

NAVY MEDICINE
FEMALE FORCE READINESS
CLINICAL COMMUNITY



Supporting Service Women After Deployment

Resource for Command Leadership

*Preparing a smooth reintegration home for
service women and their families*



Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report reflect the results of research conducted by the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Navy, Department of Defense, nor the U.S. Government.



Overview

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

- ✓ The following guide was created to support commands' navigation of available resources and develop enhanced support for their female Sailors and Marines returning from deployment.
- ✓ To access a guide tailored to female Sailors and Marines, click the paperclip icon on the left-hand side of this PDF. A printable pocket version of this guide can also be accessed here.

WHY THIS RESOURCE MATTERS

- Less than 1% of Americans have served in the military. Females represent 21% of personnel in the Navy and 8% of personnel in the United States Marine Corps (USMC). 40% of our active duty female personnel have deployed.
- Leaders must recognize their female service members for the unique challenges they overcome preparing for deployment, during deployment and during the re-integration phase to maximize readiness and retention.

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Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)

Leaders can promote an inclusive environment where all service women thrive by reviewing the below resources designed to mitigate bias and enable the readiness and retention of service women.



It is important for command leadership and individual command members to recognize, understand and mitigate bias. An inclusive environment maximizes readiness and retention. For women in the military, this not only includes differences in gender/gender identity but rank, age, sexual orientation, race, ethnic background, religion, or leadership position.

TOOLS TO SUPPORT EVERY ADSW

DEI 101 (provided by Department of the Navy) can be an important tool for implementing a lasting DEI culture in your command leading to improved post-deployment reintegration for female service members.

https://www.mynavyhr.navy.mil/Portals/55/Support/Culture%20Resilience/Inclusion/DIVERSITY_EQUITY_INCLUSION_DEI_101.pdf?ver=PjjlxH8FGWXJOenZWL4svA%3d%3d

Additional social support for your command members:

- ✓ National Association of Black Military Women
<https://www.nabmw.org/>
- ✓ Association of Naval Service Officers is a 501©3 nonprofit dedicated to the recruitment, retention and promotion of Hispanics and Latinos across all ranks of the United States Sea Services.
<https://www.ansomil.org/en-familia/>



Challenges of ADSW



Unique Challenges of ADSW

The following section provides a high-level overview of service women's medical needs to support leaders in maintaining female force readiness and cultivating a supportive environment for women to proactively plan for their deployment.

MENSTRUATION

- There is limited access to sanitary products while on deployment.
- Some female service members choose to stop menstruation, which can be accomplished by oral contraceptive or other forms of birth control.

UNINTENDED PREGNANCY

Unintended pregnancies comprise nearly half of all pregnancies in the United States. On deployment, unintended pregnancies result in medical evacuation from theater. During Operation Iraqi Freedom, approx. 11% of one U.S. Army battalion active duty (AD) female members had to be medically evacuated for unplanned pregnancies.²

INCREASED RISK OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

- The Veterans Administration reports that military sexual assault happens to 15-35% of female service members.⁸
- Reporting has historically been limited secondary to concerns over confidentiality and concerns over destroying unit cohesion, as well as the stigma associated for utilizing resources available.



Unique Challenges of ADSW (*continued*)

The following section provides a high-level overview of service women's medical needs to support leaders in maintaining female force readiness and cultivating a supportive environment for women to proactively plan for their deployment.

BALANCING MOTHERHOOD WHILE DEPLOYED

- Balancing societal expectations about caring for children, dependent adults, or child/adult with special needs and the need to progress in one career can be challenging.²⁰
- Female servicemembers are sometimes made to feel their career choices will damage their children or vice versa.
- As parents, women continue to provide the majority of childcare within a family unit, and research indicates that they are frequently challenged by these multiple roles and responsibilities while deployed.¹³
- In the case of dual military couples, deployment of one spouse often worsens marital and childcare issues.¹⁵

CAREER PROGRESSION

- Women often report slowed/delayed career progression compared to men. Many women report adverse effect on career progression related to inflexibility in career pathways when having to care for dependents. Many women also report a generalized lack of recognition of their qualifications compared to their male colleagues.¹
- Women often report less support, less cohesion from peers and supervisors over the course of their military careers.¹¹
- Body weight and physical measurements are consistently biased both with regard to gender and race, negatively impacting promotability.¹⁸
- Following childbirth, often women test lower on fitness testing for 2.5 years, negatively impacting promotability.¹⁹



Unique Challenges of ADSW (*continued*)

The following section provides a high-level overview of service women's medical needs to support leaders in maintaining female force readiness and cultivating a supportive environment for women to proactively plan for their deployment.

DEPLOYMENT-RELATED TRAUMA

While the majority of men and women returning from deployment experience return of baseline quality of life, there are some exceptions. When a service member is experiencing Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms, their transition can become delayed.²⁷

Trauma recovery is not always from combat trauma. There are many other types of trauma that your Sailors or Marines may experience including sexual trauma.

FAMILY-FOCUSED REINTEGRATION CONSIDERATIONS

The next section of this guide provides information for family members and family focused reintegration.

The additional guide speaking directly to command service members includes self reflections questions and strategies to enhance successful reintegration for all Sailors and Marines, regardless of gender and family status.



Strategies for a Successful Reintegration



Pre-Deployment Family Preparations

The following family-specific strategies can support service women and their families as they navigate deployment.

Family Support Begins With Pre-deployment Support

- [Fleet and Family Support Centers \(FFCS\)](#) and [Families OverComing Under Stress \(FOCUS\)](#) programs offer pre-deployment briefs, with offerings tailored toward Singles/Couples, Financial Planning, Parent/Child Pre-deployment, and Deployment Planning for Kids and Communication During Deployment.
- Family needs vary dependent on the family structure makeup (single, married, cohabitating, children, dual-mil).
- Children of different ages react differently to stressful situations due to developmental perspectives and coping mechanisms. Encourage members to incorporate differences seen in toddlers, school-aged children, and adolescents.
 - Tactile support items could be resourceful for younger children (ex: “Hug-a-Hero” photo pillow for children of deployed mothers, deployment or long-distance relationship books, tape recorded books read by deployed parent).
 - Teens may benefit from online support groups or local community support with friends. Establishing a support group during the early pre-deployment phase will ensure teens feel comfortable reaching out when they have a need.
- Many parents find it beneficial to help pre-plan birthdays and holidays to ensure they have a part in important days for their families while away, encourage members to consider this.



Staying Connected During Deployment

Leaders can support their service women during deployment by reviewing the following strategies to facilitate their connection with family members.

Encouraging Members to Stay in Touch with Their Families

Different deployment platforms allow for different levels of communication during deployment. Making the best of whatever communication that is possible is important to a successful re-integration post-deployment. Encourage members of your unit to prioritize time to connect with their families. Below are recommended ways women can connect with family members:

- Create a special ritual that the family and the deployed parent can both share while away from each other. For instance, little ones and the deployed mom or dad can look up at the sky each night as a reminder that they are underneath the same moon and stars.
- Utilize live and recorded video chats if able. Programs such as **United Through Reading** and **Babies on the Homefront** app incorporate a visual connection activity with deployed parents without reliable internet. Benefits to recording allow for 24/7 replay of videos when families need to see their service member.
- Pre-deployment programs such as **FOCUS** often outline the expectation of communications (frequency, availability, preferences, flexibility) as well as potential co-parenting expectations during deployment.



Delayed Recovery from Trauma and PTSD

Every Sailor and Marine's response to trauma and PTSD may look different; the below information provides an overview to support leaders' understanding of potential signs and risk factors for developing PTSD.

Signs to look for

Difficulty sleeping

Low energy

Depressed mood

Irritability

Poor focus

Increased anxiety

Anger outbursts

Social withdrawal (may include isolating or distancing from loved ones. This can include decreased interest in romantic and sexual connection.¹⁷

Risk Factors for Developing PTSD

Job dissatisfaction

Poor family functioning

Marital difficulties

If someone in your charge thinks they may have PTSD, you may encourage them to do the following:

- Immediately **MAKE AN APPOINTMENT WITH THEIR PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER (PCM)** who will refer them to a specialist to discuss potential treatment options including the following:
- **Prolonged Exposure (PE)**: Teaches one how to gain control by facing their negative feelings. [Click here](#) to learn more.
- **Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT)**: Teaches one to reframe negative thoughts about the trauma. [Click here](#) to learn more.
- **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)**: Helps the provider process and make sense of their trauma. [Click here](#) to learn more.



Family Dynamics Renegotiation and Reintegration

When a service member is deployed, everyone in the family adapts in some way to their absence. Leaders can review the below considerations and help facilitate necessary conversations between members and their families.

Reintegration Considerations

During reintegration, discussing changes or renegotiating the division of tasks and responsibilities may help weave your service member back into the household. Important items to consider:

- Children have changed during deployment; they have made new friends and acquired new skills. Children may also be feeling stress from the changes to their household after the service member's return.
- Service members can expect to be more exhausted than they think; fatigue is a common homecoming reaction for everyone.
- Service members should ease back into roles and responsibilities; it's not unusual to feel unneeded as family members have managed home life well during the deployment.
- Encourage your service members to plan time together as a couple. This can be especially challenging when they have children and other relatives who are eager to be a part of the homecoming. Remind them to be careful not to play the "Who Had It Worse" game.
- Intimacy involves emotional, as well as physical closeness. Encourage service members to talk with their significant others about each other's expectations for reconnecting physically.



Family-Centered Reintegration Programs

Leaders can promote the following reintegration programs to support their service women following deployment.

Fleet and Family Support Centers (FFSC) Post-Deployment and Reintegration Programs

RETURN AND REUNION (R&R)

- R&R programs assist Sailors and Marines in renegotiating roles and responsibilities, communicating with children and maintaining resiliency and balance. ([Link](#))

REINTEGRATION

- Programs support service members in readjusting to family life, returning to work and coping with deployment related stress and injury. ([Link](#))

Contact your local [Fleet and Family Support Center](#) at 1-800-342-9647



Spiritual Reintegration Programs

Service women may choose to incorporate spiritual and religious practices into their reintegration plan.

Incorporating Spirituality Into Reintegration

- Spirituality and Religiosity are associated with positive psychological outcomes. Religious and Spiritual beliefs can serve as a protective factor and can provide a source of meaning to their experience, a source of strength, and can generally be helpful to service members. Moreover, faith is valuable to explore as an important aspect of service members' lives.
- The Effect of Deployment on Spirituality and Religion
 - Improved or Changed?
 - Could it remain the same?
- Examples of religious activities include connecting with community, attending church and/or bible study, devoting time to meditation and/or prayer.
- Navy Chaplains and Religious Support Teams
 - Chaplain services are an essential resource available to all commands. Communication is confidential.
 - As noted in the Mental Health Playbook, Chaplains should be involved whenever Sailors would like confidential non-clinical support for difficulty or distress.
 - Help guide service members to the right resources/support.
 - [Human Performance Resource- Spiritual Fitness](#)
 - [Whole Health-Spirit & Soul](#)



Resources for ADSW and Families



Resources for ADSW and Families

Social support groups can facilitate a greater sense of community for service women.

Developing a Support Group

- Social support is an important component to reintegration after deployment.
- **There is an elevated risk of feeling isolated for females within a command that comprises a widened ratio of male and female service members.**
- It has also been shown to result in better outcomes for those recovering from experiences including trauma.³
- An embedded women's professional development group or leadership group within your command is an excellent resource for your female Sailors and Marines.
 - This type of group can provide support for preparing and returning from deployment along with leadership principals that will encourage empowerment.
- See the next slide for step-by-step guidance on how to create and facilitate a support group or professional development group.
- **Anyone in your command should feel empowered to create and facilitate this type of group. Foster inclusive and welcoming environments to promote empowerment.**



Developing a Support Group

Leaders can empower their service women by standing-up support groups to facilitate community-building post-deployment.

Creating An Embedded Support Group Within Your Command

Organize the Group

1. Designate a Meeting Space (**Tip:** Consider whether it is a safe, anonymous, and comfortable space that can accommodate everyone)
2. Identify a Leader
 - Peer (especially with Caregiver Occupational Stress Control curriculum) or professional (Behavioral Health, Chaplains, Deployed Resiliency Counselor, Substance Abuse Rehabilitation Program counselors, Fleet and Family Support Center counselor)
 - Co-leading by Senior Enlisted Leaders can provide additional acceptance from service members in the group.

Important Reminders: The basic principals of a support group include confidentiality and focus on honoring feelings and experiences. Per Dr. Judith Herman's "Trauma and Recovery", healing after trauma consists of three elements:

1. Remembering and mourning
2. Telling one's story
3. Reconnecting with life



Families Overcoming Under Stress (FOCUS) Program

FOCUS can be a one-stop-shop for resources to support a service woman and their family throughout deployment.

Families Overcoming Under Stress (FOCUS)

Through [FOCUS](#), families will learn a wide range of skills to better prepare them for each stage of deployment and following the completion of military service. The five **Key Learning Skills highlighted by FOCUS include** Emotional Regulation, Communication, Problem Solving, Goal Setting, Managing Trauma and Stress Reminders.

The effects of deployment can have multiple effects on mothers, daughters, sisters and wives. It will take time to get reacquainted and be understanding of the growth and change that has occurred.

Programs Offerings

- **FOCUS Resilience Training:** personalized training for each family. (Teaches practical skills to meet deployment challenges, stress, injury, and more.)
- **Consultations:** 30–60-minute meetings cover family and child centered topics such as behavior changes during deployment or reintegration, or family-or couple-level preparations for future transitions.)
- **Skill Building Groups:** Introduces resilience training to age specific groups.
- **Educational Workshops:** Focus on specific topics tailored to individuals/units.
- **FOCUS World:** Online interactive educational tool that helps military families become strong in face of challenges (Emotional Regulation, Goal Setting, Communication)
- **FOCUS On the Go:** FOCUS Mobile App. Easy access to resources, strategies, and other tools



Resources for Children

The following resources support service women and their children through every stage of deployment.

Resources for Children

- [National Military Family Association](#): The Association's Operation Purple Program runs camps for teens and family retreats at national parks.
- [MilitaryKidsConnect](#): An online community of military children (6-17) that provides access to age-appropriate resources supporting them through their parent's or caregiver's pre-deployment and return
- [Babies on the Homefront](#): An organization that provides military parents ideas for enhancing moments with their baby or toddler during the deployment season, along with an app for deployed parent communication/videos
- [Sesame Workshop Talk, Listen, Connect](#): An initiative that works to address issues related to multiple deployments, family changes that occur when a parent is physically or psychologically injured, and the loss of a parent
- [MILPRIDE modernmilitary.org](#): A support program for military families with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) youth
- [United Through Reading](#): An initiative that connects military families who are separated during deployment or military assignment by providing the bonding experience of shared story time
- [Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program](#): A program that provides online classes for teens to help them identify stressors and effective coping skills during their parent or guardian's reintegration
- See printable pocket guide attached to this resource.



Support Groups and Online Courses

The following online resources can support your service members throughout every phase of deployment.

Developed Support Groups

- Military OneSource: ([Link](#))
- Vet Center: ([Link](#))
- National Alliance on Mental Health: ([Link](#))
- Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance: ([Link](#))

Additional Online Courses and Workshops

- **Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program** ([YRRP DoD - Online Courses: Learn at your own pace \(yellowribbon.mil\)](#)) was developed for reservists but the reintegration information can be applied to active-duty service members. The program offers self-paced online courses in preparedness for all stages of the deployment cycle. Topics addressed within the courses include managing long-distance co-parenting, renegotiating a new normal after deployment and learning how to communicate feelings.
- **American Red Cross Reconnection Workshop** ([Register for Reconnection Workshops | American Red Cross](#)) offers specialized Deployment Service Workshops tailored to adults, teens, and children.
 - Topics addressed in adult-focused workshops include effective communication, stress solutions, trauma talk, emotional grit, connecting with kids, and defusing anger.
 - Topics addressed in child/teen-focused workshops include *Roger That! Communication Counts*, and *Confident Coping*.



Defense Health Agency (DHA) Women's Health Website

DHA Women's Health Website is a one-stop-shop to access military-wide educational resources.

DHA WOMEN'S HEALTH WEBSITE

MHS Home > Military Health Topics > Women's Health

- Women's Health**
- News & Updates
- Health Topics
 - +** Cancers of the Female Reproductive System
 - Contraception and Deployment
 - Endometriosis
 - Postpartum Hemorrhage
- Questions & Answers
 - Contraceptive Care
 - Access to Reproductive Health
- Related Links

Women's Health

The Military Health System provides comprehensive women's and gender-specific care associated with cardiovascular health, mental health, musculoskeletal injuries and reproductive health care. Our goal is to ensure the health of all women at every stage of life. No matter what your age, you can take simple steps to live healthier.

[Healthy Living By Age](#) [Find Walk-in Contraceptive Services Near You](#)

Your Health is Our Mission!

Explore the comprehensive women's health services available to you in the Military Health System at every stage of your life. Our services include:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
|  Well Woman Exams & Screenings |  Pregnancy & Reproductive Health |  Comprehensive TRICARE Coverage |  Pain Management |
|  Mental Health |  Sexual Trauma |  TRICARE Contraceptive Care |  Reproductive Health |

[Need larger text?](#)

Get the Care You Need

- [Ensuring Access to Reproductive Health Care](#)
- [See What TRICARE Covers](#)
- [TRICARE Contraception Coverage](#)
- [Find a Military Hospital or Clinic](#)
- [Find Walk-in Contraceptive Services at your Military Hospital or Clinic](#)

[More Related Links](#)

Need Help Accessing Reproductive Health or Contraceptive Care?

[Contact us](#) and tell us about your challenge. Please allow 3-5 business days for a response.

Women's Health News

[Walter Reed Revives Cancer Survivorship Days Two-Day Event](#)

[Pelvic Health Rehabilitation: A Mission Critical Resource that Enables Military Readiness](#)

[Working Together to Improve Black Maternal Health](#)

[MHS Video On Sexual Assault in the Military](#)

[U.S. Army Colonel Says It's OK to Take a Knee with Breast Cancer](#)

[More News & Updates](#)

- This is a comprehensive resource for advancing female force readiness and women's healthcare.
- Topics addressed include Well Women Exams and Screenings; Pregnancy and Reproductive Health; Comprehensive TRICARE Coverage (including coverage of Contraceptive Care); Pain Management; Mental Health; Sexual Trauma and Reproductive Health.
- Access the website [here](#).



Navy Medicine Women's Health Website

The Navy Medicine Women's Health Website is a comprehensive toolbox that provides service women, providers and leaders with the resources to increase and empower female force readiness.

NAVY MEDICINE'S WOMEN'S HEALTH WEBSITE

The Women's Health Website
Find educational resources on women's health and medical readiness designed for:

- Service Women**
Manage your health & navigate the military health system
- Providers**
Triage & address common women's health concerns
- Leaders**
Promote the health & readiness of your female force

Developed by Deloitte Consulting, LLC

- Topics addressed include Contraceptive Care; Menstrual Management; Pregnancy & Postpartum; Abortion and Access to Reproductive Health; Nutrition; Musculoskeletal; Mental Health; General Women's Health; Deployment; Women's Health Policies and Instructions; **Resources for Leadership and Providers**; Advertising Resources and COVID-19 Resources.
- Resources for leadership include **advertising flyers, pocket-cards and posters** for the Women's Health Webpage and the Deployment Readiness Education for Servicewomen (DRES) app.
- Access the website [here](#).



DRES App and Handbook

The DRES App provides critical information to support service women pre-deployment, during deployment and post-deployment (reintegration).

DRES APP AND HANDBOOK

Select a Deployment Phase:

Preparing for
Deployment

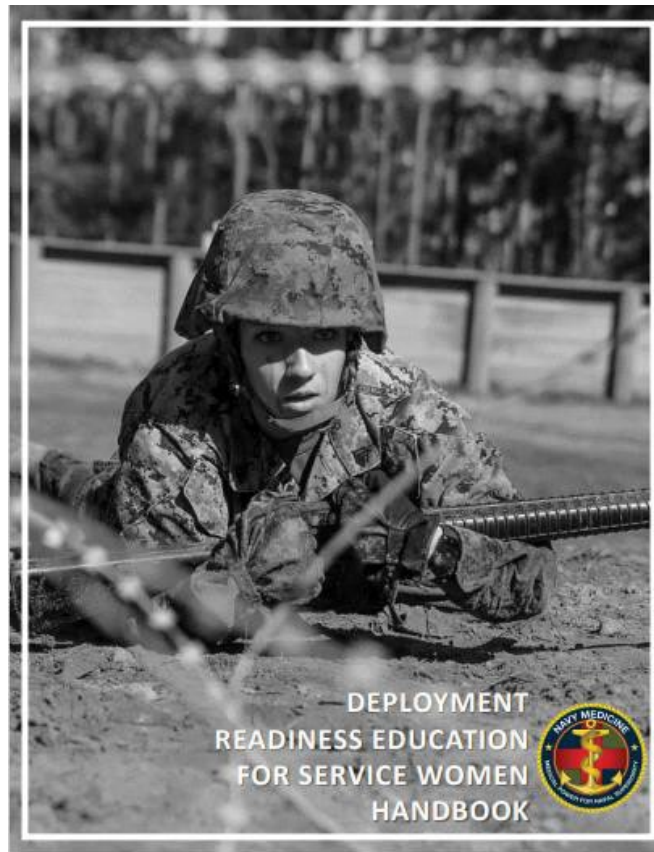
Important health information, conditions, contraception, STIs, packing list, & more

During
Deployment

Information on mental health, nutrition, sexual assault, staying connected, & more

Returning from
Deployment

Includes tips for self & family reintegration, family planning, mental health resources, & more



- Topics covered in the resources include pre-deployment packing lists, contraception advice, menstrual cycle and mental health management while on deployment, women's health care guidance, and suggestions for important communication with family before departure.

Click [here](#) to access the DRES App.

Click [here](#) to access the DRES Handbook.



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