

Together Again!

Helping military families reconnect



Family Guidebook





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A Note From Trevor...

I have been working with military kids for many years, speaking to them about issues they face, such as friendships, fears, deployment, and reintegration. Through our partnership with the USO, the **With You All The Way!** Tour has been presented to students on and near military bases around the world. I have literally spoken to thousands of children, and after each presentation, kids come up to me with relief in their eyes that someone understands what they are feeling. The more we speak to kids, the more we realize how much help they need in dealing with the tough issues of military life. Most importantly, we need to validate their feelings and listen to what they are asking for instead of telling them what we think they need to hear.

This Guidebook has been created to help you support children and to help them cope with the unique challenges families face after deployment.

I am touched by the pain and hardships these children are going through, and I am inspired by the families who have embraced reintegration and found ways to work through it. I am very proud and honored to be able to work with military children, and I'm happy to share what I have learned with you. With that in mind, I believe that the contents of this guidebook will be extremely helpful to you as you provide love and support to your amazing military kids.

Trevor Romain

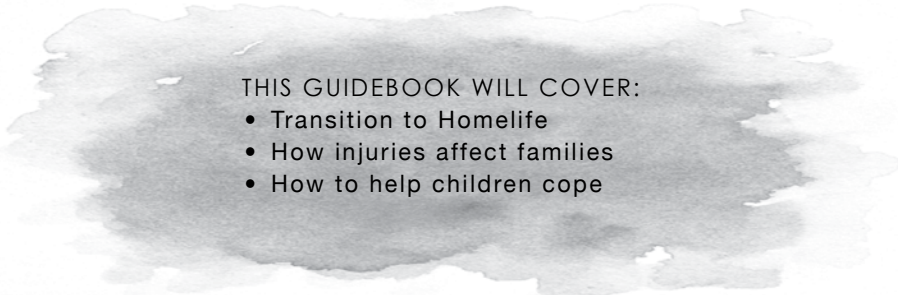
Stress is Normal

The deployment cycle is a unique challenge faced by military families. Every year, thousands of families deal with the difficulties of deployment and learn to overcome these challenges. While it is a stressful time, and it is normal to feel overwhelmed, the best way to meet and overcome these challenges is to prepare and cope as a family.

Kids, especially, can have a hard time coping. They go through their own stress and worries during deployment and need your help. By learning what to expect and what difficulties children may face, you can help them make it through this tough time and use this experience to come together and grow stronger as a family.

How to Use this Resource — Watch the DVD Together

The goal of this resource is to support parents and caregivers in helping their children cope with reintegration. Every situation is unique, but there are some common ways children react and there are ways you can prepare your children for the challenges ahead. While not everyone will experience the reintegration process in the same way, a good first step is to be flexible and accept that things will change.

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THIS GUIDEBOOK WILL COVER:

- Transition to Homelife
- How injuries affect families
- How to help children cope

When you need a little extra love from your parent just ask for it.

— High School Student, Ramstein Air Base



Transition to Home Life

The emotional cycle of deployment is challenging under the best of circumstances. Each stage of deployment carries with it a whole range of issues that military families must face, from the building stress of pre-deployment, to the constant worry while your loved one is deployed, to the changes when they return.

A child's sense of security and safety comes primarily from their connection to their caregivers, stability at home, and having a consistent routine. These can be hard to maintain during deployment, but are even more challenging when your loved one returns.

Talking Tips for Infants and Toddlers

- Even very young children can sense when something is wrong. Reassure them with hugs and extra affection.
- Younger children may not understand what has happened. Telling them you love them will reassure them that they will be cared for.
- A child's body language can say a lot about their emotions. Hanging their head or slouching could mean they need extra hugs.
- Simple games like peek-a-boo teach children that a loved one can go away and come back again.

Talking Tips for Preschoolers

- Giving them too much information can be overwhelming. Keep it as simple as possible. Give them short explanations, avoid technical words, and help them understand what has happened.

- Children use play and games to express themselves and work through their feelings. Play can also help them release stress and keep them from feeling overwhelmed.
- Doodles and pictures can say a lot. Preschoolers use art and drawing to express their feelings. Have them share what they've made and give them a chance to talk about what they are feeling.

Talking Tips for School-Age Children

Children can sometimes bottle up their emotions. Try to make sure they have someone to talk to. Drawing, journaling and active play are also good ways to release their pent-up emotions.

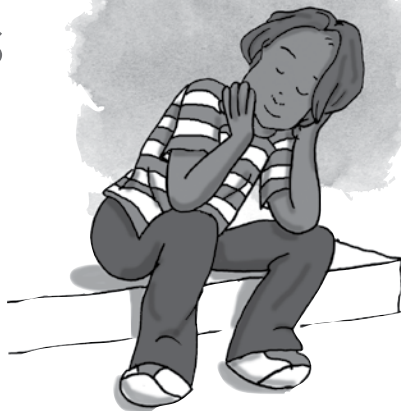
- School-age kids are old enough to understand what has happened. They are also old enough to imagine things possibly being worse than they are. Giving them appropriate details and information can reduce their anxiety and uncertainty.
 - Some may feel more comfortable expressing themselves by writing or through art than by talking.
 - Yelling in a pillow, popping bubble wrap, or exercise can help express or release fear, frustration, and anger.
- Help them share what they are feeling. Give them words to express themselves, like “sad,” “afraid,” or “feeling worried.”

Talking Tips for Adolescents

- Teens may not want to talk right way. Give them time to process their feelings. Let them know you are ready to talk whenever they are.
- Older kids will want to feel useful. If possible, including teens in conversations about their loved one can help them feel in control.
- Getting a teen to open up can be difficult. Asking them how they are doing may just get you an “I’m fine.” Try to ask open ended questions like, “How are you able to focus on your homework?” or “What do you do to cheer yourself up?”

How a Loved One's Injury Affects Children

The combat injuries and trauma of a service member affects the whole family. It influences your emotional wellbeing and your sense of security. For children, the effects can be deeper still. They may not fully understand how the injury will impact their life and change their loved one. They may blame themselves for their loved one's negative moods and behavior, or think their loved one doesn't care about them. Children may grieve for the way their parent was before and may even resent the changes the injury has had on their life. They will worry about their own safety as well as yours and other family members and will need reassurance that they will be taken care of.



Be available and encourage kids to let you know if they have questions or need a hug.

How Children React to Physical Injuries

For children, physical injuries, like scars, burns, or amputation, can be shocking at first. They will worry that their loved one won't be able to take care of them, play with them, or do the same things they did before they were injured.

Some children will want to see the injury, look under bandages or at scars, while others will shy away. Both responses are healthy and normal. When there is an option, give your child a choice and let them know that either looking or not looking is okay.

Using a picture, drawing, or a doll to explain the injury can help prepare them for seeing their loved one. Talk with your kids about where is okay to touch and what is okay to do with their loved one. You can say, "Mommy can't hug you right now but she can squeeze your hand and you can kiss her cheek."

Common Reactions in Infants and Toddlers

- Increased clinginess
- Increased aggressive behavior, crying, and tantrums
- Fear of separation from loved ones

Common Reactions in Preschoolers

- Returning to younger behaviors (thumb-sucking, bed-wetting)
- Changes in eating or sleeping behavior
- Emotional outbursts and repeated questions about the injury
- Helplessness, nightmares, and confusion

Common Reactions in School-Age Children

- Acting out, angry outbursts
- Increased anxiety and cries for attention
- Guilt, embarrassment, withdrawal, won't open up
- Fear and concern about someone else being injured
- Trouble sleeping, headaches, and safety concerns

Common Reactions in Adolescents

- Same reactions as school-age children
- More withdrawn, hiding their feelings
- Social anxiety, embarrassment about the injured parent
- Trouble concentrating and having issues at school
- Negative, risk-taking behavior

Children's Reaction to Injuries They Can't See

Because their loved one won't *look* injured, depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and Traumatic Brain Injury may be confusing for children. But even young children understand there can be changes inside the body that can't be seen on the outside. X-Ray, MRI, CT scans, or even a drawing can help explain the injury to children. Keep in mind that it may take them time to understand what their loved one is dealing with and how they have changed.

How PTSD Affects Service Members

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a treatable anxiety disorder that can occur after seeing or experiencing a traumatic event. It is common for service members who have PTSD to re-experience the traumatic event through unwanted memories and nightmares. They will

About one in three of the men and women who have spent time in war zones experience PTSD.

also avoid reminders of war, to the point where they may seem numb, unhappy, and even detached from you and the family. They may also be easily upset, angry, and have trouble sleeping and staying asleep.

How TBI affects service members

A traumatic brain injury (TBI) occurs from a serious impact causing a physical injury to the brain, which can result in noticeable changes in personality. It is common for service members who have experienced a TBI to have headaches, blurred vision, dizziness, and even nausea. They may have trouble making decisions and become forgetful. Service members may find even simple tasks difficult and have problems concentrating, which can lead to them feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and even to withdraw from their family.

How PTSD and TBI affect children:

- To children, a loved one with PTSD or TBI may not look injured. Children may be confused because they can't "see" where their loved one is hurt.
- When an injured parent acts out because of their injury, younger children may not see it as a symptom but blame themselves or think they have done something wrong.
- Children may confuse their loved one's numbness and withdrawal as not loving or caring about them.
- Some children may develop similar symptoms as their loved one, either as a way to connect with them or as a stress reaction to seeing their parent's difficulties.

Helping Children Understand Parental PTSD and TBI

Communication is vital to helping your children understand what their loved one is dealing with. As they try to understand, they'll need patience, time, and reassurance. Be ready to give extra hugs and comfort. Make yourself available to them and let them know you are there for them when they need to talk.

A Normal Trauma Response vs. PTSD

When someone experiences a serious shock or trauma, it's normal to feel upset, numb, anxious and scared. They might have many of the same symptoms as PTSD. These are usually short lived and occur soon after the event. But with PTSD, as time goes by, instead of getting better, they might develop new reactions months after the event, be stuck feeling the same symptoms, or even start to feel worse.

Helping Children Cope

Be prepared to feel a lot of conflicting emotions when your service member returns. The joy and happiness at seeing them again may be tempered if they have trouble adjusting to being home. And if they are injured, their return will bring with it worry and concern over their health and wellbeing. Sometimes, their injury will require them to be hospitalized for treatment before they can come home. The details of the injury and the decisions you have to make about their care can be extremely stressful.

It may not be possible to keep all the old routines, so build new routines.

For your children, it can be overwhelming. Children need stability and routine, especially when they are dealing with stress and anxiety. They look to you for comfort as well as guidance on how to act and feel. Keep in mind that in the beginning, you may not be able to devote as much time to them as you would like or they may need.

- Learn as much as possible about the injury, the treatment, and what to expect, not only for yourself and your loved one, but also to answer your children's questions and explain what is going on.
- Lean on family and friends for support. Accept offers of help. Choose a family member or trusted adult your kids can go to when you are not available. Having a plan and sharing it with them will help them feel safe.
- Try to keep to their routines and be predictable yourself. Normal mealtimes, bedtimes, and activities like reading a story, doing chores, or playing with friends, give kids the structure they need to feel safe.
- Offer encouragement and give them hope. A reassuring hug or pat on the back, even just sitting close to them, can help when words sometimes can't.
- Not everyone copes in the same ways. For some, quiet time is helpful. Others cope best through talking and being with people. For both children and adults, it can be helpful to share what helps each person in the family.

Coping Tips for Infants and Toddlers

- Don't hide your feelings from your child. Young children learn how to cope from watching you.
- Give plenty of hugs and affection. Physical contact reassures a child and makes them feel safe.
- Try as best as you can to maintain a routine.

Coping Tips for Preschoolers

- Let them know it's still okay for them to play and have fun.
- Try to keep a routine and let them know when plans change so they aren't surprised.
- Plan for time together. If you have more than one child, make sure you plan one-on-one time with each of them.



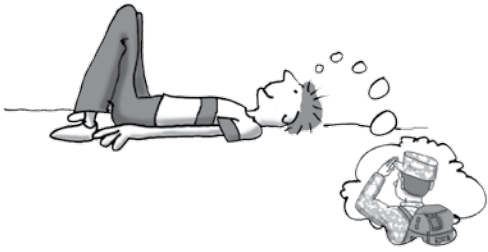
Coping Tips for School-Age Kids

- School-age kids respond to stress through their behavior rather than with words. You may need to relax some rules and exercise patience as they work through their feelings.
- Help them deal with their emotions and identify negative behaviors. Give them healthy ways to express their feelings. If they are angry, let them yell into a pillow. If they are stressed, have them exercise.
- Allow them some time to be a kid. Encourage play time with friends.
- Keep in mind that some kids, especially if they are the oldest child, may want to take on more responsibility. Try to help them feel useful without being overwhelmed.

Coping Tips for Adolescents

- Teens may have an adult understanding of what is happening, but they don't have your life experience and may need help handling their emotions. Let them know you are there for them if they need to talk.
- Teens may not want to bother you with their feelings. Sharing your feelings can be an invitation for them to share with you.
- Military children, especially teens, may feel the need to “grow up” and take on more responsibility. When appropriate, include them in family discussions. Feeling needed and useful gives them a sense of control. But remember that they are still children and need your support.

During Reunion & Reintegration



KEEP TALKING

Talking about possible issues before the homecoming can help your family get ready to be together again.

- Share thoughts and feelings to get everyone on the same page and limit any surprises.
- When it gets close to the end of the deployment, include kids in the planning of the homecoming. Ask them for ideas. Have them make signs or posters.

BE REALISTIC

You may hope that everything will instantly be fine when everyone is back together again. But many families are surprised when problems arise.

- Keep in mind that any problems you had before the deployment may come up again now that you are together again.
- Don't expect that things will go back to exactly the way they were before.
- Acknowledging that things have changed is an important step.

UNDERSTANDING

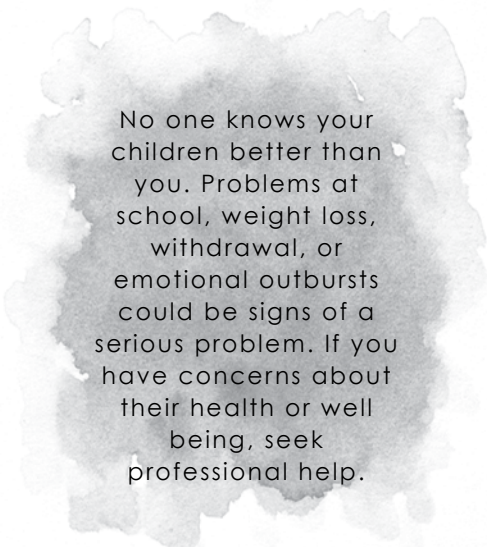
Talking about problems is one thing, dealing with them is another. Patience, understanding, and flexibility will help your family reconnect.

- The returning service member may be jet-lagged. It can take several days of waiting for available seats and sleeping in airports before they finally reach their destination. They'll need time and sleep before they can fully appreciate being home.
- A lot of families have to work at being together again. Stay available, continue to talk, and encourage kids to let you know if they're having trouble.

Be patient. Give each family member the time they need to readjust.

Tips for Younger Children

- Younger children may have their own ideas about what will happen when their parent returns: everything will be as it was before, everything will be easier, and there will be no more problems. Remind them that some things may be different.
- Young children live in the now. Expect that they may become overly excited and then overly disappointed. They may act out and have temper tantrums. Give them time to adjust.
- Remind children that the returning parent may need alone time to deal with being home.



No one knows your children better than you. Problems at school, weight loss, withdrawal, or emotional outbursts could be signs of a serious problem. If you have concerns about their health or well being, seek professional help.

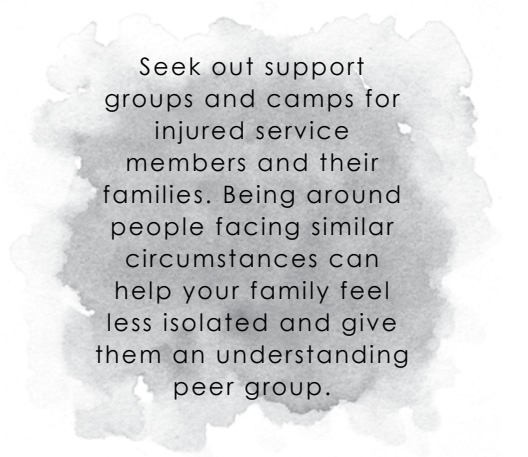
Tips for School-Age and Adolescent Children

- Older children may be confused about what to do once their parent is home. They may have taken on chores and responsibilities that the deployed parent used to do. They may feel their job is done now that their parent is home. Talk to them about what you expect. Try to include them in your decisions.
- Making it through a deployment isn't easy. Take the time to thank your kids for their help during the deployment. Give them a sense of pride in seeing it through.
- Plan time for the service member to spend quality time with each child when they return. Ask the kids if there is anything they would like to do with their parent.

Taking Care of You!

When bonding with your service member, taking care of your children, and maintaining your home, it's easy to get lost in the responsibilities and not take care of yourself. It's normal to feel overwhelmed. And while it can be hard to step away, taking care of you is extremely important! Don't feel guilty when you need time to recharge. If you don't take care of yourself, it's harder to help your family cope.

- Ask for support from family and friends. The more help you have, the more time you'll have to focus on what you need.
- Identify what helps you cope. Exercise, watch a movie, be with friends. Even if it's only for a short time, make it a part of your routine. Do things that make you happy or relieve stress.
- Send a note along with your child to school. Teachers can be there for your kids while they are at school, providing another layer of support. They can also let you know if there are any problems.
- The military has services in place for families. Keep those numbers on hand in case you need them.
- Make a plan for emergencies. Decide who will pick up the kids from school, who can take care of them and for how long. Share your plan with your children and family members.
- Stress can cause you to say and do things you may not mean. Especially with children, if you raise your voice, blame them, or say something you don't mean, it is important to explain your actions. Tell them it's not their fault, apologize, and talk to them about why you are feeling stress.



Seek out support groups and camps for injured service members and their families. Being around people facing similar circumstances can help your family feel less isolated and give them an understanding peer group.

Communication Strategies

Reconnecting now that you are together again

One of the hardest parts about the reintegration process is reconnecting with the whole family. Reconnecting is hard because time and events have changed all members of your family. You and your family had



conversations and participated in events without your service member. Now that he or she is back, there is a lot to catch up on.

You and your service member might have different interests than you did before the deployment. Reconnecting can feel awkward, even to the point where you might want to avoid it. It can feel uncomfortable because so many other things are happening.

Reconnecting is so important during the reintegration process. It is the time to learn about each other again.

How can you reconnect:

- Talk
- Listen
- Interact
- Express your feelings

Tips on Talking

Plan things to talk about

Sometimes you have to plan on things to talk about. Make a list of things to tell your service member. It's hard sometimes when your family members have different schedules. Sometimes reconnecting has to be planned so that there is always a set time for it. It's easy to forget to reconnect, but if you have a plan, it is more likely to happen. Each week plan on how to connect with each member of your family, your service member, and your whole family.

Schedule time to talk

Sometimes a lot of time can go by before you realize you have not talked. Schedule time to talk and reconnect so that it's not lost in the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

Quality can sometimes mean more than quantity

Quality conversations are those that involve feelings and ideas. They are more private and intimate, but they are rarer and take more time to achieve. Quantity conversations are quick statements usually focused on facts. It's deep conversations vs chatter. It's why questions rather than yes/no questions. Strive to have those deep conversations that allow your families to open up about their personal thoughts. Although there is nothing wrong with chatter, try to turn the conversations into quality conversations.

Talk during activities

Sometimes it is easier to talk when something else is going on, like working on the yard, watching TV, cooking, riding in the car, or cleaning the house.

Tips on Listening

Listening vs hearing

There is a big difference between listening and hearing. Hearing is simply the act of recognizing sounds, like hearing a dog bark. Listening is something you choose to do so that you can understand and make meaning out of the sounds. Meaning and learning come from listening, not hearing. When you hear your family members, try to listen carefully to what they are saying to gain better understanding.

Confirm the messages

When you are listening to conversations, check to make sure you understand exactly what was said. A lot of miscommunication can be made because the talker guessed that the listener understood everything perfectly. One way to avoid this is to double check out the message. Say something like, "When you said _____, did you mean _____?" Ask questions throughout the conversations to make sure you understand what was said. Understanding takes the efforts of both the talker and the listener.

Empathy

Empathy means that the listener recognizes and feels the emotions of the talker. More understanding occurs when the listener can feel what the talker felt. You can say to the talker, “You must have felt _____ when _____” or “I would have felt _____ if that happened to me.”

Maintain eye contact

Eye contact means that both the talker and listener look into each others’ eyes. Eye contact quickly creates a sense of trust, respect, and security.

Tips on Interacting

Communication is more than talking and listening. It is about building relationships. The best way to bond with someone is to do things together. The more you do together, and the more fun you have, then the closer you can feel to your family. You should plan to interact with each family member, interact as small groups, or as a whole family together.

Think of things that the whole family can enjoy

Try to include everybody in your activities. If you can’t include everybody, try to plan small activities between you and each family member.

Think back before the deployment for ideas

Things may have changed, so you may not be able to do the exact same thing, but think back to a fun activity and try to identify something fun that feels right for this time and place.

Small is good

Interacting doesn’t have to be a huge day long production. It can be short, cheap, but meaningful. Think of quality vs quantity when it comes to activities - the same concept applies!

Unexpected things happen

Even with the best plans, things can go wrong or change. Don’t expect everyone to have as much fun as you, or expect that everything will go smooth. Just keep in mind that just interacting together is an accomplish, even if it doesn’t go perfectly.

Ask for advice

Be sure to get your other family member’s ideas when planning activities. This is a great to find out their likes and dislikes. They may have an idea you never thought of!

Here are some things that families do to interact together

- Eat dinner together
- Go see a movie
- Look at photo albums
- Go to a local festival
- Have a game night
- Cook or bake something
- Listen to music
- Watch a favorite show
- Clean the house
- Help with homework
- Plant flowers
- Find a park to explore

Bringing your service member to speed

Your service member missed out on a lot of conversations, jokes, shows, memories, and adventures. It's easy to forget that the service member wasn't there for those moments, which can cause him or her to feel left out of the "you had to be there" moments. But your service member may still want to know about them. Bring your service member up to speed on what happened during the deployment. Don't let your service member be an outsider to all those inside jokes.

Tips on Expressing your feelings

Remember that the reintegration process has ups and downs. It's easy to get caught up in the excitement of interacting together. And it's hard to be happy if things aren't going right. But don't forget to express your feelings at any point during the reintegration process, whether your emotions are happy or sad. Your family needs to know how you feel.

A lot of military kids hide their emotions because they want to be tough. They hide them because they don't want to worry their family members, or they hide them because they might be embarrassed or think that nobody will understand. Their feelings are their feelings, and if this is truly how they feel, don't ever think that they aren't worthy.

Use *I* language, not *YOU* language

When you are telling someone how you feel, try to say *I* instead of *you*. When you use the word *you*, it sounds like blame. Don't

say, “You are such a thief!” Instead, say, “I would appreciate it if you would ask me if you can borrow my things.” Don’t say, “You aren’t obeying me.” Instead say, “I don’t understand why this rule isn’t being followed. Can we talk about it?” Starting your sentences with *I* instead of *you* really helps express your point of view.

I feel _____ when _____.
feeling *event*

Grown-ups, parents, siblings, your kids, and your friends are not mind readers. They cannot know exactly how you are feeling unless you tell them. When you tell someone how you feel, you have to search to describe the correct feelings. Sometimes we use *angry* to mask deeper feelings, like disappointed, scared, or embarrassed. We use *happy* to really mean thrilled, overjoyed, confident, and safe. Try finding that perfect word to honestly describe your emotion.

When you describe an event, you want to be specific. Say exactly what happened to make you feel this way. Instead of saying, “You make me so mad!” say, “I get really mad when I don’t know where you are going.”

Express feelings through actions

Maybe you aren’t ready to talk about your feelings. There are lots of ways to express your thoughts in other ways, like writing, journaling, doodling, or drawing. Find a craft or hobby that you really enjoy, and think about your feelings as you are doing it. Make sure that no matter what, keep your health and safety of yourself and those around you in mind.

Tips on Conflict Management

The reintegration process has a lot of room for conflicts. Conflict is a disagreement between people with opposing opinions. Conflict happens in every family, so you have to expect that it will inevitably happen in your own.

Conflict is not always a bad thing

Conflict sounds bad, and sometimes it is. But a lot of good things can come out of it! It allows us to express our feelings and sometimes come to an understanding. Lots of problems are solved effectively with conflicts as the catalyst. The important thing is that you better understand each other once it has occurred.

Conflicts need flexibility

Sometimes it's hard to be flexible, which means that you let go of your expectations and become open to a solution. Some solutions may benefit someone else more than another. Be open to accepting a new way of thinking.

Don't avoid conflict

We often avoid conflict because we are afraid of hurting someone's feelings, making someone angry, worrying someone, or maybe if things are going good you don't want to be blamed for making them go bad. It takes a lot of courage to bring up a conflict. If you are hurting on the inside, then you should bring up what is bothering you, or you might continue hurting. Solving conflicts can really help a family heal and move forward.

Where to conflict

Sometimes conflict just happens, especially at inopportune times. Other times a family member chooses when and where to conflict. If you choose to bring up something that is bothering you, choose a safe place where you feel comfortable. It's important to only include those directly involved in the conflict to see the conflict. Conflicts do not need an audience. Go to a secluded area so that your children do not witness the conflict.

Be smart and be calm

Prepare for conflict if you can. Think of and talk about some solutions before it happens. Be very calm and confident when conflicting. Keeping your emotions in check allows for more logical solutions to come forth.

The relationship wins

When we conflict, we tend to think that there is one winner and one loser. Change your thinking to: out of every conflict, the relationship wins. Sometimes we have to sacrifice a little, and we might feel like a loser. If you have to give up something in order to find a solution, be sure that you are comfortable with any sacrifice. A happy and healthy relationship should be your goal.

Tips on effective arguments

There is a big difference between arguing and fighting. Arguing is when you present or defend a position on an issue. Fighting or verbal aggressiveness involves attacking somebody's self worth.

There is nothing wrong with arguing. In fact, arguing can be a really good thing! It allows you both to find a solution to a problem. Not all arguments have a solution, but the fact that you can feel comfortable

defending your viewpoints and that you listen to other opinions is great. Arguing uses a lot of thinking and logic!

Fighting, on the other hand, is *never* OK. Fighting includes name calling, yelling, hitting, screaming, slamming doors, and all those other negatives that come when people are angry. Nothing is ever solved when a fight happens because people are too emotional and aren't thinking clearly.

Tips on Fighting

Stop a fight before it happens

Usually you can tell when an argument is turning into a fight. People usually start raising their voice, get red in the face, stop smiling, and start moving their hands or bodies more. Try to recognize when your family members start to get too emotional. Fighting involves a lot of emotion, so you have to be alert before it starts.

Recognize when fighting is occurring

Fighting involves mean words and mean actions that can hurt someone's feelings, themselves, or an object. You will have to determine if the talk is an argument or fighting.

Avoid fights and walk away

If you are involved in a fight, walk away and avoid it. Fighting never solves problems, and sometimes they can make matters worse. Avoid them.

Talk about it later

Sometimes after each person cools down, you can go back and talk about what led to a fight. Be sure that everyone is calm. Maybe go to a different place than where the fight happened. Be sure to talk about what exactly happened. You need to talk about what caused the fight so that everyone understands the same things. Talking about it afterwards can really help it not happen again.

Tips on Roles

One of the hardest parts of the reintegration process is changing jobs or roles. A role means how a person is identified (what responsibility someone has). Each family has a lot of roles for which different family members are responsible.

Who creates the roles?

Good question! Since people usually don't talk about roles, they kind-of just happen when there is a need. Sometimes as parents you can tell when there is role that needs to be filled. And sometimes a role can be discussed or negotiated.

Some roles are easy to identify, like father, mother, baby, sister, brother, etc. But some roles are harder to identify. Usually families have roles like these below:

- Nurse — takes care when you are sick or hurt
- Money Earner — Earns money at a job to support the family
- Joker — makes jokes and entertains
- Chauffeur — drives family members around
- Organizer — makes sure everything is easy to find
- Cleaner — makes sure everything is tidy
- Fix-it — repairs anything broken
- Mailman — who is responsible for taking and picking up mail
- Cook — makes most of the meals
- Laundry — washes, folds, or puts away laundry
- Dishwasher — Washes, dries, and puts away dishes
- Homework helper — helps with homework, answers questions
- Remote control boss — who gets to pick the shows

There are lots of family roles that aren't listed. What's interesting is that EACH family has their very own roles that help the family function.

Tips on Role Conflicts

The reintegration process creates many, many role conflicts. The family functioned while your service member was away. Now that the service member is back, roles get shifted again.

Why do job conflicts happen?

Conflicts (or disagreements) over roles happen a lot, especially when:

- A role is left empty
- When a family member doesn't know what their role is
- When a family member wants a different role that someone else has

- When a family member doesn't like his or her role
- When a family member doesn't do his or her role to the liking of the other family members
- Too many family members are responsible for one role
- When a family member feels like they are doing too many roles
- When a family member doesn't have enough roles

How do you fix role conflicts?

Every family on the planet has role conflicts. Sadly, few families fix role conflicts to make everyone happy. It is never a good idea to ignore role conflicts. Sometimes you might not want to bring up the fact that there is a role conflict, but if you are unhappy, then it needs to be addressed.

Step 1. Identify the problem. Do this by filling this out:

_____ **feels** _____ **when** _____ .
Name emotion what happens

Step 2. List who is involved. What is the role conflict?

Step 3. Negotiate a solution that each member can agree with

The only way to fix role conflict is to talk about it. Remember, the role will usually remain, but family members can change, share, trade, or alter roles in order to make everyone happy. Role conflict keeps a family from functioning, so the sooner it is fixed, the faster the family can heal.

Tips on Finding your Family routine

A routine is a sequence of actions. Routines change a lot before the deployment, during the deployment, and during the reintegration process. It is important to create a routine now that your family is back together. The reintegration process can often times disrupt a family's routine. To combat this, create a routine for typical weekdays, special event days, and stay at home days.

Talk to you family and come up with a routine that involves everyone's roles. Start at the beginning of the day and make a list of all the activities that go on during that day. Schedules change, but you should be able to have a list of all the things that generally happen.

Who does what? Who has what chores? When does everyone go to bed? When is homework time? Be sure to include each family member somewhere in the routine. Sitting down and having a plan creates stability.

Conclusion

As a military family, you know all the unique challenges you have to face. But none can be harder than helping your family through the reintegration process. Every family is different, and each family member will respond in their own way. Working together as a family, understanding how to be there for them, knowing when to ask for help, and learning ways to cope during this challenging time can make you and your family more resilient and make family bonds stronger.



More Resources

The Comfort Crew for Military Kids

www.ComfortCrew.org

Army Wife Network

www.armywifenetwork.com

AWN is a grass-roots effort at interactive empowerment for Army wives. Tons of valuable resources, podcast, blog, columns, & social media galore are available.

Blue Star Families

www.bluestarfam.org

Blue Star Families was formed in April 2009 by a group of military spouses to raise the awareness of the challenges of military family life with our civilian communities and leaders. Blue Star Families includes spouses and families from all services and all walks of life, including National Guard and Reserve, as well as veterans and civilians.

Military OneSource

Web site: www.MilitaryOneSource.com

This free 24-hour service is available to all active duty, Guard, and Reserve members (regardless of activation status) and their families.

USO

www.uso.org

Millions of times each year at hundreds of locations around the world, the USO lifts the spirits of America's troops and their families.

Zero To Three

www.zerotothree.org

ZERO TO THREE is proud to support military families. We work to increase awareness and collaboration throughout the military community so that parents and professionals can more effectively care for very young children and their families.

Together Again!

Helping military families reconnect

Supporting Military Children: This guidebook is meant to help military families understand the challenges children face when a parent returns from deployment. The information in this guidebook can be a good starting point to discover ways for your family to cope during this challenging time. Our goal is to help you learn what to expect and what difficulties children may face so that you can come together and grow stronger as a family.

The Comfort Crew for Military Kids is a nonprofit organization that creates resources to support and comfort military children and their families.