



Reconnecting with your Children after Deployment

Children are especially sensitive to changes in the family after deployment. Allow time for your children to get used to your return home. Ask for help when your return overwhelms you or your children.

What you need to know

A child's age affects how they cope with change. Below is a guide to help you understand how your child may be feeling.

PRESCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN	
Possible Feelings	Possible Resulting Behaviors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Confusion about what they are feeling ➤ Guilt ➤ Joy or Excitement ➤ Fear ➤ Anger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Clinginess and attention-seeking behavior ➤ Trouble separating from parent ➤ Aggression and angry outbursts ➤ A return to younger, childish behaviors ➤ Frustration.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN	
Possible Feelings	Possible Resulting Behaviors
<p><u>Same feelings as preschool children (listed above), plus . . .</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sadness ➤ Worry about redeployment of parent ➤ Worry that remaining parent will also leave ➤ Anxiety over changing roles in family ➤ Feelings of competition with returning parent (role-change) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A return to younger, childish behaviors ➤ Rapid mood swings ➤ Changes in eating and sleeping patterns ➤ Anger at both parents ➤ Attention-seeking behavior ➤ Attempts to initially split parents

ADOLESCENTS/TEENAGERS

Possible Feelings	Possible Resulting Behaviors
➤ Anger	➤ Rebellion
➤ Sadness	➤ School problems
➤ Anxiety	➤ General lack of interest
➤ Fear	➤ Significant weight loss
➤ Relief	➤ Drug or alcohol use
➤ Resentment	➤ Increased importance of friends

What are some ways to help you reconnect with your child?

Remember that change is often more stressful for children than for adults. Children have little experience coping with change. Listen to their concerns. Try to spend extra time with your children as they adjust.

- **Tell your children how much you missed them.** Let them know you are happy to see them again. It may seem like they should know this. However, hearing it from you is important.
- **Let them share how they helped while you were gone.** Praise them for helping out with family chores.
- **Allow children to express their feelings.** Children don't know what to expect from a returning parent. They may fear you will leave them again. Let them talk about their worries and fears. Don't try to force positive responses.
- **Older children usually understand deployment better than younger ones.** They may seem distant at first. This doesn't mean they didn't miss you. Show interest in things that are important to them. This may include schoolwork or social activities.

Tips to Help you Reconnect with Your Children

- **Be patient.** This period of adjustment will last several weeks. It will take time for everyone to reconnect as a family.
- **Allow your children to slowly adjust to your return home.** Avoid power struggles with both your spouse and your children. Work with your spouse and agree on rules and discipline.
- **Enjoy how your children have grown and changed.** These are not the same children as when you left. Take time to watch and learn your children's new behaviors.
- **Be caring and firm.** You may feel guilty about being away. This doesn't mean you have to give in to all of their demands. Your children need loving parents who set rules and routines.

When should you get help for your children?

Ask for help if you see the following signs in your children:

- Crying and withdrawing from others
- Lack of interest in play or school. Watch for lower grades and skipping classes.
- Trouble sleeping
- Large amount of weight gain or loss
- Attempts to hurt themselves or others

When should you get help for yourself?

Get help right away if you have any of the following:

- Trouble showing warmth and love to your children
- Being overwhelmed and not able to provide safe care
- Problems controlling your anger toward your children
- Not able to stop yelling and screaming at your children
- Hurting your children physically.
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Where can you get help?

Talk to a trusted professional if you are having trouble. This could be a social worker, counselor, provider, or clergy member. If you notice signs of stress in your children talk to a teacher or a school administrator. The school nurse, psychologist or social worker may also be helpful. Remember that there is help through the VA or in your community.



REMEMBER...

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