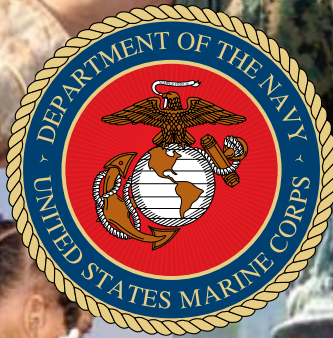


WELCOME HOME!

RETURN AND REUNION GUIDE for Marines and Families



Personal and Family Readiness Division
Manpower and Reserve Affairs Department, HQMC

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Acknowledgement

Materials have been drawn from a variety of sources in creating this guide, including Sister Services, Marine units, and website resources. Regardless of source, all the material was selected to help military members and their families prepare for what is sometimes the most challenging part of a deployment or prolonged absence – return of the military member and their reunion with family or significant others in the case of single Marines.

Reunion is a special time for everyone. While it may be a source of emotional strain for all family members, it can also be a time to work together to strengthen or rebuild relationships.

Introduction

While we pay a great deal of attention to pre-deployment preparations, returning from deployment can be just as stressful – sometimes more so. Now your return is quickly approaching, and you've no doubt been anticipating getting back home. Or, perhaps you've been managing the home front single-handedly while waiting for your Marine to return from a deployment. Maybe you are a mother, father, significant other or friend of a single Marine, and have been anxiously awaiting their return. Have you considered that just as you, and those with whom you live and work, were required to make adjustments prior to the deployment, additional adjustments will likely be necessary once the deployment is over?

The purpose of this guide is to help you smoothly transition back into your home, work and social life. To help you have a successful reunion, this guide will look at five major areas: (1) single Marines; (2) married Marines; (3) children; (4) single parents; and (5) reservists. Some of this information will be relevant to you and perhaps some won't. Take what's useful to you and apply it to your life. File the rest away for future use should your circumstances change.



Introduction

Throughout this guide you'll find a major recurring theme about settling back into your home, work, and social environments: Go slow. Why? Because, like deployment, reunion is a process, not an event. What does that mean? When you or your family member deployed, it probably wasn't after a morning notification followed by a same-day departure. Rather, you and your family went through a preparation process over several weeks. This involved attending pre-deployment meetings, receiving immunizations, reviewing checklists, packing bags, and so on. It also involved your spouse, friends or neighbors learning how to temporarily take over some of the deployed Marine's responsibilities, such as child care, vehicle maintenance, pet care, lawn care, checkbook balancing, etc.



As you were trying to take care of numerous projects and responsibilities prior to the deployment, you may have experienced some tension in your relationships at home as well as at work. Perhaps you were at times irritable with your spouse, children, or colleagues. At the same time, you may have noticed some resentment toward the deploying person for leaving, even though the deployment was necessary. Young children may have been unable to understand why mom or dad must go away, no matter how carefully the need is explained. The Marine preparing to deploy may have felt guilty about leaving the family and colleagues with additional responsibilities. In any event, unpleasant emotions such as tension and irritability may have served a purpose as you prepared for the deployment: to create some temporary emotional distance making it easier for you and those you care about to say farewell.

Again, just as deployment was a process that required time and effort, the process of reunion requires similar time and effort.

Homecoming Considerations

1. Every deployed person and their family members will experience a feeling of anticipation as the end of the deployment approaches. This may take the form of eagerness for reunion and/or a dread of a return to a problem situation.
2. Due to anticipation, few get much sleep the night before homecoming. These feelings may result in you and your family members being concerned and exhausted when the family is finally reunited.
3. It may take a while for the Marine to get adjusted to the local time zone, home cooking, lack of continual noise, etc. Some difficulty sleeping through the night is typical.
4. After the end of a deployment, it is not unusual to experience a homecoming let down. Reality seldom equals how we have fantasized life after reunion would be. It makes sense to keep expectations reasonable and to be flexible.
5. The Marine may want to stay at home and rest while the spouse may be eager to go out socializing as a couple or get the accumulated “honey do” tasks done. Skillful compromise and reasonable give-and- take will be needed if arguments and hurt feelings are to be avoided.
6. The Marine should express appreciation for the spouse’s efforts in running the household single-handedly. It is unwise to criticize the spouse’s efforts or the decisions they had to make on their own during the deployment.
7. Keep expectations reasonable and stay flexible. Special welcome efforts of the family and friends, or gifts the deployed members may bring home, may not result in the expected reaction.



Homecoming Considerations

8. Children in the home may act out more than usual. Children's reactions at homecoming may not be what the parents expected or hoped for. Very young children may not remember the deployed person and may be shy. Older children may be resentful of the time the deployed person was away from the family. Children may need time to get re-acquainted. Be understanding, and give it time.
10. If promises were made, through letters or phone calls, during the deployment, the person to whom the promises were made will probably remember and expect the promises to be kept.
11. The deployed person may feel surprised or threatened if the partner did so well on their own during the deployment. They may also feel a little jealous at how closely the children bonded with the parent at home. Such feelings are normal, but it is wiser to show the other person love and appreciation for all their efforts during the deployment.
12. The returning Marine should remember that he or she has probably not driven a personal motor vehicle in U.S. traffic for some time, and may need to allow degraded skills to refresh slowly.
13. The Marine will have experienced great change during his or her time away. Families are encouraged to refrain from making any major personal or household changes.
14. Remember that stress may increase the likelihood of substance abuse. This type of abuse may manifest itself in the form of illicit or prescription drug or alcohol use. There are alternatives to problems that may lead Marines to substance abuse. If you recognize unhealthy behaviors in yourself or your loved one, please seek assistance (a listing of available resources is included on the last page of this guide.)
15. The returning Marine may have accumulated a significant amount of money as a result of tax exempt pay, as well as, additional pay and entitlements coupled with a limited opportunity to spend money while deployed. The initial urge upon return is to spend the accumulated money with abandon. The Marine, and spouse or "significant other", should consider seeing a personal financial management specialist to explore their financial options and formulate a plan to use the money wisely.

Healing From Stress Injuries

The stress of operational deployment, especially to a war zone, can challenge Marines and their families like few other experiences in life. It can also change them in many significant ways. Most often, the changes caused by a tough deployment are positive, including developing a greater appreciation for life and relationships, a greater level of maturity, and a deeper spirituality. Sometimes, however, Marines can return from a combat tour with painful and troubling memories, such as those caused by physical injuries or near-misses, or the death or injury of close friends or leaders. They may also come home from a combat deployment still feeling keyed up, on edge, and overly alert for danger, even though danger may not really be present. In a few cases, Marines may develop significant problems sleeping, staying calm, or controlling their emotions and behavior immediately after returning from a war zone.

Most of the stress-related problems Marines may experience after returning from a tough deployment are just normal aspects of the process of readjusting to being back home and back in garrison. Just as it took a while for Marines and their family members to adjust to the deployment, it also takes them a while to adjust to being home and together again. An example of a common readjustment problem Marines may experience after returning from an operational deployment is a recurrent feeling of uneasiness while driving a vehicle in traffic in the U.S., and a tendency to scan the roadside for potential dangers just as they did while deployed to an operational theater. With patience and time, however, most post-deployment readjustment problems get better and go away within a month or two. But occasionally, post-deployment stress problems don't just fade away without help. And sometimes stress problems are so intense and troubling immediately after returning from deployment that it wouldn't be wise to simply wait to see if they go away on their own. These two situations—stress problems that either don't start to fade away after a Marine has been back a month or more, and stress problems that are very intense and troubling soon after deployment—may be indications that a Marine is dealing with a stress injury rather than just a readjustment problem.

Healing From Stress Injuries

Stress injuries are invisible but real injuries to the brain and mind that are caused by severe life challenges, such as can occur during an operational deployment. They can happen to anyone subjected to stress of sufficient intensity or duration. They are part of the cost of performing our duties as Marines. And like physical injuries, most stress injuries heal on their own if nothing gets in the way of healing. But also just like physical injuries, stress injuries have a better chance of healing quickly and completely if they are recognized and given the proper care.

There are three main causes or types of stress injury: (1) psychological trauma, (2) operational fatigue, and (3) grief from loss. The first type of stress injury, trauma, is an impact injury due to a specific event (or events) involving terror (actual fear that one would be killed), horror (witnessing gruesome scenes of carnage), or extreme helplessness. During a traumatic event, Marines may experience brief loss of control of their thoughts, emotions, or behavior. Their minds may go “blank” for a short while, or they may briefly shake or lose control of their bodies in some other way. After a traumatic event, Marines may experience difficulty sleeping, nightmares, uncontrollable memories or images about the trauma, and a desire to avoid any reminders of what happened. They may also find that after a traumatic event they become more irritable and angry, or anxious and fearful than normal.

The second type of stress injury, fatigue, is a wear-and-tear injury due to the accumulation of smaller stressors over a long period of time, usually many months or even multiple deployments. The stressors that contribute to operational fatigue include not only the many hardships and hassles of operational deployment, but also the stressors associated with separation from family and friends, money and health problems, and everything else that makes life challenging. The greatest risk factor for operational fatigue is not getting enough sleep. Whereas traumatic stress comes on abruptly, after one or more specific events, fatigue stress comes on more gradually. The primary symptom of operational fatigue is not fatigue or tiredness, though.

Healing From Stress Injuries

Rather, it's worsening anxiety or anger that becomes increasingly inappropriate for present situations, and increasingly difficult to control. Marines with fatigue injuries sometimes develop panic attacks—episodes in which their hearts beat too fast for no reason at all, even while they are resting. This condition is not new and has been called “soldier’s heart” in the past.

The third type of stress injury, grief, is caused by the loss by death or serious injury of close friends, valued leaders, or others that are cared about. Everyone reacts to losses differently. Some people feel intense emotions of anger, sadness, or guilt after a death. Others don't feel many emotions at all. But most people find that in order to come to terms with the death of someone they care about, they have to let themselves do the “work” of grieving — by allowing themselves to feel painful feelings when remembering the lost person, forgiving themselves or anyone else they feel may have contributed to the loss, and making some kind of sense out of the loss. All of this may take many months.

During deployments, the proper care for stress injuries (sometimes called combat/operational stress reactions) often consists of little more than a period of rest and recuperation, followed by a gradual return to full duty. Sometimes, stress injuries in a war zone require greater attention from a chaplain or a medical or mental health professional. Occasionally, medications will be prescribed during the deployment to promote healing or to help with sleep. Support from peers, leaders, and chaplains can do much to promote healing from a stress injury during a deployment.

After the deployment ends, there are many things Marines can do to help themselves heal from stress injuries.

- Get enough sleep every night, at least 6-8 hours
- P.T. regularly
- Don't drink alcohol every day, and don't use it to get to sleep
- Stay connected with the other Marines and Sailors they deployed with

Healing From Stress Injuries

- Talk to people you trust about what happened during the deployment — sometimes the only way to make sense out of and get over traumatic experiences is talk through them in detail with someone else
- Take care of yourself spiritually, in whatever way works for you — by being active in a faith community, going to church, praying, meditating, or talking with spiritual leaders

After returning from deployment, it's a natural inclination to wait a while before seeking professional help for stress symptoms that don't immediately go away. Many Marines are reluctant to seek mental health care because they are afraid they would be seen as weak, or that being treated by a mental health professional would harm their careers. The problem with this reluctance is that those stress injuries that don't quickly get better on their own sometimes get worse over time, and the longer they go without treatment, the less chance they have of healing completely. And the truth is that most Marines who seek help for deployment-related stress problems continue their careers without adverse effects. Here are a few signs that may indicate that professional help may be needed:

- You can't get to sleep or stay asleep for at least 6 hours each night
- You have episodes of panic (anxiety, rapid heart rate, sweating, shortness of breath) that you can't control
- You have outbursts of rage or intense anger that you can't prevent or control
- You have thoughts of suicide or impulses to hurt or kill someone else
- You have any stress symptoms of any kind that don't start to get better after you have been back for more than 30 days

It is the job of every Marine leader to not only make it OK for their Marines to get help for post-deployment stress problems, but to know their Marines and actively encourage them to get help when needed. And it is the job of all Marines to take good care of their own mental health, just as everyone must take care of their own physical health. Sources of help are listed at the end of this guide. Remember, the sooner needed help is obtained, the more likely stress problems are to heal completely.

Single Marines

As a single person, living in the barracks, you may have new roommates when you return, or you may have someone who has been living in your home or apartment in your absence. Perhaps you moved out prior to deploying and will need to find a new residence when you return. Regardless of your living situation, one of your first tasks will be to “put your house in order.” Once you’ve done that, you’ll be ready to focus on re-establishing your friends, family, and social ties.

As you anticipate going home, recognize that you’ve probably changed. You’ve made new friends and you’ve functioned in living and working environments that may be very different from anything you’d experienced previously. As a result, you’ve returned a different person based on these life experiences.

If you have a “significant other” in your life, this person may have also changed in your absence. Change inevitably creates stress. Over the short term, as you adapt to changes that may be required in your relationships, you may experience some worry, frustration, anger, confusion, fatigue, mood swings, or sleep difficulties. Usually such difficulties don’t last longer than two to four weeks. If these experiences continue, consult your chaplain, physician, counseling or mental health services for assistance.

Many couples know each other well enough that they ‘just know’ when to re-establish their intimate relations- the first hour, the first day, etc. You and your partner may want to take some time to feel comfortable with each other again. Remember that your timing as a couple is yours alone.

Regardless of whether or not you have a significant other in your life, there are, no doubt, people whom you consider to be family. What does family mean to you? Is family restricted to biological relatives or do you also think of close friends as family? Will you be going home to visit your family? Whether you see your family at a reunion event or you travel home, how do you feel about seeing them? What will you talk about? How will you respond to changes that may be taking place in your family? Perhaps a sibling is going through a divorce, or a grandparent has become seriously ill. Be prepared for changes.

Single Marines

At some point, you may feel that nothing is going the way you planned and hoped. It is still vital that you make plans, especially for the first few days of your return. If you do not have friends or family who live in the local area, make plans with other returning unit members for a homecoming activity that is special for you, and remember to call home.



One goal you may have as a single Marine returning from deployment is to meet someone new. Perhaps some of you are recently single again following a divorce or the end of a long-term relationship. Some issues to consider are: What kind of relationship are you looking for? What do you contribute to a relationship? What do you want in a relationship? Now comes the hard part. How do you actually get yourself to go out and meet new people? How you feel about yourself affects whether or not you take the risk to go out and meet new people. You have to like yourself enough to take the chance and go places and meet new people, male and female. Having a good self-image will enable you to take risks, survive any rejections and, at times, overcome the stereotypes associated with being in the military.

Now may also be a good time to focus on how you want to live upon return. Some of you may have a sense of not having been able to do

Single Marines

what you wanted during your time away. You may try to “make up for lost time” by doing everything in the first few days or weeks home. **Be realistic.** Take drinking for example. You can get drunk your first day back, wake up days later and wonder what happened to the excitement of returning. Then there are more subtle reactions, like spending money. The malls and used car lots may never have looked so good. Budget before you spend. Discussing your financial options with the personal financial specialist at MCCS may help you plan the use of your money more wisely and can ensure you are dealing with reputable agencies should you decide to purchase large ticket items. Speaking of cars, driving can be another area in which to exercise caution. You probably haven’t operated a personal motor vehicle in American traffic for some time. Your skills may be a bit rusty, so take it slow, and ease back into traffic.

If you’ve thought about returning to school, now is the ideal time to check out some of the Lifelong Learning programs, both military and civilian. The key is to focus on what makes your life full. Make plans NOW to integrate those activities into your life. Don’t forget your Single Marine Program as a source of activities and contacts. Marines who participate in the Single Marine Program make new friends, and take advantage of opportunities such as trips, special events, and volunteering to help re-connect with the community, and spend time away from the barracks.

Beyond practical issues, have you considered what impact the deployment will have on your social relationships and living habits? Many people with whom you’ve made friends with on the deployment may now be much less available to you, particularly if they’re married and are busy getting reacquainted with their families. This can promote feelings of loneliness and even mild depression. At the same time, you can keep yourself busy by actively reconnecting with old friends and acquaintances back home. Like everyone else who comes back from deployment, it makes sense to keep expectations reasonable and to be patient. Within a few weeks, your life should, once again, be back to a predictable and comfortable pattern.

Married Marines

We've discussed in other parts of this guide how during the deployment you've changed, as have your family and friends. If you are the deployed Marine, you've functioned in living and working environments that may be very different than anything you'd previously experienced. If you



are the spouse, you have also probably grown during the deployment while at home. You have taken on new responsibilities and developed confidence in your spouse's absence. Out of necessity, you have learned to cope. You may like some of your new responsibilities and may have developed skills and new ideas as to how things should be done. At the same time,

you are probably looking forward to the familiar pattern of sharing family and household responsibilities with your spouse. Keep in mind that your Marine's only frame of reference is "how it used to be" and that you will both need to communicate openly, and patiently, about how things will be from here on out.

Overall you're both probably very excited about once again spending time together as a family and sharing private time with your spouse. Both you and your spouse are probably thinking a lot about what it will be like when you are home. Maybe you're finding it more difficult to concentrate on work as your thoughts continue to drift to reuniting. While you're excited about reuniting, perhaps you're also a bit worried about some "unfinished business" in your relationship. After all, whatever issues existed in your relationship before the deployment will not have magically been resolved during the deployment. Also other lingering doubts and fears may exist. Sometimes, for example, as partners prepare to reunite, they both wonder about the possibility of infidelity.

Married Marines

How would you characterize the trust level in your relationship before the deployment occurred? What was your trust level in terms of your partner maintaining sexual fidelity? What do you think his/her trust level in you was in these and other key areas? Worries about a partner's unfaithfulness are much more common than the occurrence of infidelity. It is wise to assume you've both been faithful to one another. After all, accusations of infidelity are very serious and strike at the very core of a relationship.

If your marriage was satisfactory before the deployment, it's unlikely that any infidelity has taken place. When infidelity does occur, it is almost always a sign of much deeper relationship problems. These underlying issues must be addressed, perhaps with the help of a professional counselor, for the marriage to become healthier. If problems are left unresolved, acts of infidelity may become a devastating pattern in the relationship.

Although you'll be excited about reuniting, and the whole family will probably be thrilled with the return of the deployed person, everyone may experience a range of thoughts and feelings. Perhaps the deployed person will be a bit worried about how well he or she will fit back in. At the same time, family members might also be concerned about how the deployed person will treat them. They may wonder if their accomplishments will be noticed and appreciated. They may be concerned that the deployed person will violate the "go slow" principle and attempt to immediately "take over" everything. These concerns are a normal part of the reunion process and typically require little more than some time and patience to sort out.

The spouse at home has probably had to change some procedures while the Marine was gone. If it was the Marine's responsibility to mow the lawn, take out the trash, vacuum the carpet, or pay the bills, someone else in the family had to temporarily assume those responsibilities. Other changes in family procedures may have taken place in response to evolving family needs. In any event, the deployed person should remember to go slow when adjusting to reuniting with their family. Integrating back into the family is a process, not

Married Marines

an event that can simply happen at the front door of your home by your announcing, in essence, “I’m home and I’m in charge.” To take that approach is to invite arguments and hurt feelings. On that same note, if you are the spouse at home, remember that your Marine has actually been at work and not on a vacation, so try not to immediately hand over all of the old responsibilities before they even take off their boots. Be sure to avoid getting into the “who had it worse” game. The truth of the matter is that the separation was difficult for both of you.

One of the first changes that the newly returned Marine is likely to notice is that their partner has become more confident in his/her ability to cope with whatever hand life deals. Take notice of how this makes you feel. Are you proud of him/her? Hopefully so. Do you feel a little threatened, or perhaps not sure exactly where and how you fit into the family now? These are very normal concerns. Be sure to express your appreciation for your spouse’s valiant efforts to independently cope with the complexities of family life in your absence, and don’t be afraid to discuss any feelings of uncertainty regarding your place in the family.



Homecoming is the time we resume communicating “face to face” again. What will you and your spouse talk about? Are you open to talking about changes that have occurred in each of your lives as positive experiences that can promote growth in your relationship? Are you willing to really listen? Your partner may want to tell you many things that happened while you were away. Even though you may have been fortunate enough to have frequent phone contact,

Married Marines

letters, and perhaps e-mail and video teleconferences, your partner needs your undivided attention, face to face.

If you are the Marine, how will you respond to the way your partner has handled things in your absence? What about decisions made that you question? Will you second-guess your partner, or will you recognize that he/she was operating in a stressful environment and made the best decisions he/she was capable of making? It is helpful to remember that you were not there and you do not know all the factors that went into decision-making. As an example, if you usually managed the family finances before, but your partner has been doing so in your absence you'll need to get a thorough understanding of what has transpired. As finances can be an emotionally laden area, communication may shut down if you become critical, judgmental or angry. This may be the perfect time to work with a financial counselor so both parties can get an objective look at the family financial situation post deployment and formulate a comprehensive plan for the family's financial future. If you choose to criticize your spouse, what do you hope to accomplish besides doing damage to your spouse's self-esteem and ultimately to your relationship? So, it's in everyone's best interest for you to accept the decisions your spouse made and acknowledge that he/she made these decisions under difficult circumstances and move on.

You, as the Marine, have received ribbons, medals and awards for doing a good job in the military. The only appreciation your spouse receives for supporting your decision to be in the military is the appreciation she or he receives from you. Many military spouses feel that without that emotional payoff, going through deployments and other military-related disruptions of family life is just not worth it.

Intimacy and sex are not the same thing. Hopefully, you and your partner have maintained a solid sense of intimacy, or "emotional connection", during the deployment through communication. What you have not been able to maintain, as you and your partner are no doubt acutely aware, is the sexual component of your relationship. Since sex tends to be prominent in the thinking of both spouses during deployment, it tends to become a key focus of reuniting.

Married Marines

Given sexuality is highly personal; you need to deal with this area with patience. Although sexual intimacy can resume instantly, and this may well be your mutual desire, the level of overall emotional intimacy and comfort with one another that you experienced before the deployment make take awhile to regain. Keep in mind that for several months you've only been able to communicate with each other, at best, a few minutes a day, and that you've had no face-to-face contact. Again, go slow. Considering you've both experienced personal growth while separated, it makes sense to take some time to get to know each other again, not unlike two friends who haven't seen each other for a while. Build upon the intimacy you shared. Recognize you and your partner are "out of practice" in terms of sexual contact. As a result, it's not highly unusual after lengthy separations for temporary awkwardness to arise. Also, you may feel a bit uncomfortable together initially. If you have such experiences, do not make too much of them, as doing so only heightens anxiety, which in turn can set you up for a negative cycle of sexual problems. Simply relax, take your time, and let your sexual relationship resume in a way that is gratifying for both of you.



Children

The homecoming of the Marine is a major change for the children in the household. They have grown physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually during the deployment. Children are not as skilled at coping with their stress because they have little life experience. As a result, they may become firmly attached to the returning parent wanting their undivided attention or they may seem distant, withdrawn or seem that they just don't care. There will be a readjustment period--typically four to six weeks--for the entire family.

You can greatly enhance your family's reunion by developing realistic expectations of how your child will respond to the Marine's return based upon the child's age. What you can generally expect of different ages, and how you can facilitate the reunion process with your children is discussed below. Children are developing individuals who change rapidly in their thoughts and behavior.



Infants (Birth to 1 year):

An infant has not yet developed much of an ability to remember people and events. As painful as this might be for you to consider, do not expect an infant to recognize the parent who has returned from a long deployment. Instead, expect him/her to initially react as if the Marine were a stranger. The infant will likely cry when

held by the Marine, pull away, fuss, and cling to the person who was his/her primary caregiver during the deployment. Once again, "go slow." The baby will "warm up" to the Marine parent at his/her own pace. The newly returned parent should gently get involved in holding, hugging, bathing, feeding, playing with, and otherwise

Children

caring for the baby. The key is to be patient and let your baby's reactions be your guide in terms of what pace to proceed in getting acquainted.

Toddlers (1 - 3 years): A typical toddler response would be to hide from the newly returned parent, to cling to his/her primary caregiver, cry, and perhaps regress in potty training. Give your child space and time to warm up to the returning parent. It helps for the Marine to sit at eye level with your child and talk with him/her. A gentle offer by the Marine to play with the toddler may be helpful, but do not force the issue. Doing so will only intensify your child's discomfort and resistance. Also, the child may have a clearer memory of the deployed parent if the stay behind caregiver frequently showed him/her pictures of the military member and said "Daddy" or "Mommy," as the case may be. This is true because for children at this age, the old adage "out of sight, out of mind" aptly applies.

Preschoolers (3 - 5 years): Children in this age range tend to think that the world revolves around them. Keeping that in mind, it's not surprising that your preschooler may think he/she somehow made their parent go away, or that the Marine left because he or she no longer cared about the child. If this is the case with your preschooler, he/she may feel guilty or abandoned. Your child may express intense anger as a way of keeping the returning parent at a distance, thereby "protecting" himself/herself from further disappointment. Your preschooler is also likely to do some limit testing (see if familiar rules still apply). To promote the reunion process, parents should accept the child's feelings, not act overly concerned, and focus on rewarding positive behaviors. It is good for the returning parent to talk with the child about his or her areas of interest, be it storybooks, toys, or whatever and give the preschooler some undivided attention. Meanwhile, the Marine should support the other parent's enforcement of family rules but be careful about too quickly stepping into an authoritative role.

The child needs time to adjust to the Marine once again being an active participant in his/her life.

Children

School Age (5 - 12 years): Children in this age range are likely to give returning parents a very warm reception if the parent-child relationship was strong before the separation. The school age child may excitedly run to the Marine upon arrival. He/she will try to monopolize the returning parent's attention and want to show-off scrapbooks, hobby items, or school projects when the Marine gets home. If, on the other hand, the returning parent's relationship with the school age child was strained, the child may fear the Marine will punish him/her for all the child's misbehavior during the deployment. Such a thought process may lead the child to at first be shy or withdrawn around the newly returned parent. At any rate, it is best for the Marine to have friendly interest in what the child has done during the time of deployment and praise him/her for his/her efforts and accomplishments.

Adolescent (13 - 18 years): Adolescents can have mood swings that go up and down like a roller coaster. One moment they are solving problems in a reasonable and logical way and the next may be reacting in a purely emotional fashion. So, your adolescent's reaction to your return may be characterized by mixed emotions. Like the school age child, your adolescent will likely be very excited to see the Marine again, if the relationship was good-natured prior to the deployment. Sometimes, however, adolescents are reserved to publicly express their emotions and may be more concerned about acting "cool" in front of their peers. Adolescents tend to be very sensitive about being unfavorably judged or criticized. With this in mind, be sure to make time to discuss with your adolescent what is going on in his/her life as well as what you've experienced. As with sons and daughters of any age, it's critical to give your adolescent some of each parent's undivided pleasant attention.

Single Parent

If you're a single parent in the military, you may experience some unique concerns about reuniting with your children. If you're a custodial parent, you need to consider how your children have bonded with their caregiver during your absence. How will that bond impact your relationship with your children as well as with the caregiver? If, on the other hand, someone else has primary custody of your child, you may wonder how your child will respond since you have likely missed "regular" visits with him/her.

Strategies for coping with these situations are very similar to those described in the "Children's" section. There are however, a few additional issues to consider. If you're a custodial parent, then your children probably have been living with someone else for several months. Accordingly, to the extent this has been a fulfilling relationship, the bond between this caregiver and your children has strengthened. Your children's increased loyalty to their caregiver may be painful for you in that you may initially feel unneeded or even jealous. Again, go slow.

Focus on communicating both with the caregiver and your children, and recognize that you and your children will need to adapt to living with each other again. Your children have been living with someone else who probably had different rules and procedures compared to your own household. Give yourself and your children adequate time to "shift gears". The adjustment period, which may take several weeks, can at times be awkward. You can smooth the transition process by first of all actively involving the caregiver with the transition. To force young children to suddenly separate from the caregiver can be emotionally traumatic. Secondly, since your children have lived with different family rules and procedures, take time to compare with them the rules of your home. As you're doing this, seek your children's input regarding how they would prefer life at home. They need to feel included in the process of re-establishing the structure and "flavor" of your home environment.

If you are a non-custodial parent, your children's living conditions were probably not impacted by your deployment. Your visits with your children have, however, been curtailed. As you re-establish these visits, remember you and your children have grown and you will need to take time to get reacquainted.

Reservist

Like other areas of your life, your work environment may be somewhat different when you return. You may be worried about changes that have taken place and how you'll fit back into the organizational picture. Someone else has assumed your role, or at least "taken up the slack," in your absence. If you were a supervisor, decisions have been made by whoever fulfilled your role that you now will have to "live with." You'll also experience a change of pace and activity in your workday. That is, you'll be required to shift from your deployment schedule and activities back into "business as usual."



If you'll apply the same ideas we've discussed throughout this guide to your work situation, your readjustment should go relatively smoothly. Once again, focus on going slow. Specifically, talk with colleagues and supervisors to learn of changes and the rationale for those changes. Just as you were encouraged not to question your spouse's judgment in the decisions she reached, do not be overly

critical of your fellow workers and your supervisory chain. Just as in the situation in your family environment, you were not there at the time, and you do not know everything that went into the decision-making process. In any event, what can you realistically do other than accept decisions that have been made and move on? You can't change the past.

Be prepared for the possibility that some colleagues may harbor a degree of resentment. Why? One reason could be that from their perspective, they've assumed an arduous workload due to your absence. Now that you've been gone for several weeks or months, perhaps you're going to take at least a couple of weeks off work just when they want you to come back and start "pulling your weight" again! From your perspective it makes perfect sense that you're entitled to some time off. You've worked long hours, to include weekends and holidays. You've endured the challenges associated with functioning in a deployed environment, and you've been away from your family and friends. The issue here is not whose perception is "right" and whose perception is "wrong." The issue is simply that you need to be prepared for the possibility that you may encounter some resentment when you return to work.

If you encounter resentment, how will you deal with it? One response, and a very tempting one, would be to "give them a piece of your mind" about how unfair they are being. This might temporarily relieve your hurt and anger as you "set them straight," but may create increased resentment. Remember that your co-workers' perception and experience of your deployment is very different than yours. At any rate, a more helpful response could be something like this: *"You're entitled to your point of view. If I were in your position, I might see it that way too. I appreciate the work you did to cover for all of us who were deployed. I'm glad to get back into a familiar daily work routine and to be able to have dinner with my family each night and sleep in my own bed again."*

Reservist

There is another potential source of co-worker resentment, or at least irritation, amongst your colleagues you would be wise to avoid. Specifically, you may be tempted to entertain your co-workers with “deployment/war stories.” To a point, your colleagues will likely be interested in hearing about your experiences. Once they’ve reached their “saturation point,” however, and that point will be different for each individual, it’s time to shift the conversation to another topic. Make sure you are just as interested in hearing about what interesting things they have been doing during your deployment.



Even though there’s a limit to how much your colleagues want to hear about your deployment experiences, you’ll no doubt want to reflect on your experiences for a while. You perhaps may be feeling a little “underwhelmed” as you look back on the “good old days.” Remember your deployment was another time and place, and you need to live in the “here and now.” Your challenge, in short, is to size up the post deployment work environment and develop a way to smoothly transition back into your work environment.

And finally, another work environment challenge you may encounter when you return to the workplace is staff turnover. As you know, in any period of several weeks or months, some folks in a military unit will PCS away and others will arrive. In terms of the newcomers, you and they are an “unknown quantity” to each other. For that reason, you’ll need to establish your credibility with them, and vice versa. This is especially true if you are in a supervisory role. Also, you’ll need to learn to work together effectively as a new team.

Homecoming Tips

- **Accept that things may be different.**
- **Talk about your experiences.**
- **Go slowly – don't try to make up for lost time, especially behind the wheel.**
- **Spend quality time with your children.**
- **Reassure your children. Change often frightens them.**
- **Curb your desire to take control or to spend money.**
- **Accept that your partner may be different.**
- **Remember that intimate relationships may be awkward at first.**
- **Take time to get reacquainted.**
- **Forget your fantasies. Reality may be quite different.**
- **Take time to readjust.**
- **Communicate with your partner and family.**
- **Plan on spending some time with the entire family doing family things, but be flexible. Plan for extended family member visits.**



Conclusion

Experience has shown that virtually all Marines returning from deployment and their loved ones experience at least a little uneasiness as they readjust to their normal environment. Changes have taken place during the deployment for the Marine, family, friends, and colleagues. To successfully cope with change, adjustments in attitude, thought, and behavior are needed.

As you transition from deployment, whenever you begin to feel angry or frustrated, ask yourself, “How realistic are my expectations in this situation?” “Am I giving myself, and others, enough time and space to adjust?” Am I trying to force readjustment to happen rather than being patient and allowing it to happen at a comfortable pace?

Remember that readjusting to home life and work life is a process, not an event. As the Marine reconnects with family, work, and social environments, it makes sense to allow time and space. You will probably find that in a few weeks everything is back to a comfortable pattern again. If after two to four weeks you are consistently feeling sad, having marital difficulties, problems with sleep, appetite, concentration, or using alcohol excessively, please seek assistance.

There are numerous sources for you and your family that can help adjust to reunion after deployment. The following are some of the resources available:

- **Military OneSource** is available seven days a week, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year by calling 1.800.342.9647 inside the United States or 1.800.342.6477 from outside the United States. You can even call collect from outside the United States at 484.530.5908. Military OneSource offers advice, support, and practical solutions by master’s level consultants. Military OneSource is also available online at www.militaryonesource.com.
- **Marine Corps Community Services Counseling Services** are available on installations for one on one counseling, victim advocacy, and group support sessions with licensed, professional counselors. These services can be reached by calling your installation MCCS Marine and Family Services professionals.
- **Counseling Services** are also available through Military OneSource who has access to a network of professional, licensed counselors in your community. This counseling is available to help you resolve personal problems affecting your emotional health, relationships and family life. Possible issues may include: relationships/marital/family issues, stress, grief and loss, deployment, return & reunion and life changes. These counseling services are at **no charge**.
- **Marine Corps Family Team Building (MCFTB)** offers L.I.N.K.S., S.L.S, PREP, and CREDO which can help spouses with information on skills for successful military living, couples communication, and couples growth seminars. Log on to the MCFTB home page at www.usmc-mccs.org for more information.
- **Your chaplains available on installations, or other clergy** located in your local communities can offer a listening ear and spiritual guidance.
- **Mental health services** that are available through your TRICARE medical benefits are also a resource to call if you need them. Log on to the TRICARE website at www.tricare.osd.mil or call 1.800.DOD.CARES.
- **Installation Centers for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment (CSAPT)** are available on each installation. Working with commands, the focus is on prevention, timely identification and intervention. These services can be reached by contacting your unit Substance Abuse Control Officer (SACO).



Support

Publication Date: 02/07