

Returning Home: Veterans Training Series Transitioning

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Transition process for family prior to deployment

- Anticipation of loss vs. denial
- Train-up/long hours away
- Getting affairs in order
- Mental/physical distance
- Arguments

Conversation with Spouse

- How both of you feel
- What you worry about
- How to handle the emergencies
- Repair problems
- What you think need to be done around the house
- Be honest
- Talk about your anxiety
- Anticipated mood swings

Emotional Impact on Service Member

- Excitement / Anticipation
- Sadness at leaving home
- Concern for family during deployment
- Concern for safety & safety of unit
- Apprehension

Emotional Impact on Family

- Worry
- Stress
- Anger
- Sadness



Impact on Children

	Negative Changes in Children			
	Ages	Behaviors	Moods	Remedy
Infants	< 1 yr	Refuses to eat	Listless	Support for parent, pediatrician
Toddlers	1-3 yrs	Cries, tantrums	Irritable, sad	Increased attention, holding, hugs
Preschool	3-6 yrs	Potty accidents, clingy	Irritable, sad	Increased attention, holding, hugs
School Age	6-12 yrs	Whines, body aches	Irritable, sad	Spend time, maintain routines
Teenagers	12-18 yrs	Isolates, uses drugs	Anger, apathy	Patience, limit-setting, counseling



Children

- Military kids tend to be resilient
- Military kids with intact & stable family structures tend to do well
- Those with pre-existing issues (depression/anxiety) struggle more
- Attachment issues for younger children
- Increase in behavior issues for younger children with increased deployments
- Military teens show less risky behavior than general population
- Teachers & counselors report not being adequately prepared to deal with students deployment issues



Children and Wounded Warriors

- Children of wounded warriors have additional stress
- Important to let kids know about injuries
- While assumed to be significant, impact of psychiatric injuries on children is unknown

Increased Stress for Teens

- Separation occurs during development phase – Separation / Individuation
- Teens more aware of the reality of the risks
- Since teens are more capable of self-care, not seen as needing as much support

Teen Stress & Anxiety

- Sadness at parent's departure
- Worried about parent's safety
- Concern for remaining parent's stress
- Worry about parents' post-deployment marital problems

Additional Items in the Deployment Cycle

Couples

- New marital expectations
- Negotiating family roles
- New routines
- Shared responsibilities
- Rediscover leisure activities
- Extended family and friends
- Blended/stepfamily adjustment

Additional Items in the Deployment Cycle

Children

- Anticipate difficulties and discuss them with the family
- Focus on success
- Take individual/personal time with each child
- Talk with your children before the deployment begins
- Talk about the deployment
- Talk and have a plan for communication
- Help children for the departure

Common responses from the family during deployment

Deployment (first month)

- Mixed emotions/relief
- Disoriented/overwhelmed
- Numb, sad, alone
- Sleep difficulty
- Security issues

Common responses from the family during deployment

- Sustainment
- New routines established
- New roles acquired
- New sources of support
- Feel more in control
- Independence
- Confidence ("I can do this")

Transition Process Upon Return

Re-deployment

- Anticipation of homecoming
- Excitement
- Apprehension
- Burst of energy/"nesting"
- Difficulty making decisions

Transition Process Upon Return

Post-deployment

- Honeymoon period
- Loss of independence
- Need for "own" space
- Renegotiating routines
- Reintegrating into Family



Four Roles of Reintegration

- Redefining roles, expectations, & division of labor
- Managing strong emotions
- Abandoning emotional constriction and creating intimacy in relationships
- Creating shared meaning
(warrior, spouse, children)

Common Post-Deployment Reactions

University of Michigan Welcome Back Parenting Guide

- Both parents and children experience a “honeymoon” period.
- Role re-negotiation may take place between parents, older children and other family members who were closely involved with the family during deployment.
- Confusion may arise about the rules and routines. Do we do things the way we used to do them? What’s changed?
- Irritations and frustrations may surface between family members.
- Family members may think, “this should be easier.”
- With time, family members adjust to a “new normal.”

Common Post-Deployment Reactions Infants & Toddlers

- Infants and young children will vary in how they react to their returning parent.
- Very young infants (0-12 months) will not know the returning military parent, and will need time to develop familiarity. Because the very young child has not yet built a relationship with the returning parent, it is likely that he/she will show some signs of stranger wariness, including pulling away, fussing or clinging to the parent who was the primary caregiver during deployment.
- Toddlers are also likely to respond to the returning parent as an unfamiliar adult. They may, for example, hide from the newly-returned parent.

Common Post-Deployment Reactions Infants & Toddlers

- The heightened emotion surrounding the reunion may be simultaneously exciting and confusing for the young child, who may show his/her uncertainty by temporarily regressing in some areas. For example, the child may temporarily experience changes in eating or sleeping routines, such as wanting another bottle or wanting to sleep with parents. Toddlers who have been potty trained may have a temporary increase in toileting accidents as well.
- Toddlers may show greater fear of separation from the familiar parent, or temporary increases in shy or withdrawn behavior. They may seem more easily frustrated. Those reactions can lead to more tantrums and temporary increases in aggression, including hitting, yelling or biting.
- These reactions tend to be temporary and resolve after a brief period of time as the child builds familiarity with the returning parent and family routines are re-established.

Red Flags

Infants & Toddlers

- Increased and ongoing clinginess, crying, and whining
- Sustained or high levels of aggressive behavior
- Sustained or notable withdrawal from other people
- Showing less interest in fun activities
- Displaying more frustration and/or showing more difficulty when being comforted
- Returning to earlier stages of toileting (e.g., frequent “accidents”), feeding, or sleep difficulties

Common Post-Deployment Reactions Young Children

- The heightened emotion surrounding the reunion may be both exciting and confusing for a young child. He/she may show confusion or feelings of uncertainty by temporarily regressing in areas such as sleeping or eating routines.
- Young children may show temporary increases in shy or withdrawn behavior, and be less tolerant of frustration. The family may endure more tantrums and temporary increases in aggressive behavior such as hitting or yelling.
- Children of this age typically have an egocentric view of the world, and may believe that they caused the military parent to go away, or that the parent left because he/she did not care about the child.
- Children may use their play with stuffed animals or dolls to act out stories about separations and reunions. This can be helpful in processing experiences and feeling more in control of situations.

Common Post-Deployment Reactions Young Children

- A child may be angry at a returning parent for having been gone, and may “act out” more frequently.
- Because children in this age range are still learning an “emotion vocabulary,” they may show their feelings more, and have a harder time expressing feelings verbally.
- Following the military parent’s return, the young child may keep that parent “at a distance” in order to prevent him/herself from feeling further loss or abandonment. He/she may take a while to develop a sense of trust and to believe that it is okay to feel close again.

Red Flags

Young Children

- Increased and ongoing clinginess, crying and whining, including refusal to attend school or intense separation anxiety
- Increased and ongoing aggressive behavior
- Intense feelings of anger or sadness that persist over time
- Increased or ongoing difficulty interacting with peers
- Sustained or notable withdrawal from other people
- Showing less interest in fun activities
- Displaying more frustration or showing more difficulty when being comforted
- A regression or return to earlier stages of toileting (e.g., frequent “accidents”), feeding, or sleep difficulties

Common Post-Deployment Reactions Tweens

- Children may need a period of time to “warm up” to the returning parent. This should not be taken personally.
- Some children may seem overly clingy to the returning parent. Conversely, children may become negative and critical of the returning parent.
- Tweens may be worried about the war and whether his/her parent might be re-deployed.
- The child may ask difficult or complicated questions about the returning parent’s experiences during deployment.
- During play or conversation, tweens may recreate war or their image of what happened during their parent’s deployment.
- Changes in mood may be evident, including irritability, moodiness or whining.

Common Post-Deployment Reactions Twins

- Twins may attempt to test their limits with parents, showing defiance or refusing to follow directions.
- Mild to moderate changes in behavior may be observed, including:
 - An increased activity level
 - Decreased concentration and/or attention
 - Appearing more withdrawn from the family
 - An increase in attention-seeking behavior
 - Angry outbursts
- School performance or attendance may suffer.
- Changes in sleep or appetite may occur.

Red Flags Twens

- Dramatic change in behavior from how they were during deployment
- Engaging in behaviors considered typical for younger children: bedwetting, soiling, refusing to sleep in their own beds, baby talk, etc.
- Isolation and withdrawal
- Clinginess to the point of being unable to separate from parents
- Emotional or behavioral symptoms that interfere with school performance or social activities
- An absence of friends
- Significant problems with learning or changes in school performance
- Notable changes in sleep or appetite
- Aggression or violence toward animals, objects, other children or adults

Common Post-Deployment Reactions Teens

- The teen may have specific worries about the war and about a parent being deployed again.
- The teen's behavior around the returning parent may change:
 - He/she may be withdrawn or slow to warm
 - He/she may be overly clingy.
 - He/she may be critical, negative or angry.
- The teen's behavior around the parent who remained home during the deployment may change:
 - He/she may be dismissive.
 - He/she may be overly clingy.

Common Post-Deployment Reactions Teens

- The teen may be angry with the returning parent for leaving or with the remaining parent for choices made during the deployment.
- Rebellion and challenges to parental authority may occur.
- Mood swings or irritability may be observed, as well as mild to moderate changes in behavior including:
 - Increased activity levels
 - Decreased concentration and/or attention
 - Attempts to withdraw from the family
 - Increased attention-seeking behavior

Red Flags

Teens

- High risk behaviors, such as drug or alcohol use, sexual acting out or problems with the law
- Frequent outbursts of aggression or violence against people or property
- Repeatedly missing curfew
- Marked withdrawal from family and friends
- Depressive symptoms, including prolonged periods of sadness or crying, prolonged negative moods, changes in appetite or sleep, thoughts of death or withdrawal from desired activities and friends
- Marked changes in school performance
- Excessive tardiness or absenteeism at school

Red Flags Teens

- Significant changes in sleeping and/or eating habits
- Frequent nightmares
- Frequent physical complaints
- Threats of self-harm or harm to others
- Self-injury or self-destructive behavior, such as cutting on arms or legs
- Threats of running away
- Strange or unusual thoughts, beliefs, feelings or behaviors



RESOURCES

- California Army National Guard State Behavioral Health Office (916) 854-4492
- Military One Source (800) 342-9647
- VA – Crisis Line (800) 273-TALK
- Unit Chaplain / Ministry Team
- Behavioral Health Officer / Combat Stress Control / Aid Station or CSH
- Family Readiness Group
- TriCare
- Local grassroots organizations

Website References

- [University of Michigan](#)

www.welcomebackparenting.org

- [Hooah 4 Health](#)

www.hooah4health.com/deployment

- [American Academy of Pediatrics](#)

[www.aap.org/sections/uniformedservices/
deployment](http://www.aap.org/sections/uniformedservices/deployment)