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# **HOMECOMING AFTER DEPLOYMENT: DEALING WITH CHANGES AND EXPECTATIONS**

## **A National Center for PTSD Fact Sheet**

Ilona Pivar, Ph.D.

With deployment comes change. Knowing what to expect and how to deal with changes can make homecoming more enjoyable and less stressful. Below are some hints you might find helpful.

### **Expectations for Soldiers:**

- You may miss the excitement of the deployment for a while.
- Some things may have changed while you were gone.
- Face to face communication may be hard at first.
- Sexual closeness may also be awkward at first.
- Children have grown and may be different in many ways.
- Roles may have changed to manage basic household chores.
- Spouses may have become more independent and learned new coping skills.
- Spouses may have new friends and support systems.
- You may have changed in your outlook and priorities in life.
- You may want to talk about what you saw and did. Others may seem not to want to listen. Or you may not want to talk about it when others keep asking.

### **Expectations for Spouses:**

- Soldiers may have changed.
- Soldiers, used to the open spaces of the field, may feel closed in.
- Soldiers also may be overwhelmed by noise and confusion of home life.
- Soldiers may be on a different schedule of sleeping and eating (jet lag).
- Soldiers may wonder if they still fit into the family.
- Soldiers may want to take back all the responsibilities they had before they left.
- Soldiers may feel hurt when young children are slow to hug them.

### **What Children May Feel:**

- Babies less than 1 year old may not know you and may cry when held.
- Toddlers (1-3 years) may hide from you and be slow to come to you.
- Preschoolers (3-5 years) may feel guilty over the separation and be scared.
- School age (6-12 years) may want a lot of your time and attention.
- Teenagers (13-18 years) may be moody and may appear not to care.
- Any age may feel guilty about not living up to your standards.
- Some may fear your return ("Wait until mommy/daddy gets home!").
- Some may feel torn by loyalties to the spouse who remained.

Source: US Department of the Army. Homecoming after Deployment: Tips for Reunion. US Army Medical Department Center and School, Combat Stress Actions Office, Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio Texas. Modification of materials prepared by 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division Mental Health Section for the Persian Gulf War (1991).

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## **HOMECOMING AFTER DEPLOYMENT: TIPS FOR REUNION**

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Reunion is part of the deployment cycle and is filled with joy and stress. The following tips can help you have the best possible reunion.

#### **Tips for Soldiers:**

- Support good things your family has done.
- Take time to talk with your spouse and children.
- Make individual time for each child and your spouse.
- Go slowly when reestablishing your place in the family.
- Be prepared to make some adjustments.
- Romantic conversation can lead to more enjoyable sex.
- Make your savings last longer.
- Take time to listen and to talk with loved ones.
- Go easy on partying.

#### **Tips for Spouses for Reunion:**

- Avoid scheduling too many things.
- Go slowly in making adjustments.
- You and your soldier may need time for yourself.
- Remind soldier he or she is still needed in the family.
- Discuss splitting up family chores.
- Stick to your budget until you've had time to talk it through.
- Along with time for the family, make individual time to talk.
- Be patient with yourself and your partner.

#### **Tips for Reunion with Children:**

- Go slowly. Adapt to the rules and routines already in place.
- Let the child set the pace for getting to know you again.
- Learn from how your spouse managed the children.
- Be available to your child, both with time and with your emotions.
- Delay making changes in rules and routines for a few weeks.
- Expect that the family will not be the same as before you left; everyone has changed.
- Focus on successes with your children; limit your criticisms.
- Encourage children to tell you about what happened during the separation.
- Make individual time for each child and your spouse.

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