stress that doesn't go away is called "chronic stress." Left unchecked, it suppresses your immune system. It also can lead to heart disease, high-blood pressure,

obesity and diabetes, and a host of other ailments.

Common physical symptoms of chronic stress are headaches, muscle aches, chest pain, fatigue, upset stomach and sleep problems.

COPING STRATEGIES

The problem is that the stressful situations are not going to go away, so instead you need to find ways of dealing with and managing stress in your daily life. When you undergo moments of stress, your body is flooded with cortisol, and unless it gets burned or neutralized fairly quickly, it will start affecting your endocrine system, which is how things start going bad.

The best thing you can do at that moment is exercise. With

also an excellent post-stress snack. Peel and cut them and keep them in a small container.

If you're working at a desk, be sure to stand up every hour and stretch. You'll be surprised how much it can calm you. But the best thing is physical activity. Remember that little bits of exercise add up. If you can't do a full workout, then do a few minutes. If you can't go running, then go walking.

Whatever you do, make yourself focus on what you're doing at that moment and not on the stuff that happens to be eating you.

STRESS AND WEIGHT GAIN

Cortisol directly affects fat storage and weight gain in stressed individuals. Deep abdominal fat inside your body

make better choices."

Get into the habit of eating less fast food. Reducing that even by one or two times a week is easy to do and makes a big difference. Also, learn to eat less. If you use a smaller plate, you'll put less food on it and if you leave a couple bites worth of food uneaten, that's a hundred calories a day, which adds up to roughly 10 pounds you don't put on a year.

THE IMPACT ON SLEEP

Sleep is extremely important for your health because it helps your body regenerate. But when you're feeling lots of stress, sleep is one of the first things that gets affected. You'll find yourself sleepy at the wrong times, and when it's really time to sleep, you won't be able to.

A number of strategies can help you fall asleep easier. If you've brought work home, lay it aside and give yourself an hour or two to relax. At this point what you'll probably want to do is turn on the tube and zone out, but you might be better off doing something different. Reading a bit or listening to music will actually relax you and help you wind down faster.

But before that, you should do some exercise. It's always a good idea to burn off some cortisol. Follow that with a hot bath or shower. Certain foods will make sleeping easier. Warmed milk can be a sleeping aid, as well as cheese, yogurt, eggs and bananas.

The stress-laden world we live in is not likely to change, but with a little planning, it's possible to not just survive stress, but actually thrive. **☑**

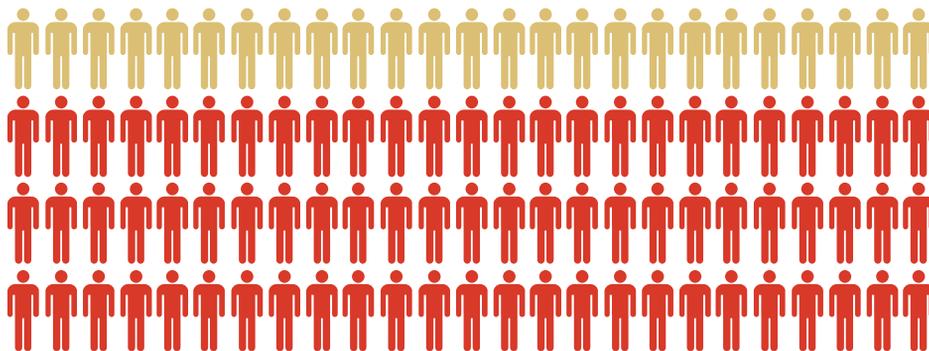
48% of Americans feel that their stress has increased over the past five years. 75% of Americans mentioned money and work as the leading causes of stress.

10 or 20 minutes of working out, you'll actually be ahead of the game. But you can also do what the zebra does after it outruns the lion and just eat something. One of the single best things would be to munch on some almonds. They relieve stress and boost your immunity. You can buy almonds in any grocery store and keep a small package of them in your bag. You need to eat only a few a day. Avocados, though they require a little preparation, are

has greater blood flow and four times more cortisol receptors compared to subcutaneous fat. Cortisol also suppresses your immune system.

In addition to exercising, adopt strategies for controlling what you eat. That means learning how to work around our own nature. "We're hard-wired to want to eat fatty, sugary, salty foods, because a long time ago, those foods meant survival," says Zerner. "But we can teach ourselves to

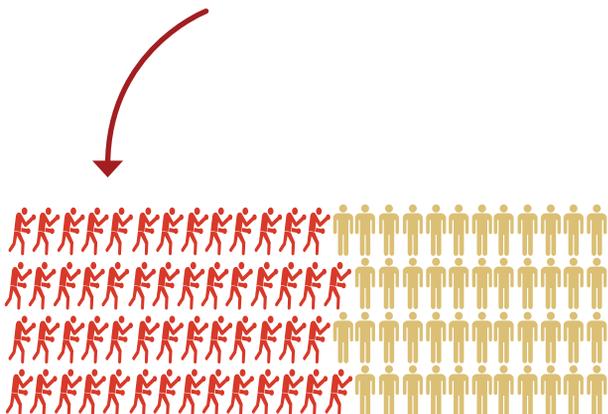
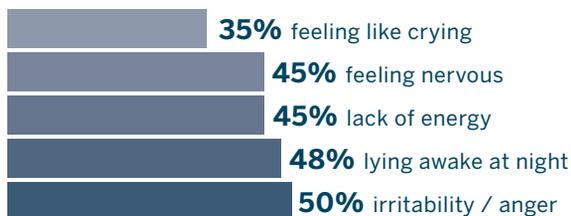
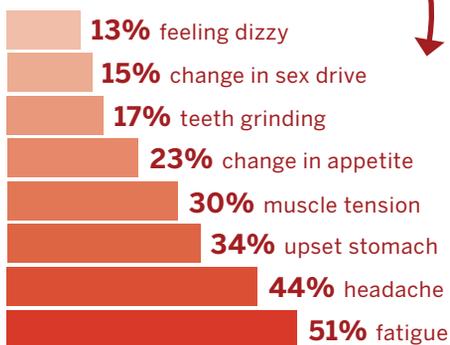
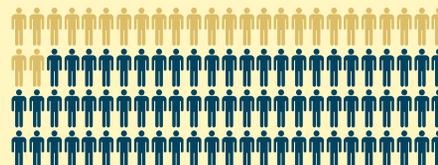
Three quarters of Americans experience symptoms related to stress in a given month:



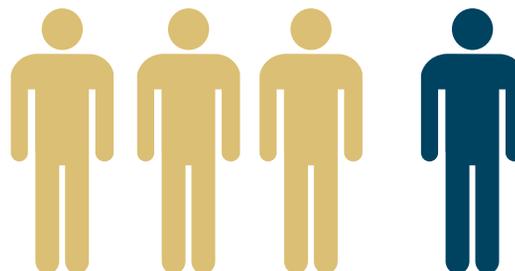
77% experience physical symptoms



73% experience psychological symptoms



54% of Americans say stress **causes them to fight** with people close to them.



One in four people report that they **have been alienated** from a friend or family member because of stress.



SHOULDERS TO LEAN ON

If you're feeling disconnected, try talking more to other spouses or others. And try not to feel as if you're imposing on them. Melissa Christiansen, whose husband, Technical Sergeant Brian Christiansen, North Carolina National Guard, deployed to Afghanistan last year, didn't hesitate to do that.

"Reach out to people around you. You'll be surprised how patriotic they are and how they want to be able to support you in any way they can," Melissa says.

— CAMILLE BRELAND

Coping With Loneliness

Know the warning signs and where you can turn. Loneliness is one of the most common issues during a deployment. The deployed spouse and the spouse or significant other at home are both susceptible. *Homefront* sat down with Carter L. Frank, national program director of the Air National Guard Psychological Health Program (West), to discuss the problem—and some solutions. **BY MARK KAKKURI**

What causes loneliness?

"Loneliness results from relational deficits—in other words, a lack of supportive or nurturing relationships in one's life," Frank says. "It doesn't necessarily mean a person has no friends. It is more related to whether they have relationships they feel they can depend on—people they feel they can trust when they need support or help."

People can also feel disconnected from their environment by lack of interest or affiliation, which can cause them to isolate themselves from others. The lack of trust or inability to trust, often fostered by failed relationships or traumatic or abusive experiences, can also contribute to feelings of loneliness or detachment.

How are loneliness and detachment related?

According to Frank, in this context we are interested in the concept of "balance" as it relates to a person's need or desire for the support of others. Disconnecting from others can contribute to loneliness, and loneliness may contribute to a growing sense of disconnectedness. So, says Frank, "They are not mutually exclusive dynamics; they can be interdependent."

He says many factors influence the onset of loneliness and a sense of disconnectedness:

Personality. Introverts tend to need less time with others and often look for internal connections with others (one-on-one, small groups). Extroverts tend to need more time with others and often look for external expressions from others (parties, events, large gatherings).

Past experiences. People who've been hurt physically or emotionally will often have difficulty trusting others. People who have learned to resist asking for help may find themselves in overwhelming situations not knowing what to do or who to turn to. People who have learned to be dependent on others may be overwhelmed simply by the fact that they feel like there is no one available to assist them when they need it.

Circumstances. These factors could involve job changes and geographic moves; socio-economic changes such as divorce, loss of income and economic status changes; illness, injury or disabilities; or unexpected or underestimated care for family members (elderly, dysfunctional, disabled).

Who can be affected by loneliness?

"It can develop for anyone, given the right combination of personality, past experiences and circumstances," Frank says, "and that critical mix is unique to everyone. Everyone has different tolerances and different thresholds where their psychological

coping skills begin to break down." Frank adds that people who have daily routines that tend to isolate them from their peers are probably more at risk for developing loneliness.

What should someone do if that person is showing signs of loneliness or feeling disconnected?

According to Frank, while loneliness could be part of a more pervasive depressed mood or even part of a clinical diagnosis of depression, its presence alone is insufficient for a clinical diagnosis. Therefore, professional therapy would not necessarily be the recommended approach. People who feel lonely or disconnected, however, should ask themselves these questions:

- What kinds of people do I tend to identify with, and what opportunities do I have to connect with them?
- What barriers am I facing that tend to keep me from taking advantage of these opportunities?
- Who or what can assist me in overcoming these barriers?
- Do I have other emotional issues that contribute to my loneliness, and do I need specialized assistance to effectively deal with them?

Who should a person speak with about their loneliness or disconnectedness?

Signs of loneliness other than sadness or emptiness:

- Lack of supportive relationships
- Isolation
- Distrust



Frank recommends these resources:

- Family and friends
- People who are in similar circumstances
- Clergy and church congregations
- Community support agencies
- Social groups revolving around an activity or interest, or self-help groups

What are some common problems in terms of military spouses dealing with these issues, and what can the average spouse learn from those?

Stay-at-home mothers often become isolated, especially if they have recently moved, says Frank. He adds that spouses of deployed military members experience the same dynamics as single parents. Their focus on taking care of their children's needs limits their ability and opportunity to connect with their peers on a regular basis, he says.

"One of the most challenging elements of single parenting is not only the lack of time but also the lack of energy to engage in supportive adult relationships," Frank says. "Moreover, spouses of military members often face the challenge of multiple geographic moves with periods of separation. Geographic moves also present the difficulty of leaving established friendships and facing the struggle of finding new ones. This can result in intentional isolation as spouses seek to avoid the pain of disrupting relational connections when they have to move again—sometimes unexpectedly."

To ease these issues, Frank says that spouses need to recognize their need for

supportive adult relationships and set aside time in their schedule to foster those relationships. "A parent's relationships with their children can be very fulfilling, but they do not replace the need for adult relationships," he says. Frank adds that it's also important to recognize that it's unhealthy to depend on your spouse for all of your social and support needs because there will be times when your relationship will be disrupted by conflict or periods of separation. This highlights the need for additional adult relationships, preferably of the same gender.

What resources are available to spouses?

Military members and their families are often unaware of the help available. Most often, Frank says, it's because they don't ask, don't know who to ask, or assume they're not eligible for assistance. Frank says this is particularly true for Guard members, because the majority of them are traditional Guard members with temporary status.

"The plethora of programs and initiatives that support military members can be something of a moving target," says Frank, but every military organization will have representatives who can assist service members in navigating through the sea of

resources available to them. These include the following:

- First sergeant and executive officer
- Airman & Family Readiness program director (ANG)
- Unit service coordinator (ARNG)
- Chaplain
- Wing director of psychological health (ANG)
- State director of psychological health (ARNG, one per state)
- Sexual assault prevention and response coordinator (SARC)
- Transition assistance advisor (TAA)
- Recovery care coordinators (RCC) ✓



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

OperationHomefront.net or Join on (800) 722-6098

JointServicesSupport.org or Join on

VeteransUnited.com/spouse or Join on

Healthcare.gov

FindAHealthCenter.hrsa.gov

samhsa.gov/MilitaryFamilies

Keep Your Immune System Strong

Daily life without your spouse might have you feeling vulnerable and alone. Fortunately, you've got a backup program—your immune system. The immune system is a remarkable mechanism that's continually fighting off infection and diseases. Below you'll discover how to support and strengthen your immune system to make sure it's working for you. **BY BRENDAN MCNALLY**

WATCH OUT FOR

Stress One thing they have learned relatively recently is the enormous degree to which chronic stress erodes your health and suppresses your immune system. A recent study from the National Institutes of Health suggests stress can be linked directly or indirectly to as much as 85 percent of ailments. Stress has been shown to suppress your immune system by raising levels of the hormone cortisol, which is normally produced when the body needs to react to danger.

The thing to remember is that building up your immune system is a long-term process. It's all about learning to make the right choices in how you live. There aren't any quick fixes here.

Smoking and drinking Of all the things you can do to help your immune system, by far the single-most important thing is to quit smoking. As long as you keep putting deadly smoke into your mouth, throat and lungs, your immune system is going to be spending most of its resources fighting, and losing, that battle. We could spend this entire article

spelling this out in horrible detail, but you already know the effects. Find a way to stop.

With drinking alcohol, it's a little different. Keeping your consumption to a moderate level—the occasional beer or one or two glasses of wine a day—is OK. But anything more than that and you're putting unnecessary strain on your system.

Antibiotics If your doctor has put you on antibiotics, certainly you should take them as prescribed. But you should also start taking action to replace and restore all the friendly bacteria that your stomach and intestines have lost because of antibiotics. Eat yogurt, especially the kind with live cultures in it. Sunflower seeds are good too. So are Brazil nuts. Not only do they have selenium, which is great for building up cold-fighting, infection-fighting T cells, they also foster the growth of good intestinal bacteria. All you need is one Brazil nut a day.

GET MORE

Vitamin A Think of your skin as your first line of defense against infection. Vitamin A helps protect and replenish your skin cells. Orange vegetables, carrots, pumpkin, sweet potatoes and squash are all good sources of beta-carotene, which the body quickly turns into Vitamin A. Most of us are not going to be eating sweet potatoes or pumpkin constantly, but carrots are always available and they're relatively inexpensive. Get in the habit of buying a bag of baby carrots, and snack on those instead of a candy bar or soft drink.



Exercise The better shape you're in, the better you feel and the easier it is for your immune system to fight off infection. Even moderate weight loss from exercise will make you healthier. Exercise is the best way to deal with stress. You'll burn off the cortisol, which means it won't start working against your immune system. Do 10 minutes of exercise, and get your mind off all the things that are bothering you. Another thing you can do is take a walk. All of these activities add up.

Sleep Sleep helps our bodies regenerate. It also helps your brain commit new information to your long-term memory. Most of us need seven to 10 hours of sleep a night. When you don't get it, you become irritable and susceptible to sickness and, particularly, high blood pressure. The key in many cases is learning how to get your body and brain to relax enough during the hour or two before you go to bed. Start off with a little exercise, then take a hot shower or bath. Then watch TV or listen to music, but relax.



DON'T FORGET THE ZINC Here's a surprise. Beef is a natural immunity booster. That's because beef is a natural source of zinc, which helps develop the white blood cells that fight off viruses and foreign bacteria. A 3-ounce portion of very lean beef is all you need. Mushrooms are another good source of zinc. Cut them up and put them on that slice of beef you're cooking, or put them in a salad. Mushrooms are also a great source of selenium, which scientists believe makes white blood cells more aggressive against foreign bacteria.



ADJUSTING TO CHALLENGES BACK HOME

Reintegration

Getting Ready for the Big Day

As the deployment clock ticks down and you begin preparing for your Airman's return, there are many matters to consider. You might be tempted to run around in a frenzy, but you would exhaust yourself before the reunion even happens. "Keep in mind that the routines for the kids, payments and maintenance need to continue," cautions Nicole Wajer, Airmen & Family Readiness Program manager for the 114th Fighter Wing, South Dakota. Remain calm and begin considering what arrangements you need to make. Here are some items to think about.

BY RACHEL LATHAM



1. You

- Get plenty of rest.** It will help you keep the right perspective and be ready for the reunion.
- To learn about what your spouse may be going through, educate yourself** some more about reunion, reintegration and combat stress issues through the rest of this publication, but also in other articles and books.
- Focus on the positive, and set realistic expectations.** Communication and patience are the keys to successful reintegration. "Don't expect everything to happen at once," Wajer says.

2. Your Airman

- Do any cellphones need to be reactivated?** If your Airman took their phone with them, try to have it turned on before the travel day so it will work as soon as your spouse is back in the country.
- Have your spouse's favorite spaces grown cluttered?** Is that spot on the counter where they drop the keys and wallet still available?
- Ask your spouse what they need.** Not every spouse has the same needs.

3. Household

- Basic home repairs or maintenance** should be done so your spouse doesn't get a honey-do list when they walk in the door. Fix leaky faucets. Weather-seal doors and windows. Hire someone if necessary.
- Does the Airman's car need servicing or cleaning?** Have the oil changed, and get the car checked out and washed.
- Check the clothes in the closet.** Did they attract dust over the months? Did the shoes?
- Consider your budget, and plan for how the Airman's pay will change upon return.** Some expenses will stop, and others will increase—for example, gas and auto insurance, cellphone and groceries.

4. Children

- Plan ahead on how many days you will let the kids take off of school,** and check with the school to ensure it's an excused absence.
- Talk with the children** in age-appropriate ways about the upcoming changes. Encourage them and let them be involved in the reunion plans. Listen to their fears and concerns.
- Think ahead to how you might arrange time for the two of you away from the kids.** Even if you don't yet have a specific plan, line up someone to watch the children. Reunion as a family is important, but so is time alone as a couple.

5. Reunion Plans

- Plan special meals.** Think of some of the Airman's favorite foods and incorporate them back into the family menu.
- Create special memories during the reunion** with welcome-home banners, small gifts and a home-cooked meal.
- Communicate with your spouse about reunion plans.**



9 Reunion Challenges

How one couple conquered them.

During deployment, changes usually occur for the service member and the family, making reintegration challenging. A little insight and support can help. *Homefront* spoke with Amber Wesser, whose husband, Staff Sergeant Tad Wesser, recently returned from a deployment to Afghanistan. She openly discussed the challenges faced by her family, which includes five children, ages 22 months to 11 years. BY LIESL MARELLI

CHALLENGE #1 Getting through the first week

When Tad returned from deployment, he had jetlag, and it took him a few days to recover. But Amber had taken that first week off from work, and they had planned a family vacation, so they loaded up the minivan and went.

Amber drove for the first few days, which felt strange, because Tad had always been the one to drive. "He hates being a passenger," she shares. As the week passed, Tad

started driving more. Amber noticed that his driving was different. Namely, he was going below the speed limit. "He couldn't explain it," she says. "It was probably because of the environment—[the cars were] going faster than they did overseas." She joked with him about it, and after a while, he resumed a normal pace.

Amber knew that traveling in a minivan with a family of seven might lead to a few arguments, but, she says, "I wouldn't have changed a thing."

CHALLENGE #2 Communication can be tricky

Like many service members, Tad shared little with his family about the deployment. Amber wished he would open up more, but thinks he was separating his family life and military experiences to protect her. "It's not so much that I can't handle [hearing about] it," she says, "but that he probably doesn't want me to handle it, because I [take care of] so many other things."

CHALLENGE #3 Re-establishing intimacy

Intimacy is a work in progress. With both Tad and Amber back at their jobs, "alone time" is hard to find. Amber describes it as similar to teenagers: "My parents aren't home—let's do something." For the Wessers, it's, "The kids aren't home—let's enjoy our time." Intimacy can be as emotional as it is physical, and reconnecting emotionally can help you reconnect physically. Amber and Tad discussed their plans and goals.

CHALLENGE #4 The Airman is different

Their youngest child—just under two—was the first to

recognize Tad as he deboarded the plane. She didn't speak to him on the first day, but she latched onto him and refused to be separated.

The older children had a million questions. After answering several, Tad needed a break. The oldest pouted. "It's not that he wanted the knowledge as much as wanting to be the center of daddy's attention," explains Amber. The oldest daughter was fine with waiting, but said, "OK daddy, but I'm going to sit right here by your side."

For Amber, her husband was the same in some ways and different in others. "He smelled different," she explains. "Different laundry soap, fuel from the jet, and he smelled probably like the different areas he was around," says Amber. "It wasn't till the first kiss hello that it finally hit home—he's here, and I can physically hold him again."

CHALLENGE #5 Being patient

After the vacation, Amber returned to her full-time job, and Tad was home alone with the kids, with little time to readjust. His patience level was



much lower than before. "The kids ... were the same," Amber notes. "[But he was] looking at [their behavior] in a different way. In the mornings, the kids have to eat, dress and get ... ready for school, and when Tad first handled these tasks with [them], he'd get frazzled." When this happened, he'd call her. She'd give him advice, but he wouldn't be very receptive, and would often retort, "I know what to do. I'm not a kid." About two hours after the argument, he would call to apologize.

Readjusting to family responsibilities is hard, but Amber's patience and Tad's ability to apologize helped make it easier.

After about three months, Tad's tolerance is rebuilding. "He's getting there," Amber says. "Every week it's getting a little bit better."

CHALLENGE #6 Being needed

Returning service members often struggle with fitting

back into the family and assuming their former roles. Someone handled their duties in their absence, and if that person doesn't pass the torch back, they might feel unwanted or unneeded. Amber is independent, but she knows her husband needs to feel needed. During his deployment, she handled multiple tasks, including full-time work, parenting, chores and finances. So, Tad's return was an adjustment for her. She had to learn to loosen the reins and let him contribute.

One example is when Amber's car broke down. "Someone stopped and helped, but I called Tad immediately," she says. "I know I could have taken care of it and not called him, but I wanted him to feel like my knight in shining armor." Involving him by phone and giving him the chance to contribute helped bring him closer to his former role in the family.

CHALLENGE #7 Take your time

Of the readjustment period, Amber says, "I think I had an expectation that [life] would go back to normal pretty fast. But experiencing it as we go, I am keeping an open mind. I'm not [thinking] 'We have to be normal by this date,' because doing that would set me up for failure. Because what's my definition of normal ... when he left? Or [is it that] we've changed because of the experience, and now this is normal?"

Amber feels that in some ways, the deployment changed their relationship for the better. For example, every year Tad goes on a weekend hunting trip, and Amber normally gives him a hard time about it. This year, she didn't. "I understood that this was his time," she says. In return, Tad is demonstrating his appreciation much more. For example, he's less headstrong in disagreements and more receptive to her points, and if he's wrong about something, he admits it.

CHALLENGE #8 Eating habits

Personal habits often change during deployment. In addition to driving slowly and less patience, Tad's eating habits changed: For the first time, he leaves food on his plate. He still hasn't resumed his former eating habits. "He just eats less now," Amber says.

CHALLENGE #9 Accepting that reintegration is a work in progress

The couple attended a Yellow Ribbon workshop after Tad's return, and Amber is already seeing the benefits. "We took a love language class, and found out what each other's love language is," she shares. It helps them understand each other better.

Amber and Tad feel they're on a good path as a couple and a family. Through communication, love and support, the Wessers are working their way to a "new normal," which might just be better than the former one. [E]

WHEN TO ASK FOR HELP Children may react to reintegration differently from each other depending on their age, and some may need extra attention or counseling. Nobody expects a seamless transition. Whether you notice a small change, such as eating habits, or a big change, like new and dangerous driving habits, it's important to realize that some issues are best addressed in counseling. Consider keeping a journal of your observations so you know what's changing for the better, what's not changing at all and what's getting worse. Ask for help if you think it's necessary.

The Welcome Home? Go Easy

Follow the Airman's cues, be patient and—if it's OK—
throw the best party ever BY LIESL MARELLI

The countdown is finally over. The days on the calendar have actually passed—despite all those weeks when it felt as if time were standing still. You're happy knowing your Airman will be home, but there's also a part of you that wonders what it will be like when they arrive. Will they be different? Will you be different? How long will it be before things go back to "normal"?

The short answer is that every relationship is unique, so the reintegration period varies. What takes a couple of weeks for some may take a couple of months for others. But a little bit of effort goes a long way when it comes to keeping your relationship happy, healthy and strong.

Be curious, not overbearing

You will probably have a lot of questions about your Airman's deployment—and possibly even more if you're there when they unpack. It's natural to have questions, but one technique to avoid is the rapid-fire method. Continual questions might feel more like an interrogation session than friendly conversation. Also, the Airman will probably get the same questions from family, friends and strangers. Answering those over and over can get old quickly,

so try asking just a few questions a day instead. That'll give your Airman time to process the questions and answer as part of a conversation.

Run interference if needed

Sometimes the things family and friends ask border on intrusive or inappropriate. For example: "Did you see anyone blown up?" As the significant other, remind those closest to you to avoid these types of questions. It's amazing how often people ask insensitive things—especially of someone who is just returning home. Remind those in your life to avoid questions that are too personal, and to focus instead on the important thing: that the Airman is home.

Remember there's no timetable

You've been looking forward to your Airman's return for months, and now that he or they are back, you're eager to have life return to the way it was. Running certain errands, cleaning the house, getting the kids ready for school, cooking dinner—you may want these chores to be redistributed to their original state. Don't expect a fast return to how things were, though. Instead, realize that you will have to adjust to your Airman being home as much as they will

have to adjust to being home with you.

Think twice about a party

Your Airman might be all about a welcome-home party—a huge gathering where everyone who wants to be a part of the reintegration can show support. Music, food, dancing, chatting, joking—this might be exactly what your Airman wants. However, not all returning service members are up for a party. Some prefer easing back into the social scene a few friends or family members at a time. Before throwing a party, ask your Airman if it's OK. If it is, ask if they want to help with the invite list or to choose the music or food.

Keep it in perspective

Friends of yours from your Airman's unit might seem to be having an easier transition than you. Keep in mind that what's visible to the public eye isn't necessarily what goes on behind closed doors. Be happy for couples that seem to have an easy reintegration, but remember that sometimes we put on a facade to keep others from knowing our real challenges. No matter how easy or difficult your reintegration process is, don't judge it by how other couples are doing. Your path is personal.

Building the Perfect Party

If your Airman is up for a party, you'll want to throw an amazing welcome-home bash. Here are some tips.

Invite list Write the guest list together.

Decide together Be sure you agree on the date. The Airman might be a bit jet-lagged upon arrival, so wait at least a couple of days before having the party.

Location Work together to find a place that is comfortable for both of you.

Music Your spouse or significant other has probably been listening to the same songs on the iPod during the entire deployment. As a surprise, find some new tunes they would like.

Food They've been craving certain foods for months. Let them help plan the menu, and if they're not up for it, consider a potluck.

Safety If your Airman's buddies from their unit are attending, make sure they don't drink and drive. Their tolerance will be much lower than usual because they've been without alcohol for months. Keep everyone safe, and have room for people to sleep over if they drink too much.





Preparing Kids for Readjustment

After a long deployment, military children look forward to nothing more than reuniting with their parent. Such a reunion is certainly cause for celebration. But reintegration can mean big changes for your family. With the right planning and a little patience, however, families can overcome these changes and build a happy new life together. **BY AMY STUMPF**

Addressing concerns early

Chances are, you and your children have had countless conversations about all of the wonderful things you will do once your loved one returns. But how much time have you spent discussing potential problems?

"Every child is different, and it varies with each deployment," says Jessi Clark-Woinarowicz, state youth coordinator with the North Dakota National Guard. "Many children worry that household rules and discipline will change. They're also concerned that the returning parent may have changed, and of course, they worry about that parent having to leave again."

She says it's a good idea to address these concerns early on—up to two months before your spouse actually gets

home. Most important, be patient and give children time to readjust at their own pace.

"The longer the deployment, the more time your children will need to adjust."

After the arrival

Once the initial excitement dies down, children may notice a change in their returning parent. They may seem tired, preoccupied or disinterested in former activities.

"My children noticed that their dad didn't like loud noises," recalls Beth Sandeen, youth services program coordinator for the North Dakota National Guard. "He didn't want to go out as much or be in crowds. We spent a lot of time talking about those changes, and reassuring the kids that he still loved them just as he always had. We also planned activities for just the four of us to reconnect.

READING LIST

- ✦ *My Daddy Fights for Freedom*, by Stephanie Phillips
- ✦ *Sesame Street's Talk, Listen, Connect*
- ✦ *You and Your Military Hero*, by Sara Jensen-Fritz, Paula Jones-Johnson and Thea L. Zitzow
- ✦ *My Story: Blogs by Four Military Teens*, by Michelle D. Sherman, Ph.D., & DeAnne M. Sherman
- ✦ *I'm Already Home ... Again*, by Elaine Gray Dumler
- ✦ *Building Resilience in Children and Teens*, by Kenneth R. Ginsburg
- ✦ *I Am Red, White, & Blue ... Are You Feeling It Too?* by Deanna Lynn Cole

"Just be honest," she adds. "Explain that Daddy needs some alone time right now. Kids understand way more than we give them credit for."

Of course, returning parents may also need a little reassurance as they struggle to accept changes in their growing children.

"It's important to help parents understand the different developmental stages," Clark-Woinarowicz says. "We often hear from dads who can't believe their daughters are suddenly into boys and makeup—a lot can change in a year."

Gradual changes

Maintaining a normal routine helps children feel safe and secure. But what happens to that routine when a deployed parent returns?

"Some kids want everything to go back to the way it was before their parent left, while others like their new routine and want to keep things the way they are," Sandeen says. "The returning parent will certainly want to assume some of their former responsibilities, but you don't want to step on your kids' toes. The key is to implement changes gradually. And encourage kids to talk about what they want."

And be careful not to set up your spouse for failure. "While my husband was gone, we had gotten into the habit of going for ice cream every Wednesday after church," Sandeen says. "It wasn't a big deal, and I even didn't think to mention it. Of course, the first week he came back and said no to ice cream, he felt like the bad guy."

As you reconnect and reshape family routines, remember to give everyone plenty of space. "Everyone needs time to redefine their role within the family," Clark-Woinarowicz says.

Doubts are normal

As exciting as your impending reunion may be, there's also likely to be a sense of apprehension. Encourage children to express their fears and anxiety, whether through open discussion, play or drawings.

"When my husband came home, everyone was so happy for us," Sandeen recalls. "People kept saying, 'Oh, you must be so happy.' And of course, we were. But that puts a big expectation on kids, and makes them feel incredibly guilty about any negative thoughts they may be having."

Clark-Woinarowicz reminds parents to be open with their own feelings and concerns, and let children know it's normal to have some negative feelings.



Reconnecting as a Couple

Welcoming your spouse home after a long deployment can be as challenging as it is rewarding. You'll be getting to know each other all over again. And that can be a great thing. Not only does it take courage to embrace the inevitable changes, it takes some preparation. Spouses at home need to be understanding and committed to making the adjustment as seamless as possible. **BY RACHEL GLADSTONE**

It will take time for your spouse to make the transition. For starters, they will probably be physically exhausted. Not only is deployment taxing, but jet lag and readjusting to your time zone can be debilitating.

"The rule of thumb is to treat the returning service member like a guest for a few weeks," says Chaplain (Major) Colin Smith of Joint Base Andrews in Maryland. "It takes that long just to catch up on your sleep."

Also, be careful about how many commitments you accept the first few weeks. Don't inundate the Airman with too many activities.

The dating game, again

Being together after a long separation might feel a bit foreign, but that's normal. "It's OK if things feel extra polite ... or contrived between you at first," Smith says. "But each of you is going to want to make

sure the other person is comfortable, and you need to talk about that stuff. It can feel kind of like you're dating again."

This raises the question of whether to schedule an immediate romantic getaway. Smith suggests waiting. "Don't ship the kids off to Grandma's the minute your spouse returns so you can have that honeymoon," he says. "[It's] probably not going to [be a] honeymoon that first week anyway. You need time to get used to each other again. Then you can relax and enjoy each other."

Besides, your children will want to spend quality time with their returning parent, and rushing off for a romantic weekend could make them feel rejected. The goal is to spend as much quality time with your family as possible in order to reconnect and re-establish a routine. When the time does come for a getaway, ask your family programs representative about a Strong Bonds retreat.

Waiting on the chores

It's probably not a good idea to greet your returning spouse with a list of chores that need to be done. Although they may have looked forward to resuming their duty as chief dog-walker, don't assume that's the case. Although it was their job before, and you can't wait to hand over the leash, it would be best to ask them if it would be an enjoyable thing to do. Make it clear that you are happy to stick with the present arrangement for the time being. After a few weeks, your spouse will more than likely be ready to give Fido a run for his money.

Letting go

During deployment, the day-to-day household responsibilities were all yours. You probably developed a system that worked for you. When your spouse returns, and is ready to take on some of those chores, you're suddenly faced with having to share these responsibilities again. Letting go isn't always easy.

"The re-establishment of living together as a couple and a family is a big transition," Smith says. "And now that [they're] back, the two of you need to sit down and talk about this transition, while recognizing that there are probably some feelings involved with that. [They] may be wondering where they fit in now."

Focus on the changes that are working, and forge a new plan together. If both of you are willing to negotiate in the decision-making process, you'll find middle ground.

"You don't want to hold on too tightly to the system you've set up while [they were] away," Smith says. "That sets the stage for conflict, which can cause your spouse to feel defensive."

Getting help

If something seems off between you and your spouse, or if your Airman can't adjust or isn't doing well, seeking counseling can be a plus. Being proactive will save you grief in the long run, and having a safe place to share your difficulties with a neutral third party can be beneficial. Many couples find that seeing a counselor is quite helpful in the reintegration process, as bringing issues out in the open can lead you to new ways of communicating and ultimately strengthen your relationship.

If you are considering counseling, Military One Source (MilitaryOneSource.mil) can be a bountiful resource for you, or you can contact your chaplain for more information. Either way, seeking the help of a professional counselor can ease the stress

RECONNECTING AS A PARENT

If you're the parent of an Airman, of course you can't wait to reconnect. But before you plan the parties, cookouts and get-togethers, take a second and try and plan everything around his or her time, not yours. The key to a successful reintegration is to afford your Airman the proper time to readjust.

The immediate reunion Don't plan too much the first time you are expecting to see your Airman. A simple meal and some small talk will suffice for now since he or she is probably still stuck in the deployment mode emotionally. If your son or daughter isn't as engaged as you would hope, let it slide and don't take it personally. Understand that this has been a very challenging period for them.

Start slow The Airman may struggle with sleep and the general change of pace. Remember not to plan too much too soon, especially during the first couple of weeks. If the Airman is too tired to do something,

of reintegration for both you and your spouse.

Your relationship first

In addition to talking, sharing activities can help ground you and your spouse. Try planning a night away from the kids; catch a movie or go out to dinner. Whatever you do, it's important to reconnect one-on-one. "Couples need to protect their couple time and not dive right into the family's activities," Smith cautions. "The kids need the parents to be tight. The marriage has to come first and be sound."

Another thing to keep in mind is that extended family can be helpful but often intrusive, so try to set some boundaries with them—at least for the first few weeks, until your household is ready for that.

Reading your partner

Pay attention to your spouse's mood, and be available to listen when they begin to open up. Talking about the deployment will help you both frame the experience.

"The bulk of attention needs to go to the returning [Airman] because [they are] coming out of a foreign environment ... into their home environment, which has changed somewhat," Smith says.

"[They are] going to be process-

ing a lot of information and feelings, and the emotions of [their] return may take a while to catch up to the reality of the situation for both of you," he continues. "You need to remember that you and your spouse have had to pull your emotions all the way

Close, but not too close It's natural to want to spend time with your Airman to make up for the lost time between you. But be careful not to smother your loved one with phone calls, visits or unexpected plans. Your Airman might need some significant alone time to back into a normal routine. Also, he or she might want to spend some time with friends as well, so avoid making plans without checking in first. The key here is to keep stress to a minimum.

Red flags Look for any warning signs: Anger, depression, restlessness and excessive drinking are indications that your Airman's reintegration isn't going as smoothly as it could be. If you notice any of these, start a dialogue with your Airman to encourage him or her to seek help. —CHRISTIAN ANDERSON

More tips

✎ Don't forget that confusion and worry during this time are common. Still, try to stay positive, because it's one of the most important qualities you can contribute.

✎ Schedule an activity during the week for just the two of you: a movie, a picnic, a bowling night. Also, simply taking a walk, working out or playing a sport together will help make communication easier.

✎ Thanking other people for the support you both received can help couples remember that they share a sense of purpose. Once the Airman feels rested and ready, write notes together or call people or visit them as a couple.

Provided by the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, through Military OneSource.

ing a lot of information and feelings, and the emotions of [their] return may take a while to catch up to the reality of the situation for both of you," he continues. "You need to remember that you and your spouse have had to pull your emotions all the way

back in order to deal with the separation you've had to endure, and it's impossible to suddenly switch gears."

It's important to plan time to communicate, but catching time when you can is also helpful. Issues might come up suddenly, and you'll want to be flexible enough to say, "The laundry can wait. I need to listen right now."

The best-laid plans

Although good communication during deployment is vital for a smooth transition, neither you nor your spouse will really know what reintegration is going to feel like until you are in the midst of it. Smith frames it this way: "It's like when you're driving in your car, and you see a big dip ahead in the road. You can prepare for it all you want, but when you get there, you're still going to feel your stomach sink a little."

But don't get discouraged when that happens. Remember that things may be far from perfect at times, but keep talking to your spouse to work through the issues, and seek professional help if you need it.

"You're at a new place in your relationship, which can be confusing," Smith says. "But if you give it time and attention, you might find that it's an even better place." ☑



LEARNING TO SHARE

Chaplain (Major) Colin Smith's wife, Kris Smith, is no stranger to the reconnection process, since her husband has deployed to Kosovo. But the one thing that never changes, no matter how many times Colin returns home, is Kris's need to redistribute the household responsibilities in a fair way.

"As the spouse, I always have the reins while my husband is gone, and I have to do a lot of things [around the house] that I'm not used to doing," Kris shared. "Sometimes I find I really have to fight not wanting to give that stuff back to him. So he's learned over time that he has to gradually take back his portion. Otherwise, there tend to be conflicts."

Maintain Your Support Network

Five reasons to stay connected after your Airman returns BY JEFF WALTER

Reintegration is a critical time, so families shouldn't lose touch with their support networks and other resources. Why?

Because the hard part isn't necessarily over. Everyday pressures of career and household can be magnified by the stresses of military duty. Staying plugged in to your support system can help identify and address any lingering issues that could threaten family well-being.

"Once you get past the honeymoon phase [of reintegration], that's when things generally start to develop," says Chaplain (Lieutenant Colonel) J.D. Moore, full-time operations chaplain for the Virginia Army National Guard. "It may be months or even two years."

To ensure that service members and their families have access to all the help they want or need, the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program offers numerous outlets for support.

1 Emotional

Staff Sergeant Matthew Martindell, an Active Guard Reserve member based in St. Joseph, MO, has witnessed the potential for difficulty during deployment.

"Some guys over there are working really odd hours," says Martindell, who has been deployed to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait—and who stayed at

home with his son during his wife's recent deployment to Iraq. "They're working 14 hours a day, and they're eight or nine hours ahead of us, and a lot of people may not understand that those people need time to turn their brains off and shut down to prepare for the next day."

On return, some Airmen may take a while to shift from "military duty" mode to "household duty" mode. They may still be processing the events of their deployment and not be immediately ready for detailed discussion or emotional openness. On the other hand, the intense emotions vented "over there" might surface at home. Counseling can help, as can Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program seminars on communication, stress management and resilience training.

2 Marital

According to Moore, being deployed tends to alter one's priorities. "The first year is a difficult transition because people are 'majoring in the minors,'" he says. After deployment, service members tend to "look at things on a larger scale, and when they get home they don't seem very concerned about the minutiae. And the spouse may interpret that as the Airman doesn't care anymore."

The challenges can deepen with multiple deployments, Moore says. "It seems that people can get over the first one pretty easily. But multiple

deployments can cause great strain on a marital relationship and the family in general. I would encourage folks who have had more than one deployment to see a counselor for a checkup on their marriage, to see where they are in their relationship." He suggests the base chaplain as a gateway to other resources.

3 Financial

With half of a married couple deployed, financial responsibilities—such as paying the bills on time and balancing the checkbook—typically fall on the one who is holding down the household. Upon reintegration, the deployed member might seek to take control of those responsibilities, which can cause problems. So, too, can any financial problems that have arisen during the absence.

"They've gotten this big sum of money while they were deployed, and they've done either the right thing or the wrong thing with it," Moore says. "They may have overspent. It goes back to who's in control of the finances." Money management seminars are among the resources provided by Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program.

4 Benefits and options

From healthcare to legal aid, service members and their spouses need to be aware of their benefits and options. Veterans Affairs is a good place to start, Moore says.

"They have a great counseling and behavioral health department," he says. "Depending on the state, there are some great outreach programs, including for wounded Veterans. Military OneSource is another one that's totally networked. You can get many resources together at one time."

Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program provides essential information on the new benefits and other changes that accompany the return home. It also offers seminars on health education.

5 Career education and training

For service members and families looking forward to post-military life, resources are available to prepare for it. Education and training in a variety of fields can help with the transition. Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program offers seminars on post-military career opportunities.



RESOURCES

Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program

Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program can connect you and your Airman with resources to help with the reintegration process, which can be the most challenging step during the deployment process.

JointServicesSupport.org/YRRP

Warning Signs of Stress Disorders

After the celebration and relief of returning home, the hard reality is that an Airman's reintegration can be marked by emotional struggles. As a spouse of a reintegrating Airman, you serve on the front lines of the battle against ongoing stress or more serious problems. Your love and watchfulness will go a long way in helping your Airman's healing and eventual adjustment. **BY MARK KAKKURI**

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Warning signs can cover a broad spectrum of behaviors, says Carter Frank, National Program Director of the Air National Guard Psychological Health Program (West), because everyone has developed his own unique way of handling stressors in life. But, he says, the more extreme signs will probably be noticed first. These include the following:

- Withdrawal, isolation and depression (lack of interest, desire and/or hope)
- Unnecessary risk taking
- Impulsiveness that is more pervasive or extreme
- Excessive and irresponsible spending
- Aggressiveness
- Violence
- Abusive tendencies (verbal or physical intimidation)
- Overeating or recurring loss of appetite
- Excessive alcohol consumption
- Illegal drug use or excessive use of prescription medications
- Inability to sleep and/or frequently occurring nightmares
- Inappropriate or overactive sex drive

OTHER SIGNS

Warning signs "typically represent the conglomeration of stressors, an excessive flow of factors that come together like a flood and overwhelm so that an individual is not able to resolve on their own anymore," Frank says. More expansive combinations of stress would include any one or even multiple instances of the following:

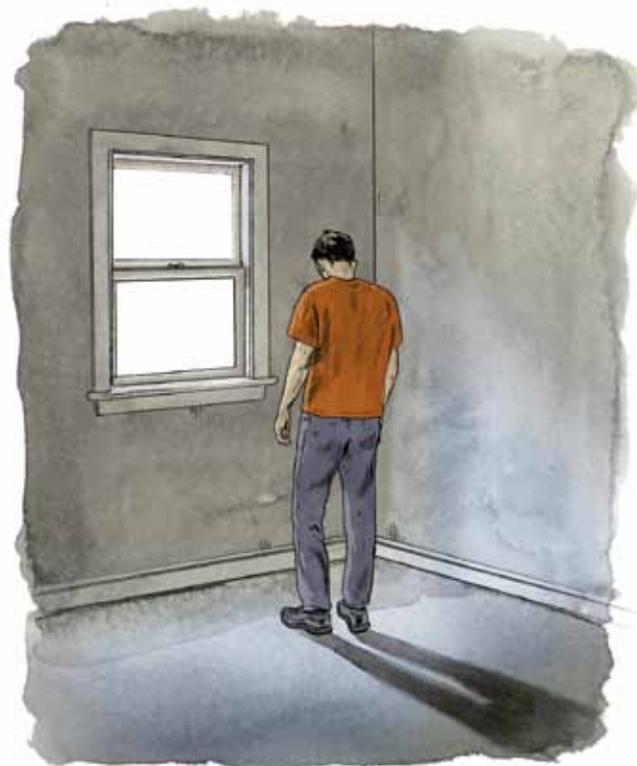
- Being afraid or anxious and not knowing why
- Persistent diarrhea, indigestion, queasiness, vomiting
- Emotional numbing (inability to feel)
- Excessive sweating
- Frequently feeling sad or tearful
- Hyperactivity, increased tendency to move around
- Inability to concentrate
- Persistent irritability
- Migraine headaches (more severe or persistent than usual)
- Pain in the neck area or lower back
- Pounding of the heart, trembling, nervous twitches
- Sleeping disturbances and constant fatigue

WHAT TO DO

STEP 1 Attempt to talk with your spouse directly to see if they recognize the problematic behaviors and want to seek help in addressing their underlying problems. "This is the most effective approach to resolving the issues and achieving stability," says Frank.

STEP 2 If your spouse is in denial and resistant to seeking help, then seek assistance. Frank says assistance should be focused on "whatever resources are available to the family." He adds these insights on how to seek advanced help: 1) Family members or those closest to the individual may

provide some assistance in persuading the spouse to seek additional assistance; 2) Consider the types of agencies or individuals (priest/pastor, group therapy, life coach, etc.) that the individual would be most responsive to in terms of breaking down resistance.



Sources of help

- People who are in similar situations/ circumstances
- Clergy and church congregations
- Community support/ assistance agencies
- Social groups or self-help groups
- Vets4Warriors.com
- www.hhs.gov
- www.healthcare.gov
- findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov/Search_HCC.aspx
- www.militaryone source.com
- www.samhsa.gov/MilitaryFamilies
- www.samhsa.gov/text4treatment/index.aspx

Holding It All Together

One spouse shares her journey through deployment to help you

BY MARK SHIMABUKURO

Sondra Owens, a billing department manager for State Farm Insurance, is a veteran when it comes to adjusting to deployment. Her husband, Chief Master Sergeant Hershel Owens of Tennessee's 118th Airlift Wing, has mobilized several times, including tours in Germany and Afghanistan. Through it all, Sondra has juggled work and home life (they have two children), and discovered strengths she didn't know she had. Here are some of her reflections.

[For the first deployment], my main concern was just reassuring him that everything at home would be OK, and we were going to be OK. I don't know that I prepared myself. My concern was more him—to make sure he wouldn't have to worry about things here when his mind really needed to be somewhere else.

Nothing really took me off guard. [The adjustment] was constant, keeping up with things that maybe I didn't handle [before]. It took a lot of organization, scheduling and to-do lists just to make sure that I got everything covered.

We have a dry-erase calendar board. I put everything on it. And that really helped clear my mind because you could just look at the calendar and know what needed to be done that day.

There were moments when it was overwhelming, and then there were other times when I thought, "OK, I've got this." You have to step back and just take one thing at a time.

Our home was relatively new, so I was immersing myself in decorating. Learning how to paint. I painted my first room when he was deployed. I would do things like reorganize the house or clean the refrigerator. I always had a project to work on.

Surround yourself with family and friends. Get out of the house, and don't stay in as much. Go out to dinner or just go with friends to do something.

Stay focused and enjoy yourself and don't get wrapped up in all the day-to-day. Have fun in the midst of that, and if you can, carry on the way you would [normally], because that helps pass the time more.

I learned I am stronger than I had given myself credit for. I was able to juggle multiple priorities—taking care of things at home, taking care of kids and work—it took more internal strength than I [knew] I had initially.

Each deployment is different, but with later ones, you know more what to expect. It doesn't get any easier in terms of his being away, but you get more into a routine, and that makes it a lot easier.

[Reintegration] for him—I won't say it was extremely difficult, but it was an adjustment. Often he would just look and I would be like "What's wrong?" and he'd say, "I'm just getting used to things again"—being in the [U.S.] again, being home again, being able to relax.

I just tried being in tune to nonverbal [cues], knowing when to inquire and when not to inquire, and understanding that sometimes when he was quiet there wasn't necessarily something wrong. And if there were days when he seemed a bit more disengaged, [I'd ask myself]: "What are some things you can do to make him smile?"



PHOTO BY JOHN CHIASSON

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