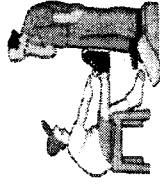


Communicating with Children - Listen

- Keep the child's age and abilities in mind.
- Praise the child for what he/she has accomplished while you were away.
- Acknowledge the child's feelings but let him know that if they did something wrong while you were gone, that is over and done with.
- Accept that it will take time to get used to being a whole family again. Some children are stand-offish at first.
- Let the current caretaker continue to be the primary disciplinarian for a while. Don't avoid disciplining but try to rebuild trust and good time feelings first.
- Expect changes – the children may not like doing the things they used to do with you before you deployed.
- Take personal time with each child individually, such as arranging a "date" with each child – but remember, your spouse comes first.
- Don't criticize new routines right off the bat. Take a "wait and see attitude."
- Remember that all children are unique individuals and may not react to your return in the same way.



Potential Behaviors When Deployed Parent Returns

- Younger children wonder why you left.
- They may initially pretend they don't care about you.
- On the other hand, a child may attach self firmly to you.
- Children may resent or be angry when you and your spouse show closeness to each other.
- Child may be anxious or unsure about what to expect
- Child may feel guilty that they did not meet some goal they set for themselves while you were gone.
- Child may fear you will discipline them for "bad" things they did while you were away.
- Child may be angry with you for going away and then feel guilty about being angry.
- Child may need time to warm up to you.
- Most children are happy and excited to have their parent home.
- They may talk non-stop to bring you up-to-date on all the things you've missed.

Remember: all children are unique and will adjust in different ways at different times.

It's Important to Seek Outside Help :

- If you are feeling and showing anger or frustration above and beyond the acceptable norm or you feel in your "gut" you're not reacting appropriately
- If you find you don't care about your child's feelings
- If you find yourself disciplining the child until YOU feel relief.
- If you find yourself warning and re-warming the child about the same behavior over and over again: Remember, the child is testing you to see if you follow through with the consequence you told them they would receive if they didn't do as they were told.
- If you seem to be spending more time disciplining for negative behavior than recognizing positive behavior.
- If you continue to provide choices even after the child has become resistant or indifferent. Eventually you must make the choice for the child.
- If the child hits you or your partner when he doesn't get his way and does not stop even when told there will be dire consequences for continuing this behavior.

You may need to consider professional advice and help if behavior problems become difficult for you and your spouse to handle, or if your usual methods of managing problems are not working, or your child becomes a danger to himself or others.

Positive Opportunities for Growth

Studies have shown that despite the distress children feel during separation, children of parents who deploy for long periods may make significant developmental gains. Children are very resilient. They also copy the behaviors of adults around them. When adults express confidence that they can handle whatever comes along, set good adult-child boundaries and are consistent in discipline and rule making children tend to do better with separation. Moreover, the challenge of the deploying parent:

- Fosters maturity and a sense of personal responsibility
- Induces personal growth
- Encourages flexibility when things don't go exactly as planned.
- Prepares children for other routine separations in their lives
- Strengthens family bonds as the family makes adjustments leading them to discover new sources of strength in each other.

Controlling Stress (Instead of the Other Way Around)

Stress is the physiological response of the body to any demand made upon it.

- **Acute Stress:** Fight of Flight response: Body prepares to defend itself. Takes about 90 minutes for metabolism to return to normal when event is over.
- **Chronic Stress:** the cost of daily living: bills, kids, jobs.... This is the stress we tend to ignore or push down. Left uncontrolled this stress affects your health — your body and your immune system.

The Top Ten Family Stressors (apologies to David Letterman)

1. Money problems
2. Children's behaviors
3. Poor communication with your spouse.
4. Insufficient couple time (you gotta date, folks, just like you did before the kids)
5. Unclear lines of responsibility for household activities — who does what when.
6. Insufficient time for yourself — neglecting to take care of yourself
7. Too much time for yourself — leaving the family out
8. Poor communication with older children
9. Sexual problems
10. In-law problems

The Physical Cost of Stress on Your Body

Ulcers, allergies, high blood pressure heart attacks, strokes, headaches, lack of energy, irritability, difficulty sleeping, over-use of medication, nervousness depression (worst case), anxiety, burnout

Many Ways to Break the Stress Cycle

- Recognize your stressors
- Define your personal self-image
- Make time for yourself sometimes
- Maintain a healthy perspective
- Practice **ASSERTIVE Communication** — you get your point across but not at anyone else's expense.
- Sufficient sleep (6 hours is good, less, bad)
- Exercise ("Groove your body 30 minutes a day)
- Prioritize what is important
- Manage your time
- Build strong, trusting relationships
- Be flexible when change happens
- Healthy eating habits

Improving Communication with Loved Ones

- 84% of all communication is non-verbal
- Communication **EQUALS** words, tone of voice, timing, pace, body language and the ability to really listen and hear what is being said.
- Successful communicating connects you with others, solves problems and promotes harmony
- Communication means **receiving** messages as well as putting messages out
- Effective listening skills can be learned and are a must for good communication: Pay close attention; don't interrupt; ask questions to show you do or don't understand what is being said.
- Skillful responses **EQUAL positive feedback** focuses on the problem not the person); **negative feedback** focuses on the person not the problem.
- Good face-to-face communication includes being clear and precise, using appropriate eye contact, receptive body language and friendly voice.
- Road blocks to communication include: "you" statements, lecturing, giving "orders", giving too much advice, making fun of the other, and not listening.
- Winning communication includes the use of "I" statements, identifying feelings/being assertive (expressing your feelings honestly and openly behind the words, without going on the attack when it is your turn to speak.)

Responding When Someone is Angry

- Stay calm and talk in a quiet voice. If you raise your voice they will raise theirs.
- Take a time out — promise to return and talk about the issue later when everyone is calmer.
- Stay on the topic — don't drag up the past
- Try to avoid blame. Put yourself in the other person's shoes.
- Think **Win-Win**



Chemical Abuse and Operational Stress Reactions

If you are using alcohol, prescription pain killers or illegal substances to help you cope with problems or powerful feelings you are having, you are not alone. Everyone comes back from combat with **Operational Stress Reactions (OSRs)** (which if left untreated can possibly turn in a Post-traumatic Stress Reaction/Disorder (PTSD)). Many people with OSRs and PTSD have tried to self-treat and manage their symptoms and feelings by self-medicating. If you are using alcohol or drugs as a way of coping, it is VERY important to find a health care provider who will be able to help you deal with this. Many people use alcohol or mind altering substances to help get to sleep or block unpleasant feelings or memories. At first, alcohol and drugs can appear to provide some relief and comfort. However, in the long run you need more and more of these substances to get the same effect. Abuse and addiction can be the result and create a whole new set of more serious problems.

The best way to deal with the powerful emotions of OSR and PTSD is to TALK to someone about what you are feeling. Nothing seems as bad as you think it is if you can put it into words with a professional who can give you feedback and support. Check with your trusted health services provider for a referral. If you are not comfortable with the first therapist you get after a few sessions, ask for another one. If they suggest you would heal better (yes Mental Pain requires healing just like body pain) if you had a little help with an anti-depressant or sleep aid, don't reject this. These medications function like cholesterol medications work for high cholesterol — that is — they can save your life.

Here are some warning signs to be alert for:

- Using alcohol, prescription drugs or illegal substances against medical advice.
- Using alcohol, un-prescribed prescription drugs or illegal drugs as sleep aids.
- Using large amounts of alcohol, prescription drugs or illegal substances for longer periods than intended.
- Mixing drugs and alcohol with medications.
- Binge drinking.
- Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Resumption of alcohol or illegal drugs after being treated for a substance abuse problem: relapse.
- Experiencing increased or decreased tolerance to alcohol or drugs.
- Experiencing withdrawal symptoms upon cessation of alcohol or drugs.
- Jeopardizing your career or family because of alcohol or illegal substance use to cope with stress or grief.

☆☆ Remember you may SELF-REFER to the Army Substance Abuse Program at any time.

Reunion Strategies

- Things don't have to be "perfect". Pretty good is good enough. You want to be fresh not totally worn out when you get back together.
- Listen to understand what your partner is saying. — keep communication lines open.
- Give some time to listen to the children but not at expense of your partner.
- Put yourself in the other person's shoes. It was hard for both, just in different ways.
- Make the homecoming special but most Soldiers like it best when it's "low key".
- Don't try to solve all the problems that come up immediately. Sit back, take a deep breath and observe how things are going so a clear strategy can be used.
- Allow several weeks for decompression. But check in with your employer to let them know you are back.
- Expect roles and personal interactions to have evolved over time.
- Re-think the family budget before you spend if you'll be earning less in the future.
- Take it one day at a time! All changes are stressful, even the positive ones.
- Reach out for help if things don't settle down in 2-4 weeks.

Some Myths about Relationships

- Solid relationships never have conflicts.
- It's a Reunion — everybody should be happy!
- In a solid, successful relationship partners are always completely compatible and always see "eye to eye".
- People are who they are. They can't change so why try to change them?
- People can be changed and I am just the one to change them.

Problem Solving

- ♣ **Work on one problem at a time.**
- ♣ **Negotiate.**
- ♣ **Use anger constructively.**
- ♣ **Take Time Outs when you need to.**

Separation and Reunion is a lot like being on an escalator. The Soldier gets off and goes in one direction while the family continues to move (grow) upwards.



You may be thinking...

- What changes have occurred?
- Have I made good decisions while separated – at home, with the kids, with our finances?
- Will I miss the freedom I've had?
- Do we still have things to talk about?
- Am I still loved for who I am?

Children may be thinking...

- Will the rules at home change?
- Will I get in trouble for the times I was bad while Mom or Dad was gone?
- How long before Mom or Dad leaves again?
- Will he/she be happy to see me?

Everyone has evolved and changed: Expect ...

- More independence from everyone.
- New House Rules
- New roles
- New Relationships and interactions.

Anticipate:

- Changes and new options for you to explore.
- A need for a lot of patience
- Maybe some health disturbances or problems sleeping.

Coping Strategies:

- Arrange for some personal quiet time.
- Stay positive – things DO get better if you work at it.
- Be realistic. Some hopes and dreams were not to be.
- Use open honest communication. Listen hard in order to understand and be prepared to give and accept open honest feedback.

Expect:

- You'll learn to respond to issues and events in new ways.
- Your partner may be surprised at how you've changed and acquired new skills.
- You might feel left out or no longer needed.
- You may have fears and apprehensions about the unknown.
- You may need to vent some anger.

Managing money well can be very challenging. Some basic tips include:

- Live within your budget and record expenses to see where the money is going.
- When making purchases, ensure your "needs" outweigh your "wants".
- Develop a plan to pay off any debt you have incurred, particularly credit cards.
- Establish an emergency fund – rule of thumb is 3 months of salary.
- Look into wise investments such as IRA's, bonds, savings plans, etc.
- PAY CASH for purchases whenever you can.
- Don't sign contracts without checking them out first. Remember most states allow you to cancel a contract within three days of making it.
- Make mutually agreeable spending decision with your partner.

Resources

- ✓ 88th RRC Family Readiness I-800-THE ARMY 1 4357
- ✓ 88th RRC website (lots of useful information): www.usarc.army.mil/88thRRC/
- ✓ PREP – Marriage Enrichment program offered free to 88th RRC Soldiers and their spouses. This retreat focuses on enhancing communication skills and closeness. Contact the 88th RRC Chaplain's office for more information.
- ✓ Single Soldier Retreat – offered free to single Soldiers, this retreat focuses on reintegration, financial, communication and career issues. Contact the 88th RRC Chaplains for more information.
- ✓ Veterans' Administration Services: www.va.gov
- ✓ Vet Centers – Army Readjustment Counseling Centers provide confidential counseling services for returning Vets for mental health issues. Free service. To find the nearest Vet Center near you check the Veterans' administration web site and look for Vet Centers under "Vet Centers" heading.
- ✓ American Red Cross – www.redcross.org
- ✓ Employer support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) – community business men who assist Soldiers in disputes with their employers over re-employment rights. www.esgr.org

If you or a family member are experiencing a life threatening problem or emergency such as a danger of suicide or a threat of violence contact 911 or your nearest local Crisis Unit immediately.

**NATIONAL SUICIDE
PREVENTION LIFELINE**
1-800-273-8255

www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

88th RRC Combat Stress Control Team
612-713-3255/3189

88th RRC Chaplains
612-713-3426/3021

MilitaryOneSource

Provides resource materials and counseling in a discreet and confidential manner to all Soldiers and family members.

Service is free. **1-800-342-9647**

www.militaryonesource.com

User ID: military Password: onesource

Materials in this guide were derived from 88th RRC Combat Stress Control Team material, Walter Reed Army Medical Center Resource Manual, Oct 2003 and the Winnepeg MFRC

Homecoming



Reducing Stress During
the Most Challenging Part of
the Deployment Cycle



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