

New Emotional Cycles of Deployment

For Service members and their Families



As our country's operational commitments have increased throughout the world, military families are now often faced with deployments in more rapid succession. In many situations, it is unknown when the deployment will end, increasing the anxiety and uncertainty for military families. Whereas the previous emotional cycles of deployment may have allowed for a period between deployments of 18 months to 2 years, some military families are now facing another deployment of the service member within 9-12 months of the member's return. Some of the military services describe 5 stages of the emotional cycles of deployment, while others describe 7 stages; however, the changes in spouses' behavior and emotions during the stages are similar. Learning about the feelings that you may experience, as well as the resources that are available to you, can help you maintain a strong military family team.

What are the stages of the "New" Emotional Cycles of Deployment? Although the actual stages haven't changed, the change in the timing of the various stages and nature of the deployments can cause increased turmoil and stress for the military family. The "new" stages are:

- Stage 1 – Anticipation of Departure
- Stage 2 – Detachment and Withdrawal
- Stage 3 – Emotional Disorganization
- Stage 4 – Recovery and Stabilization
- Stage 5 – Anticipation of Return
- Stage 6 – Return Adjustment and Renegotiation
- Stage 7 – Reintegration and Stabilization

Stage 1- Anticipation of Departure: In this stage, spouses may alternately feel denial and anticipation of loss. As reality sinks in, tempers may flare as couples attempt to take care of all the items on a family pre-deployment checklist, while striving to make time

for "memorable" moments. In the new emotional cycles of deployment, Stage 1 may begin again before a couple

or family has even had time to renegotiate a shared vision of who they are after the changes from the last deployment.

Stage 2 – Detachment and Withdrawal: In this stage, service members become more and more psychologically prepared for deployment, focusing on the mission and their unit. Bonding with their fellow service members is essential to unit cohesion, but this may create emotional distance within the marriage. Sadness and anger occur as couples attempt to protect themselves from the hurt of separation. In the new emotional cycles of deployment, as this stage happens more often and more frequently, marital problems may escalate. When a husband or wife must repeatedly create emotional "distance", they may gradually shut down their emotions. It may seem easier to just feel "numb" rather than sad, but the lack of emotional connection to your spouse can lead to difficulties in a marriage.

Stage 3- Emotional Disorganization: With back to back deployments, one might think that this stage of adjusting to new responsibilities and being alone would get easier. Although a military spouse may be familiar with the routine, (s)he may also be experiencing "burn-out" and fatigue from the last deployment, and feel overwhelmed at starting this stage again.

Stage 4- Recovery and Stabilization: Here spouses realize they are fundamentally resilient and able to cope with the deployment. They develop increased confidence and a positive outlook. With back to back deployments, however, spouses may find it hard to muster the emotional strength required, but many resources are available to provide needed support.

Stage 5- Anticipation of Return: This is generally a happy and hectic time spent preparing for the return of the service member. Spouses, children and parents of the service member need to talk about realistic plans and expectations for the return and reunion.

Stage 6 – Return Adjustment and Renegotiation: Couples and families must reset their expectations and renegotiate their roles during this stage. The key to successful

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adjustment and renegotiation is open communication. Families also need to be prepared to deal with the effects of combat stress on the returning service member. Such stress and trauma can be difficult to deal with. Troops with combat stress are often irritable, guarded, and want to be alone. Some may use increased alcohol or drugs in a failed attempt to “numb” the emotional pain they are experiencing. Attempts at renegotiation may result in increasing marital arguments.

Stage 7- Reintegration and Stabilization: This stage can take up to 6 months as the couple and family stabilize their relationships anew. As noted with Stage 6, the presence of combat stress can severely disrupt the stabilization process. Reintegration and stabilization can hit more roadblocks when a family must make a Permanent Change of Station (PCS) move immediately upon the return of the service member. Back to back deployments create stress as families stabilize only to begin Stage 1 once again.

Where can families find help?

-Your military service Family Support Center on the installation offers groups, classes, and counseling for a variety of issues. National Guard and Reserve families can contact their state or regional Family Assistance Center for assistance.

- Military OneSource, DoD's 24/7 Call Center (1-800-342-9647, www.militaryonesource.com) provides access to six (6) free private counseling sessions per problem per person with a provider in your local area for issues such as coping with deployment, reintegration, and marital and family problems.

-Local Military healthcare facilities

- TRICARE: www.tricare.osd.mil

- Online, mental health screening tools (anonymous self-assessments for depression, alcohol disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), generalized anxiety disorder, and bipolar disorder) are available online at www.MilitaryMentalHealth.org.

Individuals can print the results of their assessments to take with them to a health care provider. Results and resources are listed at the end of every assessment tool. Information on TRICARE providers, Veterans' Centers and Military OneSource is also listed.

FACTS TO REMEMBER:

- **The emotions you experience during the cycles of deployment are a normal reaction to an abnormal situation unique to the military**
- **If your service member experiences combat stress, it can interfere with your ability to reintegrate as a couple- seek help early rather than later**
- **You don't have to go it alone! Use the many resources available to you**

FEATURED RESOURCES AND DOWNLOADS:

Article on “The Emotional Cycles of Deployment - A Military Family Perspective.”
<http://www.hooah4health.com/deployment/familymatters/emotionalcycle.htm>

Resources and links specific to National Guard families:
<http://www.guardfamily.org/>

Life Articles on deployment and return, including articles specific to Reserve families:
<http://www.militaryonesource.com/skins/MOS/home.aspx>

Multiple articles on issues related to the cycles of deployment:
http://www.lifelines.navy.mil/pls/itc/url/page/LSNAPP/LSN5DETAIL.LFT?current_id=25.60.500.390.120.0.0.0.0§ion_id=25.60.0.0.0.0.0.0

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Additional Sources of Information and Assistance

Military OneSource
24/7 Call Center, Tip Sheets & Life Articles
1-800-342-9647 (24/7 Confidential Call Center)
1-800-3429-6477(Overseas)
www.militaryonesource.com

USACHPPM
<http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil>

Naval Medical Center San Diego
<http://www-nmcsd.med.navy.mil>

Commanders Page
www.commanderspage.dod.mil

MilitaryHOMEFRONT
www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil

DoD Reserve & National Guard
www.defenselink.mil/ra
www.guardfamily.org

FirstGov.gov (See Military Personnel and Veterans section)
http://www.firstgov.gov/Citizen/Audiences/Military_Veterans.shtm

Deployment Health & Family Readiness Library
<http://deploymenthealthlibrary.fhp.osd.mil>

Military Students in Transition & Deployment
www.militarystudent.org

National Military Family Association
www.nmfa.org



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A collaborative effort between the Department of Defense, the military services and military service and family member support organizational partners