# Reuniting with Children: Tips for Military Families



Reuniting with family after deployment can be a happy and stressful time. It will take time to become a family again.

For more information, visit www.militaryonesource.com on the Internet.

A military homecoming is a time for celebration. But the days and weeks that follow may be stressful. It's normal to have mixed emotions – excitement and anxieties – about the reunion. Here are tips to help make your reunion positive.

## Be patient.

- Feeling like a family again may take several weeks – and reconnecting may be awkward at first.
- It is normal to have mixed feelings for several days or weeks, even if the initial homecoming was happy.

# Take time to bond with your kids.

 You and your children will be getting to know each other again.

- To a child, a parent gone for even a few months can seem like a lifetime.
- Try to have fun together.
   Spend quality time with each child individually.
- Get involved with school and social activities.
- Children may need time and space to reconnect with you.
- Ask your spouse to help with the transition.

The days and weeks after a homecoming can be exciting but stressful for everyone in the family. Things will get better if you stay positive, take it slow and don't expect it to be perfect.

### REUNITING WITH CHILDREN: TIPS FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

# What to expect by age...

Children react differently depending on their age and experience.

Infants may cry or pull away from the returning parent and cling to the parent they know.

**Tip:** Take part in their daily routine. Talk to them. Hold, bathe, change, feed and relax with them. Babies need time to develop trust.

**Toddlers** may act shy, clingy or throw tantrums. They could revert to behaviors they had outgrown.

**Tip:** Have fun and be gentle with them. Sit and play at their level.



**Preschoolers** may feel fear, guilt or anger because they blame themselves for the parent leaving. They may misbehave to get attention.

**Tip:** Tell them you love them. Listen to them, play together and talk about their new interests. Try to keep rules and routines as consistent as possible.

**School-age children** will likely be excited, talk constantly and boast about the deployed parent. They may feel guilty and think they did not live up to your expectations during deployment.

**Tip:** Talk about what you missed. Show interest in their activities, review schoolwork and pictures. Praise them for their accomplishments.

**Teenagers** could appear moody or act as if they don't care. Teens might feel guilty for not living up to the parent's standards and may be concerned about rules and role changes in the household.

**Tip:** Share appropriate stories of what happened during deployment. Do something together even if it's washing the car or running errands. Try not to judge them. Respect their privacy and friendships.

# **Expect an adjustment.**

- You, your spouse and your children have all gone through changes. You are not the same person you were, and they won't be the same either.
- It's common to go through an adjustment period. As you and your spouse resume co-parenting roles, your relationship may be strained.
- Talk with your spouse before changing routines. Don't try to automatically return to "how things were."

# Seek support.

- If you or your family members are having problems adjusting, you may need support.
- You can contact your military family service or support center, chaplain, or medical provider for help.

