

PREPARING FOR REUNION



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

TOPICS TO BE COVERED

- RETURN HOME – ORDER OF EVENTS
- WHAT TO EXPECT
- HOW TO PREPARE
- COMMON REACTIONS
- WHAT TO DO
- RESOURCES



* This presentation is adapted from *Preparing for Reunion Stress* by National Defence publication and the DSG Re-Integration Workshop

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Decompression Phase in Cyprus

- **Day 1 : Travelling to Cyprus and administration**
- **Day 2 : Presentation on mental health (Battle mind Workshop) Return introduction (Behaviour and adaptation)**
- **Day 3 : Session:**
 - **Managing stress and anger**
 - **Healthy relationships**
 - **After-action leadership**
 - **Perspective of the returning soldier**

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Decompression Phase in Cyprus

- **Day 4 : Activities and Free Time**
- **Day 5 : Return to Canada**
- **NOTE: All Military personnel are housed in hotels**
- **Military/civilian staff organize activities and classes**
- **Supervision and discipline is maintained**

Location of Cyprus



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Reintegration in Canada

- **Arrival at the airport**
- **Transport to Military Garrison**
- **Two days leave (administrative)**
- **Back to work (three half-days)**
- **Annual and special leave**

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WHAT TO EXPECT

Reunion is more than “welcome home”

- Feelings of joy and excitement, as well as apprehension, surface
- A change (any separation of long duration implies changes)
- A challenge

The reunion is identified by many military families as the most challenging time for them

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WHAT TO EXPECT

REUNION STRESS

- Refers to the physical and emotional demands experienced by all the family members around the time of homecoming. The return as well as the departure of the service member disrupts the balance/stability of the family. The majority of families require approximately three months to feel comfortable together again; however unique family characteristics and/or circumstances may shorten or lengthen the period of reunion stress

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HOW TO PREPARE

- Discuss the homecoming with your children and family.
- Plan special events and activities for your deployed one's return
- Create hand-made welcome home banner or cards
- Cook the favourite meal of the deployed person

**Be understanding if your deployed love one is too tired*

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COMMON REACTIONS

IN GENERAL

- Increased energy and activity
- Sleep and appetite disturbances
- Reduced concentration
- Fantasizing
- Feelings of joy, excitement, anxiety, apprehension, restlessness, impatience

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COMMON REACTIONS

IN RELATIONSHIPS

- Difficulty re-establishing intimacy (emotional, physical, and sexual)
- Grieving loss of freedom and independence
- Feelings of excitement, disorientation, resentment, frustration, disappointment, anxiety, numbness

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COMMON REACTIONS

WITH THE CHILDREN

- Acceptance of new family routines
- Acceptance of growth and development experienced by each family member
- Feelings of intimacy, closeness, confidence in relationship(s)



WHAT TO DO

IN GENERAL

- Share your feelings of apprehension as well as excitement
- Share expectations and desires for the homecoming, especially concerning who should be included. Some families will include extended as well as immediate family members, while others may prefer to share this event exclusively with spouse and children



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WHAT TO DO

IN GENERAL

- Try to think realistically about the homecoming, rather than building a fantasy reunion in your head
- Remember that everyone will likely be anxious about obvious changes (hair, weight) and will need reassurance of acceptance

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WHAT TO DO

IN RELATIONSHIPS

- Communicate as openly and honestly as possible – accept your feelings as normal and not as a threat to your relationship.
- Be open to discussing family roles and responsibilities – the workload can again be shared but perhaps in a new way.
- Accept your partner's feelings.

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WHAT TO DO

WITH THE CHILDREN

- Helping children prepare
- Relax and enjoy yourself and your family
- Remember – reunion is very stressful for children; they have less experience and fewer conscious coping mechanisms than adults

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WHAT TO DO

SINGLE MEMBERS *So Parents:*

- Be patient; let your returning deployed one know that you are interested in hearing about the deployment experience when he/she is ready to talk.
- Maintain contact with families of other deployed ones; being able to share your concerns and frustrations with others who are having similar experiences will be helpful.

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Normal Factors to be Considered During Transition

It is possible that the serviceman :

- Feels physical/mental fatigue;**
- Demonstrates an emotional estrangement;**
- Becomes isolated;**
- Suffers from sleeping disorders;**
- Becomes irritable;**
- Develops feelings of guilt;**

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Normal Factors to be Considered During Transition Cont.

- **Speaks as if giving orders and has difficulty accepting instructions;**
- **Is agitated and extremely vigilant;**
- **Consumes a great deal of alcohol or controlled substances; and**
- **Excessive gambling.**
- **If the symptoms persist for more than 3 months or worsen, consult the following resources**

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WHAT TO DO

WITH SINGLE MEMBERS

- Contact the local DSC, Military Family Resource Centre or unit for persistent serious concerns during the readjustment period

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Returning to Work

- **Returning to work: targeting a minimum of two months without leaving the region**
- **6 month follow-up: (reintegration and post-deployment)**
- **Problems:**
 - Contact the Chain of Command**
 - Contact the Deployment Support Group**
 - Contact Base Medical Facilities**
 - Contact Military Family Resource Center**
(Access resources available)

TIPS FOR REUNION



- Be realistic
- Be attentive and patient
- Expect change
- Be ready for a challenge
- Don't expect results immediately
- Share your feelings
- Accept your partner's feelings
- Spend family time
- Have fun

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KEEP IN MIND...



- Communication is the key of the reunion and the reunion process takes time – be patient!
 - Let things happen naturally!
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QUESTIONS

- **What are some of the concerns you have about your soldiers return?**
- **How have you benefited from this deployment experience?**
- **What has been the negative side of your deployment experience?**
- **What skills or knowledge have you gained during this deployment? Positives and Negatives?**
- **What is your plan for self-care?**

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Finally – Keep it Simple

- **Accept and share your feelings.**
- **Take the time to re-establish the couple and/or family dynamic.**
- **Communicate.**
- **Be patient.**
- **Have realistic expectations of the return.**

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RESOURCES

If you need more information and/or support you can contact:

- Social Work Officer
- Medical Officer
- Chaplain
- Operational Stress Injury Social Support (1-800-883-6094)
- Military Family Resource Centre (694-2273)

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RESOURCES

- Unit Rear Party
- Land Force Western Area Deployment Support Group (24/7) 1-888-711-5533
- Member Assistance Program (1-800-268-7708)



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