

How To Get Back To “Normal”

Whether you're a reservist or full-time military person, your return from war means the embrace of family and friends, and resuming everyday life. Even before the rejoicing over your safe return subsides, you'll be trying to find your way back to what's normal again.

Here are some tips to help you through this time of transition:

1. **Realize the reunion is more than just coming home.** It's a major event for the people in your life -- maybe even bigger than the separation. In fact, research shows that reunion can cause more stress in people's lives than deployment. That's not to say that returning service members and their family and friends aren't happy about the homecoming. They're usually ecstatic. The stress comes from the changes that have taken place and concern for what life will now be like.
2. **Spend time with family and friends.** For months, the people who are closest to you have been living with the fear of losing you. Make a special effort to spend time with them or, if they are far away, call often to support and reassure them.
3. **View stress as normal.** Returning to your everyday life is a major change, and change always creates stress. If accepted and handled constructively, stress can be turned into a source of excitement and enthusiasm about new beginnings with family and friends.
4. **Go slowly.** Take time to ease back into your routine. Make a list of those things that must be done -- such as banking, making living arrangements, contacting friends and relatives -- and take them one by one. Trying to do too much too soon will only add to your stress level. Consider putting off major decisions until you've had plenty of time to readjust.
5. **Communicate with others.** Talking with others about your experiences and what you're feeling can help relieve stress. It's not a sign of weakness. Talk with a trusted relative, friend, faith leader or family services staffer. Military chaplains can be helpful, as most receive training in pastoral counseling and crisis.
6. **Take care of your physical health.** Get plenty of rest and exercise, eat properly, and avoid drugs and excessive drinking.
7. **Do things you find relaxing.** Go fishing, attend a concert, or take a long soak in the tub. Be kind to yourself.
8. **Watch what you spend.** Now that you're back, the urge to spend will be strong. Don't spend more than you can afford.

- 9. Start the rebuilding process together.** Do it as a family. Make the decision that this time will serve to make you and your family even stronger. Get involved in positive activities that encourage togetherness and reassurance.
- 10. Expect something of a letdown.** Most, if not all, service members experience it. It simply means that you're no longer running on pure adrenalin and that things are beginning to settle down. Or, it may mean that the homecoming hasn't solved all the problems that existed before the mobilization. Possibly, your reunion didn't go the way you thought it would. Whatever the reason, it's perfectly normal to feel this way. However, if this feeling doesn't go away, it could be a sign of something more serious. Read about this in the NMHA Fact Sheet, "When the Letdown Doesn't Let Up."

If you feel overwhelmed by your homecoming, seek help. It's not a sign of weakness. Nearly every military installation has a Family Service Center, Family Support Center or Army Community Service Center where you can access information, referral, counseling, and crisis intervention services. In addition, all military families, including those of National Guard and Reserve members who are activated for more than 30 days, are eligible for medical and mental health care either at a Military Medical Treatment Facility or at a civilian facility through the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Uniformed Services (CHAMPUS).

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).

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