



Managing a 'relief out of country' visit home during deployment

Defence Community Organisation

Relief out of country, or ROCL, visits during a deployment are a happy time for couples, children, extended family, and ADF members.

Along with the excitement and happiness, what else should loved ones expect when an ADF member returns home on brief leave? What are some ways to prepare and make the most of this time as a family and as a couple? The following information can help you manage this time.

ROCL PLANS CAN CHANGE

It's not uncommon for the needs of the Service or the unit's mission to override ROCL plans. ROCL might be cancelled unexpectedly or delayed for an unknown period of time.

HAVE REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

It's normal to have fantasies about what your time together will be like. In reality, you may have emotional ups and downs during ROCL.

You may feel happy about being together again. You may also feel stressed or sad knowing that the leave is short and that the service member will be leaving again, possibly to return to combat. These emotions are all normal.

ALLOW TIME TO ADJUST AND DECOMPRESS

The ADF member will probably need time to get over jetlag and will also need time and space to get used to being home. They may not want to talk about combat experiences – they may simply need time to process their experience, or there may be things they are

not allowed to discuss or things they're just not comfortable talking about.

HELP CHILDREN RECONNECT

Children may need extra help reconnecting with the returning ADF member. Younger children may keep their distance from the returning parent at first. Find opportunities to let your children and their returning parent spend time alone together.

TIPS FOR COUPLES

Talk with couples who have experienced ROCL. They may have valuable suggestions and helpful ideas on how to make the most of the time and how to handle the sadness of another goodbye.

Make an extra effort to be considerate and understanding with one another. Avoid topics that you know may lead to an argument or disagreement. This will help you make the most of your days together.

Realise that both of you may need a break. The parent at home with young children may be looking forward to a break when the member returns home. The returning member may be just as tired and in need of relaxation. Give yourselves time to rest and relax together.

If the ROCL is at home in Australia, you may be eager to catch up on some of jobs around the house or garden that were your partner's speciality.



However, let your partner rest first. Be sure that they understand that you are happy that they are back, and that you are not just happy to have another hand to get jobs done.

Both of you may now feel more independent and may have changed priorities. A brief leave may not give either of you time to work through these changes and just acknowledging them may help as you continue to navigate the rest of the deployment.

Your family has probably settled into new patterns and routines while the member was absent. Trying to return to old patterns, then back again when the leave is over, may be too difficult for everyone to take on at this time.

Communication is key to all good relationships and to making your time together the best it can be. Talk about your feelings and encourage your partner to talk. Listen to one another.

While you may have different ideas about how to spend the days together, try to accommodate each other's needs. It might take time to rebuild feelings of intimacy - as mental health experts explain, sex can resume immediately, but intimacy takes longer to re-establish.

Don't expect a ROCL to solve long-standing relationship problems – this isn't a time to try to solve major problems in your relationship. Instead, try to enjoy your time together as a couple and agree to work on any problems when the deployment ends. Don't start the period of leave on a bad note – save difficult issues for later when you have time to work through problems.

MAKING THE MOST OF A BRIEF REUNION

- Communicate ahead of time about how you would like to spend time. Share ideas and plans of what you would like to do.
- Don't over-commit yourselves – spend quiet time with family and resist the temptation to do too much.
- Encourage the returning service member to get enough sleep and to eat well, even during times of celebration.
- Take lots of pictures or videos of your time together.

A SECOND GOODBYE

The hardest part of ROCL is knowing that another goodbye is just around the corner. Here are some ways to make this time easier:

- Talk with your children and help the member find some special time to spend with each child before leaving.
- There is often tension in families before goodbyes – this is normal. Try to focus on the here and now and the happiness you are having together.
- Stay focused in the moment. Take the days one at a time and try not to let the pending departure preoccupy your thoughts.

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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