

PREPARING FOR REUNION!
Things to think about...

Changes in yourself -- how have you changed? Attitudes, behaviors, physical appearance? Think of some examples of your changes...are they positive changes?

Changes in your spouse -- how can you imagine that your spouse has changed? Perhaps in some of the same ways; attitudes, behaviors, physical appearance. How will you react?

Changes in the relationship -- until you have navigated through a deployment/remote tour separation, you don't really *know* if your relationship can make it. You can be 99.9% sure and still be concerned on an emotional level. This worry, obvious or not, can add to the stress of reunion.

TRUST -- did each of you follow through on promises for writing letters and/or phone calls? Sometimes it only takes one person receiving a "Dear John" or a "Dear Susan" letter to start everyone in that unit/squadron worrying about their relationships. Reassurances of love and commitment might need to be stated.

INDEPENDENCE -- often spouses at home discover many skills and an ability to keep things running while the other spouse is away. This can frighten the returning spouses, who may believe they must be needed. Couples can talk about the difference between being needed and being wanted.

HOME LIFE -- during deployment, you might have simplified life a bit; using paper plates, ordering out, etc. Perhaps your schedule has changed. For example, taking a class, or maybe getting a job. Maybe new friends are taking up some of your time. Your spouse may need some time to get used to your other (new) commitments.

CONTROL -- you may have discovered that you like having control over household decisions and do not look forward to sharing any of them. Or, perhaps you cannot wait for your spouse to return home and hand it all over. Many of us fall in-between! It would be nice that you and your spouse like to do different tasks. Sometimes negotiation and decision making needs to take place on who is responsible for what. After the deployment probably will be different than before the deployment.

RETURNING SPOUSES -- they are coming from an environment where they were told when to get up, when to work, what to eat, where to go when off duty and what kind of clothes to wear when going off-base. Spouses returning from a deployment might be unaccustomed to watching "American TV" and may at times tune you out when watching the TV. They many want to come home, lock the door and be by themselves. The first few days will be a combination of jet lag and unwinding from a hectic, routine pace. Being faced with many choices to make (what video to rent? where to go out to eat? what time to wake up in the morning? what clothes to wear?, etc.) can be overwhelming at first.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL REUNION

- Agree on plans for homecoming day and the next few days or weeks. Where do the children fit in? Are parents or in-laws coming?
- Realize the day of homecoming usually is very stressful. Returning spouses have had little sleep and lots of food. Perhaps you haven't slept a great deal or feel worn out preparing for the homecoming. Children will be excited and tend to act out.
- Accept that there will be some degree of changes in physical appearance, attitude, behavior and independence (yours and the military member's!)
- Plan time as a couple and as a family.
- Give each other time and space to adjust to one another.
- **Respect each other and the job each other did. Avoid the "I had it worse than you" game.**
- Think about how you handled the deployment; what went well and what you would like to do differently the next time. Discuss this with your spouse!
- Explain changes in your schedule and the family's schedule.

REESTABLISHING INTIMACY

- Allow each other time and space.
- Talk about your love to your spouse.
- Some people wish to be courted again before feeling comfortable resuming sexual intimacy. Others want to have sex right away. And others are a mixture of these two. The key is to talk and let each other know desires and feelings associated with a sexual reunion. It's a good idea to negotiate plans for a sexual reunion.
- Intimacy reducers: alcohol, children awake and active in the house, parents nearby, experimentation without negotiation, unresolved hurt and anger, distrust of your spouse, fear of unintended pregnancy.
- Talk with each other and listen with each other. Sexual intimacy begins with communication from the heart.

HOW WILL THE CHILDREN ACT WITH THEIR PARENT RETURNING?

Many parents worry about this. Feelings children have during and after a long separation from a parent are fear, guilt, fear happiness, excitement and anger. Separation from a parent is stressful for a child. During the early part of the deployment, your children might have acted out this stress by behaving in ways that surprise, or, worry you. About 6 to 8 weeks into the deployment, children will begin to adapt to the parent being gone and returned to their "usual" style.

When a parent returns to the family, all the members will adjust to the change. This can be very stressful for a family, especially for the children. Taking things slowly and following the child's lead in re-establishing a relationship with the newly-returned parent are good places to begin. Again, keeping a routine is important for children.

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