



# *Airmen, Civilian & Family Reintegration*

## *A Guide to Strengthen Air Force Families*



# *Reunions for Families*

- **Objectives:**
  - **Establish realistic expectations about your reunion**
  - **Recognize symptoms of stress**
  - **Identify reliable and helpful resources of assistance**



# *Reunions for Families*

## Examples of Good Expectations

- **Quality Time**
- **Rekindled romance**
- **Affection**
- **Tenderness**
- **Help around the house**
- **Help with the children**
- **Companionship**
- **Return to “normalcy”**
- **Family routines**





# *Overall QoL Findings*

- **Examples of Fears & Concerns**
  - **Difficulty adjusting to each other**
  - **Another deployment**
  - **Personality changes**
  - **Emotional distress**
  - **Depression**
  - **Post traumatic distress order**
  - **Excessive use of alcohol**



## *Reunion Expectations*

- **Expectations and fantasies are important**
- **These are a part of every reunion**
- **They keep use entertained and interested**
- **They shouldn't be taken seriously**





# *Reunion Expectations*

- **Making Your Reunion Work**
- **CLICK VIDEO HERE**



## *Exercise*

- **What did you learn from the video?**
- **What coping and communications skills were used?**
- **What did you see in the video regarding expectations of reunions?**
- **Are you expectations realistic or not?**



# *Communications*

- **Communications During Employment**
  - Email
  - Letters/Cards
  - Skyping
  - Phone calls







# *Communications*

- **What have you been communicating**
  - **How the children are doing**
  - **Your daily activities and routines**
- OR
- **Your expectations of the reunion**
- **What your loved one expects**



# *Change Management*

- **Dealing negatively with change**
  - **Change viewed as a crisis or threat**
  - **Inappropriate coping strategies**
    - **Avoidance or escapism**
    - **Denial**
    - **Unproductive thinking**
    - **Blaming others and not accepting responsibility**



# *Change Management*

- **Dealing positively with change**
  - **Acknowledge the change**
  - **Accept change as part of life**
  - **View changes as hidden opportunity**



# *Change Management*

- **Dealing with Change:**
  - **Change takes time**
  - **Attitude determines altitude**
  - **Change is constant**



# *Children's Reactions to Airman Return*

Birth to one Year

## **Reactions**

- **Cries**
- **Fusses**
- **Pulls away**
- **Clings to spouse or caregiver**
- **Has problems with elimination**
- **Sleeping/eating habit changes**
- **Does not recognize Airmen**

## **Techniques**

- **Hold/hug baby lot**
- **Bathe and change your baby/feed and play with your child**
- **Relax and be patient, the child will warm up after awhile**



# *Children's Reactions to Airman Return*

One to Three Years

## **Reactions**

- **Shyness**
- **Clingy**
- **Does not recognize you**
- **Cries**
- **Has temper tantrums**
- **Regression- bed wetting, potty training, etc.**

## **Techniques**

- **Don't force hold, hug or kiss**
- **Give them space and time to warm up to you**
- **Be gentle and fun**
- **Sit and talk at their level**



# *Children's Reactions to Airman Return*

Three to Five Years

## **Reactions**

- **Demonstrates Anger**
- **Acts out to get your attention, needs proof that you are real**
- **Is demanding**
- **Feels guilty for making parent go away**
- **Talks a lot to bring you up to date**

## **Techniques**

- **Listen to them**
- **Accept their feelings**
- **Play with them**
- **Reinforce that you love them**
- **Learn about what interests them and what they are doing at preschool**



# *Children's Reactions to Airman Return*

Five to Twelve Years Old

## **Reactions**

- **Isn't good enough**
- **Dreads Airman's return due to discipline**
- **Boasts about Air Force and parent's role in services**

## **Techniques**

- **Spend time looking at pictures, scrapbooks, and school work**
- **Praise what they've done and their accomplishments**
- **Try not to criticize**





# *Children's Reactions to Airman Return*

Twelve to Eighteen Years Old

## **Reactions**

- **Is excited**
- **Feels guilty because they didn't live up to expectations**
- **Is concerned about changing rules and responsibilities**
- **Feels too old or is unwilling to change plans to accommodate new parent**
- **Is rebellious**

## **Techniques**

- **Share what has happened during deployment**
- **Listen with individual attention**
- **Don't be judgmental**
- **Respect privacy and friends**
- **Don't tease about fashion, music and friends**



## *Relationship Adjustments*

- **Intimacy and sexual relationships may be a major adjustment**
- **Re-establish this part of your relationship slowly and naturally**
- **Talk about how you feel**
- **Ask how your partner feels about intimacy and your sexual relationship**



# *Relationship Adjustments*

- **Communications Barriers:**
  - **Unrealistic fantasies and expectations**
  - **Feeling anxiety about engaging in intimacy**
  - **Feeling that your partner is a stranger**
  - **Feelings of anger, stress, hostility or negative feelings about the separation**
  - **Concerns about faithfulness to your relationship**
  - **Feeling that sexual relationships need to be rushed to make for lost time**



# *Improving Communications*

- **Communication Enhancers:**
  - **Communication will help bring you closer together. It gives you time to get reacquainted and it helps let your partner know how you feel**
  - **Understand that feelings of anxiety are a very normal part of the reunion process**
  - **You have been a part from each other, and both of you have grown. Take time to get to know each other again.**
  - **Communication will help bring you closer together. It gives you time to become reacquainted, and it helps to let your partner know how you feel.**
  - **Don't assume the worst about your partner. If you have concerns about fidelity, talk about them engage help talking, if necessary.**



# *Reunion Stress*

## Stress Symptoms

- **General irritability, hyper-excitability, depression**
- **Pounding of the heart**
- **Dryness of mouth or throat**
- **Impulsive behavior, emotional instability**
- **Overpowering urge to cry or run**
- **Inability to concentrate flight of thoughts**
- **Feelings of unreality, weakness, dizziness, fatigue**
- **Floating anxiety, being afraid and not knowing why**
- **Emotional tensions and alertness**
- **Insomnia**
- **Hyperactivity, increased tendency to move**
- **Excessive sweating**
- **Indigestion and stomach agitation**
- **Migraine headaches, physical pain in neck, shoulders and lower back**
- **Loss/excessive appetite**
- **Increased use of prescribed drugs, alcohol or drug abuse**
- **Accident proneness**



# *Reunion Stress*

- **Stressors:**

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

- **Techniques:**

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



# *Reunion Stress*

- **Coping Strategies:**
  - **Expect to have a few doubts and worries**
    - **Your partner may think you don't need them anymore**
    - **Anxiety is a natural and normal part of reunions**
  - **Forget about fantasies**
    - **Give up any fantasies or expectations you may have about what the reunion day should be**
    - **Take it easy and let things happen naturally**
  - **Don't expect things to be exactly the way they were before the separation**
    - **You've changed, your spouse has changed, and your children have changed**
    - **Anticipate additional changes to the routines you established during the deployment**



# *Reunion Stress*

- **Coping Strategies:**
  - **Accept and share your feelings**
    - Talk about your feelings and let your partner talk too
    - Really listen. Make sure you fully understand what your partner is saying before you respond. Communication is the key
  - **See things from the other person's point of view**
    - An awareness that the Airmen no longer feels a part of things us to understand why they can be upset by even small changes
    - Recognition of the pride a partner feels in the way they've managed everything alone helps to the Airman understand the importance of accepting changes made during the separation
    - Children are people too. Try to understand how they feel. Change and uncertainty is often very frightening for them; be patient





## *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)*

- **Depression -chronic numb or flat feeling**
- **Isolation -feeling withdrawn from family and friends**
- **Alienation -absence of meaningful contact with others**
- **Rage -bouts of unexplained anger; may be internal or acted out**
- **Anxiety -unexplained nervousness, tension or hyper alert feelings**
- **Sleep disturbances – insomnia, nightmares, etc**
- **Intrusive thoughts - recollections of traumatic experience that appear for no apparent reason**
- **Startled responses -unusual, involuntary reactions to loud noises, i.e., loud toys or fireworks**



## *Reunion Resources*

- **Squadron First Shirt/Supervisors**
- **Squadron Key Spouse**
- **Installation Airman & Family Readiness Center**
- **Installation Mental Health & Family Advocacy**
- **Military Family Life Consultant (Adult & Youth)**
- **Installation School Liaison Officer/School Counselor**
- **Military Chaplain or Civilian Religious Personnel**
- **Military OneSource (800) 342-9647**