

Coping with the Deployment of a Spouse or Partner

Overview

Ways to cope when a family member has been deployed.

- Coping during a deployment
- Asking for help

Maintaining a family routine and tending to your needs or the needs of family members can be very difficult when a spouse or partner has been deployed. You may experience separation anxiety, fear, anger, loneliness, and other strong emotions during the deployment of your spouse. By knowing what to expect, learning to recognize the signs that you are having trouble coping, and knowing where to turn for help, you may be able to make this difficult time a little easier.

Coping during a deployment

There are several stages of emotion you may go through when your spouse or partner has been deployed. When they first learn about a deployment, many people begin thinking about what it will be like to live without their partner, which may cause feelings of confusion, anger, resentment, or depression.

If you experience any of these emotions, you can

- talk to your spouse about your feelings
- work to create opportunities for lasting memories during the separation
- talk with other people from your military community who are going through the same experience
- involve your entire family in getting ready for the deployment

As the time of departure comes closer, some people may begin to feel detached or withdrawn. Feelings of hopelessness, impatience, and a decrease in emotional or physical closeness are all common reactions to an impending deployment.

When a loved one leaves, family members may go through a difficult adjustment period. On the “up” side, many people feel an increased sense of independence and freedom. The “down” side could include periods of sadness and loneliness.

If you have trouble adjusting to the absence of a spouse or partner, you can

- *Try to find things to look forward to.* Take a class, volunteer, or start a project you’ve always wanted to do. Set some personal goals for yourself during the deployment period and be open to new experiences and friendships.
- *Reach out to others who are in the same situation.* Remember that you are not alone. Plan an event with other families who are coping with a deployment or find a support group through your military community.

- *Don't try to hide your feelings.* It's normal to feel sad, lonely, or angry when you've been separated from your spouse. You don't have to hide these feelings -- that may just make it harder to deal with them. Talk about how you feel with people whom you trust.
- *Do something special for yourself and your family.* Rent a movie or cook a meal that your spouse wouldn't necessarily enjoy. Plan fun outings with children during free time. Make time to read a book you've been wanting to read or visit with a friend.
- *Try to concentrate on the things you can control.* It's normal to worry about your spouse's safety during a deployment or about when he or she will come home, but this is something that you can't control. Try to focus on things that you can control, like spending time with family and friends or signing up for a class or volunteer opportunity.
- *Ignore rumors.* The military may not be able to give detailed information about the whereabouts and activities of specific units during a deployment. Without that kind of information, rumors and gossip can get started. It may be difficult to ignore rumors or gossip, but you'll be much better off if you do. Rely on official sources of information when a family member has been deployed.
- *Learn some stress management techniques that work for you.* The stress of living without your partner can take a toll on the way you feel and think. Try out some different ways to relieve stress, such as an exercise class, keeping a journal of your thoughts and feelings, or practicing meditation or deep breathing.
- *Seek support from your faith community.* Many people find comfort and solace from their faith communities during difficult times.
- *Take care of yourself.* Get enough sleep and exercise and eat healthy meals.

Asking for help

- *Ask for help when you need it.* Asking for help isn't a sign of weakness -- it's a sign that you care about yourself and your family. Don't be afraid to ask friends or family to help with the household, child care, elder care, or anything else you need.
- *Seek professional counseling.* If you're having trouble coping, feel overwhelmed by the job of managing everything on your own, or if you're feeling blue or depressed much of the time, you may benefit from speaking with a professional counselor. Contact your family service center for help finding a counselor.