

HONORING OUR HEROES

Celebrating A Soldier's Return Home

(NAPSA)—When a family member returns home from serving abroad, it's truly cause for celebration. But experts say it's important to remember that feelings of joy could be accompanied by worries caused by the many changes returning soldiers face.

“Research suggests that reunions are often more stress inducing than deployments. Every deployed soldier, family member and friend may experience a feeling of anticipation as the end of the deployment approaches. This may take the form of eagerness for reunion, or a dread of a return to a problematic situation or a mixture of both,” notes C.R. Lee Ratliff, Director, Army Reserve Family Programs. To help, his office offers these tips:

Spouses

- Don't overschedule the first days after the return. The regimentation and strict routine of deployment can leave service members craving unscheduled time and hoping for a relief from constant responsibilities.

- Don't expect your spouse to jump in and start taking care of household chores and tasks just as before. Give it time, talk about what needs to be done, and let your spouse take on household tasks at a pace that's comfortable for both of you.

- Spend time talking with each other. You've both been through separate experiences and you've both changed in some ways as a result. Talking can help you get to know each other again, to regain



Families can find ways to deal with the changes and stress faced by a returning soldier.

the intimacy you had before and to rebuild family routines that include you both.

- Don't force talk about the experience of war, but be open to it when the time is right. It's often a better idea for the service member to talk through any tough experiences first with a chaplain, a family service center counselor, or another trusted adviser or friend. If you do talk about painful experiences as a couple, try hard to listen without judging.

- Don't give up activities that you enjoy and that help you relax. You may need to be flexible to fit these activities into the new family schedule, but do your best to find a way.

Children

- Expect your children to test the rules now that both parents are home. Whenever there's a change in a family, children work to find out whether it might mean

any loosening of limits. Together, apply rules fairly and consistently.

- Children may be feeling the same confusing things you and your spouse feel—worry, fear, stress, happiness, excitement. Depending on their age, they may not understand how their soldier could leave them if he or she really loved them. Be patient with your children.

- Remember that it is hard for children to control their excitement. Let them give and get the attention they need from both of you before you try to have quiet time alone as a couple. Also, children's reactions to their soldier's return will differ according to their ages.

Families

- Watch your spending. Now that you're back together as a family you'll have some added expenses (another adult mouth to feed, for one thing). Don't lose control of the budget celebrating your partner's return.

- Seek professional help if you think there is a problem. Some anger and some tears can be expected after a long or difficult deployment, but excessive anger, mean-spirited fighting, and violence are signs that you need help. Don't feel that you have to solve serious emotional problems on your own.

More Information

The Army Reserve Family Programs Office helps soldiers and families deal with the issues surrounding a military member's homecoming. For more information and tips, visit www.arfp.org.