

AS YOUR SERVICE MEMBER RETURNS

TIPS FOR FRIENDS AND EXTENDED FAMILY MEMBERS



As a parent, extended family member, or friend of a sailor who is coming home, you are probably both excited and nervous about the homecoming. Even if you've been through a deployment before, this one may have felt different because of the increased stress due to war and terrorism. Regardless of your experience and the service member's mission, there will be a period of adjustment.

You may find these tips helpful in ensuring a successful homecoming and readjustment – for you and your service member.

What to Expect When Service Member Comes Home

You have missed your service member and they have missed you. However, re-establishing relationships will take time and communication.

- It's normal for the returning service member to "need space" upon their return.
- It's normal to feel nervous and anxious about the homecoming. With your service member, make plans for homecoming day. After homecoming, allow the returning service member to schedule the next few days or weeks.
- Expect things to be different. Take time to understand how the service member has changed. Be prepared and flexible. Remember that you may have also changed.

The service member may have seen or experienced some things that were disturbing. Some normal reactions to these abnormal situations are fear, nervousness, irritability, fatigue, sleep disturbances, startle reactions, moodiness, trouble concentrating, feelings of numbness, and frequent thoughts of the event. If needed, talking with others who were there and/or counselors trained in crisis stress reactions is very important.

Making the Reunion Easier

Take time to get reacquainted. Communicate your love and concern.

- Tell each other how you feel—nervous, happy, that you love and missed him/her.
- Listen to each other. The best way to get through the initial apprehension and regain closeness is to talk and actively listen.
- Reassure the service member that he/she needed, and that you are happy he/she has returned safely.
- Go slowly – don't try to make up for lost time.
- Accept that your service member may be different.
- Seek help for family members, if needed. It is healthy to ask for help. Many people occasionally need help to handle tough challenges in their lives.

