

## Homecoming Letdown

Most, if not all, returning service members will experience something of a “letdown” after homecoming. In most cases, it reflects that you’re no longer “running on nerves” and that things are beginning to settle down—the positive feelings will resume as soon as you’re rested and comfortable with your new surroundings.

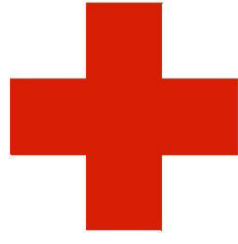
At other times, the letdown comes from the fact that the problems that existed before the deployment are still there, or because your reunion wasn’t the way you thought it would be. Letdowns that last longer than two weeks or so may indicate something more serious called clinical depression. Warning signs of depression include frequent or long-lasting feelings of despair or hopelessness, persistent lack of interest in day-to-day activities or loved ones, and major weight change. In extreme cases, thoughts of death or suicide are common. These should always be taken seriously.

## Common Coping Strategies

- *Communicate*—The key to making the transition a healthy one is to discuss everything openly
- *Approach each other as equals*—At home or at work, avoid the “I’m home and I’ll take charge” or the “I’m not budging” attitudes
- *Find out what new skills everyone has learned*
- *Be patient*—Starting over will be difficult for everyone
- *Arrange quiet time*
- *Stay positive*—Keep criticism to a minimum; if it can’t be avoided, keep it constructive
- *Don’t expect old problems to have gone away*—If you were having difficulties with people or situations at home or at work before you left, it’s not likely that your being away solved them. On the other hand,

### The American Red Cross Can Help!

The American Red Cross has licensed mental health professionals available to counsel you and your family. You can receive up to three visits with a Red Cross mental health counselor at no charge. Please call (309) 743-2166 today to



**American  
Red Cross**

# Welcome Home

## A Guide to a Healthy Family Reunion



**American Red Cross of the Quad Cities  
Area**

**1100 River Drive PO Box 888**

**Moline, IL 61265**

**Phone: (309) 743-2166**

# The Red Cross is Here to Help....

## Making Life “Normal” Again

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. You're not the same person you were before you left, and neither are the people you love and work with.

Begin by realizing that your reunion is more than just coming home; it's a major event in your life and for those around you—maybe even bigger than the separation. In fact, research shows that reunion can cause more stress in people's lives than deployment.

Stress is normal, but if it goes unrecognized and unmanaged, it can lead to serious physical and mental health problems, or show itself through alcohol abuse or domestic problems. If handled correctly, it can be turned into a source of energy and enthusiasm about starting a brand new life with your family and friends. In fact, most people find that separation and reunion can actually be a constructive experience.

Changes to Expect:

- ◆ *More independence*—Those at home or work have taken on new responsibilities, made their own decisions, and set their schedules.
- ◆ *New rules*—Things have changed at home while you were gone, including the rules and procedures used to keep things going. Don't rock the boat—the rules that are no longer needed will fade away and those that stay probably have a good reason.
- ◆ *New roles*—Those at home had to take on your roles and reversing them isn't easy or even advisable.

## Mixed Feelings

Separation and the changes it brings about can create strong—and what may seem like conflicting—emotions in you and those you care about. You may feel complete happiness about being home and at the same time worried that you might not fit back in. These emotions usually require nothing more than a little time to sort out.

## Returning Mothers

If you're a mother returning to children or young adolescents, you may find that the special, nurturing role children look for in mothers was disrupted during deployment, causing reactions that might not happen with a returning father.

Express your interest in your children's lives by discussing schoolwork and social activities and let them feel they are part of your life by telling them about your own experiences. Tell them how much you missed them—it might seem like they know that already, but they need to hear it from you directly.

## New Fathers

If you are a father who was deployed at the time your child was born, or for a good part of the child's first year, you are coming home to a whole new family. You may feel jealous of the attention given to the baby or guilt for being away during the pregnancy. Accept two facts: the infant's needs will demand attention, and the separation was inevitable. Take an active role in caring for the child as soon as possible.

## Reestablishing Intimacy

Because sex is such a powerful and instinctive way to keep couples feeling intimate, it tends to dominate both partners' thinking and fantasizing during the deployment. As a result, it becomes the focus of the reunion as well. This can lead to disappointment, especially if your expectations and needs are different than your partner's. There is no one set of guidelines for rebuilding intimacy and few people will need help getting the sexual part going again. But to avoid disappointment or hurt feelings down the road, you both should consider several points:

- Be prepared for temporary “performance” difficulties
- Make intimacy—not just sex—your goal
- Understand the differences in male and female sexuality
- Expect to feel strange together at first

Be prepared for the possibility of infidelity—This is not to suggest that partners should be suspicious of each other. Work under the assumption that you've both been faithful to one another, but understand that you both have human weaknesses, such as giving into stress and pressure. Those who are completely unprepared for its possibility are subject to

overwhelming dismay or shock on those rare occasions that it does happen.

## Service Members Who Are Single

Focus on communicating, being patient, recognizing and adapting to the changes that have taken place, and not rushing the necessary transition period. Go slowly, you deserve a good time after these months away, but trying to fit too much into your plans too soon only adds to your stress level. Spend time with your

family. One of the most heartbreaking things in the world is for a parent to lose a child, and your parents have been living in fear of this possibility.

## Children

Children have the same confusing feelings adults have: worry, happiness, fear, excitement, etc. Make sure they know how happy you are to see them again. Change is just as stressful for children as it is for adults—