



Chapter Six: The Emotional Cycle of Deployment: Homecoming and Reunion

I. Lesson Plan

- A. Purpose: Understand the unique issues faced when a deployed person returns
- B. Objectives:
 - 1. Understand the excitement and stresses that accompany homecoming
 - 2. Understand the stages of homecoming and how various age youth adjust
- C. Time: 30 minutes
- D. Preparation/Materials Needed:
 - ✦ Scratch paper, quiz answer key, laptop computer, PowerPoint slides, and LCD projector

II. Training Session Content

- A. PowerPoint Slides
 - Slide 6-1: Chapter 6 Introduction Slide
 - Slide 6-2: True or False: The Myth of the “Perfect” Homecoming Reunion
 - Slide 6-3: Homecoming and Reunion Activity
 - Slide 6-4: The Homecoming: Challenges and Rewards
 - Slide 6-5: Stages of Homecoming
 - Slide 6-6: Helping Infants Adjust to Reunion
 - Slide 6-7: Helping Youth Ages 1–3 Adjust to Reunion
 - Slide 6-8: Helping Youth Ages 3–5 Adjust to Reunion
 - Slide 6-9: Helping Youth Ages 5–12 Adjust to Reunion
 - Slide 6-10: Helping Youth Ages 13–18 Adjust to Reunion
- B. Activity and Directions
 - 1. Review Slides
 - 2. Activity: The Myth of the Perfect Reunion

III. Must-Read Background Material

- A. Helping Children Adjust to Reunion
- B. Tips for Parents to Keep in Mind
- C. Tips for the Service Member
- D. Tips for Spouse
- E. Children and Reunion

IV. Evaluation

- A. Reflection Questions
 - 1. What surprised you about the reaction to homecoming?
 - 2. What have you seen when someone who's been away returns?
- B. Application Questions
 - 1. How can you ease some of the stresses of homecoming for youth you work with?
 - 2. What are some of the positive things you can do in your classroom/program around homecoming/reunion?

Chapter 6: The Emotional Cycle of Deployment: Homecoming and Reunion

Operation: Military Kids
Ready, Set, Go! Training

Ready, Set, Go!



Slide 6-1: Chapter 6 Introduction

Content of this slide adapted from: N/A

Materials Needed: N/A

Trainer Tips: N/A

What to Do, What to Say:

- Do:**
- Review slide content with participants.
 - Share purpose and objectives of this chapter.

Say: *The purpose of this chapter is to understand the emotional cycle of deployment and the unique issues faced when a deployed person returns.*

The objectives of this chapter include understanding the excitement and stresses that accompany homecoming. We also want you to understand the stages of homecoming and how youth of various ages adjust.

True or False: The Myth of the “Perfect” Homecoming Reunion

- If you love one another, reunions are easy.
- Angry feelings should never accompany reunions.
- First few days following homecoming are often mix of relief, happiness, and anxiety.
- It’s perfectly natural for communication to be strained at first.
- Children may not feel automatically comfortable with the returning parent.
- It may take some time for the returning Service Member to adjust.
- If they really love each other, spouses/significant others will not change during absence.
- Re-established intimacy will flourish if given time to grow.
- Service Members never feel let down/lonely following deployment.
- There is no such thing as a perfect homecoming.

Ready, Set, Go!



Slide 6-2: True or False: The Myth of the “Perfect” Homecoming Reunion

Content of this slide adapted from: *Deployment and Reunion*, Military Family Forum Library, Bureau for At-Risk Youth, <http://www.Militaryfamily.com>

Materials Needed: Scratch paper for participants, answer key

Trainer Tips: N/A

What to Do, What to Say:

- Do:**
- Activity Instruction: The Myth of the Perfect Reunion
 - Trainer option: Based on time available, you may do the activity with the large group or divide into small groups.
 - Ask participants to pull out a piece of scrap paper (or hand out paper).

Say: *There are many myths related to a deployed Service Member’s return home. This is a chance to test your knowledge of the truths and myths related to this event. Please take about five minutes to answer the questions on the screen, indicating true or false.*

- Do:**
- (After five minutes) Review the answers by having the participants share their answers. (Allow participants to share some of their stories if applicable.)
 - Address any additional questions from the group.

Homecoming and Reunion Activity

Ready, Set, Go!



Slide 6-3: Homecoming and Reunion Activity

Content of this slide adapted from: N/A

Materials Needed: Marker or chalk, butcher block or blackboard

Trainer Tips: Note the resources listed at the end of Chapter 5 which support this activity. These articles describe the feelings that family members have reported during the Homecoming and Reunion stages. There may be individuals in the audience who have experienced these stages of deployment. Be sure to include their input, and have someone available to assist if individuals become emotional.

What to Do, What to Say:

- Do:**
- Ask for volunteers from the group to participate in this activity.
 - Divide them into three groups representing elementary age youth, middle school youth and teens.

Say: *Now that we have covered the emotional stages in the cycle of deployment and have a better understanding of what family members might be feeling, let's talk about what they might be feeling as they navigate the stages of Homecoming and Reunion with their Service Member.*

Do: • Ask each group to propose what they might be feeling about or doing in preparation for the Homecoming and Reunion with their Service Member. Write each group's response on a blackboard or butcher block.

Say: *What might elementary school children be feeling and doing?*

What might middle school youth be feeling and doing?

What might teens be feeling and doing?

The Homecoming: Challenges and Rewards

- Anticipated reunion is often as stressful as the anticipated deployment
- When date finally arrives, many family members are overwhelmed with rush of emotions—joy, as well as fear, anxiety, and anger
- Fears include permanent loss of a deep connection with loved one, or fear of change to a point that leaves nothing in common
- Families can reconnect on new, more exciting level if handled in a healthy way

Ready, Set, Go!



Slide 6-4: The Homecoming: Challenges and Rewards

Content of this slide adapted from: *Deployment and Reunion*, Military Family Forum Library, the Bureau for At-Risk Youth, <http://www.Militaryfamily.com>

Materials Needed: N/A

Trainer Tips: N/A

What to Do, What to Say:

Do: • Review slide content with participants.

Say: *Although homecoming and reunion is an exciting and joyful time for families, there are also many struggles in dealing with the stress of learning to live with one another again after an extended separation. Homecoming can be as stressful as deployment. A family goes through a whole range of emotions as the date approaches and arrives. Family members also fear that the deployed and themselves have both changed so much that there will be a loss of deep connection or they may have nothing in common anymore.*

If handled in a healthy manner it can be a time to reconnect on a new, more exciting level.

Stages of Homecoming

- Stage One: Anticipation (weeks and days before homecoming)
- Stage Two: Honeymoon and Readjustment
 - Honeymoon (lasts until first serious disagreement)
 - Feelings of euphoria, relief, excitement; catching-up, sharing experiences; reestablishing intimacy
 - Readjustment (approximately 6–8 weeks)
 - Intensified pressures; sensitive to each other's presence; increased tension as idealized relationship confronts reality
- Stage Three: Stabilization (8 weeks and beyond)

Ready, Set, Go!



Slide 6-5: Stages of Homecoming

Content of this slide adapted from: *Working with Military Children: A Primer for School Personnel*, Military Child Education Coalition; <http://militarychild.org>

Materials Needed: N/A

Trainer Tips: N/A

What to Do, What to Say:

Do: • Review slide content with participants.

Say: *Homecomings can be a time of celebration as well as change. Family members experience a variety of feelings before and after being reunited. These emotions are perfectly normal. In fact, there are three stages that most people experience during homecomings: anticipation, readjustment, and stabilization.*

Stage one is anticipation. The weeks and days before homecoming are filled with mounting excitement, tension, and nervousness. Days may be spent in busy preparation for a spouse's return. Fantasies of an even better relationship may surface and take the place of reality as the day of homecoming draws

closer. As the experience of homecoming fades, it is often followed by a stage of renewal and the possible renegotiations of roles and responsibilities.

Stage two is the honeymoon and readjustment. The honeymoon usually lasts until the first serious disagreement. There are feelings of euphoria and excitement and relief. Families catch up and share experiences and begin to reestablish intimacy. Readjustment takes place in approximately 6–8 weeks. Pressure is intensified and couples are sensitive to each other's presence. Reality hits.

Stage three is stabilization. The amount of time it takes for families to stabilize varies. Many experience only minor difficulty in adjusting to new routines. However, readjustment may be a longer process for others.

Helping Infants Adjust to Reunion

- Reactions
 - Cries, fusses, pulls away
 - Clings to parent who stayed behind
 - Change in sleep and eating habits
 - Does not recognize returning parent
- Techniques
 - Hold, hug as much as allowed
 - Interact, bathe, change, feed, and play with baby
 - Relax and be patient—they will warm up

Ready, Set, Go!



Slide 6-6: Helping Infants Adjust to Reunion

Content of this slide adapted from: Hot Topics: Current Issues for U.S. Army Leaders, *Reunion: Putting the Pieces Back Together*, Volume 5. No. 3.

Materials Needed: N/A

Trainer Tips: N/A

What to Do, What to Say:

Do: • Review slide content with participants.

Say: *Infants react to reunion, too. They may cry, fuss, and pull away from the returning parent or cling to the parent or caregiver who stayed behind. They may change sleeping and eating habits. Try to hold infant as much as allowed, interact with them in their daily routines, and be patient—they'll warm up.*

Helping Youth Ages 1–3 Adjust to Reunion

- Reactions
 - Shyness
 - Clinging
 - Doesn't recognize returning parent
 - Cries, has temper tantrums
 - Behavior regression
- Techniques
 - Don't force holding, hugging, or kissing
 - Give them space and time to warm up
 - Be gentle and fun
 - Meet them/sit at their level

Ready, Set, Go!



Slide 6-7: Helping Youth Ages 1–3 Adjust to Reunion

Content of this slide adapted from: Hot Topics: Current Issues for U.S. Army Leaders, *Reunion: Putting the Pieces Back Together*, Volume 5. No. 3.

Materials Needed: N/A

Trainer Tips: N/A

What to Do, What to Say:

Do: • Review slide content with participants.

Say: *Toddlers are emotional and mobile! They can react in many ways. They may be shy or clinging, and you may see behavior regression. They may not remember a parent that has been deployed for a long period of time.*

Some techniques to deal with these behaviors include:

- *giving the toddler space and time to warm up*
- *be gentle and fun*
- *don't force holding, hugging, or kissing*
- *meet them on their level*

Helping Youth Ages 3–5 Adjust to Reunion

- Reactions
 - Demonstrates anger
 - Acts out to get attention
 - Demanding
 - Feels guilty for making parent go away
 - Talks a lot to bring parent up to date
- Techniques
 - Listen
 - Accept their feelings
 - Play with them
 - Reinforce your love
 - Ask about interests
 - Assure them absence was not about them

Ready, Set, Go!



Slide 6-8: Helping Youth Ages 3–5 Adjust to Reunion

Content of this slide adapted from: Hot Topics: Current Issues for U.S. Army Leaders, *Reunion: Putting the Pieces Back Together*, Volume 5. No. 3.

Materials Needed: N/A

Trainer Tips: N/A

What to Do, What to Say:

Do: • Review slide content with participants.

Say: *Preschoolers may react by being angry, demanding, or acting out. They may talk a lot to bring the parent up to date, or they may feel guilty for making the parent go away.*

Techniques to deal with this include listening, accepting their feelings, and asking them about their interests. Reinforce your love and assure them your absence wasn't about them.

Helping Youth Ages 5–12 Adjust to Reunion

- Reactions
 - Fears of inadequacy
 - Dreads parent’s return because of discipline resulting from acting out
 - Boasts about the military and the parent’s service
- Techniques
 - Review pictures, school work, activities, scrap books
 - Praise what they have done
 - Try not to criticize
 - Affirm positive behaviors while away

Ready, Set, Go!



Slide 6-9: Helping Youth Ages 5–12 Adjust to Reunion

Content of this slide adapted from: Hot Topics: Current Issues for U.S. Army Leaders, *Reunion: Putting the Pieces Back Together*, Volume 5. No. 3.

Materials Needed: N/A

Trainer Tips: N/A

What to Do, What to Say:

Do: • Review slide content with participants.

Say: *School-age youth may dread their parent’s return if they were threatened with “Wait until your father gets home” during deployment. They also worry that they are inadequate. They generally take great pride in their parent’s participation in the military.*

Parents can reacquaint themselves with their child by going over scrapbooks, activities, and pictures from the time they were gone. It is important to praise what they have done and try not to criticize.

Helping Youth Ages 13–18 Adjust to Reunion

- Reactions
 - Is excited—if positive relationship prior to deployment
 - Feels guilty for not living up to standards
 - Concerned about rules and responsibilities changing
 - Challenging, rebellious
- Techniques
 - Share what has happened to you during deployment
 - Listen with undivided attention
 - Don't be judgmental
 - Respect privacy and friends
 - Don't tease about fashion, music, etc.
 - Get involved in education

Ready, Set, Go!



Slide 6-10: Helping Youth Ages 13–18 Adjust to Reunion

Content of this slide adapted from: Hot Topics: Current Issues for U.S. Army Leaders, Reunion: Putting the Pieces Back Together, Volume 5. No. 3.

Materials Needed: N/A

Trainer Tips: N/A

What to Do, What to Say:

Do: • Review slide content with participants.

Say: *Teens can be moody. Some are excited that a deployed parent is home while others are concerned with the rules and responsibilities changing. It is important for the deployed parent to be respectful of the teen's privacy, friends, choice of music, and fashion. They should get involved with the teen by sharing their experience when deployed and listening to the teen's interests and issues.*

The Myth of the “Perfect” Reunion

(Answer Key)

Source: Deployment and Reunion, Military Family Forum Library,
the Bureau for At-Risk Youth, <http://www.Militaryfamily.com>

Perhaps you’ve heard people talking about what they hope their loved one’s homecoming will be like after deployment, or perhaps you’ve got some ideas of your own. Here is a list of the 10 true and false beliefs regarding reunions:

1. If you love each other, reunions are easy. (False)
2. Angry feelings should never accompany a reunion as they are always a sign of serious relationship problems. (False)
3. The first few days following homecoming are often a mixture of relief, anxiety, and happiness. (True)
4. It is perfectly natural for communication to feel strained at first as partners re-establish their relationship in person. (True)
5. Children may not automatically feel comfortable with the returning parent and may be standoffish at first; an adjustment period is natural and often necessary. (True)
6. It may take some time for returning members to readjust, and they may feel “out of the loop” for awhile. (True)
7. If they really love one another, spouses/significant others will not change at all during one another’s absence. (False)
8. Re-established intimacy will flourish if given time to grow, or without being forced. (True)
9. Service members never feel let down or lonely following lengthy deployment. (False)
10. There is no such thing as the perfect homecoming. (True)

Helping Children Adjust to Reunion

Source: Hot Topics 2003—Current Issues for Army Leaders;
Reunion: Putting the Pieces Back Together, Volume 5, No. 3

Children experience a variety of feelings upon a soldier's return. While they are often resilient, change and uncertainty can be frightening for them. The parent who stays behind should talk about the deployed parent daily and leave pictures of them at the child's eye level. Encourage children to stay connected with their parent through email, letters, packages, video, phone calls, and audio messages. Also, keep a calendar to record the passage of time and special events.

Toddlers and preschoolers might not understand "duty" and "mission." Elementary school children and teenagers may understand but still show anger or fear.

Birth to 1 Year

Reactions

- Cries, fusses and pulls away from parent
- Clings to parent or caregiver who stayed behind
- Changes sleeping and eating habits
- Does not recognize the parent

Techniques

- Hold the baby, and hug him/her a lot
- Bathe and change the baby
- Feed and play with the baby
- Relax and be patient—the baby will warm up

1 to 3 Years

Reactions

- Shyness
- Clinging
- Does not know the parent
- Cries
- Has temper tantrums
- Regresses (no longer toilet trained)

Techniques

- Don't force holding, hugging, or kissing
- Give them space
- Give them time to warm up
- Be gentle and fun
- Sit at their level

3 to 5 Years

Reactions

- Demonstrates anger
- Acts out to get the parent's attention
- Is demanding
- Feels guilty for making parents go away
- Talks a lot to bring the parent up to date

Techniques

- Listen to them
- Accept their feelings
- Play with them
- Reinforce your love for them
- Ask about interests, from TV to preschool

5 to 12 Years

Reactions

- Has fears of inadequacy
- Dreads parent's return because of discipline
- Boasts about the Army and the parent

Techniques

- Review pictures, school work, activities, scrap books
- Praise what they have done
- Try not to criticize

13 to 18 Years

Reactions

- Is excited—particularly if had positive relation prior to deployment
- Feels guilty about not living up to standards
- Is concerned about rules and responsibilities
- Unwilling to change plans to accommodate parent
- Is challenging, rebellious

Techniques

- Share what has happened with you
- Listen with undivided attention
- Don't be judgmental
- Respect privacy and friends
- Don't tease about fashion, music

Because children need warm-up time like adults, changes may be gradual. The returning parent should understand that children may initially feel a sense of loyalty to the parent who stayed behind.

Both parents should stay involved in children's education, activities, and interests. Ask them about what's going on and support their positive efforts. Most importantly, try to understand how they feel and what they're thinking.

Tips For Parents To Keep In Mind

Source: Army Community Service—Deployment Handbook
<http://www.wood.army.mil/mwr/deploymentthndbook.htm>

- ✦ Avoid the “I’ve Had It Worse” game. Both partners have faced difficult challenges during the past few days/weeks/months.
- ✦ Agree on family plans for the first few days/weeks. Let everyone contribute.
- ✦ Give each other space as it is needed. People become accustomed to living without their partner and may not always consider another’s opinion before making decisions.
- ✦ If there were problems or unfinished business before the deployment, chances are they did not go away. The same financial problems or disagreements regarding children and discipline will probably reappear after the homecoming party is over.
- ✦ If you have children, that “second honeymoon” you’ve talked about may have to wait for a while. Children do not always understand being pushed aside at a time when they need attention.
- ✦ Your relationship may be awkward at first. This is not unusual. Do not feel you have to reestablish intimacy immediately. You may feel more comfortable getting to know one another again first. This may take a few hours or a few days. The “right” answer is the one that works best for you. Communicate about feelings.
- ✦ Intimacy reducers: Alcohol, children awake and scurrying around the house, unresolved hurt and anger, distrust, and experimentation without negotiation.
- ✦ Many couples have gotten into a real bind because they feel the need to celebrate their reunion with a spending spree or vacation. Remember—if you can’t afford it, don’t do it.
- ✦ Communicate events that occurred during the deployment. Reread letters or discuss questions about the deployment and home life.

Tips For The Service Member

On longer deployments, your spouse may have changed. While you've been deployed, your spouse has learned to cope with new and different situations. Don't be threatened by this independence. The fact that your spouse can cope alone does not necessarily mean he or she wants to.

- ✧ Ease yourself back into your family gradually. See yourself as a “special guest” for awhile. Don't criticize how your spouse has handled the children, finances, or the household—that can cause resentment. If changes need to be made, they can wait a few weeks. Some things will change naturally as a result of you being home.
- ✧ Be positive about the decisions your spouse has made, even if you would have handled them differently.
- ✧ Don't try and take over the finances immediately. Don't interrogate your spouse over every penny he or she may have spent in your absence. You may find sharing financial responsibilities a welcome addition to your household management.
- ✧ Don't be surprised if your spouse is a little bit envious of your travels. Your life may have appeared to be very exciting compared to his or her job at home.
- ✧ When it comes to discipline, take it easy on the children for awhile. Stick to the rules your spouse has established during your absence. Changing the rules suddenly may not only be difficult on the children but your spouse may also resent it. On the other hand, it may be very tempting to spoil the children. Don't put your spouse in the position where he or she must constantly play the “heavy” while you have all the fun with the children.

Tips for Returning Service Members:

- ✧ Take time to listen and talk to your loved ones. Communication is the basis of a healthy, growing relationship.
- ✧ Make separate time for each child and for your spouse. Have a true “family reunion” before taking time alone with your spouse.
- ✧ Support the good things your family has done. Show pleasure and interest in how your family has grown.
- ✧ Don't change systems that have been working well. If your spouse has been doing the checkbook, or a teen doing some of the cooking, don't demand an immediate return to the way things were before.
- ✧ Go easy on discipline. Don't try to “whip things into shape.” Take some time to understand how your family has changed during separation.
- ✧ Remember that romantic conversation can make re-entering intimacy easier.

When two people have been separated, it usually takes some time to become relaxed and get reacquainted.

- ✦ Take a marital-enrichment assessment.
- ✦ Manage your money carefully. It's exciting to suddenly have money and places to spend it, but spending without planning usually causes trouble later.
- ✦ Do not overdo the reunion parties.
- ✦ Be prepared to make some adjustments.
- ✦ Expect others to be a little resentful. Others usually think of deployment as much more exciting than staying home—whether you think that or not.
- ✦ Realize those at home had a difficult time, too.
- ✦ Get a check up at a local medical clinic and seek other transitional support as needed.

Tips For Spouse

- ✦ On longer deployments, expect your spouse to have changed. Pressures of the job, exposure to the suffering of disaster victims, and separation from the family may cause attitude changes.
- ✦ Be patient. Your spouse's routine may have become regimented. It will take some time to readjust to family life. He or she may try to run the family like a government unit or they may rebel against any type of schedule at all.
- ✦ You may have altered your schedule to compensate for your spouse's absence. For instance, you may have enrolled in a class or have made new friends. Give your spouse time to adjust to these new commitments.
- ✦ You may find your spouse is either surprised or hurt that you've managed so well by yourself. Try not to get defensive. Reassure him/her you very much need his/her companionship and emotional support.
- ✦ Many spouses have been devastated because their partner arrives home exhausted. Working long hours and jet lag contribute to fatigue as well as the excitement of returning home. Allow your spouse to adjust to time changes. Expect he/she will want plenty of rest the first few days home.
- ✦ Many spouses have also been hurt because their partner is not interested in the reunion celebration they planned. Allow room for flexibility and spontaneity the first few days home. Plan only homecoming activities that can be easily changed.

Children and Reunion

- ✦ If possible, talk with your children before the service member comes home. Find out what feelings of anger or fear they may have bottled up inside.
- ✦ When the service member returns, don't pack the kids off to grandma's house so you can be alone.
- ✦ Your children may choose to keep their distance from the returning parent because they may have unresolved feelings of anger toward the parent who left them. They may not trust the parent not to leave them again. These children want to be "courted" back into the relationship.
- ✦ Other children may attempt to cling to the returning parent for dear life. If the parent leaves the room, the children fear they may be abandoned. This "clinging" stage will pass when they become sure the parent will return home at the end of the day.
- ✦ Jealousy is a common reaction for children during a reunion. They were the center of attention of the parent that remained behind. Be careful not to abruptly demote the child to the number 2 spot.
- ✦ On longer deployments, expect your child to have changed emotionally and physically. Six months can mean a different stage of development, especially with children. Crawling babies may be walking or a teenager may be dating.
- ✦ Do not alter discipline procedures the family has established while the soldier was away. Discipline methods should be changed only after the parents have had a chance to discuss options privately.
- ✦ Above all, make sure your children feel loved and needed. Children need to celebrate your return, too!

Renegotiation (for longer deployments): Reality hits! The returning spouse finds a more independent family. A little anger, a little disappointment, and a little guilt creep in. This is not the same family—they are older, more mature, and more self-confident. The children seem to depend more on the spouse they stayed with, forgetting to seek help from the returned spouse. Even the parent's sexual relationship is a little strained. Things cannot be as they used to be! All these people have changed. This is the stage for clear communication of needs and wants. It's time to refocus, and reorganize. Each will feel a loss of individual freedom. It's time to renegotiate the "individual space" for all. 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.

Reintegration: This is the stabilization stage. Now the conversations become “we”, “us”, and “our.” The family begins to move forward as a unit. When you are back together again, take some quiet time to sit together, holding hands and talking about what happened. You need to listen to each other and you both need to talk. You have a thousand questions to ask, as does your spouse, and you both need reassurance that everything will be okay. Realize that you both have grown during your time apart and it is important for each of you to allow the other to have some space and time alone. This is the time to reestablish old patterns or to establish new, better ones. This can take several weeks, so don’t expect to fall back into “how it was” overnight. Take time to enjoy the intense pleasure of reuniting as a couple.

Keep this in mind as you face a family separation. The leaving and returning are never easy, but it does not last forever. Rarely are the separation and reunion exactly as you would have imagined. Both have their drawbacks, but both also have their rewards. The important thing is that you both survived the separation. Remember the time apart, what you learned, what you liked, and what you did not like. Apply these lessons to similar experiences that you may face in the future. It will help to make you a stronger, better prepared husband and wife team.

Children’s Issues

Parents can help children understand and accept the separation and their feelings about it by planning ahead. Anticipate the problems and discuss them with the entire family.

Family Pre-Separation

The family pre-separation period is stressful for parents and children. Confronted with an extended absence of a parent, family members sense a loss of continuity and security. Children may not fully understand why one of their parents must leave. Young children may become confused and fearful that Mommy or Daddy will disappear (i.e., “the fear of abandonment”).

Children are not very good at expressing fears and feelings in words. Anger and a desire for revenge, as well as guilt for feeling that way, are often demonstrated in the children’s behavior. Change is puzzling to children. They want everything to remain the same. When changes occur, children usually have no other way to release anxieties, and no where to go for help. At a time when the service member’s duties becomes more demanding of their time and energy, the spouse who stays at home may feel overwhelmed as they prepare to solely support the children, home, and car.