



The happy anticipation of a service member returning from combat deployment often is mixed with a dose of anxiety. Families might be ecstatic, nervous, scared or confused, or all of the above at once.

Family Tips for Homecoming

Don't forget!
Take advantage of the many services the Navy and Marines provide for you and your kids during this transition time.

Resources

- www.afterdeployment.org/
- www.nffsp.org/skins/nffsp/home.aspx
- www.lifelines.navy.mil/lifelines/index.htm
- www.nmfa.org/
- www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil

These are completely normal reactions. It's important to remember that everyone has changed to some degree during a service member's time away from home. Even if a family has welcomed a service member home before, every deployment — and every homecoming — is different.

Time helps a service member adjust to returning home and time helps families return to what they consider "normal." Everyone in a family, including a returning Sailor or Marine, needs to work at understanding and communicating challenges that arise.

Some basic tips for re-connecting with your returning service member:

- **Be available to talk—or not.** Let your returning service member know it's okay if he or she wants to talk — or does not want to talk — about the deployment. Many returning warriors feel more comfortable talking about their combat experiences with buddies from their ship or unit.
- **Remind your Sailor or Marine of his or her purpose in the family.** Everyone in a family has a role and needs a sense of belonging. This is important to maintaining self-esteem, which helps prevent depression or any guilt feelings.
- **Don't coddle too much.** Allow your returning service member to help you and other members of the family.
- **Understand that your Sailor or Marine needs time.** Returning home from a war zone is a tremendous adjustment for any service member. Be patient. For the vast majority, life back home starts to return to normal within a month.
- **Be knowledgeable about common stress reactions after a combat deployment.** Your returning service member may experience some of the reactions listed below.*



After Deployment

Behavioral Reactions	Physical Reactions	Emotional Reactions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trouble concentrating Jumpy & easily startled Being on guard, always alert when thinking of the war Bad dreams or flashbacks Avoiding people or places related to the trauma Work or school problems Loss of intimacy or feeling withdrawn, detached and disconnected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trouble sleeping, overly tired Stomach upset, trouble eating Headaches and sweating Lack of exercise, poor diet or health care Rapid heartbeat or breathing Too much drinking, smoking, or drug use Other health problems becoming worse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling nervous or helpless Sad, guilty, rejected or abandoned Edginess, easily upset or annoyed Experiencing shock, being numb, unable to feel happy Feeling hopeless about the future Irritable or angry Not trusting others, being overly controlling, lots of conflicts

*adapted from mentalhealth.va.gov/MENTALHEALTH/ptsd/files/pdf/GuideforFamilies.pdf

Children's reactions to a returning parent will differ according to their ages. Here are some normal reactions to expect...

What to Expect from Children

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❑ INFANTS

What you might see: Crying, fussing, pulling away from the returning parent, clinging to you or the caregiver.

What you can do: Be patient and give it some time. You will find that as the baby becomes accustomed to the returning service member being home, these behaviors will go away.

❑ TODDLERS



What you might see: Shy, clingy, not recognizing the returning parent, crying, temper tantrums, returning to behaviors they had outgrown.

What you can do: Just like with the infant, being patient and allowing the child to become used to the returning parent and having positive experiences will help. These behaviors will go away with time.

❑ PRE-SCHOOLERS



What you might see: Feeling guilty for what they think is "making the parent go away," needing time to warm up to the returning parent, feeling angry, acting out to get attention, being demanding.

What you can do: Being patient and allowing time to run its course helps here, too. Set aside some special time to spend with the child individually. This can go a long way toward heading off difficult behavior.

❑ SCHOOL-AGE



What you might see: Being excited, talking constantly to bring a parent up to date, bragging about the military parent, feeling guilty about not doing enough or "not being good enough."

What you can do: Allow your child to express feelings, perhaps through artwork. Set aside time for each child and be patient. Remember that allowing children to express themselves encourages self-esteem and builds communication skills.

❑ TEENAGERS



What you might see: Showing excitement, feeling guilty about not living up to standards, concerned about rules and responsibilities, feeling too old or not willing to change plans to meet or spend extended time with the returning parent.

What you can do: Remember that teenagers' emotions usually swing from one extreme to the other, and they often are not communicative. Encourage them to express their feelings and listen when they do. Teens might need extra time to re-adjust to having the parent home; remind them that you are there for them.

Resources

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