

# HOMECOMING AND REUNION



OPERATION  
**READY**  
Resources for Educating About Deployment and You



# **HOMECOMING AND REUNION**

## **Family Deployment Readiness for the Active Army, the Army National Guard, and the Army Reserve**

This training module is a revised publication of the Operation READY (Resources for Educating about Deployment and You) resource library, developed under a contract with Headquarters, Department of the Army, Community and Family Support Center, and Texas Cooperative Extension of the Texas A&M University System.

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## **Operation READY: Resources for Educating About Deployment and You**

**Texas Cooperative Extension  
The Texas A&M University System  
in cooperation with  
The United States Army  
Community and Family Support Center**

**2002**

## OPERATION READY MATERIALS

The Operation READY curriculum is a series of training modules, videotapes, and resource books published for the Army as a resource for Army Community Service (ACS), State Family Program Coordinators (SFPC), and Army Reserve Family Readiness Program (FRP) staff in training Army soldiers and families who are faced with deployments.

This revised curriculum includes the following training modules and reference materials:

- The Army Family Readiness Handbook
- The Army Leaders' Desk Reference for Soldier/Family Readiness (new)
- The Soldier/Family Deployment Survival Handbook (new)
- The Army FRG Leader's Handbook
- Family Assistance Center
- Predeployment and Ongoing Readiness
- Homecoming and Reunion

Videos developed for the Operation READY curriculum by University of California–Riverside Cooperative Extension, to supplement the above materials are:

- *Army Community Service: To Get the Most Out of Life, Think ACS* (new)
- *Introduction to Operation READY* (new)
- *Family Assistance Center*
- *Family Readiness Groups—A Place to Belong*
- *Practical Readiness—Smart Ways to Minimize Deployment Hassles*
- *Coping with Stress*
- *Making Your Reunion Work*

Children's Workbooks for use by parents with their children.

These materials have been distributed to all U.S. Army installations throughout the world, as well as to U.S. Army Reserve and National Guard commands. The materials are distributed in hard copy form as well as stored on CD-ROM disks. They are also available through the virtual Army Community Service website, [www.goacs.org](http://www.goacs.org). For copies of the above materials, check with your local Army Community Service, Mobilization and Deployment office, SFPC and FRP offices.

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# Reunion for Soldiers

## Facilitator's Guidelines

This module provides the facilitator with resources needed to plan and conduct a workshop. Facilitators at this stage are usually the unit chaplains. ACS staff should make this lesson plan available to all chaplains.

**Goal:** Soldiers can prepare for the challenges of reunion before returning to their loved ones.

**Audience:** This session is designed for soldiers. It is most helpful for this to be offered before reunion occurs.

**Time Required:** 60 minutes

**Room Requirements:** This workshop requires a room large enough to accommodate the participants. It is designed as a group process for roundtable discussions, with 8–10 people at each table. The room should be arranged for maximum visibility of the flip charts, videos, and overheads.

### Facilitator's Preparation:

1. Reserve a location for conducting the workshop that will accommodate the number of participants.
2. The facilitator's job is to lead the workshop. Here are some tips to make it effective and enjoyable:
  - Plan an icebreaker activity.
  - Encourage participation.
  - Check for understanding.
  - Prepare the room.
  - Make the workshop personal.
  - Gather needed material.
  - Enjoy yourself.
  - Offer amenities, such as parking and refreshments.
3. Suggested activities are presented in square brackets ([ ]) in the lesson text. The lesson text is meant to assist you and is not intended to be read aloud to the participants. The suggested activities list the visuals, handouts, or group activities that are used at particular points in the workshop.

4. The following list of PowerPoint slides are provided on the CD-ROM, or from the <http://www.goacs.org> website. PowerPoint Notes Pages are included in this handbook (pages 49–55) for your use in teaching the lesson.
  - #1 Reunion for Soldiers
  - #2 Reunion Objectives
  - #3 Making Your Reunion Work
  - #4 Communication during Deployment
  - #5 Intimate Relations
  - #6 Expectations of Change
  - #7 In Closing . . .
5. Preview the video, *Making Your Reunion Work*, if you plan to use it in the workshop. The video script is included in this handbook (pages 135–139) for your use in teaching the lesson.
6. Reproduce the necessary number of handouts for each participant (Handouts #1–9 for this lesson, pages 83–99). They can be taken to your local installation print plant and easily reproduced. You may want to add other handouts to it as well. Handouts #2–5 deal with reunion stress reactions in children, physical symptoms of stress, and coping strategies. These provide useful information for the couple dealing with reunion stress. Handout #6 is a questionnaire the instructor can use as a discussion starter or something to take home for personal reflection. Handout #7 is a general guide to community support, and Handout #8 can be used to list local support agencies and phone numbers. Handout #9 is helpful for reserve component soldiers returning to their civilian jobs, but it is also useful for an active duty soldier returning to a military unit where the soldier was one of a few selected for deployment.
7. Reproduce the **Workshop Evaluation** form for each participant. This form is included at the end of the Handouts section (page 131) and will be used to evaluate each Homecoming and Reunion lesson.
8. Assemble all other necessary workshop materials and equipment:

**Workshop Materials:**

- Flip chart paper on one easel and colored markers
- Extra markers for flip chart paper activities at tables
- Masking tape for securing charts
- Pens and pencils for participants' use

**Equipment:**

- Overhead transparency projector, or laptop computer with LCD projector and screen
- Television and VCR

**Reunion for Soldiers  
Workshop Overview  
(Estimated Time: 60 minutes)**

<b>Estimated Time</b>	<b>Presentation Section</b>	<b>Visual = V Handout = H</b>
10 minutes	Introduction Objectives	V #1 V #2
15 minutes	Getting Back Together	Video: <i>Making Your Reunion Work</i>
15 minutes	Group Discussion	V #3
5 minutes	Ways to Communicate	V #4
5 minutes	Intimate Relationships	V #5 H #1-9
5 minutes	Expectations of Change	V #6
5 minutes	Conclusion	V #7 Workshop Evaluation

# **Workshop Plan**

## **Reunion for Soldiers**

**(Estimated Time: 60 minutes)**

### **INTRODUCTION**

*[Visual #1: Reunion for Soldiers]*

Welcome to the Reunion for Soldiers workshop. We will be working in groups to facilitate discussion with others who have shared similar experiences and challenges.

Homecoming is a function of the installation or home of a reserve component unit—a broad-based community effort to welcome the redeploying soldiers back to home and unit. Reunion is a chaplain and ACS function, which addresses the critical stress involved in dealing with changes in the soldier and spouse.

This session is designed to prepare you for the challenges of reunion so that problems can be minimized and positive aspects of reunion can be maximized.

Many of your loved ones have had a similar workshop session back home. The purpose of these sessions is to help smooth the adjustment phase of reunion for both you and your loved ones.

The material we will cover applies to all soldiers. Activities are designed so that you may benefit by working with soldiers who have had similar experiences.

Feel free to share your experiences and concerns. Sharing will help all of us to understand that we have a great deal in common when it comes to reunion adjustment.

### **OBJECTIVES**

*[Visual #2: Reunion Objectives]*

During our time together, we will:

- establish realistic expectations about reunion,
- recognize symptoms of stress, and
- identify helpful and reliable sources of assistance.

## GETTING BACK TOGETHER

Expectations and fantasies are an important part of our lives. It doesn't matter if expectations are joys or concerns about reunion.

No matter what you daydream about, you may not be physically or mentally able to carry out some of your expectations and fantasies.

There is no way to predict what reunion will really be like. The video we are about to see, *Making Your Reunion Work*, illustrates this point.

This video has been made especially for reunion. The people portrayed in the video share how their expectations and fantasies are experienced when they are together again.

The purpose of the video is to assist you in understanding the adjustment process after separation. Issues raised in this video could apply to all returning soldiers.

As you watch the video, note the thoughts and feelings that both the soldier and the spouse are expressing.

A major strength of the video is that it deals with the things we just talked about—the joys, the concerns, the expectations, and fantasies of reunion. The video also addresses how couples communicate.

*[Show the video: **Making Your Reunion Work.**]*

*(Allow 15 minutes for the video.)*

## GROUP DISCUSSION

*[Ask some of the senior NCOs or officers present to integrate themselves around the groups where junior enlisted or officers are seated. Appoint these senior members as group leaders for the discussion following the film.]*

*[Visual #3: **Making Your Reunion Work**]*

Questions for discussion:

- What did you learn from the video?
- What coping and communication techniques were used?
- What did you see in the video regarding expectations of reunion?
- Based on what you saw, are your expectations realistic or not?

*(Allow 15 minutes for discussion.)*

One thing to remember from the video and in our group discussions is that not only have you changed, but so have the people you are returning to.

All the problems you left behind have not magically disappeared. All the expectations you have about your reunion may not happen.

Thus, it is important to understand and accept that things back home will probably be different from what you expect.

Accepting change is a major factor in reestablishing yourself when you return from a deployment.

Keeping this change factor in mind, if I had asked the people you are returning to the same question about their expectations, do you think your list would match with theirs?

*(Take a few responses.)*

Many of their expectations may be the same, but some may be very different. We are beginning to understand that our expectations and theirs may not coincide.

## **WAYS TO COMMUNICATE**

*[Visual #4: Communication during Deployment]*

A key to understanding different expectations is how well we have communicated during the deployment and how well we will communicate when the deployment has ended.

You have been communicating during separation, right? How have you been doing it?

*(Take a few responses—answers may include e-mail, letters, cards, tapes, videos, phone calls, teleconferences.)*

Letters and cards are the least expensive way to communicate. Sometimes, phone calls are available during a deployment, but phone calls can be very expensive. Cassette tapes and videotapes are also good methods of communication. E-mail is excellent, but it may bring only the emotion of the moment, which can be misleading.

Now that you are going home, what can you say or write besides reporting the current weather conditions or discussing how tired you are of the food in the dining facility?

*(Take a few responses.)*

Before your return, you can start talking and writing about some of your expectations.

Lines of communications should be open and two-way. Encourage your loved ones to communicate their expectations for reunion.

Some positive expectations you might share could include saying that you would like to catch up on some of the latest movies when you return.

Or you might tell your loved one that you would really like a quiet evening alone. In return, ask what he/she is looking forward to.

You could also begin to share some of your concerns. Your old job will seem rather tame after the adventure of a deployment.

You may confide that you are concerned about what your relationship will be like with the children, your spouse, with your mother or father, or with your friends.

Continuous communication during separation plays a critical role in maintaining an emotional bond between the soldier and those back home.

By expressing your expectations before you return and by asking the people you are returning to about **their** expectations, you are establishing a line of communication that will cross many barriers and minimize problems when you return.

## **INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS**

*[Visual #5: Intimate Relations]*

*[Distribute Handouts #1–9.]*

Among the major adjustments you face when you return are your intimate and sexual relationships. The best thing you can do is to go slowly. Don't anticipate "normal" sexual relations for a few days.

You and your partner are likely to feel like strangers with each other, and strangers do not have good sexual relations.

Take the time to reestablish your sexual relationship naturally. Rushing sexual relations can create major communication problems.

A few ideas that may be helpful during this period of adjustment are:

- Try not to rush.
- Talk a lot about how you feel.
- Ask how your partner feels regarding intimacy and sexual matters.

- Read Handout #1, *Reestablishing Intimate and Sexual Relations*, for other helpful ideas.

No matter how well prepared you are or how well you communicated during deployment, there are many adjustments to make upon returning.

Changes that occurred while you were away may cause you to adjust your way of thinking.

## **EXPECTATIONS OF CHANGE**

*[Visual #6: Expectations of Change]*

You can view change in different ways: as a crisis or threat; or as either a hidden opportunity to grow and mature, or as a slight disruption in the way things used to be.

If change is viewed as a crisis or threat, people try to pretend the change did not happen. They may use inappropriate coping strategies. They may avoid or deny the change. They may spend time wishing things were the way they used to be.

A poor coping mechanism for change is to blame everyone else and everything else for the change. This leads to a dead end and may cause even more problems.

Good coping mechanisms for change could be viewed as a hidden opportunity or as a slight disruption in the way things were. People who view change in this positive way acknowledge that change has occurred and that it can become an accepted part of life. Often, this view of change mobilizes people into new ways of thinking, which leads to a fresh beginning.

What changes might have happened while you were gone?

Do you view these changes as a hidden opportunity or as merely a slight disruption of the way things were?

Do you view these changes as a crisis or threat?

Ideally, all change should be viewed as hidden opportunity. Remember that no matter how accepting of change you are, it takes time for the impact of change to become integrated into your way of thinking or acting.

There is no definite period for change to begin to feel normal. On average, it takes several weeks or even months, depending on the length of separation and on your ability to accept change.

## CONCLUSION

*[Visual #7: In Closing . . .]*

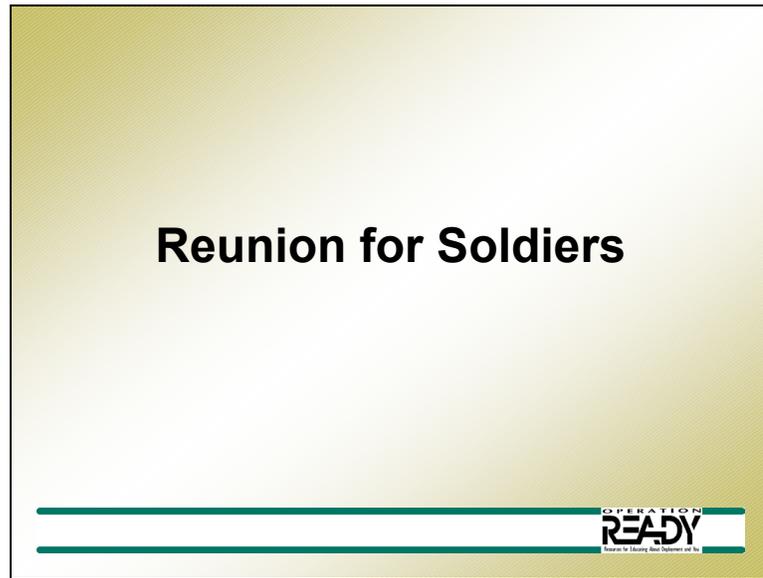
As we have discussed, reunion can be a challenge. But if you begin right now to communicate your expectations and to encourage your loved ones to do the same, the transition will be easier.

Keep in mind that there will be stresses because of the changes that have occurred. Try to look at change as a hidden opportunity or a slight disruption, and not a crisis or a dead end. A positive outlook will make for a smoother adjustment.

Good luck in your reunion!

*[Have participants complete the Workshop Evaluation form.]*





Welcome to the Reunion for Soldiers workshop. We will be working in groups to facilitate discussion with others who have shared similar experiences and challenges.

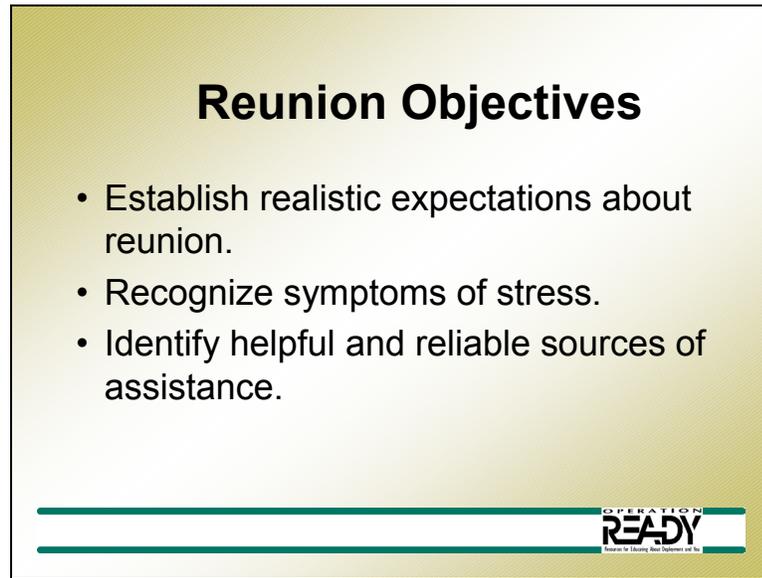
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Feel free to share your experiences and concerns. Sharing will help all of us to understand that we have a great deal in common when it comes to reunion adjustment.



During our time together, we will:

- establish realistic expectations about reunion,
- recognize symptoms of stress, and
- identify helpful and reliable sources of assistance.

### **Getting Back Together**

Expectations and fantasies are an important part of our lives. It doesn't matter if expectations are joys or concerns about reunion.

No matter what you daydream about, you may not be physically or mentally able to carry out some of your expectations and fantasies.

There is no way to predict what reunion will really be like. The video we are about to see, *Making Your Reunion Work*, illustrates this point.

This video has been made especially for reunion. The people portrayed in the video share how their expectations and fantasies are experienced when they are together again.

The purpose of the video is to assist you in understanding the adjustment process after separation. Issues raised in this video could apply to all returning soldiers.

As you watch the video, note the thoughts and feelings that both the soldier and the spouse are expressing.

A major strength of the video is that it deals with the things we just talked about—the joys, the concerns, the expectations, and fantasies of reunion. The video also addresses how couples communicate. (*Show the video, **Making Your Reunion Work**; allow 15 minutes.*)

## Making Your Reunion Work

- What did you learn from the video?
- What coping and communication skills were used?
- What did you see in the video regarding expectations of reunion?
- Are your expectations realistic or not?



*[Ask some of the senior NCOs or officers present to integrate themselves around the groups where junior enlisted or officers are seated. Appoint these senior members as group leaders for the discussion following the film.]*

### Questions for discussion:

- What did you learn from the video?
- What coping and communication techniques were used?
- What did you see in the video regarding expectations of reunion?
- Based on what you saw, are your expectations realistic or not?

*(Allow 15 minutes for discussion.)*

One thing to remember from the video and in our group discussions is that not only have you changed, but so have the people you are returning to.

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Keeping this change factor in mind, if I had asked the people you are returning to the same question about their expectations, do you think your list would match with theirs?

Many of their expectations may be the same, but some may be very different. We are beginning to understand that our expectations and theirs may not coincide.

## Communication during Deployment

What have you been communicating?

- News about bad/good chow?
- Comments about good/bad weather?

or

- Your expectations of reunion?
- What your loved ones expect from you at reunion?

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A key to understanding different expectations is how well we have communicated during the deployment and how well we will communicate when the deployment has ended. You have been communicating during separation, right? How have you been doing it? (*Take a few responses—answers may include e-mail, letters, cards, tapes, videos, phone calls, teleconferences.*)

Letters and cards are the least expensive way to communicate. Sometimes, phone calls are available during a deployment, but phone calls can be very expensive. Cassette tapes and videotapes are also good methods of communication. E-mail is excellent, but it may bring only the emotion of the moment, which can be misleading.

Now that you are going home, what can you say or write besides reporting the current weather conditions or discussing how tired you are of the food in the dining facility? (*Take a few responses.*) Before your return, you can start talking and writing about some of your expectations. Lines of communications should be open and two-way. Encourage your loved ones to communicate their expectations for reunion.

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Continuous communication during separation plays a critical role in maintaining an emotional bond between the soldier and those back home. By expressing your expectations before you return and by asking the people you are returning to about **their** expectations, you are establishing a line of communication that will cross many barriers and minimize problems when you return.

## Intimate Relations

- Intimacy and sexual relationship may be a major adjustment.
- Re-establish this relationship slowly and naturally.
- Talk about how you feel.
- Ask how your partner feels about intimacy and sexual relationships.
- Refer to Homecoming and Reunion Handouts 1 - 9.



*[Distribute Handouts 1-9.]*

Among the major adjustments you face when you return are your intimate and sexual relationships. The best thing you can do is to go slowly. Don't anticipate "normal" sexual relations for a few days.

You and your partner are likely to feel like strangers with each other, and strangers do not have good sexual relations.

Take the time to reestablish your sexual relationship naturally. Rushing sexual relations can create major communication problems.

A few ideas that may be helpful during this period of adjustment are:

- Try not to rush.
- Talk a lot about how you feel.
- Ask how your partner feels regarding intimacy and sexual matters.
- Read Handout #1, *Reestablishing Intimate and Sexual Relations*, for other helpful ideas.

No matter how well prepared you are or how well you communicated during deployment, there are many adjustments to make upon returning.

Changes that occurred while you were away may cause you to adjust your way of thinking.

## Expectations of Change What is It for You?

- Crisis or Threat
- Avoidance
- Denial
- Blaming others
- Fear
- Hidden Opportunity
- Acknowledgement
- Action
- Personal Responsibility
- Face it – it's constant



You can view change in different ways: as a crisis or threat; or as either a hidden opportunity to grow and mature, or as a slight disruption in the way things used to be.

If change is viewed as a crisis or threat, people try to pretend the change did not happen. They may use inappropriate coping strategies. They may avoid or deny the change. They may spend time wishing things were the way they used to be.

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Good coping mechanisms for change could be viewed as a hidden opportunity or as a slight disruption in the way things were. People who view change in this positive way acknowledge that change has occurred and that it can become an accepted part of life. Often, this view of change mobilizes people into new ways of thinking, which leads to a fresh beginning.

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Do you view these changes as a hidden opportunity or as merely a slight disruption of the way things were?

Do you view these changes as a crisis or threat?

Ideally, all change should be viewed as hidden opportunity. Remember that no matter how accepting of change you are, it takes time for the impact of change to become integrated into your way of thinking or acting.

There is no definite period for change to begin to feel normal. On average, it takes several weeks or even months, depending on the length of separation and on your ability to accept change.

**In Closing . . .**

- Reunion may be a challenge.
- Begin immediately to communicate your expectations.
- Encourage your loved ones back home to do the same.
- Have a great reunion!



The logo for OPERATION READY, featuring the word 'OPERATION' in a small font above 'READY' in a large, bold, sans-serif font. Below 'READY' is a small tagline: 'Return to Home and Support at Home'. The logo is set against a white background with a thin green border.

As we have discussed, reunion can be a challenge. But if you begin right now to communicate your expectations and to encourage your loved ones to do the same, the transition will be easier.

Keep in mind that there will be stresses because of the changes that have occurred. Try to look at change as a hidden opportunity or a slight disruption, and not a crisis or a dead end. A positive outlook will make for a smoother adjustment.

Good luck in your reunion!

*[Have participants complete the Workshop Evaluation form.]*

## Reestablishing Intimate and Sexual Relations

One adjustment you may face when military separation occurs is reestablishing your intimate and sexual relationships.

Most military couples face the question, “How can two people work together toward achieving intimacy when one of them is often absent from the relationship for extended periods?”

Military couples often find that reunion may bring out feelings of uneasiness and that their personal relationship is strained. Through an understanding of the effects of separation, you can better cope with the stress that accompanies reunion.

The following information about communication barriers and enhancers may help you to reconnect with your partner.

### **Barriers to intimate communication and sexual relations may include:**

- unrealistic fantasies and expectations;
- feeling anxiety about engaging in intimacy and sex;
- feeling that your partner is a stranger;
- feelings of anger, hostility, stress, or negative feelings about the separation;
- concern about faithfulness to your relationship; and
- feeling that sexual relations need to be rushed to make up for lost time.

### **Communication enhancers:**

- Communication will help bring you closer together. It gives you time to become reacquainted, and it helps to let your partner know how you feel.
- Understand that feelings of anxiety are a very normal part of the reunion process.
- You have been apart from each other, and you both have grown. Take time to get to know each other again.
- Discuss your negative feelings and frustrations. Fear of losing your partner plays a major role in developing negative feelings. Listen carefully to what your partner is trying to communicate to you.
- Don't assume the worst about your partner. If you have concerns about fidelity, talk to your chaplain, or find a counselor who can help you work through these feelings.
- Besides communication, allow yourself time to readjust to being together again. Go slowly, and enjoy your reunion.



## Children's Reaction to Soldier's Return

Reactions	Techniques
<b>Birth to 1 Year</b>	
Cries Fusses Pulls away from you Clings to spouse or caregiver Has problems with elimination Changes their sleeping and eating habits Does not recognize you	Hold the baby, and hug him/her a lot. Bathe and change your baby; feed and play with him/her. Relax and be patient; he/she will warm up to you after a while.
<b>1 to 3 Years</b>	
Shyness Clinging Does not recognize you Cries Has temper tantrums Regresses—no longer toilet trained	Don't force holding, hugging, kissing. Give them space. Give them time to warm up. Be gentle and fun. Sit at their level.
<b>3 to 5 Years</b>	
Demonstrates anger Acts out to get your attention; needs proof that you're real Is demanding Feels guilty for making the parent go away Talks a lot to bring you up to date	Listen to them. Accept their feelings. Play with them. Reinforce that you love them. Find out the new things on TV, at preschool, books.
<b>5 to 12 Years</b>	
Isn't good enough Dreads your return because of discipline Boasts about Army and parent	Review pictures, schoolwork, activities, scrap books. Praise what they have done. Try not to criticize.
<b>13 to 18 Years</b>	
Is excited Feels guilty because they don't live up to standards Is concerned about rules and responsibilities Feels too old or is unwilling to change plans to accommodate parent Is rebellious	Share what has happened with you. Listen with undivided attention. Don't be judgmental. Respect privacy and friends. Don't tease about fashion, music.



## Reunion Stress

Whether you are a single or a married soldier, a single-parent soldier, a spouse, or a child, you will face certain stressors associated with reunion. Below are some of the normal stressors you may face, along with some hints to help you adjust to the changes in your life.

### Stressors

- Emotional letdown
- Restlessness or sleeplessness
- No one understands what I have been through.
- Was my spouse faithful?
- Did my spouse miss me?
- My friends seem different.
- I didn't expect things to change.
- Other people's concerns seem petty.
- I feel like a stranger at home.
- How will the children react?
- Will the role I have filled change?
- Were my children treated well by their guardian?
- Can I make up for lost time?
- Did I handle things the right way?
- When will things feel normal again?
- I am concerned about finances.
- I am concerned about future deployments.
- The children appear confused and uncertain.

### Helpful Hints

- Accept that things may be different.
- Talk about your experiences.
- Go slowly—don't try to make up for lost time.
- Spend quality time with your children.
- Reassure your children. Change often frightens them.
- Curb your desire to take control or to spend money.
- Accept that your partner may be different.
- Intimate relationships may be awkward at first.
- Take time to get reacquainted.
- Forget your fantasies. Reality may be quite different.
- Take time to readjust.
- Communicate with your partner and your family.



## Stress Symptoms

The following stress danger signals focus on the medical and physical symptoms common to tension stress. Your physician can best determine your medical condition, but these guidelines will provide you with a general indication of your stress level. Check those signals that you have noticed:

- General irritability, hyperexcitability, depression
- Pounding of the heart
- Dryness of mouth and throat
- Impulsive behavior, emotional instability
- Overpowering urge to cry or run
- Inability to concentrate, flight of thoughts
- Feelings of unreality, weakness, dizziness, fatigue
- Floating anxiety, being afraid and not knowing why
- Emotional tension and alertness
- Trembling, nervous tics, easily startled
- High-pitched, nervous laughter
- Stuttering, other speech difficulties
- Bruxism, or grinding of the teeth
- Insomnia
- Hyperactivity, increased tendency to move about
- Excessive sweating
- Frequent need to urinate
- Diarrhea, indigestion, queasiness, vomiting
- Migraine headaches
- Pain in neck or lower back
- Loss of appetite or excessive appetite
- Increased use of prescribed drugs
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Nightmares
- Accident proneness

The more signs that are present, the stronger the likelihood that there is a serious problem. See your physician if you are concerned about these symptoms.



## Reunion Stress-Coping Strategies

Most military families find that reunions are at least as stressful as separations. This seems to be true for couples with children, couples without children, single parents, and single soldiers coming back to friends and family. Following are some coping strategies that may help:

*Expect to have a few doubts and worries.*

- Your partner may think you don't need them anymore.
- Anxiety is a natural and normal part of reunion.

*Forget your fantasies.*

- Give up any fantasies or expectations you may have about what reunion day should be.
- Take it easy, and let things happen naturally.

*Don't expect things to be exactly the way they were before the separation.*

- You've changed; your spouse has changed, and your children have changed.
- Don't get upset by things that are done differently.

*Tips on helping children adjust:*

- Children can get angry about their parent being gone.
- Toddlers and preschoolers may act like the returning parent is a stranger. They might not understand about "duty" or "mission."
- Elementary school children and teenagers may understand but show anger or fear by "acting out."
- Get reacquainted, and take things slowly.
- Children are resilient.

*Accept and share your feelings.*

- Talk a lot about your feelings, and let your partner talk, too.
- Really listen. Make sure you fully understand what your partner is saying before you respond.
- Communication is the key.

*See things from the other person's point of view.*

- An awareness that the soldier no longer feels a part of things helps us to understand why they can be upset by even the smallest changes.
- Recognition of the pride a partner feels in the way he/she handled everything alone will help the soldier to understand the importance of accepting changes made during separation.

- Children are people too. Try to understand how they feel. Change and uncertainty is often very frightening for them, so be patient.

Your family relationships should regain normalcy in a few months. However, if you had problems before you left, those problems may still be there when you get back. If you continue having problems adjusting after a few months, seek help through one of the following offices:

- The Army Community Service Center
- Family Program Coordinator
- Family Readiness Group leader for referrals
- Chaplain—a good source for confidential counseling, community contacts, and family support programs
- Red Cross
- Social Work Services
- Community Service agencies—see your local phone book (e.g., Mental Health Department, Social Services Department)

If deployment was to a war zone, natural disaster, or urban riots, be alert for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Symptoms of this disorder include:

- Depression—chronic numb or flat feeling
- Isolation—feeling withdrawn from family and friends
- Alienation—absence of meaningful contact with others
- Avoidance of feelings—inability to feel or express feelings
- Rage—bouts of unexplained anger; may be internal or acted out
- Anxiety—unexplained nervousness, tension, or hyperalert feelings
- Sleep disturbances—insomnia, nightmares, etc.
- Intrusive thoughts—recollections of traumatic experiences that appear for no apparent reason
- Startle responses—unusual, involuntary reactions to loud noises, i.e., automobile backfires

PTSD probably won't go away on its own. It needs to be treated. If you or your spouse experience four or more of these symptoms regularly, seek professional help through one of the agencies listed above.

### Adjustments for Soldiers

	<b>Family</b>	<b>Social</b>	<b>Environmental</b>	<b>Military and Civilian Employment</b>
What changes or adjustments may be waiting for you at home?				
What can you do about these changes, if anything?				
Do you want to do anything?				
How could you benefit from these changes?				



## Sources of Support and Assistance for Army Soldiers and Families

1. *Army Community Service (ACS)*: ACS is the principle source of family readiness for the Army on or near installations. It is staffed by paid professionals and volunteers. Among the services provided are Financial Management Assistance; Exceptional Family Members Program; Child Support Services; Family Advocacy; Relocation Services; and Information, Referral, and Follow-up.
2. *Army National Guard and U.S. Army Reserve Family Program Coordinator Offices*: Although not staffed at ACS levels, these offices provide information and referral services on all of the above-listed services, both military and civilian, for the families of Reserve Component members who normally reside away from Army installations.
3. *Family Assistance Center (FAC)*: FACs may be established on and off Army installations during periods of lengthy deployment. FACs provide assistance and information and referral on such matters as ID cards and DEERS, health care, legal matters, financial counseling and assistance, and family support.
4. *Rear Detachment*: A military unit may create a rear detachment when it deploys for extended periods of time. It is the primary point of contact for family members who have questions or who need assistance prior to and during separations.
5. *Family Readiness Group (FRG)*: The FRG is organized to provide mutual support for a unit's family members. It is affiliated with a specific military unit, ARNG Armory, or USAR Center. The FRG forms the third component of the Army's family support system during deployment. It operates during periods of normal operations as well, in close coordination with the affiliated unit and, if convenient, with ACS or the Reserve Family Program Coordinator's office.
6. *Installation Chaplain*: A good source for confidential counseling, community contacts, and family support programs.







## Going Back to Work

Going back to your pre-mobilization job might cause anxiety and stress similar to that caused by going home. Worries about changes that have taken place, how co-workers will respond to your return, and whether you'll still be interested in the day-to-day activities are common.

Fortunately, the transition is rarely as difficult as it's made out to be, especially if those returning apply the same ideas they used for reunion with family to their return to work. Once again, focus on communicating, being patient, anticipating and accepting changes, and using this as an opportunity to start over again.

Other suggestions include:

- *Before returning, call your supervisor for a briefing on the current situation.* Ask about how your responsibilities were handled during your absence, changes in personnel, and about any other important developments.
- *Avoid "taking charge."* Just like at home, your absence may have forced co-workers to take on new tasks or responsibilities, and they may resent it if they feel you've come back only to "take control" again. Be supportive of decisions that have been made in your absence. And, like at home, remember that even what appear to have been bad decisions made during your absence were probably made under stress.
- *Know your entitlements, both civilian and military.* Ask the appropriate person at work to review the status of your benefits and how your absence affected them. You've probably been briefed about your military entitlements, but it's a good idea to keep the phone numbers on benefits provided to you.
- *Take advantage of EAP or related programs.* If your employer provides an employee assistance program (EAP) or if similar services are available in the community, take advantage of them. Such programs often provide excellent resources for making your transition back to work and family a mentally healthy one.



# Reunion for Families

## Facilitator's Guidelines

This module provides the facilitator with resources needed to plan and conduct a workshop.

**Goal:** Families can prepare for the challenges of reunion before loved ones return.

**Audience:** This session is designed for families. It is most helpful to offer this workshop before reunion occurs.

**Time Required:** 60 minutes

**Room Requirements:** This workshop requires a room large enough to accommodate the participants. It is designed as a group process for roundtable discussions, with 8–10 people at each table. The room should be arranged for maximum visibility of the flip charts, videos, and overheads.

### Facilitator's Preparation:

1. Reserve a location for conducting the workshop that will accommodate the number of participants.
2. The facilitator's job is to lead the workshop, which includes distributing handouts and organizing group flip chart activities. Other tips include:
  - Plan an icebreaker activity.
  - Encourage participation.
  - Check for understanding.
  - Prepare the room.
  - Make the workshop personal.
  - Gather needed material.
  - Enjoy yourself.
  - Offer amenities, such as parking, childcare, and refreshments.
3. Suggested activities are presented in square brackets ([ ]) in the lesson text. The lesson text is meant to assist you and is not intended to be read aloud to the participants. The suggested activities list the visuals, handouts, or group activities that are used at particular points in the workshop.

4. The following list of PowerPoint slides are provided on the CD-ROM, or from the <http://www.goacs.org> website. PowerPoint Notes Pages are included in this handbook (pages 56–63) for your use in teaching the lesson.
  - #8 Reunion for Families
  - #9 Reunion Objectives
  - #10 Reunion Expectations
  - #11 Making Your Reunion Work
  - #12 Communication during Deployment
  - #13 Intimate Relationships
  - #14 Expectations of Change
  - #15 In Closing . . .
5. Preview the video, *Making Your Reunion Work*, if you plan to use it in the workshop. The video script is included in this handbook (pages 135–139) for your use in teaching the lesson. Note: a video is not used for every workshop. Determine if the participants have seen it and expand your workshop, if necessary, to show the video.
6. Prepare flip charts for group use. Divide one sheet into two columns, **Joys** and **Concerns**.
7. Reproduce the necessary number of handouts (Handouts #10–17 for this lesson, pages 101–115). They can be taken to your local installation print plant and easily reproduced. Handouts #11–14 deal with reunion stress reactions from children, physical symptoms of stress, and coping strategies. These provide useful information for the couple dealing with reunion stress. Handout #15 is a questionnaire the instructor can use as a discussion starter, or it can be used as something to take home for personal reflection. Handout #16 is a general guide to community support, and Handout #17 can be used to list local support agencies and phone numbers.
8. Reproduce the **Workshop Evaluation** form for each participant. This form is included at the end of the Handouts section (page 131) and will be used to evaluate each Homecoming and Reunion lesson.
9. Prepare table tents for group discussions:
  - Participants with Children
  - Participants without Children
10. Assemble all other necessary workshop materials and equipment:
  - Workshop materials:**
    - Flip chart paper on one easel and colored markers
    - Extra markers for flip chart paper activity at tables
    - Masking tape for securing charts
    - Pens and pencils for participants' use
  - Equipment:**
    - Overhead transparency projector, or laptop computer with LCD projector and screen
    - Television and VCR

**Reunion for Families  
Workshop Overview  
(Estimated Time: 60 minutes)**

<b>Estimated Time</b>	<b>Presentation</b>	<b>Visual = V Handout = H</b>
5 minutes	Introduction Objectives	V #8 V #9
15 minutes	Reunion Joys and Concerns	Flip Chart activity (in groups)
15 minutes	Getting Back Together	V #10 Video: <i>Making Your Reunion Work</i>
10 minutes	Group Discussion	V #11
5 minutes	Ways to Communicate	V #12
5 minutes	Intimate Relationships  Expectations of Change	V #13 H #10–17 V #14
5 minutes	Conclusion	V #15 Workshop Evaluation

# **Workshop Plan**

## **Reunion for Families**

**(Estimated Time: 60 minutes)**

### **INTRODUCTION**

*[Visual #8: Reunion for Families]*

Welcome to the Reunion for Families workshop. This session will prepare you for the challenges of reunion so that problems can be minimized and positive aspects of reunion can be maximized.

Your soldiers have had a similar workshop in their theater of operations. The purpose of these workshops is to help smooth the adjustments of reunion for both you and your soldier.

The material we will cover applies to all families. Activities are designed so that you will benefit by working with others who have had similar experiences.

Feel free to share your experiences and concerns. Sharing will help all of us to understand that we have a great deal in common when it comes to reunion adjustment.

At this time, please group yourselves according to the designated tables as follows:

- participants with children, and
- participants without children.

*(Allow a few moments for groups to form.)*

### **OBJECTIVES**

*[Visual #9: Reunion Objectives]*

During our time together, we will:

- establish realistic expectations about reunion,
- recognize symptoms of stress, and
- identify helpful and reliable sources of assistance.

## REUNION JOYS AND CONCERNS

I would like to begin by asking you what reunion means to you.

*(Take a few responses.)*

The dictionary states that a reunion is the reuniting of people after a period of separation. Close your eyes for just a moment and picture what your reunion will be like.

Focus on some joys you expect at reunion time.

Now focus on some concerns you have about reunion.

*(Allow participants a few moments to imagine what reunion will be like—both the joys and concerns they may anticipate.)*

*[Flip Chart activity (in groups)]*

There are flip charts at your tables. For the next five minutes, ask a volunteer at each table to list your thoughts regarding joys and concerns about reunion.

*(Allow five minutes to complete.)*

Would someone from each group post their list on the wall, please?

*(Volunteers post flip charts on the wall with masking tape.)*

*[Facilitator leads discussion.]*

Let's take a moment to compare lists. As you can see, many of you are looking forward to the same joys, and many of you have similar concerns. Let's discuss the common items you have on your lists.

*(Take a few moments to discuss and compare some common joys and concerns from the groups' charts.)*

## GETTING BACK TOGETHER

*[Visual #10: Reunion Expectations]*

Expectations and fantasies are an important part of our lives. It does not matter if expectations are joys or concerns about reunion.

No matter what you daydream about, you may not be physically or mentally able to carry out some of your expectations and fantasies. There is no way to predict what reunion will really be like.

The video we are about to see, *Making Your Reunion Work*, has been made especially for reunion. The people portrayed in the video share how their expectations and fantasies are lived out when they are reunited. The purpose of this video is to assist you in understanding the adjustment process after a separation by addressing issues that may apply to each of you.

As you watch the video, note the thoughts and feelings expressed by both the soldier and the spouse. It deals with the things we just talked about—the joys, concerns, expectations, and fantasies of reunion. The video also teaches communication techniques.

*[Show the video, **Making Your Reunion Work**. Allow 15 minutes.]*

## **GROUP DISCUSSION**

*[Visual #11: Making Your Reunion Work]*

*[Facilitator leads discussion]*

Now that the video is over:

- What did you learn from the video?  
*(Take a few responses.)*
- What coping and communication techniques were used?  
*(Take a few responses.)*
- What did you see in the video that may apply to you?  
*(Take a few responses.)*

*(Allow 10 minutes for discussion.)*

One thing to remember from the video and in our group discussions is that not only have you changed, but so has your soldier.

Problems have not magically disappeared. All the images you have about your reunion may not happen. Thus, it is important to understand that things will probably be different from what you expect.

Accepting change is a major factor in reestablishing you and your children's relationship with your soldier after a separation.

Keeping this in mind, if I had asked a room full of soldiers the same questions about their joys and concerns, do you think your list would match with theirs?

*(Take a few responses.)*

Many of their expectations may be the same, but some may be very different. We are beginning to understand that our expectations and theirs may not coincide.

## **WAYS TO COMMUNICATE**

*[Visual #12: Communication during Deployment]*

A key to understanding different expectations is how well we have communicated during the separation and how well we will communicate when reunited. What are some ways we communicate during separation?

*(Take a few responses—answers may include e-mail, letters, cards, tapes, videos, and phone calls.)*

Letters and cards are the least expensive way to communicate. Sometimes, phone calls are available during a deployment, but phone calls can be very expensive. Cassette tapes and videotapes are also good methods of communication. E-mail is excellent, but it may bring only the emotion of the moment, which can be misleading.

Your soldier will return soon, so what do you say or write besides the “kids are okay,” or “I went to work today”?

*(Take a few responses.)*

In the short time before your soldier returns, you could start talking and writing about some of your expectations. Lines of communications should be open and two-way. Encourage your soldier to communicate his or her own expectations for reunion.

Some **joy** expectations you might express are the same ones you listed on the flip chart paper.

You might begin by saying that you would like to go to a movie with your soldier. You might tell your soldier that you would really enjoy a quiet evening alone or a break from the kids. In return, ask your soldier what he or she is looking forward to.

You could also begin to express some of your **concern** expectations. You may be concerned about how you handled the children and the household tasks. You may confide that you enjoyed certain responsibilities.

Continuous communication during separation plays a critical role in maintaining an emotional bond between the soldier and those back home.

By expressing your expectations before reunion and by asking your soldier about his or her expectations, you are establishing a line of communication that could cross many barriers and minimize problems during reunion.

## **INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS**

*[Visual #13: Intimate Relationships]*

*[Distribute Handouts #10–17.]*

Among the major adjustments you face when your soldier returns is your intimate and sexual relationship. The best thing you can do is to go slowly. Don't anticipate normal sexual relations for a few days. There is no need to rush things.

You and your partner are likely to feel like strangers with each other, and strangers do not have good sexual relations. Take the time to let your sexual relationship reestablish itself naturally. Rushing sexual relations could create major communication problems.

A few ideas that may be helpful during this adjustment period are:

- Try not to rush.
- Talk a lot about how you feel.
- Ask how your partner feels about intimacy and sexual matters.
- Read Handout #10, *Reestablishing Intimate and Sexual Relations*, for other helpful ideas.

No matter how well prepared you are or how well you communicated during deployment, there are many adjustments that you and your children to will face when your soldier returns.

## **EXPECTATIONS OF CHANGE**

*[Visual # 14: Expectations of Change]*

You can view change in different ways: as a crisis or threat; or as either a hidden opportunity to grow and mature, or as a slight disruption in the way things used to be. If change is viewed as a crisis or threat, people try to pretend the change did not happen. They may use inappropriate coping strategies. They may avoid or deny the change. They may spend time wishing things were the way they used to be.

A poor coping mechanism for change is to blame everyone else and everything else for the change. This leads to a dead end and may cause even more problems.

Good coping mechanisms for change could be viewed as a hidden opportunity or as a slight disruption in the way things were. People who view change in this positive way acknowledge that change has occurred and that it can become an accepted part of life. Often, this view of change mobilizes people into new ways of thinking, which leads to a fresh beginning.

What changes might have happened while your soldier was gone?

Do you view these changes as a hidden opportunity or as merely a slight disruption of the way things were?

Do you view these changes as a crisis or threat?

Ideally, all change should be viewed as hidden opportunity. Remember that no matter how accepting of change you are, it takes time for the impact of change to become integrated into your way of thinking or acting.

There is no definite period for change to begin to feel normal. On average, it takes several weeks or even months, depending on the length of separation and on your ability to accept change.

## **CONCLUSION**

*[Visual #15: In Closing . . .]*

As we have discussed, reunion can be a challenge. But if you begin right now to communicate your expectations and to encourage your soldier to do the same, the transition will be easier.

Keep in mind that there will be stresses because of the changes that have occurred. Try to look at change as a hidden opportunity or a slight disruption, and not a crisis or a dead end. A positive outlook will make for a smoother adjustment.

Good luck in your reunion!

*[Have participants complete the Workshop Evaluation form.]*





## Introduction

Welcome to the Reunion for Families workshop. This session will prepare you for the challenges of reunion so that problems can be minimized and positive aspects of reunion can be maximized.

Your soldiers have had a similar workshop in their theater of operations. The purpose of these workshops is to help smooth the adjustments of reunion for both you and your soldier.

The material we will cover applies to all families. Activities are designed so that you will benefit by working with others who have had similar experiences.

Feel free to share your experiences and concerns. Sharing will help all of us to understand that we have a great deal in common when it comes to reunion adjustment.

At this time, please group yourselves according to the designated tables as follows:

- participants with children, and
- participants without children.

*(Allow a few moments for groups to form.)*

**Reunion Objectives**

- Establish realistic expectations about reunion.
- Recognize symptoms of stress.
- Identify helpful and reliable sources of assistance.

OPERATION  
**READY**  
Ready to Reunite and Support all US

During our time together, we will:

- establish realistic expectations about reunion,
- recognize symptoms of stress, and
- identify helpful and reliable sources of assistance.

### **Reunion Joys and Concerns**

I would like to begin by asking you what reunion means to you.

The dictionary states that a reunion is the reuniting of people after a period of separation. Close your eyes for just a moment and picture what your reunion will be like.

Focus on some joys you expect at reunion time.

Now focus on some concerns you have about reunion. *[Allow a few minutes.]*

*[Flip chart activity (in groups)]*

There are flip charts at your tables. For the next five minutes, ask a volunteer at each table to list your thoughts regarding joys and concerns about reunion.

*(Allow five minutes to complete) (Volunteers post flip charts on wall with masking tape.)*

*[Facilitator leads discussion]*

Let's take a moment to compare lists. As you can see, many of you are looking forward to the same joys, and many of you have similar concerns. Let's discuss the common items you have on your lists.

*[Discuss and compare some common joys and concerns from the groups' charts.]*

## Reunion Expectations

- Expectations and fantasies are important.
- These are a part of every reunion.
- They keep us entertained and interested.
- They should not be taken seriously.



### Getting Back Together

Expectations and fantasies are an important part of our lives. It does not matter if expectations are joys or concerns about reunion.

No matter what you daydream about, you may not be physically or mentally able to carry out some of your expectations and fantasies. There is no way to predict what reunion will really be like.

The video we are about to see, *Making Your Reunion Work*, has been made especially for reunion. The people portrayed in the video share how their expectations and fantasies are lived out when they are reunited. The purpose of this video is to assist you in understanding the adjustment process after a separation by addressing issues that may apply to each of you.

As you watch the video, note the thoughts and feelings expressed by both the soldier and the spouse. It deals with the things we just talked about—the joys, concerns, expectations, and fantasies of reunion. The video also teaches communication techniques.

*[Show the video, **Making Your Reunion Work**. Allow 15 minutes.]*

## Making Your Reunion Work

- What did you learn from the video?
- What coping and communication skills were used?
- What did you see in the video regarding expectations of reunion?
- Are your expectations realistic or not?



### Group Discussion

*[Facilitator leads discussion]*

Now that the video is over:

- What did you learn from the video?
- What coping and communication techniques were used?
- What did you see in the video that may apply to you?

*(Allow 10 minutes for discussion.)*

One thing to remember from the video and in our group discussions is that not only have you changed, but so has your soldier.

Problems have not magically disappeared. All the images you have about your reunion may not happen. Thus, it is important to understand that things will probably be different from what you expect.

Accepting change is a major factor in reestablishing you and your children's relationship with your soldier after a separation.

Keeping this in mind, if I had asked a room full of soldiers the same questions about their joys and concerns, do you think your list would match with theirs? *(Take a few responses.)*

Many of their expectations may be the same, but some may be very different. We are beginning to understand that our expectations and theirs may not coincide.

## Communication during Deployment

What have you been communicating?

- Kids are OK?
- I went to work today?

or

- Your expectations of reunion?
- What does your loved one expect of you?

OPERATION  
**READY**  
How to Think and Speak at War

A key to understanding different expectations is how well we have communicated during the separation and how well we will communicate when reunited. What are some ways we communicate during separation? (*Take a few responses.*)

Letters and cards are the least expensive way to communicate. Sometimes, phone calls are available during a deployment, but phone calls can be very expensive. Cassette tapes and videotapes are also good methods of communication. E-mail is excellent, but it may bring only the emotion of the moment, which can be misleading.

Your soldier will return soon; so what do you say or write besides the “kids are okay,” or “I went to work today”? In the short time before your soldier returns, you could start talking and writing about some of your expectations. Lines of communications should be open and two-way. Encourage your soldier to communicate his/her own expectations for reunion.

Some **joy** expectations you might express are the same ones you listed on the flip chart paper. You might begin by saying that you would like to go to a movie with your soldier. You might tell your soldier that you would really enjoy a quiet evening alone or a break from the kids. In return, ask your soldier what he/she is looking forward to.

You could also begin to express some of your **concern** expectations. You may be concerned about how you handled the children and the household tasks. You may confide that you enjoyed certain responsibilities.

Continuous communication during separation plays a critical role in maintaining an emotional bond between the soldier and those back home. By expressing your expectations before reunion and by asking your soldier about his/her expectations, you are establishing a line of communication that could cross many barriers and minimize problems during reunion.

## Intimate Relationships

- Intimacy and sexual relationship may be a major adjustment.
- Re-establish this relationship slowly and naturally.
- Talk about how you feel.
- Ask how your partner feels about intimacy and sexual relationships.
- Refer to Homecoming and Reunion Handouts 10 - 17.



*[Distribute Handouts 10 - 17.]*

Among the major adjustments you face when your soldier returns is your intimate and sexual relationship. The best thing you can do is to go slowly. Don't anticipate normal sexual relations for a few days. There is no need to rush things.

You and your partner are likely to feel like strangers with each other, and strangers do not have good sexual relations. Take the time to let your sexual relationship reestablish itself naturally. Rushing sexual relations could create major communication problems.

A few ideas that may be helpful during this adjustment period are:

- Try not to rush.
- Talk a lot about how you feel.
- Ask how your partner feels about intimacy and sexual matters.
- Read Handout #10, *Reestablishing Intimate and Sexual Relations*, for other helpful ideas.

No matter how well prepared you are or how well you communicated during deployment, there are many adjustments that you and your children to will face when your soldier returns.

## Expectations of Change

- Crisis or Threat
- Avoidance
- Denial
- Blaming others
- Fear
- Hidden Opportunity
- Acknowledgement
- Action
- Personal Responsibility
- Face it – it's constant

OPERATION  
**READY**  
Return to Training and Support of the

You can view change in different ways: as a crisis or threat; or as either a hidden opportunity to grow and mature, or as a slight disruption in the way things used to be. If change is viewed as a crisis or threat, people try to pretend the change did not happen. They may use inappropriate coping strategies. They may avoid or deny the change. They may spend time wishing things were the way they used to be.

A poor coping mechanism for change is to blame everyone else and everything else for the change. This leads to a dead end and may cause even more problems.

Good coping mechanisms for change could be viewed as a hidden opportunity or as a slight disruption in the way things were. People who view change in this positive way acknowledge that change has occurred, and that it can become an accepted part of life. Often, this view of change mobilizes people into new ways of thinking, which leads to a fresh beginning.

What changes might have happened while your soldier was gone? Do you view these changes as a hidden opportunity or as merely a slight disruption of the way things were?

Do you view these changes as a crisis or threat?

Ideally, all change should be viewed as hidden opportunity. Remember that no matter how accepting of change you are, it takes time for the impact of change to become integrated into your way of thinking or acting.

There is no definite period for change to begin to feel normal. On average, it takes several weeks or even months, depending on the length of separation and on your ability to accept change.

**In Closing . . .**

- Reunion may be a challenge.
- Begin immediately to communicate your expectations.
- Encourage your soldier to do the same.
- Have a great reunion!



The logo for Operation READY, featuring the word 'OPERATION' in small letters above 'READY' in large, bold letters, with a tagline below it.

As we have discussed, reunion can be a challenge. But if you begin right now to communicate your expectations and to encourage your soldier to do the same, the transition will be easier.

Keep in mind that there will be stresses because of the changes that have occurred. Try to look at change as a hidden opportunity or a slight disruption, and not a crisis or a dead end. A positive outlook will make for a smoother adjustment.

Good luck in your reunion!

*[Have participants complete the Workshop Evaluation form.]*

## Reestablishing Intimate and Sexual Relations

One adjustment you may face when military separation occurs is reestablishing your intimate and sexual relationships.

Most military couples face the question, “How can two people work together toward achieving intimacy when one of them is often absent from the relationship for extended periods?”

Military couples often find that reunion may bring out feelings of uneasiness and that their personal relationship is strained. Through an understanding of the effects of separation, you can better cope with the stress that accompanies reunion.

The following information about communication barriers and enhancers may help you to reconnect with your partner.

### **Barriers to intimate communication and sexual relations may include:**

- unrealistic fantasies and expectations;
- feeling anxiety about engaging in intimacy and sex;
- feeling that your partner is a stranger;
- feelings of anger, hostility, stress, or negative feelings about the separation;
- concern about faithfulness to your relationship; and
- feeling that sexual relations need to be rushed to make up for lost time.

### **Communication enhancers:**

- Communication will help bring you closer together. It gives you time to become reacquainted, and it helps to let your partner know how you feel.
- Understand that feelings of anxiety are a very normal part of the reunion process.
- You have been apart from each other, and you both have grown. Take time to get to know each other again.
- Discuss your negative feelings and frustrations. Fear of losing your partner plays a major role in developing negative feelings. Listen carefully to what your partner is trying to communicate to you.
- Don't assume the worst about your partner. If you have concerns about fidelity, talk to your chaplain, or find a counselor who can help you work through these feelings.
- Besides communication, allow yourself time to readjust to being together again. Go slowly, and enjoy your reunion.



## Children's Reaction to Soldier's Return

Reactions	Techniques
<b>Birth to 1 Year</b>	
Cries Fusses Pulls away from you Clings to spouse or caregiver Has problems with elimination Changes their sleeping and eating habits Does not recognize you	Hold the baby, and hug him/her a lot Bathe and change your baby; feed and play with him/her Relax and be patient; he/she will warm up to you after a while
<b>1 to 3 Years</b>	
Shyness Clinging Does not recognize you Cries Has temper tantrums Regresses—no longer toilet trained	Don't force holding, hugging, kissing. Give them space. Give them time to warm up. Be gentle and fun. Sit at their level.
<b>3 to 5 Years</b>	
Demonstrates anger Acts out to get your attention; needs proof that you're real Is demanding Feels guilty for making the parent go away Talks a lot to bring you up to date	Listen to them. Accept their feelings. Play with them. Reinforce that you love them. Find out the new things on TV, at preschool, books.
<b>5 to 12 Years</b>	
Isn't good enough Dreads your return because of discipline Boasts about Army and parent	Review pictures, schoolwork, activities, scrap books. Praise what they have done. Try not to criticize.
<b>13 to 18 Years</b>	
Is excited Feels guilty because they don't live up to standards Is concerned about rules and responsibilities Feels too old or is unwilling to change plans to accommodate parent Is rebellious	Share what has happened with you. Listen with undivided attention. Don't be judgmental. Respect privacy and friends. Don't tease about fashion, music.



## Reunion Stress

Whether you are a single or a married soldier, a single-parent soldier, a spouse, or a child, you will face certain stressors associated with reunion. Below are some of the normal stressors you may face, along with some hints to help you adjust to the changes in your life.

### Stressors

- Emotional letdown
- Restlessness or sleeplessness
- No one understands what I have been through.
- Was my spouse faithful?
- Did my spouse miss me?
- My friends seem different.
- I didn't expect things to change.
- Other people's concerns seem petty.
- I feel like a stranger at home.
- How will the children react?
- Will the role I have filled change?
- Were my children treated well by their guardian?
- Can I make up for lost time?
- Did I handle things the right way?
- When will things feel normal again?
- I am concerned about finances.
- I am concerned about future deployments.
- The children appear confused and uncertain.

### Helpful Hints

- Accept that things may be different.
- Talk about your experiences.
- Go slowly—don't try to make up for lost time.
- Spend quality time with your children.
- Reassure your children. Change often frightens them.
- Curb your desire to take control or to spend money.
- Accept that your partner may be different.
- Intimate relationships may be awkward at first.
- Take time to get reacquainted.
- Forget your fantasies. Reality may be quite different.
- Take time to readjust.
- Communicate with your partner and your family.



## Stress Symptoms

The following stress danger signals focus on the medical and physical symptoms common to tension stress. Your physician can best determine your medical condition, but these guidelines will provide you with a general indication of your stress level. Check those signals that you have noticed:

- General irritability, hyperexcitability, depression
- Pounding of the heart
- Dryness of mouth and throat
- Impulsive behavior, emotional instability
- Overpowering urge to cry or run
- Inability to concentrate, flight of thoughts
- Feelings of unreality, weakness, dizziness, fatigue
- Floating anxiety, being afraid and not knowing why
- Emotional tension and alertness
- Trembling, nervous tics, easily startled
- High-pitched, nervous laughter
- Stuttering, other speech difficulties
- Bruxism, or grinding of the teeth
- Insomnia
- Hyperactivity, increased tendency to move about
- Excessive sweating
- Frequent need to urinate
- Diarrhea, indigestion, queasiness, vomiting
- Migraine headaches
- Pain in neck or lower back
- Loss of appetite or excessive appetite
- Increased use of prescribed drugs
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Nightmares
- Accident proneness

The more signs that are present, the stronger the likelihood that there is a serious problem. See your physician if you are concerned about these symptoms.



## Reunion Stress-Coping Strategies

Most military families find that reunions are at least as stressful as separations. This seems to be true for couples with children, couples without children, single parents, and single soldiers coming back to friends and family. Following are some coping strategies that may help:

*Expect to have a few doubts and worries.*

- Your partner may think you don't need them anymore.
- Anxiety is a natural and normal part of reunion.

*Forget your fantasies.*

- Give up any fantasies or expectations you may have about what reunion day should be.
- Take it easy, and let things happen naturally.

*Don't expect things to be exactly the way they were before the separation.*

- You've changed; your spouse has changed, and your children have changed.
- Don't get upset by things that are done differently.

*Tips on helping children adjust:*

- Children can get angry about their parent being gone.
- Toddlers and preschoolers may act like the returning parent is a stranger. They might not understand about "duty" or "mission."
- Elementary school children and teenagers may understand but show anger or fear by "acting out."
- Get reacquainted, and take things slowly.
- Children are resilient.

*Accept and share your feelings.*

- Talk a lot about your feelings, and let your partner talk, too.
- Really listen. Make sure you fully understand what your partner is saying before you respond.
- Communication is the key.

*See things from the other person's point of view.*

- An awareness that the soldier no longer feels a part of things helps us to understand why they can be upset by even the smallest changes.
- Recognition of the pride a partner feels in the way he/she handled everything alone will help the soldier to understand the importance of accepting changes made during separation.

- Children are people too. Try to understand how they feel. Change and uncertainty is often very frightening for them, so be patient.

Your family relationships should regain normalcy in a few months. However, if you had problems before you left, those problems may still be there when you get back. If you continue having problems adjusting after a few months, seek help through one of the following offices:

- The Army Community Service Center
- Family Program Coordinator
- Family Readiness Group leader for referrals
- Chaplain—a good source for confidential counseling, community contacts, and family support programs
- Red Cross
- Social Work Services
- Community Service agencies—see your local phone book (e.g., Mental Health Department, Social Services Department)

If deployment was to a war zone, natural disaster, or urban riots, be alert for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Symptoms of this disorder include:

- Depression—chronic numb or flat feeling
- Isolation—feeling withdrawn from family and friends
- Alienation—absence of meaningful contact with others
- Avoidance of feelings—inability to feel or express feelings
- Rage—bouts of unexplained anger; may be internal or acted out
- Anxiety—unexplained nervousness, tension, or hyperalert feelings
- Sleep disturbances—insomnia, nightmares, etc.
- Intrusive thoughts—recollections of traumatic experiences that appear for no apparent reason
- Startle responses—unusual, involuntary reactions to loud noises, i.e., automobile backfires

PTSD probably won't go away on its own. It needs to be treated. If you or your spouse experience four or more of these symptoms regularly, seek professional help through one of the agencies listed above.

## Adjustments for Families

*Directions:* Take a few minutes to look at the following questions. Write out your answers in the space provided. You will have an opportunity to discuss your answers in your group afterwards.

1. How will it feel to have your soldier back in the house? Be honest about the good and the not-so-good aspects.

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2. How do you think your children will react?

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3. How will your soldier's return affect your work schedule, cooking habits, cleaning habits, free time, and general way of doing things?

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4. Have you developed new interests or friendships? Will these change when your soldier returns?

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5. What do you think will be the biggest change in your life when your soldier returns?

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## Sources of Support and Assistance for Army Soldiers and Families

1. *Army Community Service (ACS)*: ACS is principle source of family readiness for the Army on or near installations. It is staffed by paid professionals and volunteers. Among the services provided are Financial Management Assistance; Exceptional Family Members Program; Child Support Services; Family Advocacy; Relocation Services; and Information, Referral, and Follow-up.
2. *Army National Guard and U.S. Army Reserve Family Program Coordinator Offices*: Although not staffed at ACS levels, these offices provide information and referral services on all of the above-listed services, both military and civilian, for the families of Reserve Component members who normally reside away from Army installations.
3. *Family Assistance Center (FAC)*: FACs may be established on and off Army installations during periods of lengthy deployment. FACs provide assistance and information and referral on such matters as ID cards and DEERS, health care, legal matters, financial counseling and assistance, and family support.
4. *Rear Detachment*: A military unit may create a rear detachment when it deploys for extended periods of time. It is the primary point of contact for family members who have questions or who need assistance prior to and during separations.
5. *Family Readiness Group (FRG)*: The FRG is organized to provide mutual support for a unit's family members. It is affiliated with a specific military unit, ARNG Armory, or USAR Center. The FRG forms the third component of the Army's family support system during deployment. It operates during periods of normal operations as well, in close coordination with the affiliated unit and, if convenient, with ACS or the Reserve Family Program Coordinator's office.
6. *Installation Chaplain*: A good source for confidential counseling, community contacts, and family support programs.







# Communication Techniques Workshop/Retreat

## Facilitator's Guidelines

This module provides the facilitator with resources needed to plan and conduct a workshop or a retreat.

**Goal:** Soldiers and family members can recognize and deal with problems that may arise or persist after the soldier returns.

**Audience:** This session is designed for married couples to attend together, as well as single parents and older children. It should be taught as soon after reunion as is practical.

**Time Required:** Three to four hours, depending on the needs of the group and the setting (workshop or retreat).

**Room Requirements:** This workshop requires a room large enough to accommodate the number of participants. It is designed as a group process for roundtable discussions, with 8–10 people at each table. The room should be arranged for maximum visibility of the flip charts, videos, and overheads.

### Facilitator's Preparation:

1. Reserve a location for conducting the workshop or retreat that will accommodate the number of participants.
2. The facilitator's job is to lead the workshop/retreat, which includes distributing handouts and organizing group flip chart activities. Other tips include:
  - Plan an icebreaker activity.
  - Encourage participation.
  - Check for understanding.
  - Prepare the room.
  - Make the workshop personal.
  - Gather needed material.
  - Enjoy yourself.
  - Offer amenities, such as childcare, parking, and refreshments

3. Suggested activities are presented in square brackets ([ ]) in the lesson text. The lesson text is meant to assist you and is not intended to be read aloud to the participants. The suggested activities list the visuals, handouts, or group activities that are used at particular points in the workshop.
4. The following list of PowerPoint slides are provided on the CD-ROM, or from the <http://www.goacs.org> website. PowerPoint Notes Pages are included in this handbook (pages 64–74) for your use in teaching the lesson.

#16 Communications Techniques

#17 Objectives

#18 Reunion

#19 Reunion

#20 Reunion

#21 Making the Adjustment

#22 How Do People Communicate?

#23 Three Parts of a Message

#24 Communications Skills

#25 Feedback

#26 Conclusion

5. Preview the video, *Making Your Reunion Work*, if you plan to use it in the workshop. The video script is included in this handbook (pages 135–139) for your use in teaching the lesson. A video is not used for every workshop. Determine if the participants have seen it and expand your workshop, if necessary, to show the video.
6. Prepare table tents that have group designations on them and place on tables before workshop begins:
  - Couples with Children
  - Couples without Children
  - Single-Parent Soldiers
7. Prepare a flip chart (for facilitator use) with the following title:

**Communication Roadblocks** (single sheet)
8. Reproduce the necessary numbers of handouts (Handouts #18–20 for this lesson, pages 117–125). They can be taken to your local installation print plant and easily reproduced. You may want to add other handouts to it as well.
9. Reproduce the **Workshop Evaluation** form for each participant. This form is included at the end of the Handouts section (page 131) and will be used to evaluate each Homecoming and Reunion lesson.

10. Assemble all other needed workshop materials and equipment:

**Workshop Materials:**

- Flip chart paper on one easel with colored markers
- Extra markers for flip chart paper activity at tables
- Masking tape for securing charts
- Pens and pencils for participants' use

**Equipment:**

- Overhead transparency projector, or laptop computer with LCD projector and screen
- Television and VCR

## FOR THE FACILITATOR

This workshop/retreat can be presented over an eight-hour day at a comfortable facility with a catered meal, or it can be combined into an overnight retreat with the addition of other resources. A two-day retreat could be conducted with this workshop by combining it with the “Reunion Stress Management” lesson from the Operation READY Homecoming and Reunion series. Or the “Reunion Stress Management” lesson could be presented as a stand-alone workshop/retreat as this one is.

If an overnight retreat is planned, other resources could be used, such as movies dealing with marriage relationships. Some suggestions are *Jerry McGuire*, *Father of the Bride I and II*, *Shadowlands*, *Casablanca*, *The Preacher's Wife*, *The Bishop's Wife*, or others of similar interest and subject. These could be shown in the evening as informal get-togethers and referred to in the next day session, if desired.

A chaplain or social work services staff member could be asked to lead parts of the workshop. The presence of these professionals provides additional authenticity for the retreat, as well as on-the-spot counseling should it be needed.

Though the workshop time is three to four hours of contact time, additional time should be provided for participants to relax, enjoy the company of others, play and converse, or spend time alone or as a couple to process what they are learning. A retreat should not be rushed but should be a leisurely, relaxing experience.

**Communication Techniques Workshop/Retreat  
Workshop Overview  
(Contact Time: 3 to 4 hours)**

<b>Estimated Time</b>	<b>Presentation Section</b>	<b>Visual = V Handout = H</b>
30–45 minutes 5 minutes 15 minutes 10 minutes	Introduction and Icebreaker Objectives Setting the Stage with the Video Break	V #16 V #17 Video: <i>Making Your Reunion Work</i>
30 minutes  10 minutes 20 minutes 15 minutes	Reunion  One Couple’s Story  Changes Group Activity  Break	V #18 H #18  V #19 H #19, Question #1 Flip chart activity Group reports
5 minutes 5 minutes 15 minutes 20 minutes	Renegotiation Making the Adjustment Importance of Change Prioritizing Change  <b>End of first session</b>	V #20 V #21 H #19, Question #2 H #19, Question #3
	Meal/snack break	
	<b>Begin second session</b>	
10 minutes 10 minutes 25 minutes 15 minutes 15 minutes 10 minutes	Meaningful Communication  Roadblocks to Communication  Communication Skills Communication Exercise Break	V #22 V #23 Communication Roadblocks flip chart activity V #24 H #20
10 minutes 10 minutes	Feedback Thinking It Through	V #25 H #19, Question #4
10 minutes	Conclusion	V #26 Workshop Evaluation

# Workshop Plan

## Communication Techniques Workshop/Retreat

(Contact Time: 3 to 4 hours)

### INTRODUCTION

*[Visual #16: Communication Techniques]*

Welcome home!

*(Make appropriate remarks depending on the deployment.)*

This reunion workshop is for married couples and their families, and single parents and their families. Its purpose is to assist you with the challenges you may face now that you are back home.

*[Do an icebreaker exercise to introduce all members of the group to each other. Good icebreakers are found in AFTB materials and other sources.]*

I would like to invite you to join in small groups to facilitate discussion with others who have shared similar experiences and challenges. At this time, please group yourselves according to your personal situation. Tables are designated with the following name tents:

- Couples with Children
- Couples without Children
- Single Parents

*(Allow groups to form.)*

You will be using activities that may help you meet the challenges you face during your reunion readjustment phase.

### OBJECTIVES

*[Visual #17: Objectives]*

- to develop an understanding of the challenges of readjustment,
- to develop an awareness of positive interpersonal communication strategies, and
- to identify effective communication techniques

*[Show the video, **Making Your Reunion Work**, to set the stage for discussion later and to introduce the subject. Take a 10-minute break after the film.]*

## **REUNION**

*[Visual #18: Reunion—Expectations]*

I am going to ask you how your reunion has been so far. You do not have to raise your hands or stand up—just think about your experiences.

Was reunion everything you thought it would be?

Did it live up to your expectations and fantasies? Did you live up to your expectations and fantasies? Be honest with yourself.

*[Distribute Handout #18.]*

One expectation that many of you have already faced concerns your intimate relationship with your spouse. You may have had fantasies that were really wonderful, but those fantasies may not have been realized when you were together again. It will take time to get over some of the awkwardness of reestablishing intimacy. Intimacy means closeness, trust, and communication. After separation, reestablishing intimacy will not happen immediately. Take things slowly, and enjoy your reunion.

How many of you discussed your reunion expectations with your family or soldier before your reunion?

*[Ask for a show of hands. Now ask a pre-selected couple to come forward to tell their story (candidly) of their reunion, how it worked, the humorous elements, the common anxieties, and the outcomes.]*

I know many of you who were deployed had the opportunity to attend reunion workshops before you returned. Those who remained at home may have attended similar workshops.

One point of the workshop was to encourage you to express your expectations before your reunion. By doing so, you could understand each other's anticipations.

After a separation, your expectations of each other may have changed. These new expectations may be stumbling blocks, or they may be opportunities for growth.

Our goal today is to build constructively and positively on changes that may have occurred in your lives during your separation.

## **Changes**

*[Visual #19: Reunion—Changes]*

*[Distribute Handout #19.]*

You will be working with this handout during the workshop. We will address each of the four questions, one at a time, and at the end of the workshop, you will have some tools to help you resolve interpersonal conflicts. You will also have some strategies for better communication.

*[Handout #19, Question #1]*

I would like for each of you to take about 10 minutes to complete Question #1 in the handout. Remember, these are your answers and your impressions. There are no right or wrong answers.

*(Allow 10 minutes to complete.)*

## **Group Activity**

*[Flip Chart Activity (in groups)]*

At your tables are flip charts for recording your responses. Ask a volunteer to write some changes on the paper that you noted in Question #1.

After you have finished, we will discuss what your groups have written.

*(Allow 10 minutes to complete.)*

*[Group Reports]*

Let's take a few minutes to look at the list. Let a person from each table tape the paper to the wall. Volunteers can tell us what your group discussed about the changes you face.

*(Allow two minutes for each group report.)*

As you can see, you are facing many changes. Some people think that reunion is more stressful than deployment.

You may have had a fantasy that everything would be perfect when the unit returns. This is not necessarily so.

You will be going through a period of readjustment. You may have already experienced some readjustment stress. Stress is a normal, healthy reaction to change.

You may also have experienced a time known as the “honeymoon period.” This is when everything is wonderful shortly after a soldier’s return.

Maybe you have **not** experienced a honeymoon period. Problems that occurred before deployment may still be there when you are reunited.

Whether reunion was a honeymoon, a thunderstorm, or anything in between, there will come a time when you will need to look at the changes that have taken place in your life. Some of these changes may require renegotiation.

*[Take a 15-minute break.]*

## **Renegotiation**

*[Visual #20: Reunion—Renegotiation]*

Renegotiation raises many questions. It relates to the “where do I fit in” syndrome. For the soldier, renegotiation may involve such questions as:

- Where or how do I fit into my job?
- Where or how do I fit in with my friends?
- Where or how do I fit in with my family?
- Am I still needed?
- What will our intimate relationship be like?
- Will my spouse still love me?

For the family, renegotiation may involve such questions as:

- Do I have to change my way of doing things?
- Do I have to give up paying the bills? I enjoyed it.
- Do I have to start cooking huge meals again?
- What will my relationship be with my spouse?
- Will my spouse still love me?

Do we need to change any legal arrangements made before deployment, like powers of attorney, wills, guardianships, or bank accounts?

Children may wonder: Do I have to start doing things Dad’s or Mom’s way now? Will my curfew change?

These are some issues that you will need to discuss in the renegotiation stage. As you can see by your charts, you have already been thinking about these issues.

## **MAKING THE ADJUSTMENT**

*[Visual 21: Making the Adjustment]*

You have looked at some challenges you face in your relationships due to the changes that occurred during the deployment. Let's talk about ways to make your adjustment easier.

### **The Importance of Change**

*[Handout #19, Question #2]*

Look at the next page in your activity handout. Question #2 asks you to look at some changes you listed in Question #1. It then asks you how important the change was to you and whether you want to talk about it.

*(Allow 10 minutes to complete.)*

### **Prioritizing Change**

*[Handout #19, Question #3]*

Look at Question #3 on your activity handout. It refers to Question #2. Select several changes you would like to talk about. Answer each of the three areas posed in Question #3.

*(Allow 10 minutes to complete.)*

I know you are beginning to wonder where all of this is leading. It is leading to better interpersonal communication.

Let's take the rest of the time we have together to explore communication in depth. Then you may complete the activity handout. When you finish, you will have some ideas to help you to communicate more effectively.

# Second Session—Workshop Plan

## Communication Techniques Workshop/Retreat

### MEANINGFUL COMMUNICATION

*[Visual #22: How Do People Communicate?]*

Meaningful communication sometimes requires great effort, but at reunion time, it is **very important**.

Can you tell me several ways that people communicate?

*(Take a few responses—answers may include words, actions, body language.)*

As we communicate with another person, several things take place. We send a message to someone and hope they receive it the way we intend it. If they do—**success**. If not—**trouble**.

The trouble comes when the other person misinterprets what we have said, does not understand the words we have used, or there is too much emotion involved in the conversation.

*[Visual #23: Three Parts of a Message]*

As you can see, much more than mere words is involved in the communication process. This is why the best human communication happens when two people are face to face and not talking on a telephone or even a videophone. Since body language and tone of voice convey most of the message (93 percent!), we need to pay close attention to whom we're talking or listening, in order to hear everything that is being said. Then we can "hear between the lines" and sense the feelings as well as the verbal content.

### ROADBLOCKS TO COMMUNICATION

*[Flip Chart Activity (Facilitator) Communication Roadblocks]*

If there is a problem in communication and there are feelings of anger, hurt, or confusion, the process can be difficult. Roadblocks may develop if the feelings are not dealt with first.

These roadblocks may lead to interpersonal conflict. Roadblocks are the way people say things or the words people use that cause you to stop listening or paying attention to the person who is talking.

What are some roadblocks to communication? You can name these aloud, and I will write your responses on the flip chart paper.

*(Take a few responses—answers may include a hostile tone or loudness of voice, placing blame, phrases such as “you always . . .”, or “you never . . .” negative comments, etc.)*

So if these are the roadblocks, what could we do to avoid them?

*(Take a few responses—answers may include listening, feedback.)*

## **COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

*[Visual #24: Communication Skills]*

By improving our communication skills, we can improve the quality of our relationships with others.

As you can see on the overhead, keys to effective communication include tuning in, listening, giving feedback, and responding.

To “tune in” and become a good listener you can:

- Stop talking, and try not to interrupt.
- Get rid of distractions.
- Make eye contact with the other person.
- Concentrate on the message being sent to you.
- “Listen between the lines” by watching body language and tone of voice.

*[Distribute Handout #20.]*

This handout describes the three levels of listening. *[Go over these.]* How many of you believe you operate at that deepest level when listening to your partner?

Let’s try it for fun. I want you to work as couples for this exercise. Turn your chairs to face one another, and spouses will talk to each other. Single parents with children will talk to each other, or if your children are not present, find another single parent.

We will let the wives speak to the husbands for two minutes on any subject they want to discuss. During this time the husband can’t say anything. He is to listen and give his wife undivided attention. At the end of the two minutes (I’ll let you know), all of the husbands will repeat back what they heard their wives saying, along with what they think their wives were feeling.

Once that's done, reverse roles, and let the husband talk for two minutes; the wife will listen and repeat back what he said, as well as his feelings.

When you are done, discuss the exercise with each other. Was it difficult? Why?

*[Take a 10-minute break.]*

## **FEEDBACK**

*[Visual #25: Feedback]*

Feedback reflects the message as you understand it after you have listened at the deepest level you can. For example, your spouse:

- **Sends** a message:  
“When will you be deployed again?”
- You **receive** that message, determine what is meant, and reflect what you heard:  
“Are you concerned about how long we have together?”
- The sender then **responds** or clarifies what was actually meant:  
“Yes (or No). I was wondering about \_\_\_\_.”

By using feedback, misinterpretation and conflict about what was said can be avoided.

**But** you cannot listen effectively if you are too tired, you are rushed, or if you are not accepting of the person or the situation.

Often, if one of these conditions exists, you can tell the other person that you know it is important to them, but you are too tired, or whatever. “Could we talk about it later?” is an honest response.

Take a moment to look back at the roadblocks listed on the flip charts and your answers to Question #3 in the activity handout.

Pinpoint one important change that has happened since your reunion. Think about what we have discussed about communicating.

*(Allow a few minutes for participants to think this through.)*

## THINKING IT THROUGH

*[Handout #19, Question #4]*

Using the skills you have learned, take a few minutes to write down some ways you would like to approach the person(s) involved in the change.

Using the space allotted to Question #4 in the activity handout, write what you would like to say to them.

This activity will help you sort out what you want to say ahead of time. When you finally address the individual involved in the change, you can then rationally explain your concerns.

## CONCLUSION

*[Visual #26: Conclusion]*

The key to returning home and readjusting is to recognize that changes have occurred. These changes may cause conflicts.

By addressing them in sequence as you have done here, you can pinpoint which changes are causing you the most concern.

I think you will agree that this is not an easy time. Readjustment requires patience and skill. We have seen how the changes that everyone has gone through affect you and your relationships.

Remember that the way to reunion success is through communication. It is essential not only to communicate how you are feeling but also to listen to what those around you are saying and feeling. Talk openly, but also listen carefully.

*[Have participants complete the Workshop Evaluation form.]*





Welcome home!

*(Make appropriate remarks depending on the deployment.)*

This reunion workshop is for married couples and their families, and single parents and their families. Its purpose is to assist you with the challenges you may face now that you are back home.

*[Do an icebreaker exercise to introduce all members of the group to each other. Good icebreakers are found in AFTB materials and other sources.]*

I would like to invite you to join in small groups to facilitate discussion with others who have shared similar experiences and challenges. At this time, please group yourselves according to your personal situation. Tables are designated with the following name tents:

- Couples with Children
- Couples without Children
- Single Parents

*(Allow groups to form.)*

You will be using activities that may help you meet the challenges you face during your reunion readjustment phase.

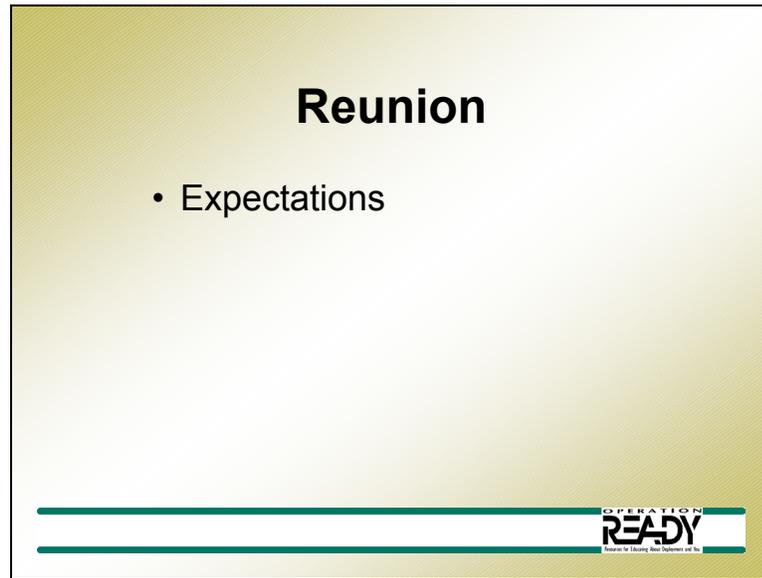
**Objectives**

- To develop an understanding of the challenges of adjustment
- To develop an awareness of positive interpersonal communication strategies
- To identify effective communication techniques

OPERATION  
**READY**  
Return to Training and Support of the

- to develop an understanding of the challenges of readjustment,
- to develop an awareness of positive interpersonal communication strategies, and
- to identify effective communication techniques

*[Show the video, **Making Your Reunion Work**, to set the stage for discussion later and to introduce the subject. Take a 10-minute break after the film.]*



I am going to ask you how your reunion has been so far. You do not have to raise your hands or stand up—just think about your experiences. Was reunion everything you thought it would be? Did it live up to your expectations and fantasies? Did you live up to your expectations and fantasies? Be honest with yourself.

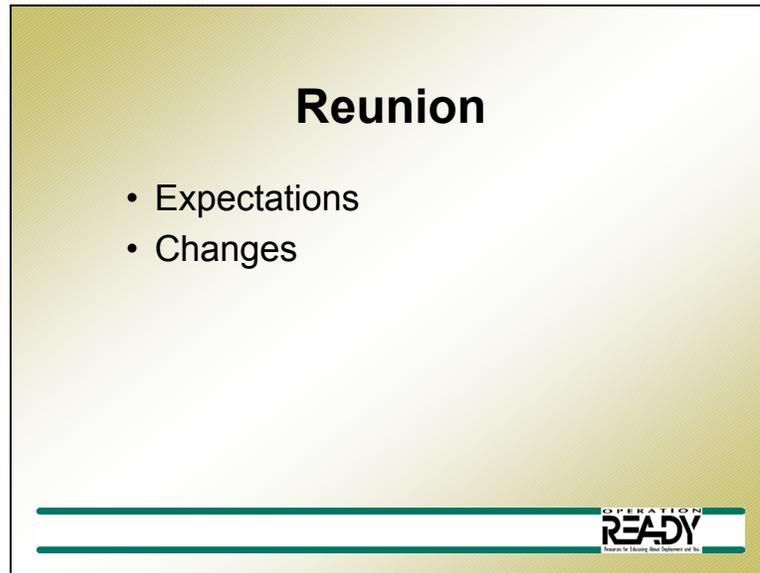
*[Distribute Handout #18.]*

One expectation that many of you have already faced concerns your intimate relationship with your spouse. You may have had fantasies that were really wonderful, but those fantasies may not have been realized when you were together again. It will take time to get over some of the awkwardness of reestablishing intimacy. Intimacy means closeness, trust, and communication. After separation, reestablishing intimacy will not happen immediately. Take things slowly, and enjoy your reunion.

How many of you discussed your reunion expectations with your family or soldier before your reunion? *[Ask for a show of hands. Now ask a pre-selected couple to come forward to tell their story (candidly) of their reunion, how it worked, the humorous elements, the common anxieties, and the outcomes.]*

I know many of you who were deployed had the opportunity to attend reunion workshops before you returned. Those who remained at home may have attended similar workshops. One point of the workshop was to encourage you to express your expectations before your reunion. By doing so, you could understand each other's anticipations.

After a separation, your expectations of each other may have changed. These new expectations may be stumbling blocks, or they may be opportunities for growth. Our goal today is to build constructively and positively on changes that may have occurred in your lives during your separation.



*[Distribute Handout #19.]*

You will be working with this handout during the workshop. We will address each of the four questions, one at a time, and at the end of the workshop, you will have some tools to help you resolve interpersonal conflicts. You will also have some strategies for better communication. *[Handout #19, Question #1]*

I would like for each of you to take about 10 minutes to complete Question #1 in the handout. Remember, these are your answers and your impressions. There are no right or wrong answers. *(Allow 10 minutes to complete.)*

**Group Activity:** At your tables are flip charts for recording your responses. Ask a volunteer to write some changes on the paper that you noted in Question #1. After you have finished, we will discuss what your groups have written. *(Allow 10 minutes.)*

Let's take a few minutes to look at the list. Let a person from each table tape the paper to the wall. Volunteers can tell us what your group discussed about the changes you face. *(Allow two minutes for each group report.)*

As you can see, you are facing many changes. Some people think that reunion is more stressful than deployment. You may have had a fantasy that everything would be perfect when the unit returns. This is not necessarily so. You will be going through a period of readjustment. You may have already experienced some readjustment stress. Stress is a normal, healthy reaction to change. You may also have experienced a time known as the "honeymoon period." This is when everything is wonderful shortly after a soldier's return. Maybe you have **not** experienced a honeymoon period. Problems that occurred before deployment may still be there when you are reunited.

Whether reunion was a honeymoon, a thunderstorm, or anything in between, there will come a time when you will need to look at the changes that have taken place in your life. Some of these changes may require renegotiation. *[Take a 15-minute break.]*



Renegotiation raises many questions. It relates to the “where do I fit in” syndrome. For the soldier, renegotiation may involve such questions as:

- Where or how do I fit into my job?
- Where or how do I fit in with my friends?
- Where or how do I fit in with my family?
- Am I still needed?
- What will our intimate relationship be like?
- Will my spouse still love me?

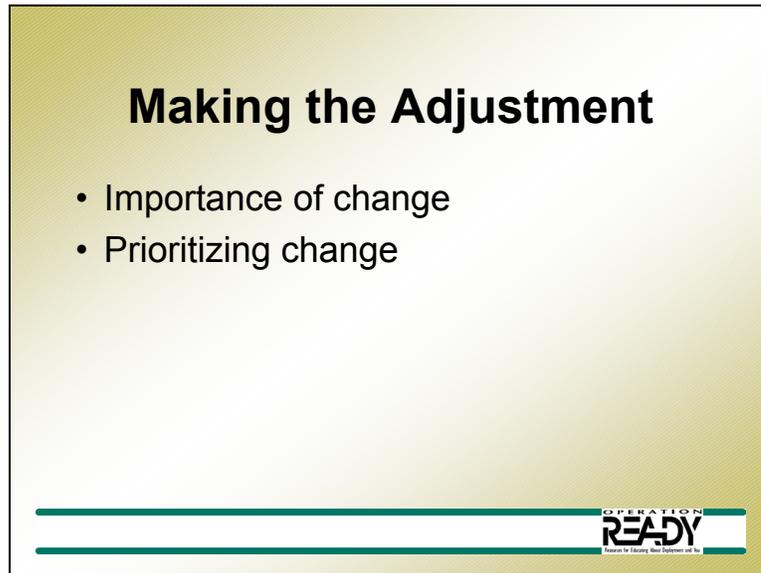
For the family, renegotiation may involve such questions as:

- Do I have to change my way of doing things?
- Do I have to give up paying the bills? I enjoyed it.
- Do I have to start cooking huge meals again?
- What will my relationship be with my spouse?
- Will my spouse still love me?

Do we need to change any legal arrangements made before deployment, like powers of attorney, wills, guardianships, or bank accounts?

Children may wonder: Do I have to start doing things Dad’s or Mom’s way now? Will my curfew change?

These are some issues that you will need to discuss in the renegotiation stage. As you can see by your charts, you have already been thinking about these issues.



You have looked at some challenges you face in your relationships due to the changes that occurred during the deployment. Let's talk about ways to make your adjustment easier.

### **The Importance of Change**

*[Handout #19, Question #2]*

Look at the next page in your activity handout. Question #2 asks you to look at some changes you listed in Question #1. It then asks you how important the change was to you and whether you want to talk about it. *(Allow 10 minutes to complete.)*

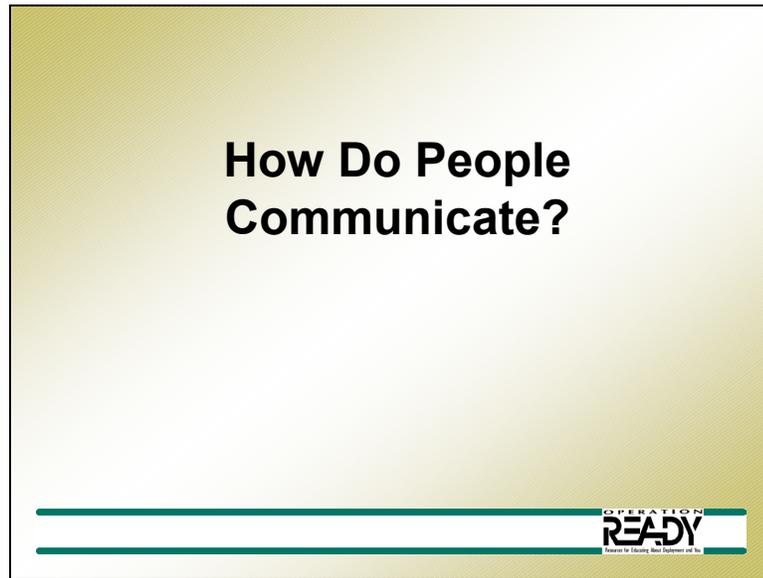
### **Prioritizing Change**

*[Handout #19, Question #3]*

Look at Question #3 on your activity handout. It refers to Question #2. Select several changes you would like to talk about. Answer each of the three areas posed in Question #3. *(Allow 10 minutes to complete.)*

I know you are beginning to wonder where all of this is leading. It is leading to better interpersonal communication.

Let's take the rest of the time we have together to explore communication in depth. Then you may complete the activity handout. When you finish, you will have some ideas to help you to communicate more effectively.



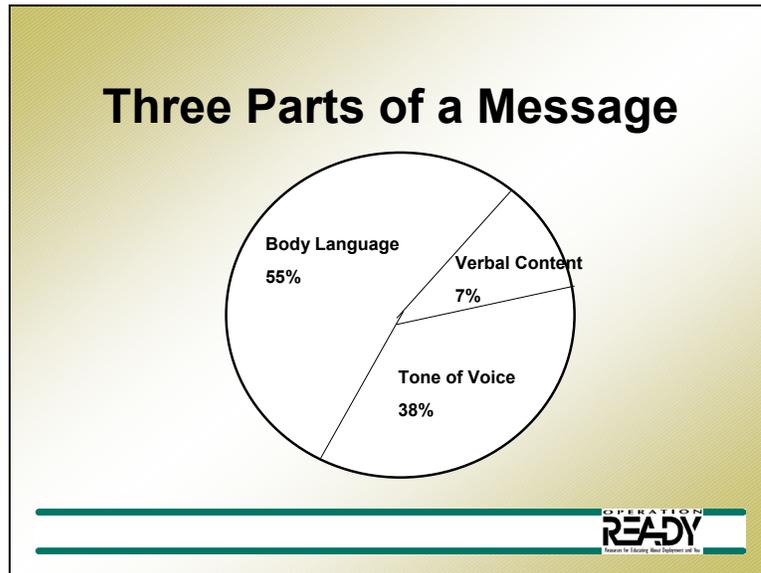
Meaningful communication sometimes requires great effort. But at reunion time, it is **very important**.

Can you tell me several ways that people communicate?

*(Take a few responses—answers may include words, actions, body language.)*

As we communicate with another person, several things take place. We send a message to someone and hope they receive it the way we intend it. If they do—**success**. If not—**trouble**.

The trouble comes when the other person misinterprets what we have said, does not understand the words we have used, or there is too much emotion involved in the conversation.



As you can see, much more than mere words is involved in the communication process. This is why the best human communication happens when two people are face to face and not talking on a telephone or even a videophone. Since body language and tone of voice convey most of the message (93 percent!), we need to pay close attention to whom we're talking or listening, in order to hear everything that is being said. Then we can “hear between the lines” and sense the feelings as well as the verbal content.

### Roadblocks to Communication

*[Flip Chart Activity (Facilitator) **Communication Roadblocks**]*

If there is a problem in communication and there are feelings of anger, hurt, or confusion, the process can be difficult. Roadblocks may develop if the feelings are not dealt with first.

These roadblocks may lead to interpersonal conflict. Roadblocks are the way people say things, or the words people use that cause you to stop listening or paying attention to the person who is talking.

What are some roadblocks to communication? You can name these aloud, and I will write your responses on the flip chart paper. *(Take a few responses—answers may include a hostile tone or loudness of voice, placing blame, phrases such as “you always . . .”, or “you never . . .” negative comments, etc.)*

So if these are the roadblocks, what could we do to avoid them? *(Take a few responses—answers may include listening, feedback.)*



By improving our communication skills, we can improve the quality of our relationships with others. As you can see on the overhead, keys to effective communication include tuning in, listening, giving feedback, and responding. To “tune in” and become a good listener you can:

- Stop talking, and try not to interrupt.
- Get rid of distractions.
- Make eye contact with the other person.
- Concentrate on the message being sent to you.
- “Listen between the lines” by watching body language and tone of voice .

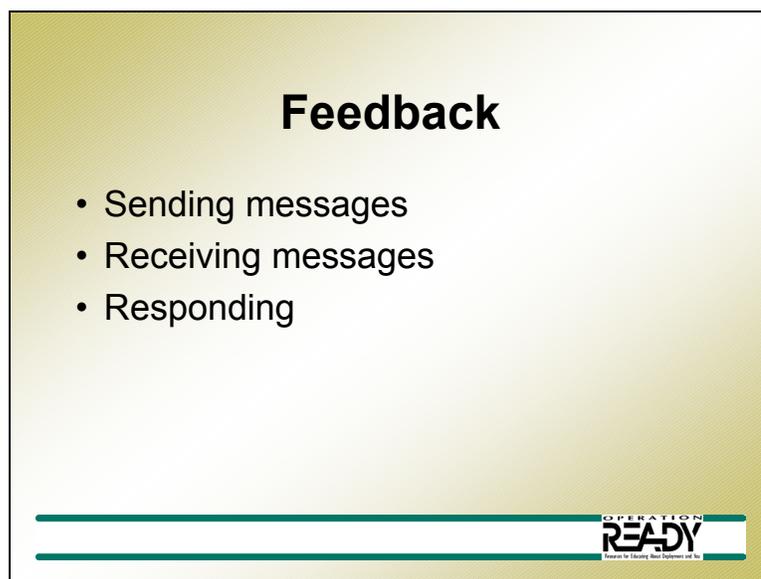
*[Distribute Handout #20.]*

This handout describes the three levels of listening. How many of you operate at that deepest level when listening to your partner?

Let’s try it for fun. I want you all to work as couples for this exercise. Turn your chairs to face one another, and spouses will talk to each other. Single parents with children will talk to each other, or if your children are not present, find another single parent.

We will let the wives speak to the husbands for two minutes on any subject they want to discuss. During this time the husband can’t say anything. He is to listen and give his wife undivided attention. At the end of the two minutes (I’ll let you know) all of the husbands will repeat back what they heard their wives saying, along with what they think their wives were feeling. Once that’s done, reverse roles, and let the husband talk for two minutes; the wife will listen and repeat back what he said, as well as his feelings. When you are done, discuss the exercise with each other. Was it difficult? Why?

*[Take a 10 minute break.]*



Feedback reflects the message as you understand it after you have listened at the deepest level you can. For example, your spouse:

- **Sends** a message: “When will you be deployed again?”
- You **receive** that message, determine what is meant, and reflect what you heard: “Are you concerned about how long we have together?”
- The sender then **responds** or clarifies what was actually meant: “Yes (or No). I was wondering about \_\_\_\_.”

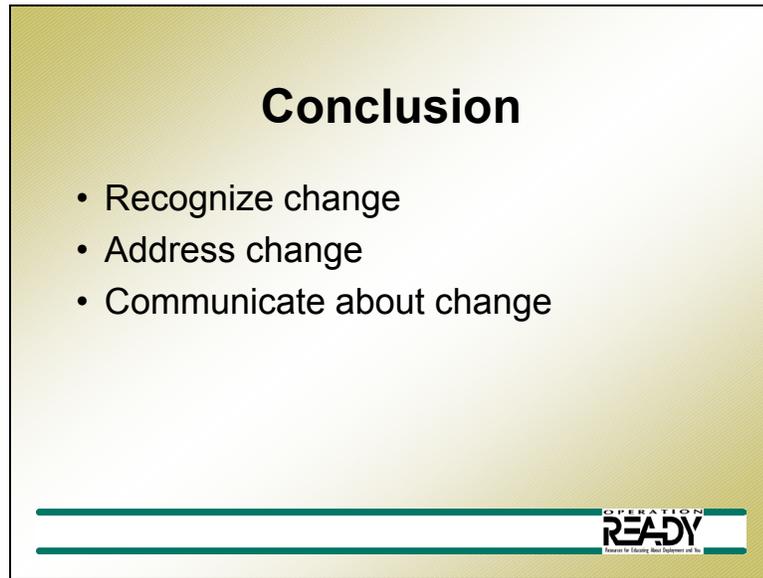
By using feedback, misinterpretation and conflict about what was said can be avoided. **But** you cannot listen effectively if you are too tired, you are rushed, or if you are not accepting of the person or the situation. Often, if one of these conditions exists, you can tell the other person that you know it is important to them, but you are too tired, or whatever. “Could we talk about it later?” is an honest response.

Take a moment to look back at the roadblocks listed on the flip charts and your answers to Question #3 in the activity handout. Pinpoint one important change that has happened since your reunion. Think about what we have discussed about communicating. *(Allow a few minutes for participants to think this through.)*

*[Handout #19, Question #4]*

Using the skills you have learned, take a few minutes to write down some ways you would like to approach the person(s) involved in the change.

Using the space allotted to Question #4 in the activity handout, write what you would like to say to them. This activity will help you sort out what you want to say ahead of time. When you finally address the individual involved in the change, you can then rationally explain your concerns.



The key to returning home and readjusting is to recognize that changes have occurred. These changes may cause conflicts.

By addressing them in sequence as you have done here, you can pinpoint which changes are causing you the most concern.

I think you will agree that this is not an easy time. Readjustment requires patience and skill. We have seen how the changes that everyone has gone through affect you and your relationships.

Remember that the way to reunion success is through communication. It is essential not only to communicate how you are feeling but also to listen to what those around you are saying and feeling. Talk openly, but also listen carefully.

*[Have participants complete the Workshop Evaluation form.]*

## Reestablishing Intimate and Sexual Relations

One adjustment you may face when military separation occurs is reestablishing your intimate and sexual relationships.

Most military couples face the question, “How can two people work together toward achieving intimacy when one of them is often absent from the relationship for extended periods?”

Military couples often find that reunion may bring out feelings of uneasiness and that their personal relationship is strained. Through an understanding of the effects of separation, you can better cope with the stress that accompanies reunion.

The following information about communication barriers and enhancers may help you to reconnect with your partner.

### **Barriers to intimate communication and sexual relations may include:**

- unrealistic fantasies and expectations;
- feeling anxiety about engaging in intimacy and sex;
- feeling that your partner is a stranger;
- feelings of anger, hostility, stress, or negative feelings about the separation;
- concern about faithfulness to your relationship; and
- feeling that sexual relations need to be rushed to make up for lost time.

### **Communication enhancers:**

- Communication will help bring you closer together. It gives you time to become reacquainted, and it helps to let your partner know how you feel.
- Understand that feelings of anxiety are a very normal part of the reunion process.
- You have been apart from each other, and you both have grown. Take time to get to know each other again.
- Discuss your negative feelings and frustrations. Fear of losing your partner plays a major role in developing negative feelings. Listen carefully to what your partner is trying to communicate to you.
- Don't assume the worst about your partner. If you have concerns about fidelity, talk to your chaplain, or find a counselor who can help you work through these feelings.
- Besides communication, allow yourself time to readjust to being together again. Go slowly, and enjoy your reunion.



## Reunion Changes

1. Since you or your soldier have returned, what changes have you noticed in your \_\_\_\_\_  
(answer those that apply to you)? List your positive and negative feelings about the changes.

**Friends and buddies?**

Positive Feelings

Negative Feelings

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**Spouse?**

Positive Feelings

Negative Feelings

---

---

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**Soldier?**

Positive Feelings

Negative Feelings

---

---

---

**Children?**

Positive Feelings

Negative Feelings

---

---

---

**Myself?**

Positive Feelings

Negative Feelings

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---

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2. Looking at your positive and negative feelings, how important are these changes? Place the changes in the spaces below. Then decide how important they are to you.

Change

---

---

- Important to me and I want to talk about it.
- Not important to me and I do not want to talk about it

Change

---

---

- Important to me and I want to talk about it.
- Not important to me and I do not want to talk about it

Change

---

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- Important to me and I want to talk about it.
- Not important to me and I do not want to talk about it

Change

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- Important to me and I want to talk about it.
- Not important to me and I do not want to talk about it

Change

---

---

- Important to me and I want to talk about it.
- Not important to me and I do not want to talk about it

3. Look at Question 2. Thinking about the changes that are important to you and that you would like to talk about, answer the following questions.

■ **The change is**

---

I would like for my (spouse, friends, children) to:

---

---

Adjusting to change would be easier if they would:

---

---

Adjusting to change would be easier if I would:

---

---

■ **The change is**

---

I would like for my (spouse, friends, children) to:

---

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Adjusting to change would be easier if they would:

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Adjusting to change would be easier if I would:

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■ **The change is**

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I would like for my (spouse, friends, children) to:

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Adjusting to change would be easier if they would:

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Adjusting to change would be easier if I would:

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■ **The change is**

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I would like for my (spouse, friends, children) to:

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Adjusting to change would be easier if they would:

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Adjusting to change would be easier if I would:

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■ **The change is**

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I would like for my (spouse, friends, children) to:

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Adjusting to change would be easier if they would:

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Adjusting to change would be easier if I would:

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■ **The change is**

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I would like for my (spouse, friends, children) to:

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Adjusting to change would be easier if they would:

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Adjusting to change would be easier if I would:

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## Listening Levels

How well do you listen? Listening is described here on three levels, each one deeper than the last one. Discuss with your spouse how each of you listens to the other.

### **Listening Level One:**

Listening means that when your spouse is talking to you, you are not thinking about what you are going to say when he or she stops talking.

### **Listening Level Two:**

Listening is completely accepting what is being said without judging what is said or how it is said.

### **Listening Level Three:**

Listening is being able to repeat back to your spouse what he or she said, and what he or she was feeling.



# Reunion Stress Management Workshop/Retreat

## Facilitator's Guidelines

This module provides the facilitator with resources needed to plan and conduct a workshop or a retreat.

**Goal:** Help soldiers and family members recognize and deal with reunion-related problems that may arise or persist after the soldier returns.

**Audience:** This is designed for single parents and for married couples to attend together. It is most helpful to offer this workshop as soon after reunion as is practical, following the Communication Techniques workshop (preferably at the same retreat or workshop).

**Time Required:** Two to three hours

**Room Requirements:** This training requires a room large enough to accommodate the soldiers and their partners. The training process is group work at round tables of 8–10 people. The facilitator works with an activity handout, with flip chart activities in groups, or with flip chart activities as a class. The room should be arranged for maximum visibility of the flip charts, videos, and overheads.

### Facilitator's Preparation:

1. Reserve a location for conducting the training that will accommodate the number of participants.
2. The facilitator's job is to lead the workshop, which includes distributing handouts and organizing group flip chart activities. Other tips include:
  - Plan an icebreaker activity.
  - Encourage participation.
  - Check for understanding.
  - Prepare the room.
  - Make the workshop personal.
  - Gather needed material.
  - Enjoy yourself.
  - Offer amenities, such as childcare, parking, and refreshments

3. Suggested activities are presented in square brackets ([ ]) in the lesson text. The lesson text is meant to assist you and is not intended to be read aloud to the participants. The suggested activities list the visuals, handouts, or group activities that are used at particular points in the workshop.
4. The following list of PowerPoint slides are provided on the CD-ROM, or from the <http://www.goacs.org> website. PowerPoint Notes Pages are included in this handbook (pages 75–79) for your use in teaching the lesson.

#27 Reunion Stress Management

#28 Objectives

#29 Readjustment Tips

#30 Readjustment Tips

#31 Conclusion

5. Preview the video, *Making Your Reunion Work*, if you plan to use it in the workshop. The video script is included in this handbook (pages 135–139) for your use in teaching the lesson.

*Note:* A video is not used for every workshop. Determine if participants have already seen this video and expand your workshop, if necessary, to show the video.

6. Prepare flip chart paper (for facilitator use) with the following titles:

**Stress** (single sheet) with two columns:

**Soldier**

**People at Home**

7. Reproduce the necessary numbers of handouts (Handout #21 for this lesson, pages 127–130). They can be taken to your local installation print plant and easily reproduced. You may want to add other handouts to it as well.
8. Reproduce the **Workshop Evaluation** form for each participant. This form is included at the end of the Handouts section (page 131) and will be used to evaluate each Homecoming and Reunion lesson.
9. Assemble all other needed workshop materials and equipment:

**Workshop Materials:**

- Flip chart paper on one easel with colored markers
- Extra markers for flip chart paper activities at tables
- Masking tape for securing charts
- Pens and pencils for participants' use

**Equipment:**

- Overhead transparency projector, or laptop computer with LCD projector and screen
- Television and VCR

10. *Note:* A chaplain, a counselor from Social Work Services, or a counselor from the Family Advocacy Program would be qualified to facilitate this workshop/retreat. If anyone other than a clinician is the facilitator, it is recommended that one of the above be on site to assist and to recognize and deal with symptoms of undue stress.

**While this workshop/retreat is effective in dealing with moderate stress induced by reunion-related conflicts, those with severe stress-related problems should be referred to community mental health for treatment.**

## **NOTES FOR FACILITATOR**

This is designed as a stand-alone workshop or retreat program to fit into a day-long activity off site and away from distractions. It also can be combined with the previous workshop, “Communication Techniques,” to create a two-day retreat/workshop to deal with reunion stress.

Since the best treatment for stress is talking out one’s anxieties and conflicts to another person, much time is given to couple’s time together to facilitate this effort. Individuals may want to seek out a helping person on the workshop/retreat staff, such as a counselor or a chaplain. Having a clinician or two on site will provide the facilitator with someone with clinical experience to help with cases of severe stress.

Recreation time for physical activities is recommended. Volleyball, softball, hiking and nature walks, or basketball, are relaxing and effective at relieving stress. Have booklets on stress and reunion subjects on hand for participants. See the bibliography listings at the end of this handbook for ideas. Have brochures and flyers on hand from community/installation helping agencies, with locations and phone numbers for referral.

**Reunion Stress Management Workshop/Retreat  
Workshop Overview  
(Contact Time: 2 to 3 hours)**

<b>Estimated Time</b>	<b>Presentation Section</b>	<b>Visual = V Handout = H</b>
30 minutes	Introduction of Retreat and Icebreaker Show Video (if desired)	V #27 Video, <i>Making Your Reunion Work</i>
15 minutes	Objectives	V #28
5 minutes	Common Reunion Stressors	Flip Chart activity (facilitator)
20 minutes	Reunion Priorities	H #21, Questions 1 and 2
10 minutes 45 minutes	Group Discussion Individual/Couple Discussion	
	Break for Family Discussion and Free Time	
10 minutes	Role Adjustment	H #21, Questions 3 and 4
10 minutes	Discussion	
5 minutes	Readjustment Tips	V #29 V #30
5 minutes 45 minutes 5 minutes	Helpful Resources Individual/Couple Discussion Conclusion	Flip Chart Activity V #31 Workshop Evaluation
1-2 hour activity	Recreational Activities/Free Discussion	

# **Workshop Plan**

## **Reunion Stress Management Workshop/Retreat**

**(Contact Time: 2 to 3 hours)**

### **INTRODUCTION**

*[Visual #27: Reunion Stress Management]*

Welcome to this session of the reunion workshop. This training is designed for married couples, single parents, and family members.

You will learn to recognize the stressors associated with postdeployment adjustment by participating in a variety of activities.

*[Do an icebreaker exercise to introduce all members of the group to each other. Good icebreakers are found in AFTB materials and other sources.]*

*[If the participants haven't seen the video, "Making Your Reunion Work," this would be a good time to show it to set the stage for the theme of the retreat/workshop.]*

### **OBJECTIVES**

*[Visual #28: Objectives]*

During our time we have together, you will:

- recognize the common stressors associated with postdeployment adjustment, and
- identify information and referral services in your community.

In the reunion workshops, which many of you attended before you came home or before your soldier returned home, you talked about stress. Those workshops dealt with the joys and concerns, expectations, and fantasies of returning home.

Now that everyone is back together, you have different challenges due to the many adjustments you are experiencing.

## COMMON REUNION STRESSORS

*[Flip Chart activity (facilitator)]*

This question is for those who were deployed. What are some things that have caused you stress since you have returned home?

I will write your responses on the flip chart paper.

*(Record responses under flip chart column, "Soldiers.")*

Now, let's hear from those who remained here during deployment. What are some things that have caused you stress since you have been reunited?

*(Record responses under flip chart column, "People at Home.")*

Let's look for similarities in the two columns. As you can see, there are several.

Some of them are expected. For example: trying to do too much; trying to make up for lost time; noticing how well the other person has done without you; negotiating activities and roles; determining how to fit in; a reunion letdown; whether your intimate relations will work out; who is in charge of what; who do I listen to, Mom or Dad?

There are many more, and all are common areas of stress after deployment. We will look closely at several of these.

Remember, all these stressors and readjustments will take time to work through. Readjustment does not happen immediately.

One stress after deployment is finding the time needed to work through the stressors and to readjust. There is so much to do, so much to readjust to, and so much to catch up on that time just flies.

## REUNION PRIORITIES

*[Distribute Handout #21.]*

On the activity handout, *Reunion Priorities*, you will notice many blank lines on the first page. Above each of these lines is a word.

What I would like for you to do is to fill in the blanks under Question 1 with activities that you would like to do.

For example, next to "Myself," you might write "read '(title)' book." Next to "Children," you might write "go to the zoo."

*(Allow 10 minutes to complete.)*

*[Handout #21, Question 2]*

Next, you will see four areas under Question 2:

- Urgent Priority
- Urgent, But Not a Priority
- Not Urgent
- Not Urgent, Not a Priority

Take 10 minutes to fill in the four areas with the appropriate activities you listed in Question 1.

For example, if you think that going to the zoo with your children is an Urgent Priority, put it in that area.

If reading “X” book is Not Urgent, But Not a Priority, list it in that area.

*(Allow 10 minutes to complete.)*

The purpose of this exercise is to help you identify things you would like to do and prioritize them. One major stressor after deployment is trying to do it all today because you want to make up for lost time!

Turn to your spouse and compare notes. Take a few minutes to discuss the differences and the similarities.

*[Group Discussion]*

*(Allow five minutes for discussion.)*

How did your answers compare? Were they just alike, or were there differences?

*(Take a few responses.)*

If you were to try this exercise with friends, your children, or other family members, what do you think the results would be?

*(Take a few responses.)*

As you can see, stress can occur when your priorities do not match with the priorities of people around you.

As we have discussed in earlier workshops, when this happens, it's time to renegotiate and communicate what we would like to do.

We're going to give you a block of time to deal with the priorities you want to renegotiate. Take a walk with your spouse or child(ren), and discuss these issues we've raised on the handout. When you have finished, come back. We'll resume in about an hour.

## **ROLE ADJUSTMENT**

Role adjustment is a major stressor for everyone at the end of a deployment. Many tasks done by the soldier before deployment were done by the spouse and children during deployment.

Time schedules, eating habits, and general ways of doing things may have changed. When the soldier returns, does everything automatically return to the way it was before deployment?

Most people say, "No way!"

*[Handout #21, Question 3]*

Look at Question 3 on your handout. Please take 10 minutes to answer those questions that apply to you.

*(Allow 10 minutes to complete.)*

*[Facilitator leads discussion.]*

We will take a few minutes and look at some role changes you have listed.

Many of you have noticed similar role changes.

Let's start with the soldiers who were deployed. How have you adjusted to the role changes?

*(Take a few responses.)*

For those of you who remained here, are there any roles you would now like to give up since your soldier has returned, or any tasks you would like for your soldier to resume?

*(Take a few responses.)*

How could you assist the soldier in adjusting to the role changes?

*(Take a few responses.)*

Soldiers dream about home and of the stability they had. They build up their expectations of reunion based upon their past experiences—the way it was. But when they return home, it may not be the same anymore.

*[Handout #21, Question 4]*

If you think there are problems with your roles changing, look at Question 4 on the handout. Take five minutes to answer this in the space provided.

*(Allow five minutes to complete.)*

Seeing change as positive can assist in the adjustment phase. One way of doing this is through communication and by examining your priorities, as we have just done.

## **READJUSTMENT TIPS**

*[Visual #29: Readjustment Tips]*

Some hints to make readjustment easier and reduce stress are to:

- Think positively (people may look and act differently, but they still care about you).
- Negotiate activities (the exercise we just completed can assist in doing this).
- Negotiate roles (don't change things that are working—be flexible and adjust gradually).
- Make time for all the important people in your life.
- Be patient—it will take weeks, and even months, to readjust.

*[Visual #30: Readjustment Tips]*

- Support positive changes.
- Expect some tension in your intimate relations.
- Expect unusual feelings (Where do I fit in now? Am I still needed?).
- Talk to your spouse, children, friends, and family members—use effective communication skills.
- Ask for help if you need it.

Remember this last tip—ask for help if you need it. There are many resources available to assist you if the adjustment and stresses of reunion overwhelm you.

Keep in mind that it will take several weeks and even months after a long deployment for things to reach a “normal” state.

Also, remember “normal” does not mean “what used to be.” Here, it means that the symptoms of stress are reduced. The jumpiness, sleeplessness, fatigue, and other physical signs should stop after a reasonable period.

## HELPFUL RESOURCES

*[Flip Chart activity (Facilitator)]*

If the signs of stress should continue, seek assistance. Let’s take a moment to list some available resources.

*(Write responses on flip chart paper.)*

*[Distribute brochures from helping agencies on your installation or in the civilian community.]*

Please take a moment to take a look at these resources so that if you need assistance, you will have a place to start.

We’re going to give you another block of time to deal with the priorities you want to renegotiate. Take a walk with your spouse or child(ren), and discuss these issues we’ve raised on the handout. When you have finished, come back. We’ll resume in about an hour.

*[Take a 45 minute break for individual and couple discussion time.]*

## CONCLUSION

*[Visual 31: Conclusion]*

During this workshop, you have looked at some stressors that you may have experienced during your readjustment to reunion.

You have considered role negotiation.

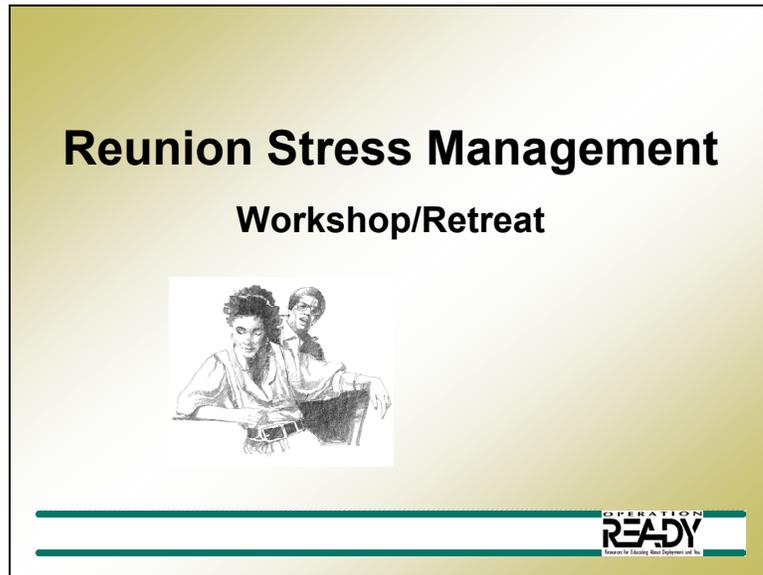
I would like to leave you with a few closing thoughts:

- Adjusting to being home, and to having your soldier home, will take time.
- Be open to the changes that you have experienced in your life. Take it slowly. Do not rush. Enjoy being together again.

*[Have participants complete the Workshop Evaluation form.]*







## Introduction

Welcome to this session of the reunion workshop. This training is designed for married couples, single parents, and family members.

You will learn to recognize the stressors associated with postdeployment adjustment by participating in a variety of activities.

*[Do an icebreaker exercise to introduce all members of the group to each other. Good icebreakers are found in AFTB materials and other sources.]*

*[If the participants haven't seen the video, "Making Your Reunion Work," this would be a good time to show it to set the stage for the theme of the retreat/workshop.]*

**Objectives**

- Recognize the stressors associated with reunion adjustment
- Identify information and referral services in your installation or community

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During our time we have together, you will:

- recognize the common stressors associated with postdeployment adjustment, and
- identify information and referral services in your community.

In the reunion workshops, which many of you attended before you came home or before your soldier returned home, you talked about stress. Those workshops dealt with the joys and concerns, expectations, and fantasies of returning home.

Now that everyone is back together, you have different challenges due to the many adjustments you are experiencing.

*[Facilitator: See the lesson plans now for information on the flip chart activity on Common Reunion Stressors, followed by the Handout #21 activity on Reunion Priorities and Role Adjustment.]*

**Readjustment Tips**

- Think and be positive.
- Negotiate activities and roles.
- Make time for others.
- Be patient.

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Some hints to make the adjustment easier and reduce stress are:

- Think positively (people may look and act differently, but they still care about you).
- Negotiate activities (the exercise we just completed can assist in doing this).
- Negotiate roles (don't change things that are working—be flexible and adjust gradually).
- Make time for all the important people in your life.
- Be patient—it will take weeks and even months to readjust.

**Readjustment Tips**

- Reinforce positive changes.
- Expect tension and unusual feelings.
- Use effective communication skills.
- Ask for help if you need it.

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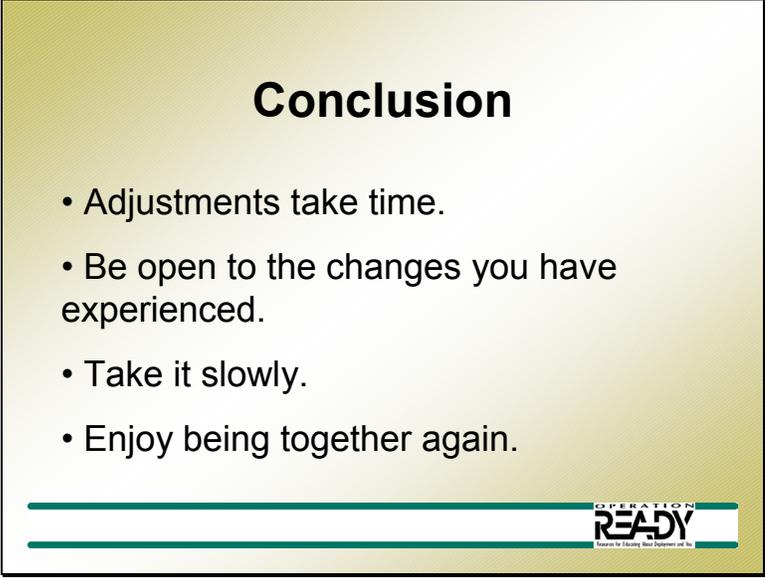
Some other tips are:

- Support positive changes.
- Expect some tension in your intimate relations.
- Expect unusual feelings (Where do I fit in now? Am I still needed?).
- Talk to your spouse, children, friends, and family members—use effective communication skills.
- Ask for help if you need it. There are many resources available to assist you if the adjustment and stresses of reunion overwhelm you.

Keep in mind that it will take several weeks and even months after a long deployment for things to reach a “normal” state.

Also, remember “normal” does not mean “what used to be.” Here, it means that the symptoms of stress are reduced. The jumpiness, sleeplessness, fatigue, and other physical signs should stop after a reasonable period.

*[Facilitator: See the lesson plans now for the flip chart activity on Helpful Resources.]*



**Conclusion**

- Adjustments take time.
- Be open to the changes you have experienced.
- Take it slowly.
- Enjoy being together again.

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During this workshop, you have looked at some stressors that you may have experienced during your readjustment to reunion.

You have considered role negotiation.

I would like to leave you with a few closing thoughts:

- Adjusting to being home, and to having your soldier home, will take time.
- Be open to the changes that you have experienced in your life. Take it slowly. Do not rush. Enjoy being together again.

*[Have participants complete the Workshop Evaluation form.]*



## Reunion Priorities

1. Fill in the activities you would like to do with each of the following:

**Friends—who**

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**Spouse**

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**Children—who**

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**Other family members—who**

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**Myself**

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2. Looking at the information in Question 1, determine the priorities for each of these activities:

**Urgent Priority**

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**Urgent, But Not a Priority**

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**Not Urgent**

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**Not Urgent, Not a Priority**

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3. Answer those questions that apply to you.

- *For the returning soldier:* What role changes have you noticed since you returned from the deployment?

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- How could you adjust to the role changes? Or do you like the new roles and think no adjustments are necessary?

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- *For those who stayed at home:* What role changes happened while your soldier was deployed?

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- How could you assist your soldier in adjusting to the role changes? Or are there some you would like to change back to the way they used to be before deployment?

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4. If you need to discuss role changes, what are the positive and negative aspects of these changes?

- Which areas could you negotiate on?

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- What would you be willing to give up?

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## Workshop Evaluation\*

1. Did you understand the objectives of this workshop?       Yes     No
2. Do you think these objectives were met?                       Yes     No
3. If you answered “No” to either 1 or 2, please explain your answer below:
  
4. Circle the word that best describes the effectiveness of this workshop:  
    Inadequate    Marginally Effective    Effective    Very Effective    Outstanding
5. Based on your above response, what are your suggestions for improving this workshop?
  
6. How did you benefit from this workshop?
  
7. Did this workshop meet the needs of the participants?       Yes     No
8. Circle the word that best describes the facilitator’s presentation:  
    Inadequate    Marginally Effective    Effective    Very Effective    Outstanding
9. Please share your comments about the facilitator’s presentations:
  
10. If you were the next facilitator to lead this workshop, how would you improve it?

\*Use the back of this sheet to continue your responses, if necessary.

