

Speaker Notes

Return Reunion Workshop for Spouses

Page 1 – Title Slide

None

Page 2 – Workshop Overview

- You made it! The deployment is almost over, and your service member will be home soon. Many of you have already planned the homecoming. You've made decisions about how you will decorate the house, what meal you will cook, what you will wear. Exciting times, but you probably have some nagging questions as the reunion draws near: Will my spouse have changed? Have I changed? Will my spouse still love me? Will my spouse approve of decisions I have made? Today, I will provide information that can help you have a smooth reunion with your service member.
- First, we'll talk about "where you've been." What have you experienced during this deployment and how you and your spouse might have changed?
- Secondly, we will talk about "where you are about to be." What are your expectations for the homecoming?
- Finally, we will talk about "where you want to be." How do you and your service member transition from your separate lives caused by the deployment to being a couple again?

Page 3 – Where I've Been

- A rollercoaster of emotions is common while your loved one is gone. During the deployment, you might have felt lonely, disoriented, overwhelmed or abandoned. Perhaps you were anxious about the safety of your service member. Maybe you had difficulty sleeping. Maybe you worried about security or were anxious about coping with the day to day issues such as: "What if there is a problem with my spouse's pay? Is our house safe? How will I manage if our child gets sick? What if the car breaks down?"
- For many, the early deployment stage is unpleasant and a disorganizing experience. For others, despite the worry and loneliness, the deployment has offered an opportunity to grow, to experience independence and self-reliance. That's ok. It doesn't mean you don't love your spouse or want them to be back home.

Page 4 – Where Else I've Been...

- For the past months, you have been the head of the house and you really have not had to answer to anyone for where you go and when, or what you spend money on. You have had the bedroom all to yourself and you've taken care of the family's finances. You have made all the decisions—large and small. Whether the decision dealt with a car repair, a financial issue or a child's education, you have had to make it on your own.
- During this time, you also may have:
 - Started a part time job
 - Become active in a church
 - Taken over spaces in the house
 - the use of the remote
- Perhaps you moved home. Your roles and responsibilities changed, as did the support structure you relied on. As the deployment comes to an end, you may feel like your hard-earned

independence is at stake. You are proud of surviving, and maybe even thriving while your spouse has been gone. You've missed your spouse terribly, but you've learned you can manage quite well while he/she is away.

Page 5 – Where I've Been (Continued)

- While your spouse was deployed, you may have experienced special events such as the birth of a child, an educational accomplishment, or the celebration of an anniversary. Perhaps you have been faced with a family illness or death, or a dear friend has moved away. If you have experienced these events with family and friends, your relationships have probably become stronger. All of these experiences, whether joyful or challenging, can lead to growth on your part. When faced with challenges, you have learned that you are able to cope and make important decisions on your own. You have gained a sense of independence and accomplishment.

Page 6 – Where I've Been (Continued)

- Be sure to appreciate who you are and what you have accomplished.
- Be grateful and feel proud of yourself for:
 - The strength you've shown
 - The family you have held together
 - The pride and patriotism you have displayed
 - Allowing your service member to focus on the mission.
- You have not only survived, you have accomplished much.

Page 7 – Where I'm About to Be

- There are many emotions that surface in anticipation of the homecoming. Amid the anxiety that homecoming brings, as well as joy, relief, and sheer happiness, you will find that everyone has expectations.
- Be prepared for changes which will require adjustments on both parts. Both of you will have changed, but realize that roles and responsibilities may never return to "pre-deployment" status. Be prepared to discuss responsibilities until roles are clearly defined again.
- Homecoming is a lot like a honeymoon. You can't stay on that "high" forever.
- Your relationship will return to normal. Ask yourself: Are your expectations for the homecoming reality or fantasy?
- Be aware, be reasonable, and be clear about what you expect.
- Reality is seldom equal to what either of you have imagined life would be like after the deployment. As such, it makes sense to keep expectations reasonable and to be flexible.

Page 8 – Where I'm About to Be (Continued)

- When planning for the reunion you may be asking yourself these questions. [Refer to slide to see questions]
- Whatever happens regarding the arrival date, stay as flexible as possible.
- Preplan your homecoming and reunion activities by discussing them with your spouse and children.
- Establish realistic expectations by talking to your children and giving them an opportunity to decorate the home or make gifts just from them to their deployed parent. Keep them involved in the planning and upcoming festivities.

- The ages of the children will be an important factor in determining when to include the children in the reunion. Communicate your preferences to family members. You may want a private reunion with your spouse and then a separate family reunion.
- REMEMBER to be realistic! Keep your plans open and flexible. Try not to overdo things. Resist the temptation to spend lots of money preparing for the “homecoming event”.
- Your spouse may be too tired to notice all your hard work, but try not to take it personally.

Page 9 – Potential Roadblocks

- There are all kinds of roadblocks that may interfere with a joyful homecoming.
 - Parents, children and visitors may impact your intimate relationship when you first come home
 - Too much alcohol during the celebration
 - Unrealistic romantic fantasies
- There may be unresolved issues as well as unrealistic expectations of each other. Be sure not to get into “who had it worse” during the deployment; it was a tough for both of you. Just like you, your spouse needs respect and reassurance, not criticism.
- Patience and flexibility will be needed.

Page 10 – Where I’m About to Be (Continued)

- It is typical for any couple who has been separated to feel anxious when thinking about that first intimate encounter. Performance anxiety and self-consciousness are normal reactions.
- Emotional intimacy is closeness, private sharing of feelings and experiences, commitment, and companionship.
- Sexual intimacy is giving and receiving pleasure through touching and communication. It involves sharing intimate and sexual pleasure. Realize that you and your spouse are “out of practice,” so it may be awkward at first. Relax and take your time.
- Patience, timing and respect are all part of learning how to re-establish communication and ease the transition to becoming a couple all over again. Focus on being friends again first, and the rest will follow.
- Just like roadblocks that can affect the reunion, there are factors that can affect your efforts to reestablish intimacy, including:
 - Interruptions by children, parents and visitors
 - Excessive use of alcohol
 - Unrealistic expectations
 - You will be more tired than you expected.

Page 11 – Where I Want to Be...

- Take time to get reacquainted with one another.
- Talk about each other’s expectations for reconnecting.
- Stay flexible.
- Emotions are intense, children can become overly excited, and schedules are unpredictable.
- Provide acceptance, appreciation and trust to your loved one, and be willing to discuss and compromise on solutions which will allow those feelings of acceptance and appreciation to be reciprocated.

Page 12 – Where I Want to Be... (Continued)

- You and your spouse will go through the process of renegotiating your marriage, but the details of what you are renegotiating may differ from those of your spouse.
- How long will renegotiating your marriage take? It may take up to 6 – 12 weeks. It could even take longer. Don't expect it to happen overnight.
- Be patient, remain steadfast and commit to a positive outcome.

Page 13 – Homecoming Tips

None

Page 14 – Homecoming Tips (Continued)

None

Page 15 – Summary

None

Page 16 – Questions

None

Page 17 – Resources

None

Page 18 – Thank You

None

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