



Managing your emotions when your partner is deployed

Defence Community Organisation

Your partner being deployed can bring up a wide range of emotions, starting when you first learn about the deployment and continuing until well after your partner has returned home.

As you go through this emotional process, you may experience many emotions, including fear, anger, loneliness, joy, relief and anticipation. Below are some tips and ideas to help you manage this phase in military life.

BEFORE THE DEPLOYMENT

When you first learn about the deployment, you may go back and forth between pretending that the deployment isn't going to happen and starting to think about what it will be like to live without your partner for a long period of time. You may feel confused, stressed, resentful or depressed.

As the day of departure nears, some partners begin to feel detached or withdrawn as the ADF member invests more time and commitment to the deployment. Common reactions include feelings of hopelessness and impatience. Some couples may experience a decrease in emotional or physical closeness. Some ideas to address these issues are:

- Keep the lines of communication open by talking about your own feelings and listening to what your partner shares. It's also helpful to discuss what you expect from each other during the deployment, including how you will communicate.
- While it may not be easy to set aside the pre-deployment preparations or your

mixed feelings about the separation, build in quality time together. This will give you some lasting, fond memories to sustain you during the deployment.

- Get to know other military partners who are going through the same experience and join in unit or Defence Community Organisation events. This will help you find comfort in sharing your experiences and begin building a network of support.

DURING THE DEPLOYMENT

Many family members go through a difficult adjustment period in the first weeks after the ADF member leaves. You may have feelings of sadness, disorientation, anxiety or anger.

Fortunately, this feeling of being on an emotional roller coaster often gives way to a growing sense of self-confidence and independence. Here are some suggestions for coping during your partner's deployment:

- Find things to look forward to. Take a class, volunteer or start a project you have always wanted to do. Set some personal goals and make a point of being open to new experiences and friendships.
- Reach out to others who are in the same situation. Plan an event with other families who are coping with a deployment or find a support group through your military community.



- Don't try to hide feelings. It's normal to feel sad or lonely or even angry. Hiding these feelings may make them harder to deal with them. Talk about how you feel with people you trust.
- Try to concentrate on what you can control. It's normal to worry about your partner's safety during a deployment or about when he or she will come home. Talk about how you feel with people you trust.
- Learn some stress management techniques. There are a range of ways you can relieve stress including exercise, writing a journal, meditation or deep breathing. Take care of yourself. Get enough sleep, exercise, eat healthy meals and be sure to drink plenty of water.

COMING HOME AND THE POST-DEPLOYMENT PERIOD

As the end of the deployment nears, Defence partners experience growing excitement and anticipation, as well as apprehension. You will wonder how your partner has changed, knowing that you have changed, too. You may have concerns about what your relationship will be like after you have been apart for so long.

The post-deployment period can last from a few weeks to several months. You may experience stress and frustration as you and your partner renegotiate your roles and responsibilities. The reintegration process may be especially difficult if your partner is having difficulty disengaging from combat or is suffering from combat stress.

There are several things you can focus on to reduce stress for you and your family during these emotional times:

- Maintain a positive, non-judgemental attitude. There may be uncomfortable moments as you and your loved one get reacquainted and begin rebuilding your relationship. The right attitude will help to lower stress and frustration when getting back together doesn't seem to be going the way you expected.
- Talk openly and honestly about your experiences during the deployment and how you've changed. It can help you re-establish a foundation of healthy communication and encourage your partner to trust you with his or her deployment experiences.
- Be patient as it may be some time before you both feel relaxed and comfortable together. You may have to modify your expectations often during this period, so keep in mind that time and patience are critical to the process of recovering from combat experience.
- Making plans together – whether it's for a weekend outing or something more elaborate – can help you focus on your life together and the future. Talking together about dreams and ideas can help you feel closer.

ASKING FOR HELP

At any stage during deployment, you can feel overwhelmed and unsure about your ability to cope. Asking for help isn't a sign of weakness – it's a sign that you care about yourself and your family.

If you're feeling so sad or anxious that you're having difficulty taking care of everyday tasks and routines, you may benefit from some professional help. Contact Defence Community Organisation through the Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608. Our staff can help assess your needs and connect you with a counsellor or other community supports.

For more information on this factsheet and other Defence Community Organisation support services visit www.defence.gov.au/dco or call the all-hours Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608.

Defence Community Organisation offers a wide range of support services for the families of ADF members.

The best way to access these services is to call 1800 624 608. The Defence Family Helpline is staffed by qualified human services professionals including social workers and psychologists.

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