

RETURNING FROM WAR Being a Couple Again

One of the first lessons learned by military spouses during a long separation is that coming home and being one-half of a couple again takes some getting used to. Through writing or phoning, you and your partner probably succeeded in staying close but, now that you're back, some fine-tuning may be needed for the relationship to run smoothly again.

Here are some tips on how to reconnect:

- **Expect everything to feel a little awkward at first.** It's entirely normal and can be part of the fun of reuniting.
- **Don't rush things.** Take some time to get to know each other again. To avoid disappointment, make intimacy – not sex – the focus of your reunion. Sex can resume immediately, but intimacy takes longer to re-establish.
- **Be sensitive to your spouse's needs.** Acknowledge the differences between men and women. Men tend to focus on the physical relationship while women may concentrate more on verbal communication and affection.
- **Communicate.** Talk with your spouse about your wartime experiences and what you're feeling. It will help relieve your stress as well as your spouse's.
- **Avoid power struggles.** It's very important to acknowledge the many responsibilities your spouse had to shoulder in your absence. Take time to ease back into your routine. This covers everything, from parenting to finances.
- **Check yourself emotionally to see if you've brought home any "extra baggage" (such as mood swings, or new bad habits) from the battlefield.** Encourage your partner to do the same and don't react negatively if he or she shares some observations about your behavior. Instead, do whatever's necessary to resolve the issues before they take a toll on your relationship.
- **Make the most of the homecoming opportunity.** This is your chance to address things about your relationship that you or your spouse didn't like before, or to build upon the intimacy you've always shared.
- **If the relationship becomes strained, get a "second opinion."** All couples can benefit from the objective observations of another party. You have many options to choose from: your faith leader, a service chaplain, a family services counselor or a mental health professional. Keep your relationship strong by getting the help you need.

The National Mental Health Association (NMHA) has several resources available to help you and your family deal with the homecoming. For more information, contact your local Mental Health Association, or NMHA at www.nmha.org or 800-969-NMHA (6642).