



For parents of returning personnel

Defence Community Organisation

Your son or daughter is returning home after a deployment: what next?

The period leading up to your son or daughter's return from deployment can often feel overwhelming. This handout provides some handy information and advice to help you manage this time.

Excitement, relief, joy and pride can be intertwined with concern, fear and worry about how best to support your returning soldier: what to say, what not to say, what the future will hold.

It's important to keep in mind that your son or daughter is capable, trained, and well equipped. The best thing you can do is to offer your support and encouragement. Take it step-by-step. While every family has its own dynamics, below are some thoughts you may wish to consider as you prepare for your son or daughter's return home.

The returning service member's sense of purpose has often been shaped by:

- Traumatic events that can be difficult for them to talk about, or even think about.
- The strong bonds they formed with fellow service members and their military unit, who have shared similar experiences.
- The highly regimented environment and routines of 24–7 military life.
- Their adoption of more aggressive attitudes that are necessary when deployed in hostile settings.
- An altered sense of self and identity shaped by war, and an altered view of the world.
- Stress and fatigue.

Below are some possible behaviours your son or daughter may demonstrate as they adjust to life back at home.

Cohesion vs withdrawal

Bonds built in combat lead to the member showing a preference for time with military mates over family members.

Accountability vs controlling

Accountability for control of military gear and behaviour may lead to a heightened need to control events and they may demonstrate irritability toward family members about this.

Targeted aggression vs inappropriate aggression

Use of anger and aggression in combat may lead to a short temper at home.

Tactical awareness vs hyper-vigilance

A high degree of situational awareness may result in the member appearing jumpy at home.

Emotional control vs anger/detachment

Keeping a necessary lid on one's emotions can become second nature to the member and may lead to them being perceived as 'uncaring' by their partner.





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Building a shared sense of purpose

Each phase of deployment brings its own set of challenges. The end of a deployment and the actual homecoming can be frustrating and upsetting for families as military logistical issues, like dates of return, can change and remain out of your control.

Typically, a 'honeymoon' period follows a deployment, during which families reunite in person, but not necessarily emotionally. Some family members may feel simultaneously awkward and excited, and at times you may feel like your returning member is a stranger.

It is not realistic to expect everything to be the same as it was before your son or daughter deployed.

Life at home does not have the edge and adrenaline associated with wartime duty, and this can lead the member to feel disconnected, even let down. They may have 'shifting gears' and settling back into domestic life.

As a parent, you may have to face the challenge of differing public views about the deployment and Australia's involvement in war. Media coverage can undermine the pride and purpose military families feel about their involvement.

Some thoughts and tips for building a shared sense of purpose:

EMOTIONS MAY RUN HIGH Remember that your returning member may find reintegration back into home life tiring and confusing and this can lead to feelings of anger and frustration. They may have a short temper. If this happens, suggest they take some time out and return to discussions when everyone feels more relaxed.

ENJOY LIFE TOGETHER Find activities that you both enjoy and have some one-on-one time.

COMMUNICATE Talking together builds a shared sense of purpose, and communication will help your member to process feelings, new information and relieve stress. Remember that military personnel often prefer to discuss war stories with their military colleagues to protect their family from traumatic memories.

LET BE Know that 'this too shall pass'. Time is one of the most important factors in healing.

KNOW WHEN TO SEEK HELP Many service members do not want to seek help for fear of damaging their career. However, the consequences of letting a problem linger untreated can be much more damaging. There are excellent treatments available to support and assist you.

For more information on this factsheet and other Defence Community Organisation support services visit www.defence.gov.au/dco or call the all-hours Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608.

The Defence Community Organisation offers a wide range of support services for the families of ADF members.

The best way to access these services is to call 1800 624 608. The all-hours Defence Family Helpline is staffed by qualified human services professionals including social workers and psychologists.

