

If you're a single parent and in the military, you may be experiencing some unique concerns about reuniting with your children. More specifically, if you're a custodial parent, have you thought about how your children have bonded with their caregiver during your absence and how that will impact your relationship with your children as well as with the caregiver? If, on the other hand, someone else has primary custody of your child, you may wonder how your child will respond to you since you have likely missed "regular" visits with him/her.

Strategies for coping with these situations are very similar to those described in the Reunion and Children section. There are however, a few additional issues to consider. If you're a custodial parent, then your children probably have been living with someone else for several months. Accordingly, to the extent this has been a fulfilling relationship, the bond between this caregiver and your children has strengthened. Your children's increased loyalty to their caregiver may be painful for you in that you may initially feel unneeded or even jealous. Again, go slow.

Focus on communicating both with the caregiver and your children, and recognize that you and your children will need to adapt to living with each other again. Your children have been living with someone else who probably had different rules and procedures compared to your own household. Give yourself and your children adequate time to "shift gears". The adjustment period, which may take several weeks, can at times be awkward. You can smooth the transition process by first of all actively involving the caregiver with the transition. To force young children to suddenly separate from the caregiver can be emotionally traumatic. Secondly, since your children have lived with different family rules and procedures, take time to compare with them the rules of your home. As you're doing this, seek your children's inputs regarding how they would prefer life at home to be. They need to feel included in the process of reestablishing the structure and "flavor" of your home environment.

If you are a non-custodial parent, your children's living conditions were probably not impacted by your deployment. Your visits with your children have, however, been curtailed. As you reestablish these visits, remember you and your children have grown and you will need to take time to get reacquainted.