



Returning home from deployment when you're a mum

Defence Community Organisation

Your return home after deployment is a time of joy and celebration. It's a wonderful time for you and your family to reconnect. But after months of being away and concentrating on your mission, getting used to being at home can be an adjustment.

There are steps you can take to help you reintegrate smoothly back into the family.

PREPARING FOR CHANGE

A lot happened while you were away, but while both you and your child have changed, you are still a family. Give yourselves time to become reacquainted.

Your child may have grown and changed. The baby you left behind may now be a toddler. Your child may now look and act like a teenager. You may regret that you didn't see your child reach major milestones and change can be unsettling. It's normal to feel this way. Spend time discovering all the positive changes you see in one another.

Don't dwell on what you missed. Instead, enjoy what your child has accomplished. If your baby is now talking, have simple conversations with them, play on the floor, do puzzles and read together. If your child is older, find out about their new interests.

Remember how important you are to the family unit. While it can be a relief to know that your family managed without you, you may also feel hurt. Just because the household didn't fall apart while you were deployed doesn't mean that you're not needed.

Be patient. While you were away, your child relied on your partner or another adult as the primary parent. If your child is a baby or toddler, he or she may appear afraid of you or cry when you approach. As painful as this is, try to be patient. Over time, as you rebuild trust, you and your child will become close again.

Be sensitive to the changes in your partner's life too. If your partner cared for your child during your deployment, they might find it hard to share the primary parenting role. Be sensitive to this and be sure to talk openly about ways you can parent as a team.

RETURNING HOME WHEN YOU'RE A SINGLE PARENT

If you're a single parent, you will have logistical and emotional matters that need your attention to re-establish a home for you and your family.

Give yourself time to settle in. If your child lived with friends or relatives during your deployment, consider waiting a few days before bringing them back home.

Unpack and set up your home. Take time to relax and unwind. This way everything will be in place and you can focus entirely on reconnecting with your child.



Make an effort to keep the connection strong between your child and the person who cared for them and provide them with updates on how your family is doing.

Expect your child to miss their caregiver as they have probably developed a strong attachment. Visit often, or help your child maintain the relationship with phone calls, emails, letters and pictures.

REINTEGRATING YOURSELF INTO THE FAMILY

While deployed, you had to focus on yourself and your mission. All of that changes when you return home and dive back onto a day-to-day parenting role. Try not to rush in and make changes when you return home. Your family probably found new ways to do things when you were gone. Maybe they left the dishes in the sink until the next morning instead of cleaning up after dinner. Maybe bedtime has shifted to an earlier time to give your partner a much-needed break. Don't try to change things back to the way things were before your deployed.

Help your child adjust to brief separations from you. Very young children may not want to let you out of their sight. You can gradually help your child get used to being apart with brief trips away.

Enjoy your time together. Don't get overwhelmed by completing to-do lists or getting everything back in order the minute you get home. You and your family are going to be excited to spend time together and catch up. Allow yourselves this special time.

ADJUSTING TO BEING HOME AGAIN

If your deployment was long, dangerous, or both, you're likely to have a more challenging adjustment. Give yourself time to get used to being home.

It's not uncommon for ADF members to have stress reactions to their deployment, which may include feeling jumpy, easily startled, or generally unsafe; becoming easily annoyed, irritated, or frustrated; feeling numb; feeling disconnected from family and friends; experiencing sadness or feelings of guilt; sleeping too little or too much; getting into unnecessary conflicts; feeling angry, sometimes with little or no provocation; being uncomfortable with physical or emotional intimacy; having intrusive thoughts, flashbacks or nightmares; self-medicating with alcohol.

If your stress symptoms don't go away after a few weeks and they interfere with daily activities and your ability to parent, it is important to seek professional help. This can be done through:

- Veterans and Veterans' Families Counselling Service: 1800 011 046
- All-hours Support Line: 1800 628 036
- Defence Family Helpline: 1800 624 608

For more information on this factsheet and other Defence Community Organisation support services visit www.defence.gov.au/dco or call the all-hours Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608.

Defence Community Organisation offers a wide range of support services for the families of ADF members.

The best way to access these services is to call 1800 624 608. The Defence Family Helpline is staffed by qualified human services professionals including social workers and psychologists.

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