



# COMING HOME

As a spouse or child of an active, Guard or Reserve Service member, who is just coming home or is arriving soon, you are probably both excited and nervous about the homecoming. Even if you have been through a mobilization/deployment before, this one has been different because of the increased stressors of the time. Regardless of your experience and Service member's assignment, you will have a period of natural adjustment. You may find this tip sheet helpful in ensuring a successful homecoming and readjustment.

## What to Expect When the Servicemember Comes Home:

- You have become more confident and independent and your spouse has changed too. Expect things to be different.
- It is normal to feel nervous and anxious about the homecoming. You may wonder whether your spouse will: "Like the way I look?" "Like what I've done with the house?" "Be proud of me for how I've handled things?" "Still need me?" "Still love me?"
- Plan for homecoming day. After homecoming, make an agreement with your spouse on the schedule for the next few days or weeks. Where do the children, parents, extended family members, or friends fit in?
- Realize the day of homecoming is very stressful. You and your spouse may not have slept much and may be worn out from preparations.
- Take time to get used to each other again. Reestablishing sexual intimacy will take patience, time, and good communication—some people need to be courted again.
- COMMUNICATE!! Tell your spouse how you feel—nervous, scared, happy, that you love and missed them. Listen to your spouse in return. The best way to get through the reacquaintance jitters, regain closeness, and renegotiate your roles in the family is by talking and actively listening.
- You've both been used to doing what you wanted during personal time. Feeling like you need some space is normal.
- Your fantasies and expectations about how life will be upon return may be just fantasies. Be prepared to be flexible.
- You and/or your spouse may be facing a change in job assignment or a move. Readjustment and job transition cause stress. This may be especially true for demobilizing Guard/Reservists who are transitioning back to civilian life.
- Be calm and assertive, not defensive when discussing decisions you have made, new family activities and customs, or methods of disciplining the children. Your spouse may need to hear that it wasn't the same doing these things alone, that you're glad he/she's back, and that you'd like to discuss problems and criticisms calmly.
- Reassure your spouse that they are needed, even though you've coped during the deployment. Talk about keeping some of the independence you've developed. It's best not to "dump" all the chores or only the ones you dislike back on your spouse.
- Your spouse may have seen or experienced some things that were very upsetting. Some normal reactions to these stressful situations are fear, nervousness, irritability, fatigue, sleep disturbances, startle reactions, moodiness, trouble concentrating, feelings of numbness, and frequent thoughts of the event. Talking with others and/or counselors trained in crisis stress reactions is very important.
- Resist the temptation to go on a spending spree to celebrate the reunion. The extra money saved during deployment may be needed later for unexpected household expenses. Stick to your household budget. Show you care through your time and effort.



## What to Expect from Your Children:

- Children may be feeling the same confusing things you and your spouse feel—worry, fear, stress, happiness, excitement. Depending on their age, they may not understand how your spouse could leave them if he/she really loved them.
- They may be unsure of what to expect from your spouse. They may feel uncomfortable or think of him/her as a stranger.
- It's hard for children to control their excitement. Let them give and get the attention they need from the returning parent before you try to have quiet time alone with your spouse.
- Prepare children for homecoming with activities, photographs, participating in preparations, talking about dad or mom.
- Children are excited and tend to act out. Accept and discuss these physical, attitudinal, mental, emotional changes. Plan time as a couple and as a family with the children.
- Stay involved with your children's school and social activities.

Children's reactions to the returning parent will differ according to their ages. Some normal reactions you can expect are:

**Infants:** Cry, fuss, pull away from the returning parent, cling to you or the caregiver.

**Toddlers:** Be shy, clingy, not recognize the returning parent, cry, have temper tantrums, return to behaviors they had outgrown (no longer toilet trained).

**Preschoolers:** Feel guilty for making parent go away, need time to warm-up to returning parent, intense anger, act out to get attention, be demanding.

**School Age:** Excitement, joy, talk constantly to bring the returning parent up to date, boast about the returning parent, guilt about not doing enough or being good enough.

**Teenagers:** Excitement, guilt about not living up to standards, concern about rules and responsibilities, feel too old or unwilling to change plans to meet or spend extended time with the returning parent.

## Take Time for Yourself:

- Look into ways to manage stress—diet, exercise, recreation—and definitely take care of yourself!
- Make time to rest. Negotiate the number of social events you and your family attend.
- Limit your use of alcohol. Remember alcohol was restricted during your spouse's deployment and tolerance is lowered.
- Go slowly in getting back into the swing of things. Depend on family, your spouse's unit, friends for support.

## Remember...

Go slowly – don't try to make up for lost time.

Accept that your partner may be different.

Take time to get reacquainted.

Seek help for family members, if needed.

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