

NAVY MEDICINE
FEMALE FORCE READINESS
CLINICAL COMMUNITY



Supporting Service Women After Deployment

Resource for Service Members

*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 a successful reintegration into home life. This can look like settling into new family dynamics and routines, and decompressing from your deployment.
- ✓ A printable pocket version of this guide can be accessed by clicking on the paperclip icon on the left-hand side of this PDF.

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.
- This resource recognizes the unique challenges you overcome preparing for deployment, during deployment and during the re-integration phase to maximize readiness and retention. This resource is a guide to preparing you for smooth transitions.

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Challenges of ADSW



Unique Challenges of ADSW

There are many challenges to life as ADSW, below are deployment-specific challenges.

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.¹⁷

Trauma recovery is not always from combat trauma. There are many other types of trauma that you or your fellow Sailors or Marines may experience including sexual trauma. The Veterans Administration reports that military sexual assault happens to 15-35% of female service members.⁶ *(Note: Reporting has historically been limited secondary to concerns over confidentiality and concerns over destroying unit cohesion, as well as the stigma).*

SELF-REFLECTION PROCESS

The following section includes self reflection questions and strategies to enhance successful reintegration for all Sailors and Marines, regardless of sex and family status.

Additional sections of this guide provide information for family members and family focused reintegration.



**Pre-Deployment
Preparations and
Considerations**



Pre-Deployment Family Preparations

The following family-specific strategies can support you and your family during your 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.
- Discuss your deployment with your children early (~ 3 months ahead of time) and often as possible! You can show them your full battle gear, discuss what your life will be like and show them around your new home or work place (if possible), to help them understand your life.
- Children of different ages react differently to stressful situations due to developmental perspectives and coping mechanisms. Planning should 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 parents, 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.



Staying Connected During Deployment

While you're deployed, consider calling your family, writing letters or downloading chat apps to maintain a strong family connection.

Connecting with Your Family

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.

Recommended ways you 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.
- **TRY TO CALL** once a week on a set day if possible (daily will be nearly impossible and can upset the home routine if you cannot call).
- **DOWNLOAD WHATSAPP** for free texts and calls when you have access to Wi-Fi.



Preparing for Life After Deployment

While you're deployed, consider calling your family, writing letters or downloading chat apps to maintain a strong connection.

Think about how you would like to celebrate your return

- Which friends or family would you like present for your return? Who do you want to tell?
- Would you prefer a small gathering or a large party? Or even nothing?
- It is OK to ask for what you would prefer, instead of what you think other people would want.
- Keep your loved ones informed of your travel arrangements in case you arrive sooner or later than expected.

Allow yourself to feel all kinds of emotions

- What emotions are you feeling right now when you think about returning from deployment?
- Give yourself permission to feel the way you feel, even if it's uncomfortable. You may need some time to settle into your life and sort out emotions.

Share how are you feeling

- Your friends and family may be unsure how to talk about your experiences, but sharing with them can be a helpful way to recognize your feelings and adjust to life after deployment.
- Do you have a "go-to" loved one that you talk to about your life? If not, is there someone you feel comfortable with sharing your feelings and experiences?
- [Military One Source](#) offers consultation and tips on how to reconnect with family and friends after your return from deployment.



Preparing for Life After Deployment (*continued*)

Consider the below self-reflection questions to begin preparing for life after deployment.

Take care of yourself

- What are some things you enjoy doing that put you at peace? What do you do for self-care?
- You may have lots of people to see and places to go but give yourself time to readjust.
- Ease back into your routines and try to be patient if things don't feel comfortable right away. Sometimes it can take weeks or even months before you feel settled again.

Avoid “unhealthy” habits

- What do you typically do to cope? Are these habits healthy or unhealthy? Some people use more healthy habits like going to the gym or reading an interesting book. Unhealthy habits can include excessive alcohol use or shopping sprees. Alcohol is a depressant and could suppress your feelings. Also, it can cloud judgment and limit clear thinking.

Set realistic expectations, focus on the positives

- You may want everything to immediately fall back into place. This expectation is probably unrealistic. Try to focus on the positive and what is going right, instead of what may be going wrong.
- Talking with your family about your return will also help you and your family manage expectations.
- Feeling grateful and enjoying the small moments are a helpful way of connecting with loved ones.
- What are some things you can think of right now that you are grateful for? What are some ways to give yourself credit for the positives in your life?
- Most importantly, **be patient with yourself and your loved ones during this transition!**



Strategies for a Successful Reintegration



Delayed Recovery from Trauma and PTSD

Consider the following signs and risk factors for trauma and PTSD; reach out to your provider if you think you may have 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 you think you may have PTSD

- If you think you may have PTSD, immediately **MAKE AN APPOINTMENT WITH YOUR PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER (PCM)** who will refer you to a specialist to discuss potential treatment options including the following:
- **Prolonged Exposure (PE)**: Teaches you how to gain control by facing your negative feelings. [Click here](#) to learn more.
- **Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT)**: Teaches you to reframe negative thoughts about the trauma. [Click here](#) to learn more.
- **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)**: Helps you process and make sense of your 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. Family members create new routines and new methods for managing household chores. Leaders can

Reintegration Considerations

When you deploy, everyone in the family adapts in some way to your absence. Family members create new routines and new methods for managing household chores.

During reintegration, discussing changes or renegotiating the division of tasks and responsibilities may help weave you 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.
- Expect to be more exhausted than you think; fatigue is a common homecoming reaction for everyone.
- Ease back into roles and responsibilities; it's not unusual to feel unneeded as family members have managed home life well during the deployment.
- Plan time together as a couple. This can be especially challenging when you have children and other relatives who are eager to be a part of your homecoming. Be careful not to play the "Who Had It Worse" game.
- Intimacy involves emotional, as well as physical closeness. Talk 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

You may choose to incorporate spiritual and religious practices into your reintegration plan.

Incorporating Spirituality Into Your 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 you as a service member. Moreover, faith is valuable to explore as an important aspect of service members lives.
- The Effect of Deployment on Spirituality and Religion: Questions that may arise post-deployment
 - Have perspectives improved or changed?
 - Could it remain the same?
- Examples of religious activities that may support post-deployment 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 and to you as an individual. 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.
 - Your command can also help guide you to the right resources/support.
 - [Whole Health-Spirit & Soul](#)



Resources for ADSW and Families



Resources for ADSW and Families

Social support groups can facilitate a great sense of community as you and your fellow members navigate home life.

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.**
- Social support has been shown to result to result in better outcomes for those recovering from experiences including trauma.¹
- An embedded women's professional development group or leadership group within your command is an excellent resource for you and your fellow 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.
- **You are encouraged to create and facilitate community-building groups that can support the wellbeing of all members and should feel empowered to create and facilitate this type of group.**



Developing a Support Group

Step-by-Step instructions to stand-up a command-wide support group.

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, Who Can Lead?
 - 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 you and your family throughout deployment.

FOCUS Program

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 can support you and your family 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.
- [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 for Military Families](#): 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, and queer 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 storytime
- [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 you 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

The 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

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](#)

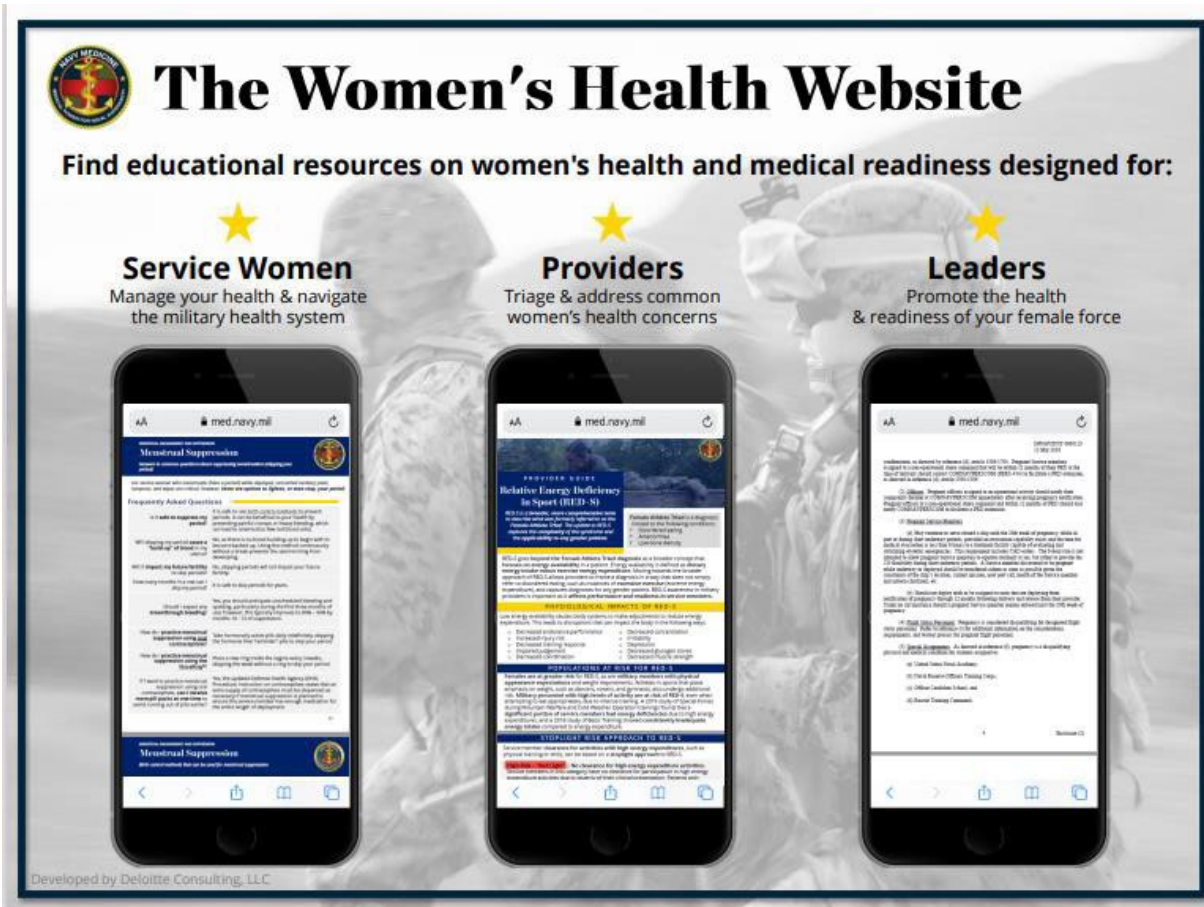
- This is a comprehensive resource for advancing female force readiness and women's healthcare.
- Topics addressed include Well Women Exams and Screenings; Pregnancy and Reproductive Health; Comprehensive TRICARE Coverage (including coverage of Contraceptive Care); Pain Management; Mental Health; Sexual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



- 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

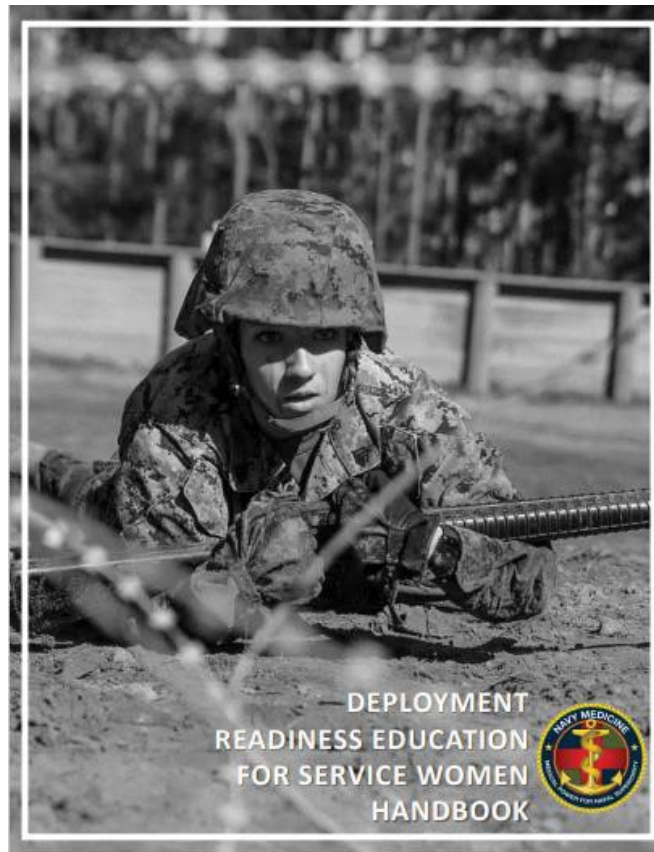
Important health information, conditions, contraception, STIs, packing list, & more

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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