

## **Section C-2 Special Interest Topics**

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## **Special Interest Topics**

### **Reunions and Homecoming**

Reunions and homecoming are a time of celebration and change. If your spouse has been away a long time, it is easy to remember only the very good things and set high expectations for his or her return. We all want to have a picture perfect homecoming. Realistically, reunions and homecomings bring an adjustment of roles for everyone. The transition from your picture perfect homecoming to reality is not always smooth. Try to be realistic and understanding. It is very normal to feel the very same feelings of apprehension and fear as you did for the deployment. You are probably feeling great relief and hope. It is quite common for communication between you and your spouse and the family to be strained at first. You are getting reacquainted and re-established as a couple. Separation and time have changed you both. While change can be good, it always takes some time to adjust to change.

It is important to remember that your children have grown and changed both emotionally and physically. It is common for children to experience a variety of feelings and reactions both before and after their parent comes home. They may become firmly attached to the returning parent; wanting their full, undivided attention. Or they may seem distant, withdrawn, and pretend as though they do not care. They may be worried about things they have done. Ultimately they will be happy that their family is back together, but there will be a period of adjustment. Show them you care – give them extra attention and time to adjust. Tell them how much you love them. Include your children in the process of creating your new “after-the-separation” family.

After weeks or months of being apart, it takes time to acclimate to being together. When your spouse comes home, give him or her time to adjust. Do not spout off a list of problems or concerns as soon as he or she gets home. Allow him or her some time alone. Roles and responsibilities in the household have undergone a big change. Family dynamics are different. The role reversal of changing back to pre-deployment responsibilities can impact strongly on your marital relationship. You may like some of your new responsibilities and may have developed skills and new ideas as to how things should be done. Your spouse’s only frame of reference is “how it used to be.” It can take several weeks to reestablish the newly agreed upon roles and responsibilities. Try hard to maintain an attitude of mutual respect and appreciation for each other’s contributions to the relationship. Talk to each other. Encourage individual family members to discuss how they felt about the separation. Communication between family members is an essential element in reunion. Focus on happy memories. Discuss the difficult memories or events that happened, but try to focus on the positive aspects and outcomes. Turn your negative experiences into learning experiences. We all grow from the experiences we have and share.

For some couples, counseling may be helpful in gaining insight into your relationship and assist in rebuilding roles and lines of communication. Do not address your marital issues in front of your children. A military chaplain or your own pastor is a great resources for advice and

counseling. Military installations also offer counseling in various clinics. Seeking help for your relationship can be very insightful and can help to enrich your marriage.

Your spouse will also undergo a transition to his or her regular job. It may have changed. His or her responsibilities may be different. Be a sounding board, listen to his or her feelings, and give them the space he or she needs to adapt to all that is happening.

### **Stages of Reunion**

Before a deployment or training mission, your spouse has a sense of “mission”. It is an extremely busy time and there are many preparations to make both in his or her military and civilian life. Emotions run a broad spectrum between high and low. Then there is goodbye. Goodbye has conflicting meanings of “be safe,” “will I ever see you again?” “will you miss me?” “how will you manage without me?” and “what will this (separation and deployment) be like?”

During separation due to military service, your spouse is a full-time service member serving his or her country. That is his or her main mission and focus. He or she may have a sense of international significance. He or she will build strong bonds and friendships through the teamwork of the mission. It will probably be a milestone in both his or her personal and military life.

Returning home is a mixture of extreme happiness and apprehension. Your spouse may have dreams and a concept of the perfect homecoming. He or she is excited to see family and friends and tell them about the deployment experiences. He or she is ready to return to the routine civilian life in the community with his or her family.

Once he or she returns to his or her civilian position, his or her job may be entirely different. Although law protects your spouse’s employment rights, his or her employer may change your spouse’s responsibilities and status. There will probably be new employees and work processes to adjust to since he or she left. Colleagues and peers may or may not be interested in hearing about the deployment.

At home, the family has changed. The children are older. New family routines may have been established. There may be new family friends. Role adjustment is the most significant element to adapt to at home. Things are different than they were before the deployment.

What are the best ways to help your spouse adjust to the changes? Think and act positively. Praise your spouse, and praise the children. A positive attitude is contagious. Negotiate your “new roles.” Flexibility and compromise can go a long way in meeting everyone’s needs. Make time for all the important people in your life, especially your children and extended family. Thank your support group. Many others – family, neighbors, teachers, and church members have been there for your family. Let them know you appreciate and value their contributions. Be patient with the adjustment process. You did not change overnight when your spouse was gone. Do not expect the adjustment phase to happen immediately.

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Support the positive changes in your family and acknowledge ways to make improvements. Do not be surprised by tension or irritability. It is very normal – and it’s okay. Expect unusual feelings and questions such as, “where do I fit in?” Use active listening and communicate openly with your spouse, your children, and your friends. Seek help from professionals when you need it. Share your experiences and ideas with others in the unit and family readiness group. Rely on the FRG for support and resources and be there for each other!