

Army Reserve Child, Youth & School Services

MILITARY KIDS: HOMECOMING AND REUNION

Homecomings and reunions are the last stage in the deployment process and they are a time of celebration as well as change. Military Family members, particularly children, experience a wide variety of feelings before, during, and after being reunited. All of these feelings are perfectly healthy and normal in families who have been separated for several months and have adapted to life without one another. In fact, there are generally three stages military Families experience as a result of the reunion experience: anticipation, readjustment, and stabilization.

Anticipation

The weeks and days before homecoming and reunion are filled with excitement, nervousness, tension, and relief. During deployment family members have learned to adjust to the absence of the service member in day-to-day activities. Reuniting again simultaneously brings both joy and anxiety because daily life as a military family is about to change again.

Readjustment

As anticipation of the homecoming and reunion fades, and the family is reunited once again, daily roles, responsibilities, and rules are renegotiated. Experts have identified two time periods specific to this sometimes challenging stage:

- ◆ Honeymoon (Usually until the first serious disagreement)
 - ⇒ Feelings of euphoria, relief
 - ⇒ Blur of excitement
 - ⇒ Catching up and sharing experiences
 - ⇒ Beginning to readjust to intimacy
- ◆ Readjustment (Approximately 6–8 weeks)
 - ⇒ Pressures of daily life intensify
 - ⇒ Sensitivity to Soldier's presence
 - ⇒ Increase tension as daily relationships confront reality

Stabilization

The amount of time it takes families to stabilize during homecoming and reunion varies. Many of them encounter only minor difficulties in adjusting to new routines. For others, however, readjustment may be a longer process that requires additional support. Seeking assistance, if needed, is critical to helping all families navigate homecoming and reunion in a healthy and positive manner.



CONTINUED ON BACK 

CYSS Mission: To support readiness and quality of life by reducing the conflict between military mission requirements and parental responsibilities



This information has been provided by Army Reserve Child, Youth & School Services.
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The reunion of a military Family is a good time, but there are often many adjustments that everyone needs to make. To make sure this reunion is a building block rather than a stumbling block, here are some reactions military children experience upon the return of their deployed parent that educators should note.

Birth to Age 1

- Cries
- Fusses
- Pulls away
- Clings to other spouse/caregiver
- Has problems with elimination
- Changes sleeping and eating habits
- Does not recognize Soldier

Ages 1 to 3

- Shyness
- Clinging
- Does not recognize Soldier
- Cries
- Has temper tantrums
- Regresses...no longer toilet trained

Ages 4 to 5

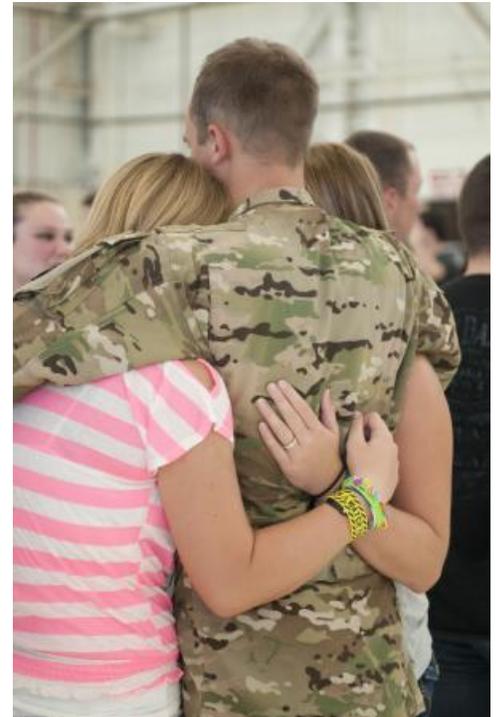
- Demonstrates anger
- Acts out to get attention
- Needs proof Soldier is real
- Is demanding
- Feels guilty for making Soldier go away
- Talks a lot

Ages 6 to 12

- Feels he/she is not good enough
- Dreads return because of discipline
- Boasts about Soldier

Ages 13 to 18

- Is excited
- Feels guilty because they do not live up to standards
- In concerned about rules and responsibilities
- Feels too old or is unwilling to change plans to accommodate
- Is rebellious



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Thus, military children are in need of heightened understanding and support from educators as the schools they attend is where they will spend a great portion of their day. To help educators more thoroughly understand what military children are experiencing, here are a few intervention strategies:

Focus on students and the classroom learning environment

Retain routines and emphasis on the importance of learning while always leaving room to tend to individual student physical, emotional, and social needs.

Provide structure

Maintain predictable schedule with clear behavioral guidelines and consequences to create a safe and caring classroom. If student is distressed about the Family homecoming, find appropriate time for them to share feelings, needs, excitements, fears, hopes, and wishes.

Maintain objectivity

Respond in a calm and caring manner to student inquiries and answer questions in simple, direct terms. Regardless of your own political beliefs, refrain from expressing personal opinions.

Be patient and reduce student workload as needed

Expect temporary slowdowns or disruptions in learning when a homecoming and reunion occurs.

Listen

Be approachable, attentive, and sensitive to the unique needs of students. Let kids know they can speak individually with you or a school counselor, nurse, psychologist, or social worker about their questions and concerns. Take time to acknowledge the circumstances and answer student questions as needed in a factual manner.

Be sensitive to language and cultural needs

Be aware of, knowledgeable about, and sensitive to the language, values, and beliefs of other cultures in order to assist students and their families appropriately. Inquire about school, community, and military resources available to assist kids and their Families in coping in healthy ways.

Acknowledge and validate feelings

Help students develop a realistic understanding of homecoming and reunion. Provide reassurance that their feelings of excitement, joy, nervousness, tension, and relief are normal responses. All individuals and their families adjust to the changes involved with reunion at a different pace.

As our Soldiers come home, continue to build healthy classroom/school environments for military kids that foster connectedness, look for opportunity each day to reach out to military kids, and most importantly, remember what a major difference you too can make in military students lives each and every day when you show you care.

WELCOME HOME!!

Information adapted from *Deployment and Reunion Guides for Ages 3-6, 7 to 12*, and *"Army Brat Pack" for Teens* by USARPAC Child and Youth Services; *Working with Military Children, A Primer for School Personnel* (2002) by the Virginia Joint Military Family Services Board; and The Healthy Parenting Toolkit, *Step Into Your Child's World*, (2009) developed by ParentLink, College of Education, University of Missouri in collaboration with Lincoln University and the United States Department of Agriculture.



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