



Military Support Services

**For Family Members of Those Being
Deployed**

Military Support Program For Family Members

Provided By:

The Counseling Team International (TCTI)

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So Where Do We Start?

Almost everyone has experienced, or will experience, a stressful situation either prior, during, or post deployment. During situations such as these, family and friends are able to assist military personnel with coping. They are able to provide necessary support and understanding that aid in overcoming issues surrounding deployment. This program has been created for family members or friends to use as a reference when coping with the various issues regarding your family member or friend's deployment, as well provide information regarding what your loved ones may face.

There are three primary objectives in this handbook:

1. To provide a general understanding of your own feelings across the different phases of deployment.
2. To provide an understanding as to what your family member or friend may experience regarding their deployment, as well as what you may do to provide support or how you may be supportive.
3. To provide you with references and resources should you feel the need for further assistance.

This handbook will be divided into three primary sections.

- *Section Two* will provide you with a better understanding of what feelings you may personally be experiencing during the entire deployment process. It will also show you how to deal with those feelings in an effective and productive manner.
- *Section One* will outline the primary purpose for your involvement in helping your family member or friend deal with all three phases of deployment. This will be done by providing you with a better understanding of what feelings and emotions they may be experiencing and how to help them deal effectively with those feelings and emotions. You can be a tremendous support in helping your family member or friend progress successfully across the three phases of deployment –pre-deployment, deployment itself, and returning home after their deployment service.
- *Section Three* will provide you with a set of references and sources that are to be used when you feel as if further assistance is needed. These resources will include counseling services, peer support services, and chaplain services.

Section One: **What Types of Things Will I Experience?**

A look at what feelings and emotions you may have

Stage One: Pre-Deployment

Being notified your family member or friend will soon be deployed is something that most people do not want to experience. There are a variety of emotions that you may experience when you are informed that your family member or friend will soon be leaving to defend this country.

How might I react?

There are a variety of ways in which you might react when you learn your family member or friend is soon to be deployed. These reactions may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Shock at the idea of your family member or friend being deployed
- Denial
- Anger and/or resentment
- Anxiety about having to face the future without your family member or friend
- Fear about the separation between you and your family member or friend
- Concern regarding how the family will continue on with normal life once your family member or friend is deployed
- A sense of loss and grief regarding the deployment of your family member or friend
- Anxiety and fear about your new need to take on more family responsibilities and how you will adjust to these new responsibilities
- Anxiety over the potential loss of income for you and your family
- Children may feel loss over the separation from their parent and may worry about their safety
- Hope
- Excitement for your family member or friend
- Pride
- Shame

These emotions and reactions are to be expected. You should try to avoid berating yourself if you are experiencing negative reactions towards the deployment of your family member or friend. As time progresses, you will begin to adapt to the idea of your family member or friend being deployed just as they will begin to adapt. This adaptation process will take some time and needs to be worked through, rather than worked around.

What do I do?

There are a variety of ways in which you can begin to cope with the notion your family member or friend will soon be deployed.

- Talk to your family member or friend about your fears and concerns
- Talk to other members of your family regarding your fears and concerns

- Realize you are not alone with these feelings
- Reach out to support groups and others who have gone through what you are now experiencing.
- Discuss how you will keep in contact with your loved on while they are away
- Enlist friends and family members to help you with daily responsibilities once your family member or friend is deployed
- Spend quality time with your family member or friend
- Discuss how family roles will change with every member of your family as well as with your family member or friend
- Plan ahead financially
- Attend counseling sessions both individually and jointly with your family member or friend
- Create a social support system for yourself comprised of people who love and care for you
- Research the types of experiences your loved may have while they are away
- Be open minded about your family member or friend's deployment
- Get into a military support family group

It is important that you deal with your fears and concerns rather than push them aside. Pushing them aside will only cause these issues to continue building up until they are finally unbearable. Dealing with them on a continuous basis will give your coping skills optimal effectiveness.

Stage Two: During Deployment

After your family member or friend has been deployed, you will experience a new set of feelings, reactions, and stressors. These stressors are also normal as you are learning to adjust to life without the daily support of your family member or friend's presence.

What should I expect?

Some of your reactions may be:

- Loneliness
- Trouble sleeping
- Difficulty concentrating on daily activities
- Sadness
- Feelings of abandonment
- A sense of loss
- Emptiness
- Hope
- Apprehension about the well-being of your family member or friend
- Worry about how the rest of the family is coping
- Stress regarding financial obligations
- Feeling overwhelmed by the increase in responsibilities
- Anxiety about essentially being the sole decision maker
- Anger
- Change in eating habits

- Concern about the amount of accessible communication you have with your family member or friend
- Anxiety over parenting issues
- Feeling overwhelmed as children may act out and test the new circumstances
- Pride
- Shame or embarrassment

Once your family member or friend has been deployed, it is important for you to be able to successfully adapt to the changes in your life. In order to do this you will need access to a variety of sources to help you through the transition. Keep in mind other members of your family are adjusting as well and you will all need to be patient and understanding of the new circumstances you are in.

How do I handle it all?

There are several ways in which you can handle the added stressors of your family member or friend's departure.

- Communicate with your family member or friend. Discuss how you are feeling while they are away and talk about the changes you have both been through
- Write or e-mail your family member or friend on a regular basis to establish a routine for both you and your family member or friend
- Communicate your fears and concerns with your family and friends. Use them as your support network
- When you are feeling overwhelmed, ask friends and family members for their help
- Discuss the changes you are going through with your family members
- Talk with them about how different everyone's new roles may have become
- Reach out to support groups on websites, other military family members, mental health professionals, The Counseling Team International, etc.
- Keep up to date on the deployment status of your family member or friend
- Engage in activities you normally would not have had time for (take a class, learn a new skill, pick up a new hobby)
- Ask your family member or friend for advice on daily family, financial, and legal issues they would have been a part of otherwise
- Create individual and family goals in order to establish a new routine and sense of normalcy for your family
- Concentrate on the things that can be controlled (self, family, job) and accept the things you cannot control (deployment events etc.)
- Realize your fears and anxieties over the situation are normal

Transitioning to life with your family member or friend deployed may be a struggle at the beginning. However, as time begins to progress, your pain and fear should begin to subside. You will slowly adapt to your new routines and will feel a heightened sense of independence. Try to remember, in order to heal from pain and move forward we have to travel through the hurt rather than move around it. You may not be able to do this on your own. You may need the help of your support system and also the help of others who have experienced the same things. Do not be afraid to reach out when you are in need.

Stage Three: Post Deployment

Now that your family member or friend is returning home there are certain issues you will need to address collectively. Don't be blinded by the promise life will return to normal once they come home. During your time apart, both you and your family member or friend have gone through a variety of changes. Both of you have learned to adapt to your new circumstances and have consequently grown individually. Just as you and your family member or friend actively adjusted to deployment, so must everyone actively cope with life post-deployment. Just like the adjustment process during deployment, it may take some time to adjust to life post-deployment.

How will I be different?

The reunion between you and your family member or friend will be a greatly anticipated event. Here are some of the emotions and reactions you may have prior to your family member or friend's arrival and after they have been home for a few days.

- Anticipation for your family member or friend's arrival
- Anxiety about how your family member or friend will assimilate to the changes that have occurred at home
- Nervousness concerning the restoration of your relationship with your family member or friend as well as his/her relationship with the other members of your family
- Eagerness to be reunited
- Concern about how children will react to the return of your family member or friend
- Apprehension regarding your potential decreased independence
- Hope
- Anxiety since your expectations have changed while your family member or friend has been abroad
- Concern about how your family member or friend has potentially changed
- Fear of how the time spent apart has hurt your relationship together
- Relief your family member or friend will be able to become an active member in your family again
- Irritability concerning the changes in responsibilities
- Concern about the ability to re-integrate your expectations with the expectations of your family member or friend

During the reunion and re-integration aspect of deployment, it is critical to remember both of you have gone through changes over your time spent apart. Only patience, love, and effort from both sides will help in overcoming this obstacle. Sometimes families feel as if they have to learn about one another again – or as if for the first time. Do not try to immediately resume to pre-deployment life for that may be unrealistic. What is realistic is to gradually work through the uncertainties together and live a “new” normal.

How do I deal with my feelings?

The anxiety and nervousness you feel is expected. Here are some things you can do to help deal with those feelings:

- Keep in mind that change is inevitable
- Be patient with yourself and with your family member or friend
- Express your appreciation and love for one another
- Spend time alone together
- Continue the new activities that you engaged in while your family member or friend was away, perhaps incorporating him/her in your new hobbies
- Allow yourself adequate time to get re-acquainted with your family member or friend
- Communicate your feelings and issues with your family member or friend. Be open about how you are feeling and dealing with the situation
- Communicate those fears also to your friends and family and continue to use them as a support system
- Dissect any major problems into smaller, manageable parts and deal with those smaller parts on a continual basis
- Discuss how the first days after your family member or friend's arrival will be planned
- Discuss both your expectations and the expectations of your family member or friend so both parties are clear about the roles they will begin to fulfill
- Attend counseling sessions both individually and together so you are able to adequately express your feelings

The process of re-integrating your family member or friend back into home life will be a process for which both parties need to be patient. It may take some time to get re-acquainted with one another, learn your new roles within the family, and understand each other's perspectives. Recognize that your family member or friend may experience difficulty as they become re-integrated into civilian life. Try to recognize that they may not be ready to talk or fully understand what they are experiencing. Try not to categorize this as a sign that your relationship is "over". As they receive more help and support themselves, the more they will be able to communicate what they are experiencing. While the reunion can be full of anxiety and fear, it is also one of the happiest times in the entire deployment process. Your family member or friend is finally home.

Section Two: What Are They Experiencing?

A guide to help you understand the feelings of those being deployed

Stage One: Pre-Deployment

An individual who is about to be deployed may experience a variety of emotions surrounding his/her pending deployment. These emotions, and the ways in which they are dealt with, can greatly affect him/her during their deployment and also how they transition back into their lives once they return home from deployment. Dealing effectively with these emotions will help your family member or friend be properly prepared as well as be successful after the deployment process has been completed.

So, what kind of emotions and worries do they have before they are deployed?

Initial reactions and emotions regarding pre-deployment may include:

- Refusing to believe that they are being deployed
- Excitement
- Frustration and/or resentment
- Anxiety about facing the unknown arena of military deployment
- Distress pertaining to the impending separation and physical distance that will take place with regards to family and friends
- Uncertainty about life continuing on at home without their support
- Frustration over receiving an assignment and having to wait until their deployment date
- Denial
- Concern regarding their careers once they return home from deployment
- A sense of loss and grief since they are leaving behind family members, friends, and peers
- Anxiety about the additional burdens loved ones will be forced to bear
- Concern regarding the reduction to income for the family
- Fear of missing important events and holidays
- Fear regarding the gruesome reality of combat

Most individuals will be able to adapt to the idea of deployment once they become more and more prepared for their deployment date. However, the level of adaptation does not take away the fact that they may experience shock, denial, anxiety, irritability, sadness, fear, excitement, or pride.

I understand now what they're going through, but what can I do?

In order to effectively deal with issues related to these stressors, it is important that family and friends provide a good social support system for the individual being deployed. This can be done in a variety of ways:

- Engage your family member or friend in conversation regarding their pending deployment
- Ask your family member or friend questions about his/her fears and address those fears together

- Help your family member or friend recognize that having a mixed emotional reaction is normal at this stage in the deployment process
- Ensure them that you will be a unit of support
- Discuss ways in which you can keep in touch once deployment has been reached
- Get involved with an exercise program
- Enjoy recreational activities
- Create a support network for those who are being left behind (who will help out if family needs become overwhelming, babysitting, etc.)
- Discuss how family routines, rules, and expectations will change during the period of deployment
- Have each member of the family spend alone time with the individual that is being deployed
- Encourage them to journal their thoughts and emotions regarding deployment
- Reach out to other individuals who have gone through the same experience
- Attend counseling sessions with your family member or friend to help address their emotions regarding deployment
- Be knowledgeable and prepared for what may lie ahead in the subsequent stages of deployment

Stage Two: During Deployment

Once your family member or friend has been deployed, an entirely new set of stressors will possibly present themselves. Being subjected to combat first hand may provide them with new concerns in addition to the concerns they may already have.

What new feelings or reactions will they have once they've been deployed?

Emotional reactions during deployment may include:

- A lack of stability through both complex and continually changing missions
- A sense of detachment associated with long deployments
- Anxiety over having to work in harsh climates and geographical areas
- Frustration over their living situations
- Exhaustion from long days and inadequate rest
- Interpersonal problems with their peers
- Fear of combat itself
- Anxiety of the exposure to a foreign culture
- Concern over having limited leisure time
- Worrying about how things are at home
- Fear of how his/her family is coping without their daily support
- Apprehension regarding the lack of time to assimilate into this new situation
- Frustration regarding the lack of attained information

- Frustration at political turmoil or perceived deception
- Sense of anger or betrayal that deployment conditions may be contrary to what they were initially told
- Overwhelmed by duties
- A sense of loneliness
- Feelings of guilt for family and friends that they had to leave behind
- Frustration or boredom if there is relatively no “action”

Individuals who have been deployed will experience new feelings and reactions to their emotions and their surroundings. As a consequence, you may see a change in their demeanor and outlook on certain events. This is natural. Experiences change people both for the good and for the bad. However, in order to help your family member or friend more easily transition from life pre-deployment to life deployed, you should be a strong support system for them and keep in mind they are experiencing these new changes just like you.

So what can I do to help?

To ease the anxiety for your family member or friend, you can:

- Keep a strong line of communication while they are away
- Help them realize that their fears or anxiety towards combat is normal and to be expected
- Ask them questions regarding their fears and listen to their concerns
- Provide them with details of events that they have missed out on in the home front
- Encourage other family members and peers to establish communication with your deployed family member or friend
- Encourage and praise them for what they are accomplishing while away
- Keep them looking forward to the future and not dwelling too much on the negatives of the here and now
- Try to keep your personal anxieties and fears from the person being deployed (learn to share those emotions with other people in your support system)
- Help decrease their feelings of helplessness
- Be supportive even if they provide limited information regarding their feelings or military responsibilities
- Recognize that even though you may make offers to listen if they want to talk, they may not want to discuss the unpleasant aspects of deployment they are immersed in daily. Take this opportunity to provide detailed information about home life to make deployment bearable

Stage Three: Post Deployment

Now that your family member or friend is returning home, he/she is not stress and worry free. There are certain stressors that are directly related with the return home, or “normal” life. These stressors, like the others, need to be dealt with and faced rather than pushed aside and overlooked.

What else can I expect?

Reuniting with friends, peers, and family members can bring its own level of uneasiness for your family member or friend. Here are some changes to be watching out for:

- Anxiety or frustration about how things at home have changed since they have been away
- Irritability about the different types of responsibility
- Concern for their post-deployment health
- Feelings of depression due to their guilt about actions they engaged in while in combat
- Anger surrounding the fact they have missed out on family and friends while they were away
- Fear of re-integrating their new expectations with your new expectations
- Pride
- A new sense of honor and purpose
- New confidence in abilities
- Apprehension surrounding their return to employment status
- Feelings of grief and loss for those who didn't come home
- Changed views on life
- Nervousness regarding the restoration of family roles and relationships
- Trouble readjusting to the rules, regulations, and policies of everyday life
- Excitement about coming home

During this time of reunion and transition to home life, it is important you talk with your family member or friend regarding the changes you have both experienced. It is important to keep in mind you have both changed over your time apart and that patience on both ends will help ease the anxiety felt by both sides.

How can I help complete the transition?

Once again, support is what is most important. Here are some ways to deal with the new challenges that you may face together.

- Be aware there will be change
- Maintain reasonable expectations of the new changes
- Prior to your reunion, discuss how you would like to spend the first days after the reunion
- Continue to express your appreciation for your family member or friend
- Spend quality alone time together

- Encourage other family members to spend alone time with the individual returning home from deployment
- Help your family member or friend become acquainted with a peer support group
- Be attentive to his/her reactions to coming home and address those issues as they arise
- Encourage your family member or friend to understand their adaptation to coming home may take some time
- Be sure to give your family member or friend space
- Be flexible and patient. Communicate your respect
- Ask your family member or friend about what he/she learned while away
- Engage your family member or friend in conversation regarding his/her feelings of combat and also about returning home
- Be patient
- Attend counseling sessions together, as well as allow your family member or friend to attend individually, to discuss the differences and changes you have both experienced
- Encourage your family member or friend to re-connect with his/her social group
- Help your family member or friend find or re-connect with hobbies and activities they previously found enjoyable
- Research other people's experiences regarding reuniting and reintegration
- Encourage your family member or friend to get into a military support group

The reintegration of your loved back into mainstream society may not be an easy task and may take both time and effort for both of you. In order to ensure that the transition will take place in an effective manner, both of you may need to be aware changes have occurred and strive for reasonable expectations for those changes. If at any time you feel as if the transitions are too stressful, be aware there is an abundance of resources available to both you and your family members or friends regarding military deployment. Never give up hope, help is out there!

What may be ways they will be affected once they return home?

Once an individual has been through military deployment, they may develop what is known as *Acute Traumatic Stress*. Acute Traumatic Stress can produce considerable psychological distress and can surface in a variety of physical manifestations. Although these reactions are normal, your family member or friend will still need a strong support network to help them through this tough time.

Acute Traumatic Stress may represent itself in the following ways within one month after exposure to an extreme traumatic stressor:

- A sense of numbing, detachment, or absence of emotional responsiveness
- A reduction of awareness regarding his/her surroundings
- Derealization – change in perception of the outside world, individual may appear to be unfamiliar or mechanical
- Depersonalization – change in perception of the self; may feel detached from interior mental processes or their body; may feel like they are in a dream

- The inability to recall an important aspect of the traumatic event (dissociative amnesia)
- Re-experiencing the event through recurrent images, thoughts, dreams, illusions, flashback episodes, and a sense of re-living the experience
- Experiencing distress when they are exposed to a reminder of the traumatic event
- Avoidance of things that may elicit recollections of the trauma (thoughts, feelings, conversations, activities, places, people, etc.)
- Anxiety
- Difficulty sleeping
- Irritability
- Lack of concentration
- Hypervigilance or exaggerated startle response
- Desire to isolate oneself

If your family member or friend is experiencing these types of reactions, they will typically last for a minimum of 2 days and a maximum of 4 weeks. If these reactions last longer than the 4 week allotted interval than it is possible your family member or friend is suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD, may be characterized by painful, feelings of guilt or anger about surviving while others did not, or about certain things they had to do, or experience, in order to survive. PTSD occurs only if active symptoms have not been resolved within 4 weeks after the incident. Prior to this, PTSD may seem to be more intense than, but still similar to, Acute Stress Disorder.

In PTSD, the individual may experience a variety of physical and emotional reactions. These reactions are not limited to the following:

- Re-experiencing the traumatic event through images, thoughts, or perceptions
- Re-experiencing the event through illusions, hallucinations, and flashbacks
- Re-current distressing dreams of the traumatic event
- Anxiety towards the exposure of items or ideals that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event
- A physical reaction at the exposure of items or ideals that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event (increased heart rate, increased amounts of sweat, blurred vision, body shakes, etc.)
- Attempts to avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversations related to the traumatic event
- Attempts to avoid activities, places, and people related to, or a resemblance of, the traumatic event
- Inability to recall an important aspect of the event
- Decreased interest or participation in activities they regularly engaged in

- Feelings of detachment from others
- Decreased ability to express or feel emotion
- Sense of a short future (no expectations for a career, normal life span, etc.)
- Abnormal difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Unusual outbursts of anger
- Increased difficulty concentrating
- Hypervigilance or exaggerate startle response

If your family member or friend is experiencing these types of emotional and physiological reactions and these reactions have lasted longer than one month then they may be suffering from PTSD. If this is the case, speak with your family member or friend and help them find a mental health professional who is equipped to assist them through the process of healing and treatment.

Section Three: What If I Need Help?

References and sources to be used as you see fit

Chaplains: A chaplain is a member of the clergy who serves a group of people, regardless of denomination. Chaplains are not organized as a mission or church. The role of a chaplain is to provide the individual with spiritual counseling and assistance during times of need. Military chaplains can be found both on local military bases as well as abroad. If your family member or friend is a member of law enforcement or fire service, you will have access to a chaplain through both military and law enforcement or fire service connections.

Peer Supporters: These are individuals who are peers of equal standing and are trained in basic crisis-intervention and counseling skills. The role of a peer supporter is to be readily accessible to personnel in times of crisis and assist an individual in procuring professional help or other resources as appropriate. If your family member or friend is a member of law enforcement or fire service, you will have access to peer supporters through their law enforcement or fire service department.

Organizations offering assistance:

Association	Website	Phone Number
The Counseling Team International	www.thecounselingteam.com	(800) 222-9691
The Military Family Network	www.emilitary.org	1-866-205-2850
Military HomeFront	www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil	1-800-342-9647
USDA Military Families	www.usdamilitaryfamilies.org	
Military Families United	www.militaryfamiliesunited.org	(202) 429-5600
Operation Military Family	www.operationmilitaryfamily.org	(425) 679-5671
Military Child	www.militarychild.org	(254) 953-1923
Fisher House	www.fisherhouse.org	(888) 294-8560
Military Families Voice of Victory	www.mfvov.com	(207) 299-4495
Military One Source	www.militaryonesource.com	1-800-342-9647
American Military Family	www.americanmilitaryfamily.org	(303) 746-8195
National Military Family Association	www.nmfa.org	(703) 931-6632
Military Support Groups and Centers	http://www.military.com/benefits/resources/family-support/military-support-groups-and-centers	

Books offering information:

Married to the Military: A Survival Guide for Military Wives, Girlfriends, and Women in Uniform by *Meredith Leyva*

Today's Military Wife: Meeting Challenges of Service Life by *Lydia Sloan Cline*

Chicken Soup for the Military Wife's Soul by *Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Charles Preston, and Cindy Pedersen*

Military Families: Adaptation to Change by *Edna Hunter*

A Tribute to Military Families: Letter of Thanks From Our Nation's Children by *National Military Family Association*

Surviving Deployment: A Guide for Military Families by *Karen Pavlicin*

Heroes At Home: Help and Hope for America's Military Families by *Ellie Kay*

Your Military Family Network: Your Connection to Military Family Resources by *Military Family Network*

A Family's Guide to the Military for Dummies by *Sheryl Garrett, Sue Hoppin, and Tanya Biank*

A Cup of Comfort for Military Families by *Collen Sell*

Home Fires Burning: Married to the Military, For Better or for Worse by *Karen Houppert*

The Military Support by *Amanda Springer*

Spirit of Freedom by *Lieutenant Colonel Dawn M. Smith*

Mom's Field Guide: What You Need to Know to Make It Through Your Loved Ones Military Deployment by *Sandy Doell*

Deployed, Not Disconnected: Hope and Help for Husbands and Wives Facing Separations Due to Military Assignments by *Don Martin and Karen Martin*

I Miss You!: A Military Kids Book About Deployment by *Beth Andrews*

What to Expect in the Military: A Practical Guide for Young People, Parents, and Counselors by *P.J. Budahn*

In Harm's Way: Help for the Wives of Military Men, Police, EMTs, and Firefighters by *Aphrodite Matsakis*

Faith Deployed: Daily Encouragement for Military Wives by *Jocelyn Green*

Changing Step: From Military to Civilian Life: People in Transition by *Ruth A. Jolly*

Life After Deployment: Military Families Share Reunion Stories and Advice by Karen Pavlicin

The Military Father: A Hands-On Guide for Deployed Dads by Armin A. Brott

When Johnny/Joanie Comes Marching Home: Reuniting Military Families Following Deployment by Lester Westling Jr.

Surviving Military Separation: 365 Days by Marc Maxwell

Encouragement for America's Hidden Heroes: Survival Tactics for the Families of Military Forces by Amy Stevens

Resources:

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Dorian, Edrick H., Nagdimon, Jay M., & Jablonski Kevin J. Deployment Psychology Applications for Law Enforcement Agencies. *Behavioral Science Services: Los Angeles Police Department*

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Litz, Brett T. (2007). Research on the Impact of Military Trauma: Current Status and Future Directions. *Military Psychology: Volume 19, Number 3*.

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Oimoen, Angela. (2007). Military Stress I: Deployment, Separation, and Reunion. *Online Encyclopedia of Family Stress and Coping*.

Tarpley, Alice. Deployment and the Military Family.

United States Navy. Leader's Guide for Managing Personnel in Distress