



Families with Kids

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1.1 THE EMOTIONAL CYCLE OF DEPLOYMENT

In this section, you will learn about the family's "*emotional cycle of deployment*" which has five stages. The stages span the entire deployment process, from the time a service member receives a deployment notice through the time that the service member returns home.

STAGE	TITLE	TIME FRAME
Stage 1	Pre-deployment	Generally, from getting orders for deployment to the day of deployment (although timing is different for everyone)
Stage 2	Deployment	Generally, the first month of deployment
Stage 3	Maintenance	Lasts for the majority of the deployment
Stage 4	Re-deployment	The month before the deployed parent is expected to return home
Stage 5	Post-deployment, Reuniting with Family	The moment the deployed parent returns and usually lasting between 2 -5 months of readjustment

Each stage has its own time frame and unique emotional challenges. Each family member needs to know how to deal with these challenges. Otherwise, problems adjusting to deployment will get worse over time.

The information in this section will help service members and their families:

- Know what to expect.
- Understand how other family members feel.
- Avoid major miscommunications.
- Deal with deployment positively.

1.1.1 Pre-deployment Stage

The pre-deployment stage often includes these common experiences:

Negotiation - Children are often worried about their parent leaving and try to "talk them into" staying home. They may negotiate with the service member parent, saying things like, "You don't really have to go, do you Mommy?" and, "Daddy, if I'm a really good girl will you stay home?"

Getting affairs in order — Many preparations and decisions are made about where will we live, who will be responsible for certain tasks, and who will care for our children?

Grief – It's common for families to feel intense sadness or loss when faced with life without a parent for a period of time.

Arguments- It's normal in stressful times for people to be more irritable and on edge. So, it makes sense that family members would argue more.

The Emotional Cycle of Deployment Table

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1.1.1 Pre-deployment Stage (cont.)

Helpful Tips For the Service Member and Spouse:

- **Communicate.** Make sure younger children understand the deployment is part of Mommy's or Daddy's job. Young kids need to know you aren't leaving because of anything they've done wrong. You should also tell them you are going to help people who live in a far away country. And you should remind your older children that you love and appreciate them.
- **Family Time.** Don't ignore your children's needs while you're busy preparing for the deployment. Plan some fun family outings so everyone can spend quality time together before you leave.



1.1.2 Deployment Stage

Here are some common deployment stage experiences:

Mixed Emotions: it's typical for all family members to deal with a roller coaster of emotions, including anger, sadness, fear, pride, excitement and anxiety.

Feeling Numb: in the first month of the service member's absence, overwhelming emotions may lead to numb feelings in all family members.

Sadness: family members may grieve the emotional and physical "hole" left in the household by the deployed service member.

Difficulty Sleeping: strong emotions and household changes make it difficult to relax enough to sleep.

Not Feeling Safe: when a parent departs, many children feel less safe and secure because of the change in family structure.

Helpful Tips For the Service Member and Spouse:

- **Spend Extra Time with Your Kids.** The remaining spouse should spend extra time helping the kids in this transition. While it's important to be honest about the service member's deployment activities, it's okay to put a "positive spin" on the job to prevent the children from getting overly worried about their parent's absence and safety.
 - **Pre-written, Pre-stamped Postcards.** The deployed service member should take some pre-written, pre-stamped postcards ready to mail while traveling. These letters will help your kids feel connected, while more permanent communications are set up.
-

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1.1.3 Maintenance Stage

Expect these common experiences in the maintenance stage:

New routines are established: remaining family members will create new ways to run the household (housework, shopping, helping with homework, recreational activities) to adjust to the service member's absence and to feel "normal" again.

New sources of support are discovered: family, friends, playgroups, community gatherings and religious/ spiritual activities offer great connections and community for the family.

Less anxiety as the family gets used to the transition: as challenges arise, family members learn to cope with crises and make important decisions. The children will begin to feel safer and more secure.

Independence: while family members continue to miss the service member, they become independent and live happy, successful lives during the deployment.

Some problems might intensify: while most families adjust well, some worries, negative feelings, or difficult behaviors may continue. If these problems persist, struggling family members should seek help.

Helpful Tips for the Service Member and Spouse:

- **Communicate with the Deployed Parent.** As the family settles into their new routine, it is important that communication continue as much as possible with the deployed parent. Families should set a communication schedule. For example, Dad will call from Afghanistan on Sundays at 2 p.m. A schedule makes it easier for the family to be available when the deployed parent calls. A schedule also allows the family to anticipate and look forward to the calls.
- **Communicate on Important Days.** Service members should make a special effort to contact the family on or around birthdays, anniversaries and other important dates. If this isn't possible, leave a "back-up" card with a pre-written note inside helps spouses and children feel connected on special days.

Communication is key.

Find ways to stay connected.

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1.1.4 Re-deployment Stage

These are some common experiences in the re-deployment stage:

Anticipation of Homecoming: like the deployment stage, children may have mixed emotions during the homecoming period. This is common and normal.

Excitement: excited children and spouses start making post-deployment plans (“When Mommy comes home we’ll go to the carnival,” or, “We’ll watch lots of movies when Daddy gets back”).

Nervousness: some children worry about how change will affect their deployed parent. Children may ask questions like, “Will Mommy recognize me? Will I recognize her?” Or “Is Daddy going to be mad that we painted the house without him?”

Mixed emotions: it is normal for a child to confuse pride (about accomplishments while the parent was gone) and concern (that the parent may feel “left out” or not approve of changes made in their absence).

Helpful Tips for the At-Home Parent:

- **Keep Routines.** Keep your routine as normal as possible so children don’t get anxious or feel ignored by preparations for the service member’s return.
- **Include Kids in the Preparations.** This will help them feel a part of the excitement of their parent’s homecoming. Creating signs, baking a cake, making a card, and planning a party are great ways for kids to get involved.



Keep kids involved in the **planning**
of a parent’s **HOMECOMING.**

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1.1.5 Post-deployment Stage

Common post-deployment stage experiences:

Honeymoon Period: this can be a wonderfully joyous occasion, with children rushing to the returning parent for hugs and kisses. For a while, everyone is happy to focus on the parent's safe return. The family may ignore many problems and conflicts to enjoy the celebration.

Readjustment of Family Roles: homecoming can also be confusing for children. Eventually, the returning service member will want to reassert their family member role. Readjusting roles can create tension as all family members figure out their post-deployment routine.

Reintegrating into Family (getting to know your family again): the service member may feel pressure to make up for lost time and missed milestones. They may want to resume their old household responsibilities. Some changes will require adjustment. Children may have grown or become more independent. And kids may be confused between which parents' rules they should follow.

Helpful Tips For the Service Member and Spouse:

- **Recognize Change.** It's important for everyone to realize that things won't be exactly as they were *before* the deployment.
 - **Reconnect.** Attending family gatherings, enjoying events as a family, and spending "alone time" with your children will help everyone reconnect.
 - **Clarify Expectations.** To avoid arguments and hurt feelings over changing roles and routines, talk openly about everyone's expectations.
 - **Give it Some Time.** **Go slow**, be patient, and allow several months to reestablish close family connections. Returning parents should slowly rebuild trust, allowing relationships to heal naturally and without force.
-

1.2 TYPICAL RESPONSES AT DIFFERENT AGE LEVELS

In this section, you will learn how kids at different ages commonly react to separation. Each child has their own unique reactions but learning guidelines can help you understand your child's reactions.



1.2.1 Separation

Children react differently when separated from a parent during deployment. These different reactions depend on a child's age, personality, life experiences, physical and emotional health, and relationships with their parents.

The following information is meant to be a helpful guideline for the behaviors of children based on developmental levels. Keep in mind that each child will have their own unique reaction to deployment. This is even true for siblings in the same household.

Kids behave and react differently to protect themselves from pain, to gain reassurance that they are still loved, and to assure themselves that the at-home parent won't "abandon" them. Lots of reassurance from both parents will help reduce the amount and intensity of these reactions.

	AGE	BEHAVIORS	MOODS	WHAT YOU CAN DO: AT-HOME PARENT	WHAT YOU CAN DO: DEPLOYED PARENT
Infants	0-1	Won't eat, more fussy	Less energy or interest in things	More affection, see pediatrician	Support spouse, communicate
Toddlers	1-3	Tantrums, cries, acting out	Grumpy, angry, sad	More attention, hugs, affection	Send letters, photos, e-mails, show love
Preschool	3-6	Potty accidents, clingy, won't sleep	Sad, moody, frustrated	More attention, conversations, hugs	Send letters, photos, e-mails, show approval
School Age	6-12	Whines, "acts out" for attention	Grumpy, moody, sad	More attention, maintain routines, conversations	Send letters, photos, e-mails, show interest
Teenagers	12-18	Isolates, turns to peers, takes risks	Anger, depression or gives the sense that they don't care	Patience, limit-setting, conversations	Send letters, photos, e-mails, stay involved

1.2.2 Infants

Infants 0-1 year must be held and actively nurtured. If the at-home parent gets depressed during the service member's deployment, the infant may fuss a lot, have less energy and interest in what's going on around them. They may lose weight by refusing to eat. In these cases, a pediatrician should evaluate the baby right away. The at-home parent should also monitor their own self-care and seek support from others. They may need to seek professional care from a therapist or counselor if they have difficulty adjusting or feel depressed.



What can the deployed parent do? It is possible for deployed service members to help care for an infant negatively affected by their absence. Letters, e-mails, postcards and photos are powerful ways to communicate love, affection and support to the family back home. These items also help the at-home parent, who may be lonely and depressed. In turn, the at-home parent will bring renewed energy and affection to their care of the children.

Toddlers model behaviors of the at-home parent.

1.2.3 Toddlers

Toddlers (1-3 year olds) tend to copy the attitudes and behaviors of the at-home parent. If the at-home parent is coping well, the child will tend to do well. If the at-home parent has emotional difficulties, a toddler may become gloomy, tearful, throw tantrums, or develop sleep problems. Children usually respond positively to more attention, hugs and holding hands. The at-home parent might benefit from sharing their day-to-day experiences with other parents facing similar challenges. At-home parents must balance the demands of childcare with getting their own individual needs met.

What can the deployed parent do? Toddlers can identify people in photos and understand that a person still exists even when they are not present. The deployed parent should communicate directly with the child through letters, e-mails and postcards. Some of the deployed parent's letters can be read by the spouse much like a bedtime story. And, through updated photos, the deployed parent can be "kept alive" in the child's imagination.



1.2.4 Preschoolers

Preschoolers (3-6 year olds) with negative reactions to a parent's deployment may act younger than their age. They may also have difficulty with potty training or bed wetting. Struggling toddlers may revert to "baby talk," thumb-sucking, sleeping in the parents' bed, and so forth. They may also seem more "clingy," irritable, depressed, aggressive, and have fears that the at-home parent will leave them.

The at-home parent should reassure children with extra attention and physical closeness (hugs, holding hands). Children find comfort in familiar patterns. So, if possible, avoid changing family routines. Your answers to their questions about deployment should be brief, matter-of-fact and to the point. This will help to comfort the anxiety of a child's overactive imagination.

What can the deployed parent do? Younger preschoolers respond well to visual stimulation. Sending cards, photos, funny images and colorful pictures may really cheer them up. If you have an older preschooler who's learning to read, you can write short, simple notes to help them practice reading. These notes will help them feel connected and make them proud of their abilities as well.

Children find **comfort** in familiar patterns so *minimize changes* in family routines.

1.2.5 School Age Children

School-Age Children (6-12 year olds) may whine, complain, become aggressive or "act out" their feelings. They may focus on the deployed parent missing a key event. For example, they may say, "If Daddy really loved me, he'd be here for my birthday." Some signs of difficulty adjusting may include: sleep problems, loss of interest in school, not eating or eating too much, and not playing with friends. School age kids should talk about their feelings with the at-home parent. They will need more attention (hugs, joint activities, help with homework) than usual. It's best to stick to family routines as much as possible since this helps kids feel more safe and secure. Keeping school-age children involved in extra-curricular activities is also a good idea.

What can the deployed parent do? Celebrate birthdays and other important events, like good report cards or sports achievements. Buy birthday presents, cards and other gifts before deploying. This way, your child will feel special, opening something you picked out. Writing detailed letters directly to the older school-aged child will also help them feel important and connected to you.

School-Age children will need more **ATTENTION** and **PHYSICAL AFFECTION.**

1.2.6 Teenagers

Teenagers (13-18 year olds) may rebel, fight, and seek attention in unhealthy ways. They may lose interest in school, peers, and activities. They also run an increased risk of experimenting with unsafe sex, alcohol, and drugs. Since teens often deny their problems and worries, the at-home parent must stay actively involved in their teenager's life. At-home parents need to keep the line of communication open, talking about life issues with their teens regularly. If your teenager's grades suffer, be patient and look for ways to help improve things. Encourage your teen to get involved in sports or other social activities that can provide some structure to their life. Find ways to give them more family responsibilities so they feel important and needed.



What can the deployed parent do? E-mails and letters show that deployed parents understand a teenager's frustration. Through emails and letters, you can also explain your expectations of your teen as a young adult. Teenagers need to understand you expect them to act maturely, help around the house, and support the at-home parent. You should also encourage your teen to express their feelings in letters and emails back to you. Teens generally respond well to a balance of love and boundaries.

1.2.7 Getting Support

Deployment is a challenging time for all families. Support from friends, family, other parents, and the community can be a great help and comfort. The following support networks offer help to parents and children:

- Family Readiness Groups or Rear Detachment Command
- Family and friends
- Playgroups
- Religious/ spiritual activities
- Community gatherings
- Army Community Services
- Behavioral Health Services

1.3 FACTORS THAT AFFECT RESPONSES TO DEPLOYMENT

In this section, you will learn about the challenge of deployment that families face. Deployment puts stress on the entire family. Families of deployed service members face unique challenges and problems, including:

- Fear for the deployed parent's safety
- Disrupted patterns and routines
- Feeling overwhelmed by new roles and responsibilities
- Less income and more worry about finances
- Negative reactions from children to sudden changes in the family
- Need for developing new coping and resilience skills
- Need for renewing family relationships
- Need for making new friends, and for joining support groups

Several factors affect the way families respond to these new challenges:

- How the at-home parent is adjusting
- How the child/ family was doing before the deployment
- If the family or child is experiencing multiple stressors (e.g., multiple changes)
- Availability of social support (parents, friends, teachers, clergy)
- Age and gender of the child
- Service member's unit/ specialty/ location in war zone
- Critical events (i.e., death of a known family friend in the unit)

1.3.1 The Adjustment of the At-Home Parent

Deployment often creates stressful circumstances for the at-home parent. At-home parents may have to take over new roles and responsibilities. They may have to adjust to a reduced income. Families that relocate during deployment may have to adjust to the separation from close friends and a supportive community. Deployment may even create or increase marital tension.

Young families may face added difficulty in dealing with deployments because they're not used to the military lifestyle. Learning to adapt to the lifestyle of a military family takes time and experience—something many young families lack.

Children look to their parents as examples as they respond and adapt to big changes. If parents struggle to cope with these new demands, the children will likely struggle as well. On the other hand, kids cope and function well during deployment when their parents function and cope well. Children adjust better when they see their at-home parents cope with the separation, manage the household, and stay involved socially.

1.3.2 Pre-deployment for Child And Family

Family life *before* deployment is often a good indicator of what family life will be like *during* deployment. If a child was anxious *before* deployment, that same child will likely be anxious and struggle to adjust during the deployment. If any of these factors exist before deployment, kids and families may have trouble coping during deployment.

- Children who are not living with one of their parents.
- Children who have been exposed to family violence.
- Children who have a family history of mental illness.
- Children who had behavioral health problems (like depression or anxiety disorders).
- Children who have experienced loss.
- Children who have experienced threatening and/ or frightening events.
- Children living in blended families (with step-parents).

These issues can be overwhelming without help. Family, friends, counselors, clergy, and military family support groups, all offer support and community that can help ease the pain of deployment. The next session has recommendations for support.

1.3.3 Multiple Stressors

At-home parents may also face stressors like relocating, money troubles, job uncertainty, family problems, and news of combat-related injuries and death. These multiple stressors can negatively affect the at-home parent's coping abilities.

When children see high levels of stress faced by their parents, they may hide their feelings to avoid causing more stress. Children who feel unsafe or insecure may only show subtle signs of depression or anxiety. Or they may show no signs at all. As life returns to "normal," these children may display behavioral problems and other negative stress reactions.

**Deployment
is one of *many*
stressors for
at-home parents.**



1.3.4 Availability of Social Support (Parent, Friends, Teachers, Clergy)

Children and families cope with deployment much better when they have support. Here are some ways to build social supports:

- Join a support group for families of deployed service members.
- Talk with another adult about adjusting to deployment.
- Go to church, synagogue, mosque or temple. Places of worship are a great source of community and new relationships.
- Talk with a therapist.



1.3.5 Age and Gender of the Child

Younger children usually show the greatest signs of distress and anxiety-related difficulties during deployment. Younger kids are still developing emotionally and mentally. Their coping styles differ from those of older children.

Boys seem to have a tougher time coping with deployment than girls. The majority of deployed parents are fathers. It may be harder for boys to cope with the loss of a male figure in the home.

1.3.6 The Service Member's Deployment Circumstances

Deployments have lengthened in the last decade. And more service members are returning with physical disabilities, brain injuries, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These

factors can make deployment and reunion *very* tough on the family.

A service member's rank can also affect the amount of stress the family will experience. Families of services members with lower ranks usually face more stress and more trouble coping. Families of the Guards and the Reserves may also have more trouble coping with lengthy deployments. Many of these families have less experience adapting to the military lifestyle and deployments.

The service member's unit type may affect the amount of worry family members will face. Families of combat unit service members may worry more than families with service members in support units.

The amount of communication between service members and their families during deployment can also play a role in family stress. Staying in touch with home is important. It allows service members to deal with the challenges of the separation. With today's advanced technology (e-mail, videos, and teleconferencing), more military families are able to communicate. The more families stay connected throughout the deployment, the better they'll cope with circumstances that arise.

1.3.7 Critical Events

Frightening and tragic events are a real part of combat. These events can make it tough to cope with deployment.

- The deployed spouse gets injured
- A family friend dies in war
- A member of the deployed spouse's unit dies in war

Let's look more closely at how a family's ability to adjust and cope can be affected by an injury to the deployed spouse.

1.3.7 Critical Events (cont.)

Being notified of injury. While it is ideal for the injured spouse to contact the at-home spouse, this is not always possible. Sometimes another service member must call to inform the family of the injury. Sometimes information about these injuries may be incomplete or wrong, causing even more anxiety.

It's important to act fast. After learning of the deployed spouse's injury, the at-home spouse should act fast. This might even mean meeting the deployed spouse far from home. These situations can disrupt family routines and can be hard on the children.

Joining a spouse at a hospital far from home. It's common for spouses to join their injured service members at a military hospital far from home. Parents may be forced to leave children in the care of other adults or bring them to the military hospital. Disrupted schedules, routines and relationships can be unsettling for children. Addressing the needs of the injured spouse and the children can be an added burden and strain on the at-home parent.

Children visiting their injured parent. Children may miss school, spending time in places unequipped to meet their needs. Talk with your children before visiting the hospital. Prepare them to handle whatever situation they'll face with the injured parent. Kids need this preparation if the parent has suffered injuries that are hard to look at (such as amputations) or have impaired the parent's ability to function (such as a brain injury).

Sharing information with children. Telling your kids about the parent's injury can be difficult. Sharing too much or too little information can make it hard for kids to understand the nature or seriousness of the injury. The non-injured parent should have other adults around (in person or by phone) for support. These supportive adults can help ensure the information shared with children is age-appropriate and accurate.



1.4 WAYS PARENTS CAN PROMOTE COPING AND STABILITY

In this section, you will learn how self-care is just as important as caring for your children. You will also learn ways to help your entire family cope with deployment, build resilience, and how to determine if your child needs additional support and where to find it.

1.4.1 Helping Parents Cope During Stressful Times

If you've flown on an airplane, you've heard the flight attendant tell parents, in the event of an emergency, to secure their own oxygen mask before securing a child's oxygen mask. In the same way, parents should first manage their own self-care and support before addressing the needs of their children.

Here are some self-care tips for the at-home parent.

1) Taking care of yourself is a necessity. Give self-care high priority. Create a schedule with special time for yourself. (Include your children, if appropriate). Let your kids know you'll be better able to take care of them if you first take care of yourself. You'll have more energy and be in better spirits if you take time to exercise, nap, spend time alone, or take time with a good supportive friend. These activities can be brief, but planned. Thank your kids for giving you time for yourself. Let them know how much better you feel.

1.4.1 Helping Parents Cope During Stressful Times (Cont.)

2) Have a "mommy's/ daddy's day out." To maintain your sanity, set aside some special time for yourself without the kids. Of course it helps if you can find good childcare during this time. Check with local daycare centers, neighborhood babysitters, or willing friends and family members. Or consider swapping your Mommy's (Daddy's) days with another parent.

Here are some great activities for your day out:

- Read a book or start a book group.
- Go to the movies or start a movie group.
- Go to lunch with a friend.
- Take a long walk or hike.
- Visit a church, synagogue, mosque or temple.: Joining a place of worship can help you find community and build new relationships. You may also find spiritual direction, peace, and strength.
- Work out. Take a class at a gym or community center. Try a new sport or physical activity. Sports leagues and hiking groups also provide good social outlets.
- Start, or re-start a hobby. Find a group nearby with similar interests.
 - Join a professional group or a neighborhood organization.
 - Take a class. Learn an instrument. Take an art or film class. You'll meet people with similar interests and expand your horizons.



3) Support Networks with other Families.

Join a support group of parents with deployed spouses. Talking with people who are facing similar experiences helps!

Schedule activities with your kids.

Plan weekly get-togethers with other families, monthly outings for the children (a favorite restaurant, the park, a picnic, etc.), and a visit to or from parents and in-laws around mid-deployment.

1.4.2 Helping Families Cope with Deployment

There are many things you can do as a family to cope with deployment. The following is a list of suggestions for coping with the challenges of deployment. Each suggestion will be discussed in further detail in this section.

1. Talk as a family before deployment.
2. Make plans for the family to continue to grow together, and include the deployed parents in on going projects.
3. Continue family traditions and develop new ones.
4. Help children understand that the deployment is not permanent.
5. Tell your children why you are upset.
6. Address your child's questions and worries as truthfully as possible.
7. Maintain routines and discipline in the home.
8. Keep a close relationship with your child's school and teachers.
9. Monitor war-related media exposure based on child's age and maturity..

1.4.2 Helping Families Cope with Deployment (cont.)

1. TALK AS A FAMILY BEFORE DEPLOYMENT

Make time before the deployment to discuss how life will be different. Focus these discussions around your faith in the children's ability to carry out responsibilities. Discussions like these

will help the kids realize they are an important part of the family, and that they share a responsibility in helping the family survive. Shared family responsibilities will also give the at-home parent more time and energy for the children.

2. MAKE PLANS FOR THE FAMILY TO GROW TOGETHER

Don't put life "on hold" until the deployed parent returns. Set specific goals for each of the children and the at-home parent. Start family projects.

Help children find ways to communicate with the deployed parent. Record and report the progress on each goal, so the deployed parent can be part of that progress by providing encouragement. Parents should make these "progress reports" a part of their communication plan during the deployment.

3. CONTINUE FAMILY TRADITIONS AND CREATE NEW ONES

Family routines and traditions help stabilize the family unit and combat stress. So keep celebrating Friday pizza nights or Saturday

outings even after a parent deploys. If you don't have any family traditions, now is a great time to start one! Here are some ways other military families have kept a sense of stability for the family:

- Family bowling night
- Attendance and fellowship at places of worship
- Involvement in events with other families
- Camping with other families
- Hiking as a family

4. HELP CHILDREN UNDERSTAND DEPLOYMENT IS TEMPORARY

You may not know exactly how long the deployment will last, but you can estimate when the deployed parent might return home. Once you know the return date, help your children create a "homecoming". The calendar should include events that help the children keep the parent's absence in perspective. Here are some examples of events to include on the calendar:

- Holidays
- Birthdays
- Special family events
- School events
- Vacations
- Other "markers"

Calendar events break the time a parent is deployed into shorter time periods.



4. HELP CHILDREN UNDERSTAND DEPLOYMENT IS TEMPORARY (Cont.)

Here are some calendar ideas from other military families:

- A paper timeline that extends around a room. Let your child draw pictures and write important dates on the timeline.
- A paper chain, with links that contain important dates and drawings. Let your child cut the links to show the passage of time.
- A traditional calendar with family photos. Color in special events and cross out the days until the deployed parent comes home.

5. TELL YOUR CHILDREN WHY YOU ARE UPSET

Children tend to focus more of their concern on their at-home parent. If children know why their at-home

parent is emotional, they can accept the situation much more easily.

NOTE: Don't share all the details of your concerns or problems with your children. Use good judgment and share just the things that will ease your child's worries.

6. ADDRESS YOUR CHILD'S QUESTIONS AND WORRIES AS TRUTHFULLY AS POSSIBLE

Be open when talking with your children about the deployed parent. Ask your children what prompted their questions or concerns. Here are some tips:

- Listen carefully before you try to correct any false ideas or assumptions.
- Explore the questions and concerns to show that you are trying to understand your child's worries.
- Don't pursue the issue if the child appears to have "moved on."
- Reassure your child about military training and protection, without making false promises about the safety or well-being of the deployed parent.

7. MAINTAIN ROUTINES AND DISCIPLINE AT HOME

During deployment, children often test the resolve of the at-home parent by breaking rules and

resisting routines. At-home parents may be tempted to relax the rules during this time. But ignoring family discipline will only add stress and make enforcing household rules more difficult.

Here are some tips for keeping routine and discipline in the home:

- **Be proactive.** Tell your children you plan to keep the "normal" bedtimes, morning routines, chores, and homework rules in place.
- **Follow through with consistent consequences and rewards to keep the program going.** Children respond best when they know you have firm boundaries and that you enforce your rules.

8. KEEP A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL AND TEACHERS

Schedule regular meetings with teachers, administrators and counselors. Let these people know your spouse has been deployed so they understand the extra stress your child is facing. Educators can help you to recognize signs of stress in your children. As the at-home parent, be prepared to have extra parent-teacher conferences.

9. MONITOR MEDIA EXPOSURE

The amount of war-related news your child watches should be based on the age and maturity of the child. Here are some tips:

- Watch what your children are watching.
- Talk about what they watched.
- Limit exposure to graphic images (especially young children).
- If your children have questions, use words and concepts your children can understand.
- Give honest, age-appropriate, answers.
- Be prepared to repeat explanations or have several conversations.
- Acknowledge and encourage your children's thoughts, feelings, and reactions.

1.4.3 Building Resilience

Building resilience is the ability to adapt well to unexpected changes and events. Resilience involves behaviors, thoughts and actions that can be learned over time. Resilience can help to manage stress, anxiety, and uncertainty. Anyone can develop resilience, and children can develop it as well.

Below are some tips to help children build resilience. To survive these challenging circumstances, children need lots of love, care, and support from parents, teachers, and other caring adults.

Ten Tips to Build Resilience in Children and Teens

1. Make Connections
2. Have your children help others
3. Stick to daily routines
4. Take a break
5. Teach your child self-care
6. Move toward your goals
7. Encourage children to see themselves positively
8. Maintain a hopeful outlook
9. Look for opportunities for self-discovery
10. Accept change



**Children can learn
to adapt to
unexpected events
and
*stressful situations***

Ten Tips to Build Resilience in Children and Teens

1. Make Connections. Connecting with people strengthens resilience.

- Schedule one-on-one time with each child in addition to spending time together as a family.
- Teach your children how to make friends. Explain to your child that you must be a friend to have friends.
- Teach your children the skill of *empathy*. Empathy is the ability to experience and appreciate another person's feelings. Teach empathy by talking about it and by showing your children you understand their feelings.
- Create a strong family network to support your children through disappointments and hurts.
- If you help at your children's school, make sure no child is isolated.
- Some families find comfort in connecting with God. Deployment may be a good time to introduce your children to your own religious traditions.

2. Have your children help others. Children who feel helpless may feel better when they help others.

- Involve your children in age-appropriate volunteer work.
- Ask your children to help you with household tasks.
- If you help at your child's school, brainstorm with children about ways they can help others.

3. Stick to a daily routine. Following a routine can provide comfort to children. In particular, young children need structure in their lives. Encourage your children to develop their own routines.

4. Take a break. Have fun. Don't focus on the worries and anxieties of life.

- Teach your children to focus on things that don't cause them worry or stress.
- Be aware of troubling things your child may encounter, whether it's the news, the internet, or conversations. Make sure your children take breaks from those things when they get upset.
- If you help at your child's school, help create some unstructured time in the school day for children to be creative. Art projects (painting, drawing, and sculpting,) are a great way for kids to express their feelings creatively. Do this at home, too.

5. Teach your child self-care. Lead by example in teaching your children to make time to eat properly, exercise, play, and rest.

- Make sure your children have time for fun.
- Control your child's schedule, leaving room for "down time" to just relax.
- Kids who can care for themselves and have fun will stay balanced and cope with stress better.

Anyone can build **RESILIENCE** including children.

Ten Tips to Build Resilience in Children and Teens (cont.)

6. Move toward your goals. Teach your children to set reasonable goals and move toward them one step at a time. This builds your child's resilience to move forward in the face of challenges.

- Praise your child for moving toward their goals (even small steps). Focus on the things your child has accomplished, instead of the goals they haven't yet reached.
- Break large school assignments into small, achievable goals for younger children. For older children, acknowledge their accomplishments on the way to larger goals.
- Create a goals project. Set a goal with your child. Then help create a form that tracks their progress. Post this form in a place where your child will see it (like the refrigerator). For example, a goal to make a book of poems and pictures for Dad while he is in Iraq.

Poem # & Title	Date Completed	In Binder?
Poem #1- Sunshine	October 15, 2007	Yes
Poem #2- Hope	October 20, 2007	Still coloring it.
Poem #3		
Poem #4		
Poem #5		

7. Encourage your children to see themselves positively. Remind your children of ways they have successfully handled hard times in the past. Help them understand those past challenges have taught them how to handle future challenges.

- Teach your kids how to solve problems and make positive decisions.
- Teach your kids to find humor in life. Show them how to laugh at themselves.
- If you help at your child's school, show kids how their individual accomplishments contribute to the well-being of the whole class.

8. Maintain a hopeful outlook. When your children face painful events, help them keep a long-term perspective. If they are too young to do this on their own, tell them about a future beyond the current situation. Reassure them that things will be better soon.

- A positive outlook helps children see the good things in life and builds resilience.
- Use history to show that life moves on after bad events.
- Share age-appropriate books and movies that focus on children overcoming tough challenges. Then talk about what you learned.

9. Look for opportunities for self-discovery. Children often learn the most about themselves during tough times.

- Help your children see how challenges can teach them "what they are made of."
- If you help at your child's school, lead discussions on things students have learned after facing tough situations.

10. Accept change. Change can often be scary for children and teens.

- Help your children see that change is part of life.
- Talk with your children about positive aspects of change.
- If you help at your child's school, discuss the different kinds of positive change students face at school (moving up a grade, meeting new friends, learning new things).

1.4.4 When To Seek Help For A Child

Sometimes a parent's best efforts are not enough to prevent a child from having problems during deployment. The decision to seek professional help for your child can be difficult and painful. Talking openly and honestly with the child about the decision will help. It also helps to talk with the child's doctor, teachers, clergy members, or other adults who know your child well. These symptoms may mean your child needs professional help:

Preschoolers:

- Constantly refusing to go to daycare/ school, sleep, or take part in normal activities due to severe worry or anxiety.
- Hyperactivity; fidgeting; constant movement beyond regular playing.
- Frequent nightmares.
- Frequent, unexplainable temper tantrums.

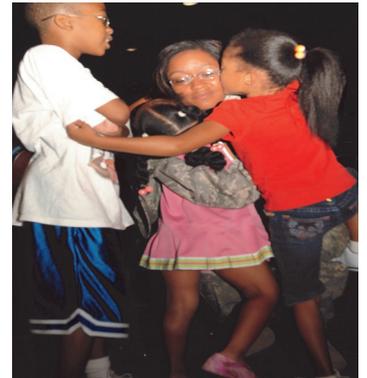
Elementary Age Children:

- Marked drop in school performance.
- Poor grades in school.
- Increased difficulties with peers at school.
- Constantly refusing to go to school, sleep, or take part in normal activities due to severe worry or anxiety.
- Hyperactivity; fidgeting; constant movement beyond regular playing.
- Frequent disobedience or aggression (for longer than 6 months), and resistance to authority.

Pre-Adolescents and Adolescents:

- Marked change in school performance.
- Inability to cope with problems and daily activities.
- Marked changes in sleeping or eating habits.
- Frequent physical complaints.
- Acting out sexually.
- Depression, persistent negative moods and attitudes, suicidal thoughts.
- Abuse of alcohol or drugs.
- Intense, irrational fear of becoming overweight.
- Frequent nightmares.
- Threats of self-harm or harm to others.
- Self-injury or self-destructive behavior, like cutting on arms or legs.
- Frequent outbursts of anger and aggression.
- Threats to run away.
- Violating other people's rights (such as resisting authority, truancy, stealing, or vandalism).
- Strange thoughts, beliefs, feelings, or unusual behaviors.

If these problems persist, talk to a trained professional who works with children and adolescents.



1.4.5 Where to Find Help For A Child

If you're worried about your child's emotions or behavior, first talk to:

- Friends.
- Family members.
- A spiritual or religious counselor.
- School counselor.
- Pediatrician or family doctor.

If your child needs professional help, here are some options to find a qualified therapist or counselor for your child:

- Military Hospital or Medical Center.
- Military One Source.
- TRICARE.
- Veteran's Administration.
- Employee Assistance Program through an employer.
- Local medical society, local psychological society.
- Local mental health association.
- County mental health department.
- Local hospitals or medical centers with behavioral health services.
- Department of Psychology in nearby university.
- National Advocacy Organizations (National Alliance for the Mentally Ill; Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health; National Mental Health Association, Anxiety Disorders Association of America).
- National professional organizations (American Psychological Association; American Academy of Pediatrics; American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry; American Psychiatric Association).

**There are many
resources
available to you and
your children.**



1.5 RETURNING HOME

Most families think homecoming is a time of joy and celebration. But reuniting with family after deployment can be difficult. The period of reconnecting with family may feel a bit “bumpy.” Families may face unexpected difficulties and challenges during homecoming. In this section, you will learn how to prepare a smooth transition home and how to adjust to different challenges of being home.

1.5.1 The Family's Reaction

For many families, the idea of a reunion brings up feelings of happiness and excitement. For others, anticipating the reunion creates anxiety and uncertainty. If the family had problems before deployment, the homecoming may cause more stress, anxiety, and fear. Most families feel a mix of joy and anxiety about the homecoming.

Typically, families expect the homecoming to be a wonderful, problem-free time. Family members focus so much on surviving the deployment that they often forget to anticipate the challenges of homecoming. The reality of homecoming catches many families off-guard. Here is a typical cycle that families often experience following the reunion:

1.5.1 The Family's Reaction (cont.)

Phase	Description
Honeymoon	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Everything seems wonderful; sense of euphoria and relief• Focus is on family time – catching up and sharing experiences• Conflicts/ annoyances are avoided
Adjustment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pressures of daily life get stronger• More conflict/ irritation with each other• Realization that changes need to be made• Roles/ expectations are changed and tested
Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adjustment in roles/ expectations are made• Decrease in conflict• Disagreements are addressed, not avoided

The amount of time spent in each phase depends on the family. Usually, it takes families six months to a year to fully re-integrate after a deployment. All families need to have realistic expectations and keep the lines of communication open after deployment.

Difficulties in Adjusting

The change in family structure during deployment is one of the most difficult adjustments after homecoming. During deployment, families often change their structure. Family members learn new roles and responsibilities. For example, the at-home spouse may start paying bills and mowing the yard—responsibilities the deployed spouse had before leaving.

It may be difficult, or impossible, for the family to completely return to the same roles and structure that existed before the deployment. Service members may have trouble knowing how to integrate into the family's new structure. They may even feel "left out." The family may also struggle to "fit" the service member back into the family organization. There may be different ideas and expectations about roles within the family. **As a family, talk openly about these different expectations.**

During the deployment, everyone has gotten older and experienced new things. The at-home spouse has probably become more independent. Family members may have changed the way they look at life, and have probably matured over the course of the deployment. Birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries have been spent apart. There may have been a graduation, or a child may even have been born. Service members change as well. **It is common for families to feel like strangers after a deployment.** An awkward period following the reunion is normal. It takes time and effort to adjust to these personal changes.

It is normal to feel anxious, impatient, and resentful during this time. You may want to "fix" things quickly. Daily events, like trying to find the silverware, may make you impatient. There may be some leftover anger if the service member missed out on important events. There may also be some leftover resentment over the increase in household responsibilities required during the deployment. The service member may resent changes made at home during the deployment. They may also resent changes in family dynamics caused by the deployment. These feelings are all a normal part of the readjustment process.

1.5.2 The Children's Reactions

Children react in unique ways to reuniting with a parent following a deployment. Some children react in ways that may upset the returning service member. Some children may not want to hug or kiss their returning parent. If the service member understands how children cope with homecoming, they'll avoid feeling hurt or upset by the child's reactions. Expect changes in children. These changes are common in children during a deployment:

- They have grown and gotten older..
- They have better verbal and motor (coordination) skills.
- They may be angry or upset that the service member left.
- They may listen to the at-home parent more than the service member.
- They may test limits with bad behavior.
- They may refuse to give up routines or roles they took on while the service member was away.

Kids' reactions vary by age. Here is a list of the reactions common in different ages:

Age	Reaction
0-12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cries, fusses• Pulls away from you• Won't recognize you• Clings to your spouse• Eating and sleeping habits change• May have bowel/ bladder problems
1-3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cries for no apparent reason• May not recognize you• Prefers your spouse• Is shy and hesitant with you• May have temper tantrums• Regresses (returns to old behaviors, for example: if toilet-trained, may begin having accidents)
3-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrates anger• Acts out to get your attention• Is demanding and whiney• Talks a lot so you know what's going on• Feels responsible for you leaving
5-12 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is angry about you being gone• Worries about you disciplining them• Acts out• Seeks out your attention• Competes with your spouse for attention• Shows pride in your service• Wants to tell you everything they did while you were gone
12-18 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acts like they don't care even though they may be excited• Worries about change in rules• Concerned they have not lived up to your standards• Angry and rebellious

These are normal reactions to a challenging situation. But if these behaviors or symptoms last more than three months, seek professional help. Start with your child's pediatrician. The next section offers suggestions for coping with these reactions.

1.5.3 Adapting To The Homecoming

Before coming home, service members anticipate how their children will react at the initial homecoming. They may look forward to hearing an infant say “Daddy” or “Mommy” for the first time. They may expect their toddler to run into their open arms during the initial greeting. Or they may picture an older child begging to hear all about the deployment. These hopeful thoughts may have even helped the service member get through tough times.

Unfortunately, some of these expectations can lead to disappointment. Children do not always greet the returning parent in such open and clear ways. They are more likely to greet the returning service member with uncertainty, shyness, or anger. Children who first show signs of happiness may later withdraw from the returning parent, preferring instead to play by themselves. The child may even strike out at the service member or others.

Children automatically adjust to new situations. During deployment, the child adjusted to the service member’s absence. Children need time to readjust when the deployed parent returns.

You should realize that a separation of even a few weeks can seem like a lifetime to a child. Rebuilding trust and closeness takes time and energy.



1.5.4 Before Returning From Deployment

For a smooth transition after your homecoming, get prepared!

Talk with your children. Before returning home, begin to talk about their worries and concerns. Talk at their level about the specifics of coming home. For example, you might say, “Daddy is going to be coming home on a big airplane. I’ll be in my uniform. I will meet you and Mommy in the stadium.” Children will have less fear if you tell them what to expect.

Send photos. Send recent pictures of you so your kids know what you look like now.

Send an item. Send some personal items home so your children feel close to you before you return.

Special event. Plan a special event for just you and your child, such as camping or going to a ball game. Let your child pick the event and help make plans. Planned events like these help the child know they are important!

Hold off on Your Second Honeymoon. Put your “second honeymoon” with your spouse on hold for a couple of months after your homecoming. Children do not understand being put aside at a time when they need attention.

You also need to prepare for homecoming with your spouse. Discuss each other’s worries and concerns about your homecoming. Try to set realistic expectations with your spouse about reuniting the family. Anticipate and plan for problems before they occur. For example, talk about responsibilities: who will change the diapers; who will take the kids to soccer practice. Talking through these issues before the homecoming will help you avoid marital conflict.

1.5.5 The Homecoming

There are several things to keep in mind that will help with the homecoming transition. The list below includes suggestions that can help with all children:

- **Remember – you are all adjusting!**
- **Tell your kids how much you love them.** Your kids need to hear you say how much you missed them and how happy you are to see them again.
- **Don't take it personally.** Children often say and do things they don't really mean when they are upset or confused.
- **Listen sensitively to your children.** Show them you are interested and ready to hear what they have to say.
- **Don't force your children to spend time with you.** Let things happen naturally. Give your children time to readjust to you at their pace.
- **Spend time with each child individually. Make a date with each of them.**
- **Limit your criticisms and judgments of your children.**
- **Praise your children verbally and physically for big and small accomplishments.** Tell them, "Nice job!" "Wow, I'm impressed," or "I am so proud of you." You can also give your child a hug, a high five, a pat on the back, or a special handshake. Children *cannot* be "spoiled" with praise.
- **Keep in mind that children mirror their parents.** If you demonstrate strength and patience, it is likely that your child will be strong and patient, too.
- **Do not change the discipline your spouse used while you were away.** Discipline methods should be changed only after you and your spouse have had a chance to discuss the issue privately.
- **Honor the relationship between your child and your spouse.** Your children were your spouse's center of attention while you were away. Don't abruptly demote your children to the number two spot upon your return.



- **Learn about what's happened while you were away and what your child has accomplished.** Together look at pictures, home movies, scrapbooks, art work, homework, awards, report cards, medals, trophies, and so on.
- **Bravery medals.** Give your children "bravery medals" for being brave while you were away.
- **Show an interest in the everyday events of your children's lives.** Find out what new interests your children developed while you were away. Don't tease your children about their interests, no matter how strange they may seem to you. Instead, get involved in their activities.

1.5.5 The Homecoming (cont.)

Suggestions for things to do with your children upon returning home:

Age	Activity
0-12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hold your baby often• Bathe and change your baby often• Feed and play with your baby often• Be patient - your baby will warm up
1-3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Give your child space and time to warm up• Don't force interactions• Sit and play at their level (play on the floor with them)• Be gentle and fun; speak with a soft voice
3-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listen to your child without criticism• Accept your child's thoughts and feelings• Play games with the child that he/ she chooses• Tell and show your child you love him/ her• Find out about the new things in your child's life (friends, books, a TV show, a new sport, etc.)
5-12 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Praise your child's accomplishments since you've been gone• Let your child show you his/ her pictures, homework, or scrapbooks• Be positive; don't criticize• Get involved in your child's education and activities
12-18 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share what has happened during your deployment• Listen to your child's stories with undivided attention• Be positive; don't criticize or be judgmental• Respect your child's privacy and friends• Don't tease your child about his/ her interests• Get involved in your child's education and activities

1.5.6 Special Circumstances

New Dads: Service members who were away for the birth or the first year of a baby's life will be coming home to a whole new family.

Some of the unique challenges in this situation include:

You may experience feelings of jealousy and/ or guilt. You may feel jealous of the attention your wife gives your baby. You may feel guilty for being away during your wife's pregnancy and the birth of your child. You need to accept two facts: (1) your baby's needs demand attention; and (2) the deployment was unavoidable. Move past your negative feelings. Instead, take an active role in caring for your baby and your wife.

Your wife may experience feelings of resentment toward you and even your baby for having to care for an infant on her own. Express appreciation to her for all she has done in your absence. Spend time alone with her. Talk about your feelings together.

Your baby's needs come first, and those needs are expensive. Now that you're home, you won't get the special pay you received while deployed (like family separation pay). Be prepared for a tighter budget.

Spend time with your children. Older children may feel lost and angry with all of the changes. Spend quality time with them.



1.5.6 Special Circumstances (cont.)

Single Parents: If you're a single parent returning from deployment, you'll face unique challenges. In particular, you may be anxious about relationships your children formed with the people caring for them while you were away. You may also worry about re-creating your own bond with your children. Here are some tips for a smoother transition with your kids:

- Communicate openly and frequently with your children and their caregiver before and after you come home. Make sure the caregiver is actively involved in the transition. Separating from the caregiver may be difficult for your children. Keep your kids in touch with the caregiver. Schedule activities with the caregiver, especially in the first month after coming home.
- Talk with the caregiver about your children's routines and schedules. Learn the caregiver's rules and disciplining methods. Try to integrate this information into your own routines, schedules, and rules. This will help ease the transition for you and your children.



For Soldiers with Combat Stress/ Post Traumatic Stress

Reactions. If you're having a tough time with combat stress reactions or you've been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), you may be even more worried and uncertain about spending time with your kids. You may worry about how you'll react to your children or how they'll react to you. You may also worry about "keeping it together" in front of your family. Your concerns are normal. They reflect your desire to be a good parent. Here are some ways to help the entire family when you come home:

- **Take care of yourself.** Continue any treatments you've started. Or seek out appropriate treatment.
- **Teach your children about PTSD, using age-appropriate language.** Teach them what to expect. Assure them that you're working to overcome your problems. You can say things like this: "Sometimes when people have this, they want to be by themselves or they may be grouchy. I may be like that sometimes. I want you to know that even if I am, it's not your fault, and I love you very much." Involve your spouse in the conversation, too.
- **Assure the children that their feelings are normal and valid.** They may be angry, confused, sad, ashamed, or afraid. They may direct their negative emotions toward you. Patiently accept their reactions.
- **Tell your children that your problems are not their fault.** You may take your anger out on your children. For example, you may yell at them because they made a mess or are making too much noise. If this happens, calm yourself down and apologize. Let your kids know your anger was not their fault. Tell them you're working hard and getting help to feel better.
- **Seek support from friends, family, school, church, etc.** You should not carry this burden yourself.

1.5.6 Special Circumstances (cont.)

For Soldiers with Brain Injuries or other Physical Injuries. If you have sustained a brain injury (sometimes called Traumatic Brain Injury or TBI) or another physical injury while deployed, you may be worried and uncertain about spending time with your children. You may wonder how your kids will react to your injuries, especially if the injuries have changed the way you look or act. You may worry about how you'll relate to and play with your kids. These are normal concerns—they show you care about your relationship with your family.



If you need lots of medical attention, you may worry about how your children will react to the doctor's visits and the equipment. If you have an internal injury with no visible wounds, your spouse or children might think you're "okay" and won't understand why you aren't able to do certain things. Again, all of these concerns are normal, and they show your desire to be a good parent. If you did sustain an injury, here are some ways you can help both yourself and your family when after returning home:

- **Take care of yourself, physically and mentally.** It's important to continue your medical care, or seek behavioral health support if you suffer from combat stress, depression, or anxiety.
- **Before you return home, discuss the injuries with your kids over the phone.** Send them a picture of you or talk over a webcam so they know what you look like with your injury. Involve your spouse in preparing your children for your return home.
- **After returning, teach your children about your injuries.** Use age-appropriate language. If appropriate, show your children your injury. Let them know what to expect as you heal. Involve your spouse in these conversations, too.
- **Tell your children that their feelings are normal and valid.** They may be angry, confused, sad, ashamed, or afraid. They also may be proud of your injuries. They may direct their negative emotions toward you. Or they may try to shield you from everything negative. Whatever their reactions, be patient and accept their emotions.



1.5.7 Conclusions

As a military family, you selflessly serve the needs of our country. But as you've read, deployment can challenge even the strongest families. Fortunately, families can find ways to cope with all stages of deployment and build resiliency so they can adjust to life after the homecoming.

We hope this information will help you adjust and cope with this challenging time. To learn more about families and deployment, we encourage you to take the friendly quiz, read the fact sheets, and try out the activities in the rest of the **Families with Kids** program. You should also take part in the **Families with Kids** workshop. It has exercises to help you develop tools to deal with deployment-related family challenges. The activities on this website can help you feel better and keep your family connected and moving forward. Good luck!

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