



Australian Government
Department of Defence

Absence from home support

Defence Community Organisation



For Australian Defence Force members
and their families

www.defence.gov.au



Absence from home support' handbook
Produced by Defence Community Organisation

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Contact Defence Community Organisation for further information:

1800 624 608

United Kingdom 0800 051 2187

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DefenceFamilyHelpline@defence.gov.au

www.defence.gov.au/dco

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Follow Defence Community Organisation on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter to receive information about support services, links with community organisations, and the range of DCO events for families.

www.facebook.com/defencecommunityorganisation

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Disclaimer

The content, including publications referred to, in this handbook are intended to provide a summary and general overview of the deployment cycle, tips, and supports related to ADF member absence due to service reasons. Defence does not provide advice concerning, or recommending or promoting, any non-government organisation referred to in this handbook.

Cover image:

The crew of HMAS Anzac and their families farewell each other as the ship departs for South East Asia from Fleet Base East, Sydney.

Photo by ABIS Kieran Dempsey

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Introduction

ADF members may be called upon at short notice to deploy anywhere in Australia or around the world, meaning they often have to spend time away from their families. Whether the time apart is due to deployment, training, exercise or posting, it can be a challenge for both the ADF member and the family at home.

However, timely preparation can help to make the experience more manageable for all concerned.

Defence families do not have to make these preparations in the dark. Defence Community Organisation (DCO) was established in 1996 from the three single Service welfare agencies to provide support to ADF members and their families. Following the amalgamation of DCO's Defence Family Helpline and the National Welfare Coordination Centre (NWCC), coordinated and streamlined absence from home support is available to ADF members and their families.

Extensive information and resources are available in this handbook to familiarise you with what you might expect from each stage of absence- from pre-absence, during absence to homecoming. You will also find practical guidance for each stage, such as how to prepare for the absence/deployment, different ways to handle any challenges that may occur during the period of absence and hints and tips to readjust as a family when the member returns. The **Member and Family Care Plan** starting on **page 18** gives you a useful tool for your planning.

This booklet is only one part of the support services, practical assistance and products offered to Defence families by the Defence Community Organisation (DCO). DCO's services not only inform and prepare you for deployment and time apart, but also provide you with support to make these experiences manageable, positive and strengthening ones for your family.

Some of the family support available during the ADF member's absence includes regular absence support calls, 24-hour advice and referrals, short-term social work support, and assistance with emergency and crisis, as well as assistance for parents to help children dealing with parental absence. We also have interactive programs, information products and community connection services.

If you have any queries about absence from home support, or wish to access any of these services or products, contact the all-hours Defence Family Helpline on **1800 624 608** or at DefenceFamilyHelpline@defence.gov.au.

You can also visit the DCO website at www.defence.gov.au/dco to find out more about Defence family support, and if you would like ongoing updates from DCO, follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Preparing for deployment

Although deployment and time apart can be challenging for families, timely preparation can help to make the experience more manageable and positive for all concerned. In this section, you'll find important information, guidance and tips for making your preparations.

Be informed – Find out about the member's operation, and what effect the time apart may have on your family so you can prepare emotionally as well as practically.

Plan ahead – There are practical things you can do to make sure the family is well cared for and things run smoothly in the member's absence, including making a family support plan. The ADF member will also have to perform some important administration before they go.

Involve the whole family – Getting the whole family involved in preparations, including children, will make sure everyone feels heard, informed and that they have an important part to play.

For ADF members—prepare practically

For support to be delivered appropriately to your family during absence or deployment and in times of emergency or bereavement, there are some essential things for you to do before you go.

Check your personal details in PMKeyS

Make sure you have named your primary emergency contact person and next of kin in PMKeyS and that their details are accurate and up to date.

When you name a primary emergency contact you are telling Defence who you want to be contacted if you are injured, become sick, or if the worst should happen, you die. Your next of kin is your closest living relative over the age of 18, usually a partner, child, parent or sibling. Your primary emergency contact and next of kin may be the same person.

It can also be helpful to leave your PMKeyS number with your family as they may need this in the event that they have to urgently contact you or for other administrative purposes.

Have your partner and dependants formally recognised

If your partner and dependants are not formally recognised by Defence, they may not receive Defence entitlements and support, including housing, relocation, child care, emergency assistance, education and employment assistance, or bereavement payments and compensation.

To have your partner formally recognised by Defence, you will need to complete an 'Application for Recognition of a De Facto Relationship' and submit it to your chain of command.

You can have your dependants recognised by completing form AD150, with relevant supporting documentation and submitting to your chain of command.

Other web forms are available for changes to dependant or partner details, and other categories of recognition such as special needs and dependants (unaccompanied).

If you would like further information, or have any questions please contact your local Personnel Office or visit the Pay and Conditions website, www.defence.gov.au/payandconditions/Default.asp.

The forms are available from web forms system at intranet.defence.gov.au/webforms, or through the Defence Service Centre intranet.defence.gov.au/webforms.

ID cards

Ensure that everyone in your family has a current Defence Common Access Card (DCAC or commonly known as 'family card') so they can gain access to Defence facilities and receive military benefits. You can request a family card by submitting an AE294 Form, available on Web Forms.

Absence from home support

You can also request for your partner/family to have limited 'escort privileges', so that they can take an additional person, such as another family member, on base with them (please note this is only available for persons 18 years and over). Fill out form AC989, *Pre-deployment emergency contacts confirmation*.

Complete form AC989 – Pre-deployment emergency contacts confirmation

Each time you are deployed, you will be required to complete form number AC989 on web forms and submit it to the National Welfare Coordination Centre (NWCC) – which has integrated and is now a part of the Defence Community Organisation. This allows the NWCC to access your emergency contacts details if they need to contact them in the case of emergencies during the deployment. You should let whoever you nominated as your emergency contact know that if their details change or they go away on holiday that they will need to let the NWCC know.

The NWCC/Defence Family Helpline can be contacted by calling 1800 624 608 or visit www.defence.gov.au/nwcc.

Register your family for deployment support

Your family can register to receive regular absence support calls from DCO during your absence or deployment by calling the Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608.

See the [Absence support](#) section on **page 12** for more information.

Make a Will

Upon entry into the ADF all Defence members should make a Will and are responsible for having a valid and current Will. Defence provides legal assistance in the preparation of simple Wills through a Defence Legal Officer. Alternatively, members can use a solicitor in private practice, the Public Trustee, a trustee company or make their own Will using a commercially available kit at their own expense.

Failure to make a Will or update your existing Will could result in a member's estate being distributed according to the rules of intestacy and not in accordance with their wishes. This means that, should you die, your family may not be provided for appropriately.

Making a Will doesn't have to be complicated or expensive. You can seek free advice from a Defence Legal Officer, or a civil legal practitioner. Contact a Defence Legal Officer by searching for 'Defence legal' on the Defence intranet (DPN) and further information is available on the AE610 – *Will Instruction Sheet*.

Note: if you have complex financial arrangements or estate planning needs then you may want to consider consulting with an independent legal practitioner at your own cost.

Storage at DCO Headquarters

If a Defence member elects to lodge their Will with DCO they must send the Will through their Ship's Office or Unit Orderly Room. The Defence ship, establishment or unit submitting a member's Will for safe custody must ensure that the Will is enclosed in a sealed Defence Will envelope (Form AD530, *Tri-service Will Envelope*). The sealed Defence Will envelope must be sent with Form AC567, *Lodgement of Wills*.

Note – pins, staples or wire clips must not be used to fasten Form AC567, nor should they be used to seal envelopes containing Wills. Wills should be promptly forwarded to:

Wills Administrator
Defence Community Organisation Headquarters
DKE-01-05
PO BOX 7921
Canberra BC ACT 2610

Email: adf.wills@defence.gov.au

Storage with other agencies

If a Defence member elects to lodge their Will with a solicitor in private practice, Public Trustee, trustee company or other person, they should notify DCO HQ by completing a 'Certificate as to Will already in existence', stating that they have made a Will, and provide the name, address and telephone number of the person, authority or organisation in whose custody the Will is lodged.

For further information refer to the [Defence Casualty Manual \(CASMAN\)](#), Chapter 5, Annex 5A.

For partners, parents and families—plan ahead

Preparing as a family before the time apart is very important - whether this is your first time or you have already experienced absence from each other previously. Planning in advance, when emotions are not running too high, can provide an opportunity to create a comprehensive and realistic plan. Ideally, these conversations should occur before the ADF member departs, so that everyone in the family can be a part of the important discussions and decisions.

Be informed

The member's unit will usually hold briefs for families before, during and after a deployment. If requested, these briefs can provide you with important information about the length and nature of the absence/deployment, ways of communicating with the deployed member and important contacts within the unit. Contact the unit directly for more information – if you do not have a direct number you can contact the Defence Service Centre on 1300 333 362.

Another great resource is Defence's Global Operations website, www.defence.gov.au/operations where you can find out more about the deployment, exercise or operation.

ForceNet is a great way for families to be informed about relevant services and current Defence matters. For more information go to www.forcenet.gov.au or call the Defence Service Centre on 1800 333 362.

It is also important to make sure you take note of the ship/unit support staff's contact detail as well as the phone number, postal address and email for your ADF member during the deployment. If you misplace any of these details you can contact the Defence Family Helpline, in conjunction with the, National Welfare Coordination Centre, on 1800 624 608 or www.defence.gov.au/nwcc.

The member can also provide their family with some brief information about what their role or responsibilities are.

Make plans

It is very important to make plans for the care of your family during your absence, to ensure that family life runs smoothly and everyone has easy access to support and information when they need it.

Some questions to start you off in your planning:

- Are there changes you need to make to your current financial arrangements?
- Does your family know where all the important records and information are kept?
- Does everyone in your family know how to perform maintenance and repairs, or where to find the right assistance?
- Do you have a plan for emergencies, and does your family know who they can contact in an emergency or if they need extra support?
- Does everyone know what their new daily responsibilities and duties will be in the ADF member's absence and how to perform them?
- How you will communicate as a family when the ADF member is away?
- If the ADF member is deploying overseas, you may want to consider applying or checking that all family members have a current passport.

The Member and Family Care Plan

The Member and Family Care Plan is a useful tool to bring together important information about personal arrangements, records and emergency details for your family in one easy reference.

The plan also guides you through important considerations including financial arrangements, home preparation and maintenance, legal considerations, medical needs, emergency plans and other practical matters. The questions help you assess your current level of family readiness and may identify issues you haven't thought about yet.

The Member and Family Care Plan is entirely for your own use, but you may choose to leave a copy with another family member or trusted friend in case of an emergency.

You can find a copy of the Member and Family Care Plan at the end of this booklet, or visit the DCO website to download a copy.

https://www.defence.gov.au/DCO/Master/documents/Publications/Member_and_Family_Care_Plan.pdf

Communication plan

Being able to communicate and remain connected with each other plays a critical role during a period of absence. It is important to discuss prior to your member's departure how you will stay in communication as a family and to find out what works for everyone, such as different technology options that are available. For ideas on how to stay in touch refer to **page 7**. Another consideration may be what impact the operational requirements may have on the ability for the ADF member to stay in touch or what they can or can't discuss.

You could also explore what your expectations are, such as when you may be able to talk to each other or what topics you may or may not discuss. For example, you may decide to only discuss topics that strengthen the relationship and perhaps leave bigger conversations/topics for when you both have enough time and patience to be able to communicate effectively (of course unless it's an emergency).

A helpful tip is to work out how you will manage if one of you are unable to communicate at a pre-scheduled time, for example, due to operational requirements, tiredness or conflicting commitments. One way could be writing an email, sending a quick 'I'm thinking of you text' or for younger children drawing a picture.

Other assistance to help you prepare

We have created a number of DVDs to help you begin discussions as a family prior to absence, such as *Going Solo—Dealing with Absence in Defence Families*, for families with younger children, and *Don't Forget it's Bin Night—Stepping up when Mum or Dad is away* for families with teenagers.

We have also produced a range of children's books which are designed to help younger children understand more about the military lifestyle and to develop coping strategies for parental absence. You can also request to receive an absence from home support teddy bear for children over 3 years of age.

As a partner or family member you can also request to receive regular absence support calls from one of our human service professionals at the Defence Family Helpline. These calls can be useful if you have any questions, concerns or require additional support. We can also send you out an Absence Support pack.

You can request an Absence support pack, opt-in to receive absence support calls, get a copy of the DVDs, books or an absence from home support teddy bear by contacting the Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608.

Another great resource is the [ADF Financial Services Consumer Council](#) website. The website features a budget calculator and a deployment checklist to help you with your financial planning.

Prepare emotionally

The emotional impact

Each stage of the deployment—pre-deployment/deployment, the time apart and the reunion—may be characterised by a variety of strong emotions, which is completely normal. Knowing what to expect can help you to manage these feelings more effectively, respond more positively and feel more in control.

In the lead up to deployment, you'll likely go through a rollercoaster of emotions. Excitement, worry and sadness are common feelings to experience. Family members at home may notice that they begin to withdraw from the departing member to make the farewell easier. It is also not unusual to feel that you just want the ADF member to 'go already' and get the goodbye over with. During this time, try and be kind to yourself and allow yourself the space and freedom to process how you are feeling.

Talk about it

Try to involve everyone close to the ADF member—partners, children, parents, relatives and close friends—in your preparations for deployment. This will make sure everyone feels heard, informed and that they have an important part to play.

Be prepared for relationships to change and shift during the time apart, as the deployed member and the family at home have their own separate experiences, responsibilities and personal growth. Working together and communicating openly about your feelings and expectations at this early stage will help to keep your relationships strong and make it easier to adapt to changes.

Ways to look after yourself and your family

There are proactive things you can do to manage your feelings and reactions, and to support yourself and your family during deployments.

You can plan to incorporate these things into your routine before your family member deploys. You might sign up for DCO's SMART programs to learn strategies to overcome negative emotions and make your responses more positive. You might set up a support network in your community or enrol in sporting or community groups. See [During deployment, or time apart](#) on **page 7** for more ideas about looking after yourself during deployment.

Know what support is available to you—having all the contact information at hand makes it easier to access support when you need it. Reading our [Absence support](#) section on **page 12** will get you off to a good start.

Resources are available for parents with information and tips for supporting children through deployments, from very young children to teenagers. See [Support for children and adolescents to help manage with parental absence](#) on **page 15** for more information.

During deployment, or time apart

In this section, you will find information on what to expect, how to look after yourself, find support and to effectively manage your time apart. You can also explore ways to stay informed about the operation or exercise, and communicate with the deployed member.

Defence provides a range of support to the families of deployed ADF members, including regular contact from our support staff and practical assistance during emergencies. Go to the [Absence support](#) section on **page 13** for more information.

For ADF members

It is important to be aware that deployment and more broadly, absence from home, impacts on every member in some way mentally and emotionally. Whilst, everyone's deployment experiences will be different, there will be times where you are busy and probably others where you need to manage feelings of boredom or fatigue. It can be helpful to focus on what you can control and to maintain perspective—you could try and view the deployment as an opportunity to put your skills to practice or to grow both professionally and personally.

When you are away you will also be isolated from family and friends, people who provide you with support and who you can relax with. To manage this, find ways to communicate and to stay in touch with your loved ones. Here are some tips that may be useful when you away to remain connected and healthy:

- **Share your experience** – Although you probably won't be able to share all the details of your day-to-day activities, try and let your loved ones at home in on what is going on. For example, you could talk about how you are feeling or provide a small highlight and/or lowlight of your day – something as simple as what you ate that day. Another topic of conversation could be talking about the things you are looking forward to when you get home with your loved ones. The point is try where possible to stay connected with your loved ones.
- **Communicate** – If there are times that you don't feel like sharing, then to reduce misunderstandings and potential hurt, let your partner/family member know that at the moment you are tired or overwhelmed and that when you are feeling up to it you will make contact again.
- **Listen to your loved ones** – Ask about how your family or friends at home are managing. It can be challenging when you are away to know how to provide comfort or reassurance, especially if things around the house break or unexpected crisis happens. But one way to help from far away is to simply listen and to validate your loved ones experience, you could tell them that they are doing a good job or to empathise with what they are going through.
- **Celebrate important milestones and each other** – Even from a far it is possible, with some prior planning and thought, to celebrate important milestones, such as birthdays or anniversaries. Prior to leaving you may want to book a special delivery/leave a present behind or simply on the day (or as close to) to make contact and to let that special person know that you remember and are thinking of them. Another idea is to periodically verbalise to your partner, or those important to you, what you love and appreciate about your relationship.
- **Find ways to unwind** – This is highly individual and will also be dependent on what is available wherever you are, but some simple ways to unwind may be to exercise, use controlled breathing or meditations, or use a stress ball.

For further information refer to Joint Health Commands Deployment Guide, which is available from the ADF Health & Wellbeing webpage, <https://www.defence.gov.au/health/healthportal/Deployment.asp>

For the partners, parents or families at home

Experiencing a variety of intense emotions during your time apart is completely normal, and knowing what to expect can make the feelings much easier to manage.

During the time apart, you will usually go through a period of adjustment—your lifestyle and routine may be disrupted, and you may feel a sense of loss, loneliness or anxiety. Assuming dual roles, renegotiating roles and relationships and recognising personal strengths have also been described as key characteristics of the deployment/ absence from home experience. As you begin to settle into your new routine, find new support and gain independence and self-confidence, these feelings normally subside.

- **Routine is key** – Try and establish a new routine as early as possible, as this can help you to feel more in control, to handle your day-to-day commitments and gives you a sense of normality. At the same time, understandably things may be busier than usual, so sometimes it may not be possible to do everything and simply do your best. You may find it helpful to try and simplify things.
- **Look after yourself** – Make sure to exercise, eat well, get enough sleep, and to do the things you enjoy; as being healthy helps you to feel good emotionally as well as physically. Try and limit your use of alcohol, caffeine and nicotine as they may give you immediate comfort but take a long-term toll and do not actively improve your stress levels.
- **Keep socially connected** – Try to keep in regular contact with family and friends. Feeling connected to others is important for your wellbeing and can help you effectively cope with challenges. We can also help you to connect with your community to find other Defence families who can share their experiences, strategies and support with you. See the [Support for children and adolescents to help manage with parental absence](#) section on **page 16** for more information.
- **Talk it out** – Talk through your emotions or concerns with a close friend or family member who you trust to be supportive. It is important to be able to express what you're feeling and to realise you are not alone.
- **Look after each other** – All the ADF member's loved ones at home will be dealing with the member's absence, and you can support and help each other through the deployment, whether it's by spending time together doing activities you enjoy or talking through your feelings.
- **Carve out 'me' time** – This might sound nearly impossible and hard to enact in practice, but try and find ways for you to recharge, it could be small things like having a bath, listening to music, or taking a night off cooking and ordering take-away. If you have children, you could ask a close family member or friend for some time to yourself. If this isn't possible another suggestion is to let your child/ren have screen time or an activity that occupies them, so you can have a few moments to yourself.
- **Relax and unwind** – Learn some relaxation and stress management techniques to help you to unwind and respond more positively to life events and challenges. There are a range of ways you can relieve stress including exercise, watching a comedy, writing in a journal, deep breathing or through a meditation app or yoga course. You might choose to do this through DCO's FamilySMART program (**see page 16**). Above all, be kind to yourself and give yourself credit for your ability to cope despite the circumstances.
- **Keep busy** – Time passes more quickly when you are occupied. You might choose to learn something new, take a course, or volunteer or contribute to your community somehow. Think of the time apart as a chance to grow and to get involved in things that make you happy.

Absence from home support

DCO's lifestyle magazine, *Defence Family Matters*, is a good place to find ideas, as it regularly profiles community support and activities of interest to Defence families.

- **Reach out** – Be aware of the support services that are available to you during deployment. See the **Community events and support** section on **page 13** for more information. Seek help if you are experiencing negative emotions—such as anger, abandonment or anxiety—for prolonged periods, or are facing other difficulties in the member's absence. You can call the all-hours Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608 for support, advice or referral.

Staying in touch

Communication between the deployed member and the family at home is essential to help you to:

- keep your relationship fresh and strong
- share important moments and feelings
- remain involved in each other's lives despite the physical distance between you
- ease anxieties, loneliness and any sense of loss
- reassure each other of your continuing love and support
- facilitate the reunion process.

With this in mind, try to make your communication frequent and positive. Be clear, open and honest about your experiences and feelings. Try to limit negative emotions and responses as they can be difficult to resolve when you are not face-to-face.

Restrictions

Be aware that keeping in touch by telephone or Skype may not be available in particular locations, or may only be sporadically available. Email, social networking sites and online communications may also be restricted.

The conditions of the deployment will indicate how and when you can keep in touch. You should be able to find out these details from the unit or the National Welfare Coordination Centre/Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608.

Contact details

Make sure you have the member's PMKeyS number and their unit contact details noted correctly and in full. If you're unsure of the details call the National Welfare Coordination Centre/Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608. The NWCC/Defence Family Helpline is also the place to call if you need to relay an urgent message to the deployed member.

Letters

ADF members often say letters are the best form of keeping in touch, as they can be read and re-read any time and aren't dependent on online or telephone access.

You don't have to be restricted to standard letters—you can send cards, postcards, artwork, local news snippets or photos.

Write your letters as if talking directly to your loved one, but make sure to express yourself clearly so there's no room for misinterpretation or confusion.

It's a good idea to date or number each letter so that if more than one letter is received at once, the deployed member will know which one was written first.

For the ADF member sending letters to home, consider sending individual letters to each family member (especially if you have more than one child) and, without compromising operational security, include descriptions of your activities or photos of your living quarters to give your family an idea of your life away.

Care packages

Care packages can be like sending a little bit of home to your family member when they're deployed. Packages can contain gifts, non-perishable food items and toiletries.

It is best to use a sturdy container and not to send perishable goods. Be aware that mail sent is subject to border security and sending publications or materials such as tobacco, alcohol, pornography or culturally offensive or inappropriate written material may be prohibited.

Keep in mind your package may be opened in front of others, so it is wise not to send private or embarrassing material.

Before sending a care package to an ADF member, families should visit the Australia Post website at www.auspost.com.au and read the [International Post Guide](#).

Postal information

Free postage applies for all mail up to two kilograms (cubed), with the exception of post to Malaysia and Papua New Guinea. When sending anything by post, make sure the member's unit details and full address are legible and correct. Keep in mind there may be delays in delivery.

To check addresses or any weight or content restrictions for the particular deployment, contact the member's unit or call the National Welfare Coordination Centre/Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608.

For more information about Defence mail service and postage costs, visit Australia Post's Defence mail website at www.auspost.com.au/sending/check-sending-guidelines/mail-for-defence-personnel or call 13 76 78.

Telephone calls

Telephone communication gives you direct contact with your loved one and is often available during deployment, though the length of calls may be limited and they can become expensive especially when made to mobile phones or to distant locations. You may find it useful to make a list of important things to tell each other before making the call.

Emails, video calls and social media

Emails, internet video calls like Skype, and social networking sites (such as Facebook Messenger or Whatsapp) are another avenue for families to share experiences and connect with each other, but are entirely reliant on the member having access to the internet.

If using social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter, keep in mind not to share sensitive or indecent material as posted material becomes part of a public forum and leaves your control. **Do not post anything that could compromise operational security, including the ADF member's geographical location.**

If the member is travelling overseas, it's a good idea to set up the technology account while in Australia, as the set-up can become more difficult overseas.

Check with the unit to see whether these types of communications can be accessed and to find out any special addresses you will need to know.

ForceNet

ForceNet is a Defence e-communications platform families can use to keep in touch with their member and receive updates from their member's Service as well as their ship/unit or squadron. For more information go to www.forcenet.gov.au or call the Defence Service Centre on 1800 333 362.

Reunion

In the lead-up to reunion you may experience excitement and anticipation as well as worries and doubts, as you wonder about your relationship with each other, changes that might have taken place and the other person's feelings toward you.

When you first reunite, it's common to feel a little awkwardness, especially after long absences, and it may take time to re-establish closeness and easy face-to-face communication.

Both the homecoming member and the family members at home may have changed. Be prepared for this, as the other person may not perfectly match your memory or expectation of them and there may be some realignment of your relationship.

You will likely have to make some changes to your routines and roles, as what worked before the time apart may not be the best fit for you anymore. Talk openly and honestly through any changes, and make sure to give each other the time and space to adjust to your new life together.

All of these feelings will normally pass, but if you are having difficulties readjusting, the human services professionals at the Defence Family Helpline can direct you to resources or services that may help. You can contact the Defence Family Helpline 24/7 on 1800 624 608.

For ADF members

Despite how happy and excited you may be at returning home, it is also likely that you may come home fatigued, jetlagged, or emotionally overwhelmed. If this is the case, then try and respectfully communicate how you are feeling with the important people in your life and work together so that you are both able to have a well-deserved rest. It is also important to be mindful that your partner or family members will have also experienced a lot whilst you have gone and will probably need your time and attention. So try and balance time for you to rest and recuperate, while also spending time with your loved ones.

People adjust in different ways and within different timeframes. Some will adjust very quickly while others will need to take more time. Every deployment is different. If you have been on deployment before, it may be helpful to remember what worked and what didn't last time, and see if these concepts can be applied this time. In some cases, the ADF member may be dealing with some serious stress responses from their deployment. Support and guidance is available from the Defence Family Helpline or the ADF All-hours Support Line on 1800 628 036.

Further information is also available from Joint Health Command's *Home Coming Guide*, which is available from the ADF Health and Wellbeing webpage,

<https://www.defence.gov.au/health/healthportal/Deployment.asp>.

For partners, parents or families

A great deal of attention is often paid to how as a family you will handle things when your loved one, the ADF member, leaves and the thought of reunion appears common-sense. For most hopefully it will be an easy and seamless process, but it is important to be aware that it can take some adjustment and work on both parts to re-establishment a new routine and in some cases to rebuild your connection as a couple or family.

It can be helpful to fill your loved one in on what has taken place whilst they have been gone. For example, you could talk about what the family routine has looked like and then to slowly relinquish some of the household or caring responsibilities back to them.

Where possible also try and find some downtime for yourself, such as seeing friends or family or perhaps engaging in some self-care practices that you may have been unable to do when they were away. If you require any additional support you can contact the Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608.

Absence support

Defence provides a range of support to the families of deployed ADF members. We provide regular deployment support calls, 24-hour advice and referrals, social work, and assistance with emergency and crisis, as well as assistance for helping children cope with parental absence. The member's unit is also there to help and will run programs of support for you.

You can access any of these services by calling the all-hours Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608 or visit the DCO website at www.defence.gov.au/dco for further details.

24/7 Helpline

Families can contact the all-hours Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608 at any time about deployment matters. The Helpline operates 24/7 and is staffed by qualified human services professionals, including social workers and psychologists, who can provide you with assessment, advice or referrals.

This service should not replace Triple-Zero (000) in emergency situations.

Absence support calls

If you would like to receive regular contact from us during your family member's deployment, register with the Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608.

This contact allows you to ask any questions or express any concerns you may have, and allows us to inform you of local activities, groups and support services or community resources you may need.

Professional support

If needed, we can supply short-term brief intervention and support services from Defence Social Workers to help you through any difficulties. You can make an appointment with your local DCO Defence social worker by calling the Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608.

Support for children and adolescents

Resources are available for parents with information and tips for supporting children through deployments, from very young children to teenagers. See the [Support for children and adolescents to help manage with parental absence](#) section on **page 15** for more information.

Unit-delivered deployment support

The member's unit will often run events for Defence families, including information sessions, farewells, social get-togethers and welcome home events. Ship/Unit welfare officers and ADF chaplains are also available to provide support and guidance to members and families at any stage of deployment. Talk to ship/unit staff directly for more information.

Emergency support

If an emergency or crisis occurs when an ADF member is away from home, their family may access practical assistance. DCO also offers support in times of injury, illness or bereavement, including help with obtaining compassionate leave consideration for ADF members.

Families can call the Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608 anytime, and can visit www.defence.gov.au/dco for more information on available emergency assistance.

Community events and support

Your community is often a rich bank of support to draw on, with resources and structures in place which can help you through times of deployment. We keep a directory of local Defence- and community-run initiatives and we can help you to connect with the organisations, groups or events that best suit your needs.

DCO holds a variety of local events to support the families of deployed members, including farewell and welcome back events, workshops and family activities.

Community groups may run programs which build on your life skills, keep you active and engaged in the community, or help you network with other Defence families to share experiences and support each other.

To find out what's on offer in your local area, contact the all-hours Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608 or visit the *Your Community* section of the DCO website and click on your state or territory.

<https://www.defence.gov.au/DCO/Community/default.asp>

Stress management and building resilience

DCO run a suite of programs called FamilySMART, TeenSMART and KidSMART, which target challenging aspects of Defence life such as deployment.

The SMART sessions help Defence families identify and build on their strengths, learn techniques to cope with stressful situations, and become more resilient, positive and self-reliant.

FamilySMART is designed for partners, TeenSMART for teenagers and KidSMART for primary aged children.

To find out more about SMART programs in your area, call the Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608.

Information for families

You can sign up to receive a newsletter from your local DCO office to find out what is happening in your area by visiting your area office page on the DCO website www.defence.gov.au/dco or by contacting the Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608 or email defencefamilyhelpline@defence.gov.au.

Defence Family Matters is a free lifestyle magazine published for Defence families which you can read online, subscribe and opt out from on our DCO website www.defence.gov.au/DCO/DFM/default.asp.

ForceNet is a Defence e-communications platform used to connect families with services related to the Defence member and information on Defence matters relevant to them. For more information go to www.forcenet.gov.au or call the Defence Service Centre on 1800 333 362.

Support for children and adolescents to help manage with parental absence

Children and deployment

Communicating truthfully and openly with children about deployments is important to help them understand and cope with a parent being away. If possible, prepare the child for what is going to happen in advance, explaining clearly where, why and for how long the parent is going away. This helps dispel uncertainties and fears, or any belief that the separation is their fault.

Encourage children to express their feelings, perhaps by sharing some of your own. It can help for each parent to spend time individually with each child prior to and after they've been absent to encourage communication and to let them know that they are loved. Special time together helps to cement bonds and provides positive memories.

Involve older children in the planning and preparation for your member's absence, especially in figuring out new roles and responsibilities while they're away. Keep the usual rules, expectations, and discipline in place in the parent's absence, and establish a new routine as early as possible.

Encourage children to keep a record of special events in their lives through art, photos, stories or scrapbooks, which they can send to their parent or show them when they get home. Read the [Staying in touch](#) section on **page 9** for more tips for strong family communication during deployment.

For further information refer to the *'Helping Children Cope with a Parent's Absence from Home'* factsheet, available on the DCO website.

Resources for parents and children

Resources are available for parents with information and advice about guiding children through deployments, from very young children to teenagers. You can order any of these free resources from the all-hours Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608.

Videos

There are two informative videos available about deployments, which we encourage you to watch with your children. The videos can be a useful tool for starting a discussion about what an absence will mean for you.

Going Solo—Dealing with Absence in Defence Families outlines strategies and ideas for helping younger children and families cope with a parent's absence during deployment. Built on experiences shared by other Defence families, the online video provides useful tips to handle all stages of deployment, from preparing for the member's absence to reuniting as a family upon the member's return.

Don't Forget it's Bin Night—Stepping up when Mum or Dad is away examines the impact of deployment on families with teenagers, and presents mechanisms for older children to both cope with the parent's absence and see the possibilities for personal development it affords.

Absence from home support teddy bears

DCO has absence from home support teddy bears in the uniforms of the three Services. The bears are provided free of charge for children aged three and over for families with members who have deployed or will deploy in the near future. Bears can be requested by contacting the Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608 or defencefamilyhelpline@defence.gov.au.

Books

DCO has a range of children's books, including the *Sapper Pat*, *Pepper Penguin* and *Tyler Turtle* series, which are designed to help young children understand more about the military lifestyle and develop coping strategies for parental absence.

Children can follow the adventures of teddy bear Sapper Pat in his overseas Army postings, and cuddly penguin Able Seaman Pepper Penguin as he travels the world on Navy ships. The books give young children an easy-to-understand picture of life in the military, and what their parent might be experiencing while they are away from the family on deployments or postings. Pat and Pepper also show children ways to stay in touch, and positive ways to manage time apart and reunions.

The *Tyler Turtle* picture book and workbooks are designed for younger children, and follow the colourful Tyler as he learns simple strategies to help him cope with his mother's absence and return.

Books can be requested from the Defence Family Helpline or your local DCO office.

Support for children

24-hour support

Children are often unable to articulate their feelings and thoughts as adults do. If they are having trouble dealing with stress and changes during deployment or absence, it will often present in their behaviour or in health complaints.

If you or your children are having difficulties, you can access help, advice or referral by calling the all-hours Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608.

Defence School Mentors

Defence School Mentors are placed in schools across Australia, and provide support to Defence students in times of parental absence. Visit the DCO website and click on the Kids tab for more information or to see which schools have Defence School Mentors in place.

www.defence.gov.au/DCO/Family/Kids/Education.asp

KidSMART and TeenSMART

Children can use deployment as an opportunity to step up, assume new responsibilities, gain self-confidence and to develop resilience. To help them do this, our local DCO offices run fun and interactive resilience-building programs designed for Defence kids called KidSMART and TeenSMART. During these programs, children learn how to manage change and stresses in their lives, and gain practical tips for coping with parental absence.

KidSMART guides primary aged children through handling emotions with the help of mascots Tyler Turtle and Sam Super. Older children can attend a one-day TeenSMART session, where they can meet like-minded Defence teens and share their stories about being part of a military family.

Contact the Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608 for more information or to sign up for a program.

Connecting with community

We also have community connection services to help identify local events and groups for Defence families. These can give Defence children the chance to meet kids in the same situation as themselves, have a lot of fun and feel part of and proud of the Defence community.

Contact the Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608 to access our community directory or to obtain personalised advice. You can also visit the Community connection section of the DCO website and click on your state or territory to find out what's on offer.

www.defence.gov.au/DCO/Community/default.asp

More information

For more information about supporting children through deployment, contact the all-hours Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608.

Member and Family Care Plan

Emergency support

Are you aware of the emergency support that Defence Community Organisation can provide?	yes/no
Have you registered your family for deployment support contact from Defence Community Organisation?	yes/no

Deployment

Deployment/exercise/course	
Location	
Estimated departure date	
Estimated return date	
Detail any restrictions on communication with the member while they are away (such as weight limits on postal items, access to internet, etc)	

Unit contact details

Supervisor/s	
Name	
Contact number	
Name	
Contact number	
After hours/Duty Officer	
Name	
Contact number	

Unit Welfare Officer	
Name	
Contact number	
Does the partner or dependant/s have ID to gain access to the military base (ie National Family Access Card or a Dependant Base Card) <i>If not, contact the Unit Orderly room or Unit Welfare Officer to organise</i>	yes/no

Personal details

ADF member			
Name			
Rank			
PMKeyS number			
Mobile number			
Email address			
Postal address while away			
Ship/Unit/Squadron			
Category/Mustering/Trade			
Partner			
Name			
Date of birth			
Address during members absence			
Contact numbers			
Dependants			
Name	Relationship to member	Date of birth	Live with member
			yes/no

Absence from home support

Schools	
Have you informed your child's teachers and carers of the member's absence so they can be supportive or your child's needs?	yes/no
If relocating, have you advised the school of your next location and moving date?	yes/no
Have you informed your child's Defence School Mentor of their parent/carers deployment or absence?	yes/no

Personal details administration

Has the partner and/or dependant/s been formally recognised by Defence?	yes/no
If not, the ADF member should complete Webform PE357 for a partner or AD160 for dependant/s, and submit the forms to their Commanding Officer.	yes/no
Are all the member, partner and dependant details correct and up-to-date in PMKeyS?	yes/no
Has the member named their Next of Kin and Primary Emergency Contact in PMKeyS?	yes/no
Has the member lodged for AC989 with the National Welfare Coordination Centre (NWCC) to confirm emergency details?	yes/no

Medical details

Doctor	
Name	
Contact numbers	
Name	
Contact numbers	
Dentist	
Name	
Contact numbers	
Name	
Contact numbers	

Specialist	
Name	
Type of specialist	
Contact numbers	
Name	
Type of specialist	
Contact numbers	
Special needs	
Does any member of the family have current special medical needs (including mental health issues or pregnancy) or recognised conditions?	yes/no
Are these special needs formally recognised by Defence? <i>If no, you can begin the recognition process by contacting the Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608</i>	yes/no
Name	Need or condition
Allergies	
Do any family members suffer from known allergies or adverse drug reactions?	yes/no
Name	Allergy/adverse reaction

Private health insurance	
Does the family have private health cover?	yes/no
Fund name	
Policy number	
Fund contact details	
Level/type of cover	
Hospital cover	yes/no
Ambulance cover	yes/no
Immunisation	
Are children fully immunised relevant to their age?	yes/no
Are adults up-to-date with immunisations?	yes/no
Where are immunisation records kept?	
Other issues	
Detail any religious, cultural or other considerations that would have a bearing on medical treatment administered to the family	
Have family doctors and emergency contacts been notified of these issues?	yes/no
Has the member registered for the ADF Family Health Program? (www.adffamilyhealth.com)	yes/no

Insurance

Home and contents	
Company and policy number	
Is policy up-to-date?	yes/no
Vehicle/s	
Company	
Policy number	
Is policy up-to-date?	yes/no
Company	
Policy number	
Is policy up-to-date?	yes/no
Life insurance	
Company	
Policy number	
Is policy up-to-date?	yes/no
Private health insurance	
Company	
Policy number	
Is policy up-to-date?	yes/no
Other	
Company	
Policy number	
Is policy up-to-date?	yes/no
Company	
Policy number	
Is policy up-to-date?	yes/no

Finance

Is the partner or person in charge of finances fully familiar with the financial arrangements of the family?		yes/no
Bank account and credit card details		
Account with		
Name on account		
Account number and BSB		
Expiry date		
Can partner access all accounts?		yes/no
If no, what are the arrangements?		
Payments		
Are the regular bills automatically paid from your pay or bank account?		yes/no
If no, how are they paid?		
Are there sufficient funds in place to cover all periodic payments (eg phone, utilities, insurance, rent or mortgage)?		yes/no
Is the person in charge of finances aware of the due dates and payment methods for all regular bills or expenses?		yes/no
Budgeting/financial planning		
Do you have a personal tax adviser or financial counsellor?		yes/no
Company		
Contact details		
Do you have an up-to-date budget?		yes/no
Is the family sufficiently funded to meet all bills and expenses incurred?		yes/no
Include details of emergency funds available, or someone who would be able to provide you with emergency financial assistance, to deal with unforeseen expenses or emergencies		

Legal

Will – ADF member	
Does the member have a current Will? <i>If no, you can seek free advice from a Defence Legal Officer, or pick up a Legal Will kit from a Post Office or newsagent</i>	yes/no
Is the Will lodged with Defence? <i>We strongly encourage you to forward your Will to DCO for storage</i>	yes/no
If no, where is the Will located?	
Who is the Executor?	
Has the member lodged a 'Certificate of Will in Existence' form with DCO?	yes/no
Contact details	
Will – partner	
Does the partner have a current Will?	yes/no
Where is the Will located?	
Who is the Executor?	
Contact details	
Power of Attorney	
Have you appointed a Power of Attorney?	yes/no
Name	
Contact details	
Where are the Power of Attorney documents kept?	
Electoral voting	
Have you registered for voting in your current electorate?	yes/no
State electorate	
Council electorate	

Motor vehicles

Licences	
Are all licences valid for the current state or territory where you live?	yes/no
Member drivers licence number	
Expiry date	
State	
Other licence (ie. boat, etc)	
Expiry date	
State	
Partner drivers licence number	
Expiry date	
State	
Other licence (ie. boat, etc)	
Expiry date	
State	
Roadside service	
Do you have membership with a roadside service provider (ie. NRMA, RACQ) for assistance in the event of a breakdown?	yes/no
Company	
Membership number	
Contact details	
Registration	
Vehicle 1 registration number	
Registration due	
How will registration be paid?	
Vehicle 2 registration number	
Registration due	
How will registration be paid?	

Absence from home support

Vehicle 3 registration number	
Registration due	
How will registration be paid?	
Vehicle 4 registration number	
Registration due	
How will registration be paid?	
Insurance	
Vehicle 1 policy number	
Insurance company	
Renewal due	
How will renewal be paid?	
Are all the people who may drive the vehicle listed on the policy?	yes/no
Vehicle 2 policy number	
Insurance company	
Renewal due	
How will renewal be paid	
Are all the people who may drive the vehicle listed on the policy?	yes/no
Vehicle 3 policy number	
Insurance company	
Renewal due	
How will renewal be paid	
Are all the people who may drive the vehicle listed on the policy?	yes/no
Vehicle 4 policy number	
Insurance company	
Renewal due	
How will renewal be paid	
Are all the people who may drive the vehicle listed on the policy?	yes/no

Maintenance and service	
Are family members aware of the general maintenance requirements of the vehicles and how to perform basic checks (oil, water, tyre pressure, changing a tyre, etc)?	yes/no
Do all vehicles contain sufficient emergency equipment (spare tyre, jack, tool kit, first aid kit, etc)?	yes/no
Vehicle 1 service due	(date or kilometres)
Company	
Contact details	
Vehicle 2 service due	(date or kilometres)
Company	
Contact details	
Vehicle 3 service due	(date or kilometres)
Company	
Contact details	
Vehicle 4 service due	(date or kilometres)
Company	
Contact details	

Home and security

Rental property	
Real estate and agent	
Contact details	
Rent payment arrangements	
Where are lease documents	
Own home	
Mortgage payment arrangements	
Where are mortgage papers or house deeds kept?	

Home and contents insurance	
Membership/policy number	
Company	
Due date	
Home arrangements	
Are fire detectors or smoke alarms installed and working?	yes/no
Has any necessary mail redirection been organised?	yes/no
Does the family know where the spare keys for house and vehicles are kept?	yes/no
Are all electrical systems and major appliances in good working order?	yes/no
Are fuses and circuit breakers labelled?	yes/no
Are family members aware of location and function of these?	yes/no
Security	
Is there sufficient security for the home while absent?	yes/no
Are there adequate and functioning locks or bolts on all doors and windows?	yes/no
Are there additional security measures to add to the home (security doors or screens, front door peep hole, sensor lights, etc)?	yes/no
Are all alarm systems and sensor lights in good working order?	yes/no
Maintenance and repairs	
Are all tools (such as lawn mower) in good working order and are family members familiar with where they are kept and how to operate them?	yes/no
Does the family know who to contact for home maintenance or repair issues (plumber, electrician, Defence Housing Australia, etc)?	yes/no
Plumber details	
Electrician details	
Other services	

Important documents

Are your important documents secure?		yes/no
Do all family members know where important documents are kept?		yes/no
Document	Location	
Birth certificates		
Adoption papers		
Marriage certificate		
Court orders		
Passports		
Wills		
Power of Attorney		
School reports/records		
Immunisation records		
Medical records		
Dental records		
Investment documents		
Prescriptions		
House deeds		
Mortgage papers		
Vehicle registrations		
Insurance policies		
Tax returns		
Citizenship papers		
Appliance warranties		
Spare keys		

Emergencies

Emergency contacts	
If there was a medical or other emergency with the partner, who should be called?	
Name	
Contact details	
If there was a medical or other emergency with one of the children and the parent/s were not contactable, who should be called?	
Name	
Contact details	
Relationship to child	
Secondary person to call in an emergency situation	
Name	
Contact details	
Emergency plans	
Does the family have local support in the event of an emergency?	yes/no
Does the family have a prepared emergency kit (including a first aid kit and severe weather provisions)?	yes/no
Do all family members know where it is located?	yes/no
Does the family have support to assist with the preparation of the home in the event of severe weather?	yes/no
If a member of the immediate family became ill or incapacitated while the serving member is absent, what emergency plan is in place to ensure the family is cared for and has access to the necessary support?	

Useful contacts

Defence Community Organisation

The Defence Family Helpline

1800 624 608

DefenceFamilyHelpline@defence.gov.au

www.defence.gov.au/dco

The Defence Family Helpline is your first point of call for support, information and connection with your community, including your local DCO team. The Helpline is available 24/7 and is staffed by qualified human services professionals including social workers and psychologists.

Australian Defence families who are living overseas can contact the Helpline free of charge by calling their country-specific freecall number from a landline.

United Kingdom 0800 051 2187

North America/Hawaii/Canada 1855 809 3999

Malaysia 1800 816 443

Papua New Guinea 0008 61 004

National Welfare Coordination Centre (NWCC)

In conjunction with the Defence Family Helpline the National Welfare Coordination Centre provides a 24/7 information and referral service for families of deployed ADF members. The NWCC is a part of the Defence Community Organisation and is staffed by Service personnel who can help with deployment queries such as mailing addresses and postal regulations, give you current information about operations, and pass urgent information to the deployed member. The NWCC website also has links to useful information for families of deployed members.

1800 624 608 | nwcc.australia@defence.gov.au | www.defence.gov.au/nwcc

Defence-delivered support

The All Hours Support Line

A 24/7 confidential telephone triage support service for ADF members and their families to access mental health advice and referral.

Available services include psychology, medical, social work, and chaplain services

Within Australia 1800 628 036

Outside Australia +61 2 9425 3878

<https://www.defence.gov.au/Health/HealthPortal/MentalHealthOnline.asp>

Global Operations

Outlines the current operations in action overseas or within Australia.

www.defence.gov.au/Operations

Defence Housing Australia (DHA)

Comprehensive housing services for Defence families.

139 342 | www.dha.gov.au

Community-delivered support

Defence Families of Australia (DFA)

A Ministerially appointed advocacy group for Defence families.

1800 100 509 | www.dfa.org.au

Defence Special Needs Support Group (DSNSG)

A network of peer support for Defence families with special needs.

1800 037 674 | www.dsnsng.org.au

Open Arms Veterans and Families Counselling

Provides free and confidential counselling to anyone who has served at least one day in the ADF, and their families.

Open Arms has a range of self-help tools that can help build resilience during stressful times. To find out more visit the High Res website.

1800 011 046 | www.openarms.gov.au/

Beyond Blue

A not-for-profit organisation working to address issues associated with depression, anxiety and related disorders in Australia.

1300 224 636 | www.beyondblue.org.au

Kids Help Line

Free, confidential and anonymous 24-hour telephone and online counselling service for young people five to 25 years old.

1800 551 800 | www.kidshelp.com.au

Lifeline

A national 24-hour support line providing crisis support, suicide prevention and mental health services.

131 114 | www.lifeline.org.au

Mensline Australia

A national 24-hour service for men providing support, information or referral by telephone or online.

1300 789 978 | www.mensline.org.au

1800 RESPECT

A national counselling helpline for sexual assault, domestic family violence counselling service, available 24/7 nationwide.

www.1800respect.org.au

Australia Post

Information about postal costs and restrictions during deployments or exercise.

Call 13 76 78 or visit

<http://www.auspost.com.au/sending/check-sending-guidelines/mail-for-defence-personnel> Page 31