

REAL WARRIORS ★ REAL BATTLES

REAL STRENGTH

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Reintegrating into Civilian Life



Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class John P. Curtis

Finding Your New Normal

Now that you've been home a few weeks, the rush of excitement you felt stepping off the plane or ship has probably begun to fade a little. The flags have been put away, the bands have stopped playing and the newspapers are focusing on other things. Your life has suddenly become private again, giving you the chance to put things back in order.

Where do you start? How do you begin making life normal again, when "normal" now means something completely different than before you received your orders?¹ ^[1] Here are some tips to help you in this transition:

Taking Care of Business

- Check your driver's license and vehicle tags to make sure they have not expired. Check on speed limit changes.
- Reactivate your vehicle insurance to reflect your current status.
- Conduct preventive maintenance checks and services on your privately owned vehicle, especially if no one has driven it for one year.
- Verify registration in [TRICARE](#) ^[2] for you and your family.
- If you have left the military, register your Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty (DD214) with your county veterans service officer and the county registrar.
- Employment:
 - Notify your employer and set up a return date.
 - If not employed, look into filing for unemployment insurance.
 - Sign up for the Transition Assistance Program (TAP).
 - Contact the Employer Support for the Guard Reserve (ESGR) representative for more help in your area.
- School:
 - Check your status with school (if applicable).
 - Investigate all your education's benefits. The [Department of Defense Voluntary Education Programs](#) ^[3] Web site provides all branches of the National Guard and Reserve with the latest education information.
 - Notify your creditors that you are no longer eligible for the 6 percent interest rate on financial loans. Creditors may demand the remainder of the unpaid interest amount if you choose not to contact them.
- Complete your travel voucher with your unit to receive per diem and other allowances.
- File your federal and state income taxes.

- Rescind any power of attorney you may have outstanding.
- Ensure any promotions, awards or re-enlistments are recorded in your permanent file.
- Unpack your gear as soon as possible and ensure proper cleaning and serviceability.
- To ensure your personal success, adopt a healthy lifestyle and exercise regularly.

Reconnecting with Your Spouse/Significant Other

- Go slowly! It takes time to reconnect. Be patient and be flexible.
- Listen, learn and let go! Listen to your partner's experience. Learn how they've been living while you were gone. Let go of your expectations of how they should have behaved while you were gone and accept the person as they are.
- Time, time, time! Make your partner your priority. Time spent with them is an investment in your future.
- Learn the new routine. Your partner has developed a way of life while you were gone. Learn their routine and adapt to that routine.
- Celebrate! Your partner ran a tough marathon of stress, anxiety and loneliness while you were gone. He or she managed and succeeded with a lot of responsibilities. Celebrate their victories and let them know you are proud of them.
- Fight fairly and resolve conflict! Yes, it won't be long before you will have disagreements. That is normal. Work the conflict through to a healthy resolution. Get help if you can't resolve the conflict.
- Attend a Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program marriage enrichment weekend if you are married. The program teaches couples effective communication skills, addresses problem resolution strategies that work and reveals how to discover the hidden issues in a relationship.

Reconnecting with Your Children

- Learn all you can about your child's life while you were gone. Let them share pictures, crafts, stories and memories.
- Be patient with your child and yourself. You can't make up the time missed overnight. It will take time for your child to reconnect with you, trust you and re-bond with you. Frustration as a parent is normal. Violence and verbal abuse are never acceptable.
- Negotiate your role as a parent. While you were gone, your spouse or your child's guardian set the pace as a parent. You can't take over all at once. Work your way back into the parent role one step at a time. Respect what was done while you were gone.
- Remember this is a child, not a member of the military. Learn the developmental stage your child is in and use age-appropriate parenting techniques. One size doesn't fit all. Your child is unique, so parent uniquely. Some ideal resources include:
 - [The "SOFAR" Guide for Helping Children and Youth Cope with the Deployment of a Parent in the Military Reserves](#) ^[4]
 - "Talk, Listen, Connect," Sesame Street publication; [A Special Magazine for Parents and Caregivers](#) ^[5] [PDF]
- These guides provides age-appropriate parenting suggestions and tips for service members and spouses:
 - ["COMING HOME": A Guide for Service Members Returning from Mobilization/Deployment](#) ^[6]
 - ["COMING HOME": A Complete Guide for Spouses of Service Members Returning From Deployment](#) ^[7]
- Accept guidance from your spouse or your child's guardian. Your most recent job has been as a member of the military. You need some retraining. Listen to the person with the most experience with your child.
- Take a parenting class with your child. You learned to become a warrior. You can learn how to be a better parent. Your local school district will have information on parenting classes. Sign up and invest in your child's welfare.

Reconnecting with Your Parents

- Be patient with your parents. They want to reconnect with you, but may not know how.
- Negotiate new roles/responsibilities. Your parents may want you to be the way you were before you left. That isn't possible. Let them know, up front and patiently, the new relationship you want to have with them. Help them define new boundaries and new ways to relate to you.
- Share with them what is appropriate. Do not shut your parents out of your life. Share what you can with them about your combat duty. Let them know your plans and your whereabouts.
- If you have younger siblings, be respectful of your parents' rules for them and be aware that you are a role model, whether you want to be or not, for your siblings. Remember, your military "language" may not be appropriate for your siblings.
- Celebrate! Realize your parents sacrificed a lot while you were gone. They worried about you and supported you. Celebrate their accomplishments and thank them for their support.

- Anticipate that your parents may want to celebrate your return and reconnect you with your relatives and their friends. This may be overwhelming for you. Make your parents aware of what you are comfortable with and “negotiate” with them regarding their intentions for you.² [8]

Sources

¹“[Welcome Home: A Guide to a Healthy Family Reunion](#) [9],” last accessed 3/20/09

²“[Beyond The Yellow Ribbon](#) [10]”: Bringing Soldiers and Their Families All The Way Home; Minnesota National Guard, last accessed 3/20/09

Additional Resources

- DCoE Outreach Center — For questions about reintegration, resilience, other psychological health issues or traumatic brain injury, call **866-966-1020**
- “[Beyond The Yellow Ribbon](#) [10]”: Bringing Soldiers and Their Families All The Way Home, Minnesota National Guard
- “[COMING HOME](#) [7]”: A Complete Guide for Spouses of Service Members Returning From Deployment
- “[COMING HOME](#) [6]”: A Guide for Service Members Returning from Mobilization/Deployment
- “[Welcome Home](#) [9]”: A Guide to a Healthy Family Reunion
- “[Talk, Listen, Connect](#) [5],” Sesame Street publication; A Special Magazine for Parents and Caregivers:
- [National Guard Family Program](#) [11]



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