

**Marriage and Deployment**  
**By Jennifer K. Paweleck, Psy.D.**  
**Chief, Community Mental Health Service**  
**Raymond W. Bliss Army Health Center**

No matter how much you enjoy serving your country, deployments create stress. If you are married and/or have children, leaving your family creates additional stress. Spouses often report increased marital conflict before and during a deployment. Post-deployment reunions can also be challenging due to the natural adjustment period that occurs. Below are some issues to consider if you are married and planning to deploy.

Pre-Deployment

- Make time for yourself to gather your thoughts and prepare for deployment. Ensure that you are mentally and physically fit and ready to deploy.
- Spend time with family and friends. Make time for you and your spouse to be alone; spend some time with each child; and, last but not least, do things as a family.
- Discuss your concerns with your family, and listen to their concerns. No matter how much your spouse loves you, he or she may have some concerns about trust or managing the household in your absence. Your children may be wondering if you will come back. Offer honest, age-appropriate information to your children in response to their questions.
- Make sure that your finances are in order. If you are the primary financial manager for your household, educate your spouse so that he or she can take over these duties in your absence and ensure that financial obligations are met. Also, make a plan for what you will do with the extra money that you receive while deployed. Having a plan for using the money means that temptation is less likely to get the best of you and result in impulsive or frivolous spending.
- Encourage your family to become involved in the family support groups on post, as well as other sources of social support.

During Deployment

- Keep in touch with your family and friends via e-mail, letters, phone calls, and care packages. Stay current on the things that matter most to you. This will help after you return home, too, because you will feel less behind, less like you have so much to catch up on.
- If you must talk business in your correspondence with your spouse, start your conversation by checking on one another and end your conversation with positive words, love, and encouragement.
- Take care of yourself physically and psychologically.
  - Get some exercise at least 20-30 minutes per day, at least three days per week.

- Eat well—do not skip breakfast; choose low-fat, high fiber foods; watch your sugar and junk food intake; eat complex carbohydrates; try to stick to a regular meal schedule; and do not overeat.
- Stay hydrated and try to limit caffeine and alcohol intake. Caffeine and alcohol dehydrate the body. Also, caffeine can cause physiological arousal—increased heart rate, shortness of breath, tightness in the chest—that mimics anxiety.
- Try to get adequate rest and sleep.
- Make some time for yourself to relax with deep, diaphragmatic breathing; visualization; meditation; and/or progressive muscle relaxation. Enjoy hobbies such as reading, writing, or listening to music. Pray. Interact with others—fellow service members, chaplains, mental health professionals—and talk about your experiences and feelings, share good news from home, and so on.
- Keep a journal of your experiences. Writing is helpful to process today’s events and tomorrow’s expectations. If you are willing to share these thoughts and feelings, your journal can be a nice gift to your family when you return from deployment to let them know what your life was like while you were deployed.
- If crises occur, try to view them as opportunities for growth and maturity, a challenge rather than a threat. Something can be learned from everything that happens.
- Stay involved as best you can in your children’s education, activities, and interests. Ask them about what they are doing, and support their positive efforts at education, extracurricular activities, helping your spouse, etc. Try to understand what your children are thinking and feeling.
- Reach out to your fellow service member to decrease feelings of loneliness and isolation. Social support is the best mediator of stress and other psychological issues. Share ideas for overcoming the challenges of separation and reunion.
- When you are preparing to return home, be sure to say appropriate goodbyes to your cohorts as best you can. You likely formed a new family with many of your fellow service members, and it is important to say goodbye and/or arrange to keep in touch if you desire.

### Post-Deployment

- Make an appointment to address any mental or physical concerns you may have upon returning. If it is no big deal, at least you can put your mind at ease. If there is a problem, the sooner you know, the quicker you can get healthy again.
- Expect an adjustment period no matter how happy you are to be home and how happy your family is to have you back.
  - Anticipate doubts and worries. Anxiety is a predictable part of reuniting.
  - Expect change. Recognize that you, your spouse, and your children have all changed to some degree. Everything from tastes and interests to the way the household is run may have changed. Make small, gradual changes and ease back into your role in the family. This process can take several

weeks or months, depending on how long you and your family were apart and each family member's ability to cope with change and stress.

- Be prepared for the reappearance of old problems. Separation does not erase problems, and problems do not solve themselves. Taking a break from the issue and stepping back may have helped you and your spouse to gain a new perspective, but the issue itself may still exist. There may also be new issues to address.
- Be realistic in your expectations. Forget your fantasies, and let things happen naturally.
- Share your feelings, and accept others' feelings, whatever they may be. Feelings are never right or wrong; they just are. Expect that the deployment has been difficult for everyone, and be prepared for all sorts of feelings—relief, hope, anxiety, and even resentment.
- Be prepared for challenges as you try to reestablish physical intimacy with your spouse. Take your time getting reacquainted, and do not try to rush sexual relations to make up for lost time!
- Take time to communicate and reconnect with your family and friends. Plan family time to help bring everyone back together. Make time for just you and your spouse. Plan some special time for you and each of your children to get reacquainted.
- Be aware that you and your family have changed to some degree. Your family has had to keep going—working, going to school, maintaining the household—in your absence, and it may take some time for you to blend back into the routine. Keep an open mind as you recreate your role in the family. Commend your family for the good things they have done, and do not try to change routines that are working well.
- Avoid a busy schedule, and make some time for yourself to get back into interests or hobbies that you missed—the positive things that bring you joy and help you relax. If you do not have good hobbies, create some.
- Recognize that deployment can be very difficult, and do not be afraid to talk to someone—your spouse, your family, your friends, a chaplain—or seek professional help if you are having problems adjusting to being back.
- After the initial reunion, discuss the division of chores in the household.
- Be patient, and give yourself time to adjust. Recognize that you have been away for quite some time, and do not expect everything to go back to the way it was overnight. Understand that, even if you did not find the deployment stressful or difficult, it can still have an impact on you and your family in ways that you may not realize.

Before, during, and after deployment, it is important to use your personal resources, such as positive coping skills, faith, and communication, to maintain a positive yet realistic attitude. If you feel that your personal resources are not enough at any point, do not be afraid to seek help. Just sharing your thoughts, concerns, or feelings with someone can often bring tremendous relief. We are all in this together, so thinking that you have to deal with deployment issues alone is unrealistic and unhealthy, a good way to set yourself

up for failure without even realizing it. Thank you for working to protect this great nation, and let us know how we can help you.

For more information about deployment-related stress and other mental health concerns, call the Behavioral Health Service at Raymond W. Bliss Army Health Center at 520.533.5161. You can find us on the web at [amedwshuac1.amedd.army.mil](http://amedwshuac1.amedd.army.mil) under “Behavioral Health.” Also, check out the following useful websites for more information:

- Find out about the deployment cycle support concept through the Deployment Health Clinical Center at [www.deploymenthealth.mil](http://www.deploymenthealth.mil).
- Learn about family readiness through Army Community Service at [www.armycommunityservice.org](http://www.armycommunityservice.org).
- Get information about post-deployment health through the U.S. Army Office of the Surgeon General (OTSG) and the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (CHPPM) at [www.hooah4health.com](http://www.hooah4health.com).
- Read about managing relationships during and after war at [www.equalityinmarriage.org](http://www.equalityinmarriage.org).