



Australian Government
Department of Defence

Away from home

Defence Mental Health & Wellbeing





*'Mental health and wellbeing is the state in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with normal stress of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community'**

Defence's vision is that our people – military and public servants – experience positive mental health and wellbeing. *They are Fit to Fight – Fit to Work – Fit for Life.*

*World Health Organization

When Defence members spend time away from home due to deployment, training, exercise or posting, the time apart can be particularly stressful for both the member and their loved ones. It is helpful to realise that the thoughts and feelings that each person in the family may experience are often normal responses to the stress associated with separation.

Thoughts and feelings during time apart

For the people staying at home, common thoughts and feelings can be associated with different stages of time apart. The stages are pre-separation, separation and homecoming.

Pre-Separation

You may experience thoughts such as:

- are they really going to leave me with all of this
- they won't talk properly to me about the separation
- how am I going to cope
- their job must be more important than mine
- where are they going exactly
- will they be safe.

You may experience feelings such as:

- restlessness
- irritability
- anger
- resentment
- hurt
- fear
- depression.

Separation

You may experience thoughts such as:

- If I love them why am I relieved they've gone?
- I don't feel like mixing socially yet
- what am I going to do with this hole in my life?

You may experience feelings such as:

- numbness
- aimlessness
- indecisiveness
- anger
- being overwhelmed or withdrawn.

Homecoming

You may experience thoughts such as:

- why should I give that up just because they have returned?
- they don't understand the difficulties I've had
- they think life here was exactly the same while they were away
- they've changed a lot.

You may experience feelings such as:

- excitement
- relief
- happy but distant
- resentful and wary at the same time.

Suggestions for coping with time apart

People can do more than they realise to help themselves. The following suggestions may be useful.

Pre-Separation

Talk matters through and try to resolve any problems or family conflicts before departure. Be informed about where the member will be going and involve the whole family in preparations so everyone feels they have an important part to play. Discuss possible short and long term effects of the separation and develop a family support plan. Ensure a plan is in place to deal with bills and family finances during the separation. Discuss likely communication limitations during the separation.

Separation

Share your concerns with others and don't bottle things up. If you're the one staying at home, enjoy yourself when possible (you have every right to do so), and help and support others when you can. Allow yourself to be upset at times, but don't allow the separation to dominate your life. Ask for help; it may surprise you how many people like to lend support. Stay in touch with the member who is away and try to make your communications positive.

Homecoming

Be aware of your expectations: they might not be realistic. Both the person who is absent and the people staying behind may have changed, so remember to take these changes into account when communicating. Renegotiate relationships and roles, be patient with each other and be prepared to accept change. Accept that family reintegration is a process of adjustment and will take time and effort. Be alert for delayed stress reactions, including ongoing irritability, withdrawal and increased alcohol use, and seek support from a Mental Health Professional as required.

Children

Children may experience a sense of insecurity during a parent's long absence. They are often unable to articulate their feelings and thoughts as adults do and may have trouble dealing with stress and changes. This may present in their behaviour or in health complaints.

If possible, prepare children in advance and involve them in the planning and preparation by being truthful and open about where, why and for how long the parent will be away. This will help ease fears and uncertainties about the separation.

During the separation, children need added support and attention. Perhaps the most important step to minimise adverse effects on children is to keep the absent parent a part of the family's emotional life.

Strong, frequent and positive communication during separation is essential and each child should be given individual attention from both the deployed parent and family members at home.

Establish a new routine as early as possible but keep the usual rules, expectations and discipline in place during the time apart.

Where to seek help

If you or someone in your workplace is in crisis and you think immediate action is needed, call **Emergency Services 000**, contact your doctor or local mental health crisis service, or go to your local hospital emergency department.

Emergency contact information – 24 hours

If you or someone you know needs help, call:

- Emergency on **000**
- Lifeline on **13 11 14**
- Suicide Call Back Service on **1300 659 467**.

ADF

Contact your local on base Health Centre, Mental Health Professional or the Duty Officer/Officer of the Day for immediate assistance and referrals.

The ADF Health and Wellbeing Portal is an online health information resource tool for ADF members and their families www.defence.gov.au/health/healthportal/

Your chain of command is a primary resource that can provide advice, referral and support.

Military Chaplains are connected to all ships/units/bases around Australia and on Operations. They can provide all-hours support and appropriate referral. To access Defence Chaplaincy support, call **1300 333 362** and ask to speak to the Duty Chaplain from your area and service.

The ADF Mental Health All-hours Support Line (ASL) is a confidential telephone service for ADF members and their families available 24/7 on **1800 628 036** or if calling from overseas **+61 2 9425 3878**.

If you are away from base, or for out-of-hours assistance, you can call **1800 IMSICK (1800 467 425)** to locate the nearest support.

Defence Family Helpline (1800 624 608) The Defence Family Helpline is available 24/7 for ADF Members and their families, and is staffed by qualified human services professionals including social workers and psychologists. Defence Community Organisation website is: www.defence.gov.au/dco

The National Welfare Coordination Centre (NWCC)

Serving Families of Deployed Australian Defence Personnel.

As part of the Headquarters Joint Operations Command, the National Welfare Coordination Centre (NWCC) provides a 24 hour support, referral and information service for families of Defence personnel deployed on operations and exercises.

1800 801 026 or **+ 61 2 6127 1812**.

Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Office (SeMPRO)

SeMPRO offers advice, guidance and support to current and former Defence personnel who have been affected by sexual misconduct, whether the incident is current or historical.

This includes support to ADF cadets, officers and instructors of cadets, APS personnel, commanders, managers, supervisors, support people and families affected by sexual misconduct. **1800 736 776 (1800SeMPRO)**.

Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling (formerly WCS): is a national mental health service that provides 24-hour free and confidential counselling, group programs and suicide prevention training for current and ex-serving ADF members, and their family. To get support or to find out more, call **1800 011 046** or visit **www.OpenArms.gov.au**

APS (and Reservists)

Defence Employee Assistance Program (EAP) (including the Reserve Assistance Program – RAP). The EAP provides short term confidential counselling and support for employees and immediate family members (if eligible). It is easily accessible, voluntary and can provide support on a range of personal and work related issues. The Defence EAP can be accessed by calling **1300 687 327**.

