

Being separated from family and friends is never easy, but the Predeployment Guide provided here can make it a more bearable experience for you. The PreDeployment Guide will answer your questions on deployment as well as the reunion of friends and family. Please select from the following categories.

Introduction/ Background Information

This guide was created to assist military members and their families in preparing for and coping with separations caused by contingencies, extended TDYs, remote assignments, and natural disasters.

Predeployment/ General

As a member of an active duty unit with potential for world-wide deployment on short notice, the following information will aid in making a family separation more manageable.

Too often, family members deny the possibility of duty separation, and pretend it is not going to happen. This denial can be emotionally harmful. Once separation occurs, they are likely to find themselves unprepared. It is much healthier for families to face issues directly and become better prepared to positively address the life style changes brought about by separation. Adequate preparation for all family members is the key to minimizing the problems which will inevitably arise during a duty separation. Sometimes families avoid talking about things which bother or worry them. They are afraid that talking about things will make matters worse. In reality, open discussion provides family members the opportunity to clarify potential misunderstandings, get a better idea of what is expected, work out solutions to identified problems, and to better prepare themselves for the coming separation.

Having a sense of control over events is a significant moderator of the stress associated with separation. We all desire some sense of control even in the face of uncontrollable situations. Feeling no control over a situation can lead to characteristics of learned helplessness. The perception of even some control can be enough to lessen most negative responses and become a base for building positive coping behaviors. An individual's appraisal of upcoming events as being highly stressful or undesirable but manageable will significantly influence their coping level. That appraisal is related to the degree to which individuals feel that they have adequate knowledge, coping skills, social support, and some control over future events. Preparation for coming events, especially undesirable events, can greatly alter a person's attitude. Therefore, the importance of education and preparation cannot be overstated. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Single parents and dual career military couples face the same reality. They may experience even greater stress and responsibility during preparation of the separation. No other "parent" remains at home and, therefore, separation takes on an increasingly stressful dimension.

There is a difference between being ready "to go," and ready "to part." Being ready "to go" means having your duffel bag packed, all shots up to date, and other duty essential preparations completed. Being ready "to part" from your spouse and other family members means being aware of the personal and family issues related to separation, and being prepared to deal as constructively as possible with those issues.

Plan ahead. This is one of the keys to a successful family separation. There are many things you can do before you leave. This will prevent your spouse from feeling they have to handle it all alone and you from worrying about all the things left undone.

The best place to start is at an assignment or predeployment briefing. Topics discussed are informative ranging from an unclassified intelligence briefing to whom to contact if your allotment or pay check is late. It will also provide you and your spouse invaluable information about services available through your Airman & Family Readiness Center and other base agencies.

Then, read this guide. Mark or highlight passages you find particularly interesting or helpful. Some parts you may want to re-read or post on the refrigerator just in case an emergency occurs and you don't have time to find the page

you need.

Spend an evening with your spouse to discuss the assignment or deployment, how both of you feel, what you worry about, how to handle emergencies, or repair problems, and what you think needs to be done around the house to get things together.

Have a "show and tell" day. Even if it is the dead of winter, learn how to start and operate the lawn mower. Ask your spouse to show you how to check the oil in the car and where to add brake fluid and transmission fluid. Do you know how much air goes into the tires? How to change a flat tire? Learn these things BEFORE your spouse departs on an assignment or deployment.

When the departing spouse is the person who usually does the laundry, cooking, etc., be sure you are comfortable with the appliances within your home. Do a load of laundry. Learning how to sort clothes may save the family from having to wear strange colored underwear. If you are not familiar with commissary shopping and cooking, plan a dinner, make your own shopping list, then prepare a meal for your spouse or family.

Use the various checklists and tools found in this booklet.

Finally, before departing, make sure the remaining spouse is the one with the keys and checkbook.

So much will depend on your advance preparation. The more you can learn and accomplish before the family separation, the more confident both of you will be when the parting time comes.

Remember, Plan Ahead!

Deployment and the Single Service Member

While the majority of the information in this guide deals with separation issues involving couples, deployments or extended TDYs can be just as demanding for the single military member. Not only will you experience all the emotions and relationship stresses discussed in this guide; you have the added burden of finding a reliable individual to handle your personal affairs during your absence. The importance of a will and power of attorney is just as critical for single members as it is for their married counterparts. Please take time to go through this guide. You will find it helpful.

A Military Spouse's Viewpoint

For many spouses, when the separation finally occurs, for many spouses this is a reality check. Until now there was the possibility of a change in orders or some other eventuality to prevent departure. But the separation is inevitable, and the spouse must cope.

When your spouse leaves or deploys, a piece of you goes too, but that's what you want...for part of you to be with your spouse. You find that you, too, keep your spouse present with you. You may sleep with their picture on your nightstand, or you may leave a pair of their shoes by the front door.

When your spouse leaves, you go through a whole series of different emotions. About six to eight weeks before your spouse leaves you begin to "psyche up" for the departure, and you both get very busy thinking about details that need to be tended to before departure. You both may feel excited, intimidated, and maybe a little worried about how you will manage. About three to four weeks before your spouse leaves, you begin to put distance between the two of you, build a few walls, maybe withdrawing from each other. You may become irritated with each other and you may even have a fight. This distancing reaches a peak about two to three days before your spouse leaves when you both think they should be gone so that you both can begin counting down to the reunion...which may seem an eternity away! This "distancing" is normal and allows you to permit this person who is so very important to you to go away...for a while.

When "THE DAY" arrives you may drive your spouse to the base and be thinking that some way, something,

somehow will keep them home. Whatever you say to each other may seem awkward and not quite right, and afterward, when you reflect on not seeing each other for a long time, you may wonder why you couldn't have been more romantic, or have given a "warmer" good-bye.

YOU ARE NORMAL!

For the first day or so after your spouse leaves, you may feel like a robot, just going through the motions, almost like you are in shock. You might just want to stay home. You may not want anyone around you. You may wonder if it was easy for your spouse to leave you, after all, your spouse seemed to be excited about going on assignment or deployment. You may feel overwhelmed by all the responsibilities you are facing. Then you may get angry with your spouse, with the Air Force, your spouses' commander or duty section, perhaps even with the whole world! How could your spouse leave?

You will get over that too, and find you can handle the separation. You'll probably find yourself within a few weeks beginning to settle into a pattern. If you don't find some comfortable pattern or routine and continue to feel upset, call your Airman & Family Readiness Center. They can give you information and or assistance to help you over this hurdle.

The new pattern of your life while your spouse is gone may find you a little more subdued, and certainly lonely. Sleep may come a little more easily than in the first few weeks of the separation, but probably not as easily as when your spouse is at home. Food may finally begin to taste less like sawdust. You may find from your spouse's letters that they are not angry with you, just lonely, and missing you.

IF YOU FIND A ROUTINE THAT WORKS WHILE YOUR SPOUSE IS GONE, STAY WITH IT! THAT REGULARITY, THAT RITUAL IS VERY COMFORTING!

Six to eight weeks before your spouse comes home, you may begin planning for the homecoming. There are decorations to make, and special meals to plan, and nagging worries:

WILL MY SPOUSE HAVE CHANGED?
STILL LOVE ME?
APPROVE OF THE CHANGES IN ME?
HAVE THE SAME CLOSENESS WE HAD BEFORE?

As the time grows nearer, you will probably get more and more excited, may sleep less, and launch into a frenzy of house cleaning. In your mind you play over and over again various versions of the homecoming. You imagine...

You see the reunion in slow motion, over and over again, like in the movies; with sunlight and fields of flowers, and you two as the only people in the world.

In the last few days you seem to find yourself feeling many different emotions. Butterflies keep you awake at night. You should be happy that your spouse is returning, and you are, but you are also apprehensive. For the past months you have been the head of the house and you really haven't had to answer to anyone for where and when you go, or what you spend money on. You have had the bedroom all to yourself and you've taken care of the family's finances. Maybe you 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.

The Big Day arrives and you've probably not slept well at all and you've spent hours trying to look your best. You finally have that reunion. There may be raindrops instead of sunlight, and instead of fields of flowers, there are fields of people at the hanger.

The hugs and kisses are every bit as good as you remember, and your spouse raves about how good you look and you tell your spouse they're a sight for sore eyes.

Your spouse tells you that they are proud of the way you kept the home fires burning, and it doesn't matter that you didn't save more money, and you want to believe your spouse, but there is something in their face, perhaps something in their voice.

Understand that your spouse too, is apprehensive about the homecoming, and they also want to be very, very right. They may be a little unsure and may wonder if maybe you have learned to do without them too well...perhaps they're not needed, or wanted anymore. You KNOW your spouse is wanted AND needed, and you should tell them that

again and again!!

When you are back together again, take some quiet time to sit together, holding hands and talking about what happened. You need to listen to each other and you both need to talk. You have a thousand questions to ask, as does your spouse, and you both need reassurance that everything will be okay. Realize that you both have grown during your time apart and it is important for each of you to allow the other to have some space and time alone.

The time to reestablish old patterns and to establish new, better ones, takes several weeks; so don't expect to fall back into "How it was" overnight. Take time to enjoy the intense pleasure of reuniting as a couple.

Keep this in mind as you face a family separation:

- The leaving and returning are never easy, but it does not last forever.
- Rarely are the separation and the reunion exactly as you would have imagined. Both have their drawbacks, but both also have their rewards.
- The important thing is that you both survived the separation. Remember the time apart, what you learned, what you liked, and what you did not like, and apply these lessons to similar experiences you may face in the future. It will help to make you a stronger, better prepared husband and wife team.