

Expectations

Deployments are HARD, but homecomings are hard too! Reunification usually follows three phases:

1. The *Honeymoon Phase* looks a lot like a fairy tale. You want EVERYTHING to be perfect and no one wants to bring up problems and frustrations.
2. The *Adjustment Phase* is where things get a little trickier. You both have likely changed while apart, and now you have to figure how to fit back together. You've managed everything in their absence, but now you have to start managing together because that's what couples do. It WILL be frustrating to watch them change some of your well-established routines.
3. The *Integration Phase* is when the changed routines settle into a new normal. Conflicts are addressed and resolved. Role changes are accepted, and responsibilities are shared again.

Every unification is unique.

Some will be easy, some will be harder. But these three phases will likely be present for those times when your spouse has been deployed for long periods.

Preparing for Return

Part of preparing for your soldier's return is preparing your heart for the changes to come. Adjustment just takes time and patience. Common challenges that come up include:

Family role changes: You've likely become a lawn-mowing, finance-handling guru since he's been gone. But be prepared to give some of that back. Families share the load, so, sharing responsibilities is a loving part of reintegration.

Resentments: Your soldier has likely missed out on so many things. Your child's development, birthdays, anniversaries, and maybe even a birth! This hurts, and he will struggle through these feelings and resentments. Unfortunately, you can't give back the time lost, but your patience and understanding will help your spouse through some of these resentments.

Re-connection: At first, you will feel like strangers instead of the married couple you are. Don't fill up those first few weeks with big homecoming parties, but instead spend some time together doing what you love!

Big Changes: You both have likely changed while your spouse was gone. You will need to acknowledge and talk about the changes you see in each other and even appreciate them.

Routine Changes: How will your spouse start sharing in routines like bedtime stories, bath time, or driving them to school? These are small but can be very important to a child.

Big emotions: Our kids feel the excitement and anxiety of homecomings. Emotions at a parent's return can be confusing for them. Talk to them about how YOU feel in order to give them the emotional vocabulary they need such as, "Mommy is both excited and a little nervous for when daddy comes home. How about you?"

Family Unity After Deployment IS TRICKY!

Temper your expectations. Expect there to be a few bumps in the road. Watch for signs of stress or anxiety in your kids. Talk about your concerns and worries with your spouse, and then make a plan together. Be united in your parenting, in your routines, and in your communication. Help your spouse get back into family and daily life. And remember, cut each other a little slack during this time of adjustment.

Sources:

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