

As a single person, you may have someone living in your home or apartment in your absence. Alternatively, you may have "moth balled" your home, or perhaps you moved out prior to deploying and will need to find a new residence when you return. If you live in the dormitory, you might have gained a new roommate during your absence. Regardless of your living situation, one of your first tasks will be to "put your house in order." Once you've done that, you'll be ready to focus on reestablishing your family and social ties.

As you anxiously anticipate going home, recognize that you've probably changed in subtle ways. You've made new friends. You've functioned in living and working environments that may be very different than anything you'd previously experienced. Perhaps you've taken up diving, weightlifting, or jogging. You've rubbed shoulders with a "different world" and stretched your comfort zone. As a result, you'll go home an enriched, but a somewhat changed person. If you have a "significant other" in your life, this person may have also changed in your absence. And change inevitably creates stress. As you adapt to the changes which may be required in your relationships you may experience over the short-term some worry, frustration, anger, confusion, appetite disturbance, fatigue, mood swings, or sleep difficulties. Usually such difficulties don't last longer than 2 to 4 weeks. If they continue, consult your physician or mental health professional for assistance.

Regardless of whether or not you have a significant other in your life, there are no doubt people whom you consider to be family. What does family mean to you? Is family restricted to biological relatives or do you also think of close friends as family? Will someone whom you consider family be there to greet you at the airport? Will you be going home to visit your family of origin? If so, how do you feel about seeing them? What will you talk about? How will you respond to changes that may be taking place in your family? Perhaps a sibling is going through a divorce, or a grandparent has become seriously ill. Be prepared for changes.

You may feel that nothing is going the way you planned and hoped. It is still vital that you make plans, especially for the first few days of your return. If you do not have friends or family who live in the local area, make plans with other returning unit members for a homecoming activity that is special for you and remember to call home. One goal you may have as a single member returning from deployment is to meet someone new. Perhaps some of you are recently single again following a divorce or the end of a long-term relationship.

Some issues to consider are:

- What kind of relationship are you looking for?
- What do you contribute to a relationship?
- What do you want in a relationship?

Now comes the hard part. How do you actually get yourself to go out and meet new people?

How you feel about yourself affects whether or not you take the risk to go out and meet new people. You have to like yourself enough to take that risk, to go places and meet new people, male and female. Having a good self-image will enable you to take risks, survive the rejections, and, at times, overcome the stereotypes associated with being in the military.

Your return may also be a good time to focus on how you want to live upon return. If you've thought about returning to school, now is the ideal time to check out some of the educational programs, both military and civilian. The key is to focus on what makes your life full and to make plans NOW to integrate those activities into your life.

Beyond practical issues, have you considered what impact the deployment will have on your social relationships and living habits? Many people with whom you've become friendly on the deployment may now be much less available to you, particularly if they're married and are busy getting reacquainted with their families. This can promote feelings of loneliness and even mild depression. At the same time, you can keep yourself busy by actively reconnecting with old friends and acquaintances back home. And like everyone else who comes back from deployment, it makes sense to keep expectations reasonable and to be patient. Within a few weeks, your life should be back to a predictable and comfortable pattern again.