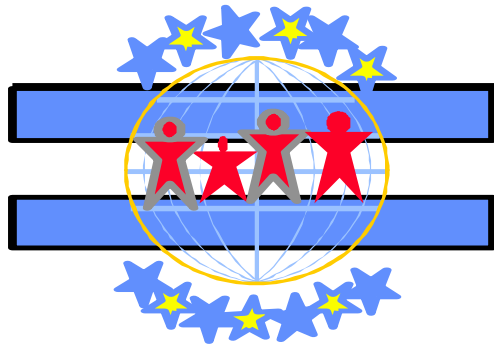


The Emotional Impact of Deployment/Remote Tours on the Military Family



**524 Stuart Ave
Shaw AFB, SC 29152
Telephone: 803-895-1252
DSN: 965-1252**

THE DEPLOYMENT/REMOTE TOUR CYCLE



STATE OF EQUILIBRIUM

- Relative Tranquility
- A Partner to Share Joys and Responsibilities
- Shared Responsibilities at Work



READJUSTMENT

- Renegotiation of Marriage/Family/Work
- Ecstasy
- Relief
- Disappointment
- Guilt
- Change

ANTICIPATION

- Detachment Beginning
- Denial, Shock, Anger
- Frustration, Rejection



ANTICIPATION OF REUNION

- Joy
- Hope
- Apprehension
- Excitement
- Expectation

EMOTIONAL DISORGANIZATION

- Despair
- Loneliness
- Irritability
- Confusion
- Overwhelmed with Responsibility



STABILIZATION

- Calm
- Self-Assured
- Adjusting to Being Alone
- Absolved Work Load
- Detachment



STAGES OF SEPARATION

As the separation day arrives, you'll notice specific emotional changes. You are likely to experience the following stages and patterns during separation:

PRE-SEPARATION - (PROTEST)

- Anticipation of Loss (6-8 weeks)
- Denial
- Increase in family and work stress
- Change in ability to cope
- Experience selfish, tense, unpatriotic, or guilty feelings
- Distancing (3-4 weeks)
- Increase in physical and mental exhaustion
- Detachment and withdrawal (up to 7 days)

SEPARATION - (EXCITEMENT)

- Shock (first 72 hours)
- Emotional disorganization-- (first 6 weeks) withdrawal, anger, frustration, confusion, delayed stress reaction in some instances
- Recovery and stabilization (midpoint)
- May experience guilt because you do not miss spouse any longer
- Anticipation of homecoming (lasts 6 to 8 weeks) (excitement, worry, fear)

REUNION - (SURVIVAL AND GROWTH)

- Renegotiation of relationships and work roles (first 4 weeks)
- Personality and physical changes in children
- Financial changes
- Goal changes
- Reintegration and stabilization (4-8 weeks)

STAGES OF EMOTIONAL CHANGES

Oftentimes feelings of guilt and remorse overshadow us when our planned separation and homecoming do not go as we anticipated. You are not alone! These are all normal reactions. Outlined below are eight basic stages we go through when faced with a separation. Your awareness of these stages may help you recognize and manage the changes that are inevitable.

ANTICIPATION OF LOSS- (4 to 6 weeks before departure. This stage is characterized by crying, depression, and anger, then guilt at feeling this way. There is also frustration in your awareness of how many household and family business chores must be handled before he/she

goes, and a bona fide physical as well as mental exhaustion for both partners. Everyone is on edge, and slight irritations can grow to major proportions.

DETACHMENT-1 week before departure. This stage is characterized by feelings of hopelessness; how will I cope, how will the children react? Don't worry if your sexual relationship suffers and proves to be unsatisfying. This is a normal reaction to stress.

Feeling guilty about arguing right before departure adds to everyone's unhappiness. This is a normal reaction and is part of nature's way of making it temporarily easier to say good-bye.

Get all the necessary mechanical things out of the way as quickly as possible. Remove as many tasks as possible from the last day so that you can keep panic out of that day. Make family #1 on your priority list. Do all the crazy things you have always wanted to do together--run through the sprinkler with the children, go camping with the family--have your relationship in the best possible shape that you can.

EMOTIONAL DISORGANIZATION--6 weeks after departure. This stage is characterized by irritability, sleep disturbance, and feelings of aloneness and emptiness. You may find it hard to complete tasks, concentrate, and in general, you may feel "out of the routine." **DON'T GET STUCK HERE!!!!**

STABILIZATION. This is the stage where you will spend most of your time. Patterns are formed and become routines. You relax a little. You discover that you can deal with the everyday things and even solve the "biggies" without your partner.

This is the stage of personal growth. Make an effort to do things you've always wanted to do and never seemed to have time for. Find a support group, take classes, volunteer, work, and seek opportunities for new responsibilities. There may be times of mild depression or sadness, but don't dwell on it.

ANTICIPATION OF HOMECOMING--6 weeks before arrival. This stage is characterized by excitement, joy, and relief that it's almost over. Many spouses go into a physical frenzy--cleaning every inch of the house, and getting all the projects completed. Normally, the spouse at home has few apprehensions--but the spouse returning has many. The returning spouse wonders: Will the kids know me? How much have the kids grown and changed? Will they accept my authority again? Has my spouse become too independent? Where do I fit in?

THE HOMECOMING. A range of emotions may be experienced during this event--from ecstatic to disappointment. Everyone is on a nervous high. The family member may be exhausted from the preparation of the return. The spouse is exhausted from the trip. Everyone wants the returning spouse's attention. When it's not given, we often feel hurt. There may be tearful moments prompted by joy or sadness.. Expect no conversation or much conversation. The returning spouse may sleep alot--the energy level is normally low for days. The unwinding from the emotional high takes its toll!!

Families who have experienced the excitement of several returns from remote tours, urge that reunions be downplayed; expectations not be too great so that the disappointment in a delayed arrival or the exhausted returnee will not be overwhelmed.

RENEGOTIATION--6 weeks to 3 months. This stage may be characterized by anger, depression, and guilt. The returning spouse may find a more independent family or work roles and responsibility changed. Family members and co-workers are not the same--they are older, more mature, and more self-confident. The children seem to depend more on the partner they stayed with, forgetting to seek help from the returning spouse. Even the sexual relationship may be a little strained.

This is the stage for clear communication of needs and wants. **It's time to re-focus, and reorganize.** The loss of individual freedom is felt by everyone.

Many divorces occur during this stage. The returning spouse boldly marches in to recapture his/her kingdom. The family members want to retain their routine and the spouse who stayed may not want to give up the measure of independence, decision-making, and private freedom he/she experienced during the separation. Again, embrace the change. Renegotiate your roles at home and work and continue to move forward.

Be Very Cautious During This Stage!!

REINTEGRATION. This is the stabilization stage. Now the conversations become "we", "us", and "our." The family begins to move forward as a unit. You may have experienced a difficult time, but in the end, everyone in the family is stronger, more confident, and less frightened by the unknown. Be mindful that changes have occurred and people may be a little different. There is a "new normal" as it relates to people and family. Find that "new normal" and see where you fit in versus trying to make immediate changes.

REMEMBER . . .

**WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU LEMONS--
MAKE LEMONADE!**

A MILITARY SPOUSE'S VIEW

It is normal to experience an array of emotions when your spouse is chosen for a temporary duty assignment. Six to eight weeks before the departure, you and your spouse mentally prepare for the separation. Both of you feel excited and worried about how to manage and resolve even the most minor details. You become irritated with one another. Petty arguments and s-t-r-o-n-g disagreements erupt. Three to four weeks before the separation either and/or both of you are likely to build walls and withdraw in order to distance yourself. The distancing peaks a few days before your spouse leaves. Remember, however, distancing is important because it allows you to let go for a while and to get ready for the separation and COUNTDOWN TOWARDS REUNION.

“THE DAY” arrives and you prepare to say good-bye. Words seem awkward between you and with everyone around. Whatever you do or say seems off-kilter, inappropriate, or just not quite right. After reflection, you question whether or not you were romantic or romantic enough. Was it the right “good-bye”?

BELIEVE IT OR NOT -- YOU ARE FINE!

A few days after the separation you feel as though you are in a daze, a haze, and a fog--maybe shock. You may feel indifferent and seem to have little to no energy. You may want to go into a room and hibernate. You wonder...was it easy for him/her to leave? You may feel overwhelmed with responsibilities. You may feel angry with your spouse, the Air Force, and their Commander, or even with the whole world!

Many of these emotions occur. However, taking charge of the challenge of separation helps you gain the control to handle the separation. Within a few weeks you adjust and settle into a routine. If you don't begin to find your niche and you remain upset and unsettled, call for assistance from the Airman and Family Readiness Center at 895-1255.

*You know you're surviving the separation when your life becomes less intense. Sleep comes more easily than it did the first few weeks of separation. Food begins to taste like food, again--
FLAVOR!*

**YOUR ROUTINE IS IMPORTANT!
WHEN YOU FIND ONE THAT WORKS,
STAY WITH IT!
IT'S COMFORTING!**

ABOUT 6 TO 8 WEEKS before your spouse returns, you begin planning for the reunion. There are decorations to make, parties to plan, food to prepare, etc. You have lots of “to-dos” and lots of questions and concerns--Perhaps, a new outfit? A new hair-do? A complete makeover? Has he/she changed? Will he/she still love me? Have I changed? Will he/she like the changes? Will things be as they were before the separation?

As the homecoming time draws nearer, you and the children may become excited--losing sleep and launching into a frenzy of preparations. In your mind you rehearse the perfect homecoming.

The last few days before your spouse arrives, you experience a flood of different emotions--sleeplessness, loss of appetite, unexplained aches and pains, and on, and on. The anxiety and excitement may not let you sleep. In the excitement and anticipation of reunion, you wonder how things will change. You are more independent now. Perhaps, you've learned you're pretty good at managing on your own.

REUNION DAY arrives, you've spent hours preparing for this day, and YOU'RE DETERMINED the sun will shine and the birds will be chirping. Well, the rain is falling or the snow is blowing and there's not a bird in sight (so much for the chirping).

The “perfect” reunion may not have occurred, but the hugs and kisses are plentiful and still as sweet as you remember.

Your spouse expresses his/her pride in the way you managed the household. Yet, you detect a distinct drop in the tone of his/her voice. Understand he/she, too, takes into consideration your independence. After all, you managed well without them, and he/she may feel unneeded. Remind your spouse of your need and desire for him/her--again and again.

Now that you are back together, spend quiet time alone. Talk about what happened--the good and the not so good. You both need to listen and talk to one another. You both have a million things to say. Reassure each other that everything is fine. Be patient and understanding with each other. Give each other space and time alone to relax and reflect. Realize that you both grew from the experience.

Things are no longer as they were. It takes time to re-establish old patterns and create new ways of doing things to maintain harmony. Take time to enjoy one another.

Neither separations nor reunions are ever easy.

Neither one of you seems as the other imagined. Both of you bring drawbacks and rewards that yield growth experiences for you and your family.

REMEMBER, separations are not forever!