

31ST FIGHTER WING

SPOUSE'S REINTEGRATION GUIDE



31 FSS/ESFR

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INTRODUCTION

Deployments affect people in many ways. You've been managing the home by yourself, waiting for your loved one to return. Home and work circumstances have been altered by your spouse's absence, requiring you to change and adjust to your spouse being gone. These changes can take you by surprise when your spouse returns home and expects things to be exactly the same as when he/she left. Anticipating these changes means expecting and preparing to deal with these differences you'll encounter once your spouse returns. There is more to come, before breathing that final sigh of relief that the deployment is "over"...expect some additional adjustments after your spouse's homecoming.

Commanders and supervisors at all levels want to make sure your needs are addressed and taken care of as you make the sometimes difficult transition back to normal family life. Because you deserve the very best care, we have outlined a gradual and deliberate process that will help you succeed in this goal. It is critical you pay attention to multiple aspects of your life and experiences as a family: physical and emotional health needs, family and social well being, practical tasks and requirements, and time simply to relax and unwind. Agencies and personnel that have the responsibility for these tasks will work with you to ensure your reintegration as a family goes smoothly. Reintegration is a process, not an event. Enjoy your time as you readjust. Reflect on your spouse's deployment in a positive way. Take care of urgent needs; don't procrastinate on essential responsibilities dealing with your relationships, health or financial matters. Be patient with your spouse and with yourself. Go slow and give your spouse time to get reacquainted all he/she has missed.

This guide is designed to help you, your spouse, and your family smoothly return to home, work, and social life. Not everything will apply to you in this guide; it is not designed to cover every situation or circumstance. Use what is helpful and keep the rest for future reference. Finally, thank you for the sacrifices you and your family have made while your spouse was deployed. For that you have our deepest gratitude and appreciation.

HOMECOMING PREDICTIONS

You and your family will experience a feeling of anticipation as the end of your spouse's deployment approaches. This may take the form of eagerness for reunion or a dread of a return to a problematic situation or a mixture of both. Few get much sleep the night before homecoming. Children in the home may act out more than usual. These feelings may result in you and your family being keyed up and exhausted when your family is finally reunited. It may take your spouse time to get readjusted to the local time zone, home cooking, lack of continual aircraft noise, etc. Some initial sleeping difficulty through the night is typical.

After the end of a deployment, it is not unusual to experience a "homecoming let down/post-deployment plummet". Reality is seldom equal to how we've fantasized life after reunion would be. Your spouse may want to stay at home while you may want to go out as a couple or get the accumulated "honey do" tasks done. Skillful compromise and reasonable give and take will be needed if arguments and hurt feelings are to be avoided. Special welcome efforts you make may

not result in the expected reaction. It makes sense to keep expectations reasonable and to be flexible.

Children's reactions at homecoming may not be what you and your spouse expected or hoped for. Very young children may not remember your spouse and may be shy. Older children may be resentful of the time the deployed person was away from the family. Children may need time to get reacquainted.

If there are unresolved marital or family problems before the deployment, they will not have gotten better during the deployment. Realize it will take time and effort to resolve such problems. Be patient and keep expectations reasonable.

If promises were made, through letters or phone calls, during your spouse's deployment, the person to whom the promises were made will probably remember and expect those promises to be kept.

Your spouse may feel surprised or hurt that you did so well on your own during the deployment. Or he/she may feel a little jealous at how closely the children bonded with you. Such feelings are normal.

REUNION AND MARRIAGE

You have probably grown during the deployment. You've taken on new responsibilities, and you've developed confidence that you can "keep the ship afloat" in your spouse's absence. Out of necessity, you've learned to cope without your spouse. Now that your partner is coming home, you may be buying groceries to prepare your spouse's favorite meal, redecorating the house, and preparing your children (if you have any) for your spouse's return. At the same time you're probably looking forward once again to the familiar pattern of sharing family and household responsibilities with your spouse.

Both you and your spouse are probably thinking a lot about what it will be like to be together again. Maybe you're finding it more difficult to concentrate on your tasks at home as your thoughts drift toward reunion; perhaps you're also a bit worried about some "unfinished business" in your relationship. After all, whatever challenges existed in your relationship before the deployment will not have magically resolved during the deployment. Maybe there are other lingering doubts and fears. Over all, though, you're probably excited about once again spending time together as a family and sharing private time with your spouse.

CHANGES AT HOME

Although you'll be excited about the reunion, and the whole family will probably be thrilled with the return of the deployed person, everyone may experience a range of thoughts and feelings. Your spouse may be a bit worried about how well he/she will fit back in. It really helps to keep your deployed spouse up-to-date as big changes and decisions are made so no "surprises" hit him/her upon returning home. At the same time, family members might also be concerned about how your spouse will treat them. They may wonder if their accomplishments will be appreciated

or resented. You may be concerned that your spouse will violate the “go slow” principle and attempt to immediately “take over” everything. These concerns are a normal part of the reunion process and typically require little more than some time and patience to sort out.

You probably had to change some procedures while your spouse was deployed. If it was your spouse’s responsibility to mow the lawn, take out the trash, vacuum the carpet, or pay the bills, someone else in the family had to temporarily assume those responsibilities. Other changes in family procedures may have taken place in response to evolving family needs. Integrating your spouse back into the family is a process, not an event that can simply happen at the front door. Your spouse will likely notice that you’ve become more confident in your ability to cope with whatever life deals but may feel threatened it. These are very normal concerns.

TRUST/FIDELITY

Sometimes, as partners prepare to reunite, they both wonder about the possibility of infidelity. Worries about your partner’s unfaithfulness are much more common than the occurrence of infidelity. It is wise to assume you’ve both been faithful to one another unless you have strong evidence, not merely suspicion, to indicate your spouse has been unfaithful. After all, accusations of infidelity are very serious and strike at the very core of a relationship. If your marital relationship was an overall satisfactory one before the deployment, it’s unlikely that any infidelity has taken place. When infidelity does occur, it is almost always a sign of much deeper relationship problems. Accordingly, these underlying issues must be addressed for the marriage to become healthier.

COMMUNICATION

Homecoming is the time you will communicate “face to face” again with your spouse. What will you and your partner talk about? Are you open to talking about changes that have occurred in each of your lives during the deployment? Are you willing to really listen? Your partner may want to tell you many things that happened while he/she was deployed. Even though you may have been fortunate enough to have frequent phone contact, letters, and perhaps email and video teleconferences, your partner needs your undivided attention face-to-face. Avoid getting into the “who had it worse?” game. The truth of the matter is that separation was difficult for both of you.

INTIMACY/SEXUALITY

Hopefully, you and your partner have maintained a solid sense of intimacy, or “emotional connection”, during the deployment through frequent communication. Since your sexual relationship tends to be prominent in both your and your spouse’s thinking during the deployment, it tends to become a key focus of reunion. You will need to have patience with this area. The level of overall emotional intimacy and comfort with one another that you experienced before the deployment may take a while to regain. Keep in mind that you’ve been able to communicate with each other at best only a few minutes per day and have had no face-to-face contact for the past several months.

Considering you've both experienced personal growth while separated, it makes sense to take some time to get to know each other again, not unlike two friends who haven't seen each other for a while. Build upon the intimacy you shared. Recognize you and your partner are "out of practice" in terms of sexual contact. As a result, it's not highly unusual after lengthy separations for temporary awkwardness to arise. Also, you may feel a bit uncomfortable together initially. Simply relax, take your time, and let your sexual relationship resume in a way that is gratifying for both of you.

SIGNS OF REINTEGRATION STRESS (include but are not limited to the following)

Physical Signs

- Stomach problems—upset stomach, nausea
- Bowel problems—diarrhea, constipation
- Heart/lung problems—heart pounding, dizzy or light-headed, out of breath, cold sweat, dry mouth or pale skin
- Headaches, migraines
- Vague aches and pains
- Impotence

Behavioral Signs

- Eating changes—too much or too little
- Sleeping changes—too much or too little
- Fatigue, no energy, drained
- Jumpiness
- Frustrated, irritable, angry
- Bad personal hygiene
- Crying spells
- Avoidance of others
- Increase in alcohol use
- Disregard for rules, regulations, social norms

Cognitive Signs

- Poor concentration
- Difficulty making decisions
- Flashbacks
- Intrusive thoughts
- Nightmares
- "Spaced out" or trouble focusing
- Memory problems

Emotional Signs

- Loss of motivation
- Loss of “purpose” or direction
- Loss of trust/confidence in leaders
- Thoughts of hurting self or others
- Quick to anger, impatience
- Depression
- Frustration, irritability
- Worried, anxious, keyed up
- Guilt, shame
- Numb (don’t feel anything)

SIGNIFICANT SIGNS OF DISTRESS (include but are not limited to the following)

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)—PTSD is when a person has been exposed to a traumatic event, and reacted to it with helplessness, fear, or horror—and now has trouble dealing with it. Signs of PTSD may include the following: Images and thoughts of the traumatic event, distressing dreams, sense of re-living the event, irritability or outbursts of anger, inability to remember important aspects, trouble concentrating, exaggerated “startle” response.

Bizarre or unusual behavior—this means someone who is showing uncharacteristic behavior that is far from what someone would normally do. This can include “delusions”, or seeing things other people do not see.

Domestic violence—personnel dealing with strong emotions after a deployment can lash at others, especially family members.

Alcohol abuse—personnel can drink too much and get into dangerous situations, including drinking and driving.

Suicidal thoughts—personnel may show signs of thinking about hurting themselves.

CHILDREN AND REUNION EXPECTATIONS

Change is at least as stressful for children as it is for adults. Your spouse’s homecoming is a major change for the children in the household. They’ve grown physically, emotionally and socially during the deployment. Children are not skilled at coping with their stress in large part because they have little life experience. As a result, they may temporarily act out or regress to a less mature stage of behavior as part of their reaction. There will be a readjustment period—typically 4 to 6 weeks—for the entire family. You can greatly enhance your family’s reunion by developing realistic expectations of how your child will respond to your spouse’s return based upon your child’s age.

Infants (1 – 12 months)

An infant has not developed much of an ability to remember people and events. Accordingly, as painful as this might be for you to consider, do not expect a baby to recognize your spouse who has returned from deployment. Instead, expect him/her to initially react as if your spouse is a stranger. The infant will likely cry when held by your spouse, pull away, fuss, and cling to you instead. Once again, go slow. The baby will warm up to your spouse at his/her own pace. Your spouse should gently get involved in holding, hugging, bathing, feeding, playing with, and otherwise caring for the baby. The key is to be patient and let your baby's reactions be your guide in terms of what pace to proceed in getting acquainted.

Toddlers (1 – 3 years)

A typical toddler response would be to hide from your newly returned spouse, to cling to you, cry, and perhaps regress to soiling if he/she is potty trained. Patience is needed! Give your child space and allow him/her to warm up to your spouse. It helps for your spouse to sit at eye level with your child (to look less intimidating), and talk to him/her. A gentle offer by your spouse to play with the toddler may be helpful, but shouldn't be forced. Doing so will only intensify your child's discomfort and resistance. Showing your child pictures of your spouse and saying "Daddy" or "Mommy" while your spouse is gone will help your child remember better.

Preschoolers (3 – 5 years)

Children at this age range tend to think the world revolves around them. Keeping that in mind, it's not surprising that your preschooler may think he/she somehow made your spouse go away. He/she may think that your spouse left due to not caring about him/her any longer. If this is the case with your preschooler, he/she may feel guilty or abandoned. As a result, your child may express intense anger as a way of keeping your spouse at a distance, thereby "protecting" himself/herself from further disappointment. Your preschooler is also likely to do some limit testing (see if familiar rules apply). To promote the reunion process, wise parents will accept the child's feelings, not act overly concerned, and focus on rewarding positive behaviors. It's good for your spouse to talk with your child about his/her areas of interest (storybooks, toys, etc.) and give some undivided attention. Your preschooler needs time to adjust to your spouse once again being an active participant in his/her life.

School Age (5 – 12 years)

Children in this age range are likely to give your spouse a very warm reception if the parent-child relationship was strong before the deployment. The school age child may excitedly run to your spouse as soon as the parent gets off the plane. He/she will be inclined to monopolize your spouse's attention and want to show off scrapbooks, hobby items, or school projects when your spouse gets home. If, on the other hand, the child's relationship with your spouse was strained, the child may fear your spouse will punish him/her for misbehavior during the deployment. This may lead the child to at first be shy or withdrawn around your spouse. It is best for your spouse to have friendly interest in what the child has done during the deployment time.

Adolescent (13 – 18 years)

Adolescents can have mood swings that go up and down like a roller coaster. One moment they are solving problems in a reasonable and logical way and the next may be reacting in a purely emotional and childlike fashion. Your adolescent will likely be very excited to see your spouse again, if the relationship was amicable prior to the deployment. Sometimes, however, adolescents don't want to publicly display their emotions and may be more concerned about acting "cool" in front of their peers. Adolescents tend to be very sensitive about being unfavorably judged or criticized. Be sure to make time to discuss with your adolescent what is going on in his/her life as well as what you've experienced. It's critical to give your adolescent some of each parent's undivided pleasant attention.

TIPS FOR READJUSTING WITH CHILDREN

- Think and be positive. A child's behavior is indicative of a need.
- Parents need to discover and solve the need.
- Negotiate activities with children and their roles in the family
- Make time for your children. They primarily need your quality time investment.
- Be patient. Loss of patience is counterproductive and will result in the opposite result of what is desired.
- Quality time is stopping prior activity, focusing on the child and doing what the child wants to do without distraction.

CHARACTERIZATION OF STRESS IN CHILDREN

Infants

- May show signs of apathy
- May refuse to eat
- May suffer weight loss
- May be fussy and unable to be consoled
- May be fearful and attach to remaining parent
- May have stranger/danger fear

Toddlers

- Will take their cue from the primary caregiver
- May become sullen and tearful
- Tend to throw more temper tantrums (indicator they are unable to cope)

School Age

- May whine more
- Complaints are more frequent
- May become aggressive or act out their feelings
- May focus on absent parent missing a key event (birthday, holiday, etc)

- May experience signs of depression

Adolescents

- More irritable, rebellious, tendency to fight and participate in attention getting behavior
- Lack of interest in school, peers, and school activities
- At greater risk for promiscuity, alcohol, drugs
- May deny problems or worries

CHARACTERIZATION OF DEPRESSION IN CHILDREN

- Loss of appetite
- Change in sleep habits or sleep disturbances
- Behavioral agitation or a slowing of movement
- Loss of interest in usual activities and playing with friends (isolation of self)
- Loss of interest in school

TIPS FOR READJUSTING WITH YOUR SPOUSE

- Do something special to welcome your spouse home—help the children make a welcome banner, make your spouse’s favorite dessert, etc, but be understanding and flexible if your spouse is too tired to notice.
- Give your spouse time to adjust to being home. Don’t tightly schedule activities for them. Don’t expect them to take on all their old chores right away. Understand that your spouse may need time to adjust to a different time zone, change in food, etc.
- Plan on some family togetherness time. Suggest a picnic or a special family meal. Time together helps your returning spouse to get back into the rhythm of family life.
- Be patient and tolerant with your spouse; he/she may not do things exactly as before. New experiences during deployment may bring changes to attitude and outlook. Your spouse may have some initial discomfort adjusting, but this doesn’t mean your spouse is unhappy with you or the family.
- Stick to your budget. Don’t spend money you don’t have on celebrating your spouse’s return. Show you care through your time and effort, not by how much you spend.
- Don’t be surprised if your spouse is a little hurt by how well you were able to run the household responsibilities without him/her no matter how well you did on your own.
- Stay involved with your children’s school activities and interests. Don’t neglect the children’s need for attention as you are becoming reacquainted with your spouse.
- Don’t be surprised if children test the limits of the family rules when your spouse returns. It’s normal for children to want to find out how things may have changed by acting up a bit. Consistent enforcement of family rules and even-handed discipline are key to dealing with acting out.

PURPOSE OF YOUR SPOUSE'S REINTEGRATION SESSION

The reintegration process your spouse will go through is designed to facilitate his/her smooth transition from the combat environment to family, community, and workplace here at Aviano. The objective is for your spouse to complete all medical and non-medical post-deployment requirements immediately after he/she returns, in a manner that minimizes adverse impact on your spouse and your family but allows for a gradual reintegration. This process also helps identify higher-risk individuals who have been exposed to unusual danger, experienced loss, witnessed disturbing events, been injured, had major family challenges, etc., who may benefit from additional counseling or other services.

YOUR SPOUSE'S REINTEGRATION SCHEDULE

The exact date and time your spouse returns from deployment is dependent upon airlift scheduling. As airlift times are finalized, we will be able to plan the specific place and time for the reintegration based upon the size of the group returning. Reintegration begins when your spouse gets off the plane and concludes when reconstitution leave is complete. All processing requirements will be accomplished prior to reconstitution leave starting. The formal session is a two half-day program, typically conducted at the Mass Briefing Facility (new base theater), beginning on the second day after your spouse returns. You are welcome to attend. The session's location, date, and time will be provided by your Squadron Commander or First Sergeant. The schedule is outlined below.

Day 0 (Day of Arrival)

- Welcome by unit, family and friends.
- Turn in deployed medical record and post deployment health assessment
- Turn in any weapons or classified information
- Receive overview of reintegration activities

Day 1 (Day to Relax)

- Rest, decompress, and take personal time

Day 2 (First half day session)

- 0900: 31 FW/CC Welcome
- 0915: Reintegration Overview
- 0925: Mobility Bag Briefing/Turn-in Instructions
- 0930: Combat Wingman Briefing
- 0940: Safety Briefing
- 0955: Break
- 1005: SARC/Sexual Assault Video
- 1055: Medical Intelligence/Screening
- 1230: Release to Sq/CCs for unit-specific briefings, etc.
- 1400-1600: Turn in Mobility Bags

Day 3 (Second half day session)

- 0900: Community Information Announcement
- 0910: Communications Workshop
Reintegration and Children Workshop
- 0925: Chaplain
- 0935: Travel Voucher Completion
- 1400-1600: Turn in Mobility Bags

Day 4 – Day 17 (Reconstitution time off)

USAFE RECONSTITUTION TIME OFF POLICY

When our troops return from a contingency deployment, it is vital that they take time to recover and spend quality time with loved ones. The USAFE policy is commanders will provide deployed personnel with 1 day of down time for every 6 days deployed, for a maximum of 14 days. Personnel will have the option of taking one 4-day pass during their down-time period where they can travel anywhere during the 4 days, but the pass must begin and end in the local area (note, passes may not be used in conjunction with leave). For the remainder of the time, personnel must remain “present for duty” with their duty location being at home taking care of quality of life areas that need attention due to their lengthy deployment. If the member desires to depart the local area for more than 4 days during their down time, they must be on ordinary leave. **[Extracted from COMUSAFE Msge on Down Time After Contingency Deployments]**

CONCLUSION

There are successful reunions, but no ideal ones. “Ideal” is something that is only a fantasy. A mature and successful reunion is one where all concerned are aware of their own desires and concerns, and aware of those of their spouse and children. Along with all the positive and excited moments, there are the very natural feelings and problems that require serious discussion and problem solving. The successful reunion includes excited smiles, embraces, laughter, and humor. It also requires a mature understanding that in order for the separation to have been a positive experience, we must give a lot of “slack” to each other, do a lot of talking, a lot of planning and problem solving, and some forgiving. Children should know when it is all said and done, their parents both love them now more than ever.

KEY COMMUNITY SUPPORT AGENCIES

Chapel: The Chapel provides religious services, counseling, marriage enrichment programs, and other services. A Chaplain’s counseling affords you privileged communication at all time—total confidentiality.

Family Advocacy: Family Advocacy offers parenting classes, anger management classes, marriage building and communication, stress management, and counseling/therapy for life crises and difficult situations.

Airman and Family Readiness Center: The A&FRC is your point of contact for Air Force Aid, information about the base/local community, resume writing and job search classes, veteran's benefits, marriage and parenting classes, relocation assistance for PCS, personal financial management training, computer resource room to access the Internet, among other services.

Life Skills: Life Skills offers individual consultation and classes for psychological factors that affect medical concerns. They offer outpatient services such as individual, child/adolescent, and marital/group psychotherapy. Crisis Intervention services are also available.

Legal Office: The Legal Office can help you establish a will and power of attorney. They provide advice and assistance to help you meet your legal needs.

QUICK REFERENCE PHONE LISTING

31 FW Commander	0434-30-4700	Fitness Center (Area F)	0434-30-7161
31 FW Command Chief	0434-30-4709	Fitness Center (Area 2)	0434-30-7574
Squadron Commander		Golf Course	0434-30-7386
First Sergeant		Home Fuels	0434-30-5083
Key Spouse		Housing Maintenance GHRP**	0434-30-7906
AADD	0434-305938	ITT Office	0434-30-5072
AMC Passenger Terminal	0434-30-7680	La Bella Vista Club	0434-30-4303
American Red Cross**	0434-30-5576	Law Enforcement Desk	0434-30-7200
Arts and Crafts Center	0434-30-5022	Legal Office	0434-30-7843
Auto Skills Center	0434-30-2277	Library	0434-30-5893
Base Exchange	0434-30-7331	Life Skills*	0434-30-5321
Base Pool	0434-30-5593	Medical Appointments	0434-30-5000
Bowling Center	0434-30-7487	Medical Services (TRICARE)	0434-30-5133
CDC #1 (Area 1)	0434-30-8246	Mensa	0434-30-5082
CDC #2 (Area F)	0434-30-5199	MPF Customer Service	0434-30-4715
Chaplain**	0434-30-5211	Outdoor Recreation	0434-30-8623
Civilian Personnel Office	0434-30-7291	Pass & ID	0434-30-7769
Command Post	0434-30-7673	Public Affairs	0434-30-7555
Commissary	0434-30-7647	SARC	0434-30-7272
Dept of Defense School	0434-30-5877	Shoppette (Area F)	0434-30-7773
Education Center	0434-30-5330	Shoppette (Area 1)	0434-30-5876
A&FRC (AF Aid)****	0434-30-5407	Veterinary Treatment Facility	0434-30-8485
Family Advocacy	0434-30-5667	Wood Skills Center	0434-30-7892
Financial Customer Svc	0434-30-CASH	Youth Center	0434-30-7575

*Contact Law Enforcement Desk at 0434-30-7200 to reach Life Skills after duty hours

**Contact Command Post at 0434-30-7673 to reach the Red Cross or Chaplain after duty hours

***Contact Fire Dept at 0434-30-7616 for assistance from 1700 to 0500 and all day on weekends and holidays

****Contact Unit First Sergeant or Command Post at 0434-30-7673 to reach AF Aid after duty hours