

Reunion Advice from Military Families

In *Life After Deployment*, by Karen Pavlicin, (Elva Resa Publishing, January 2007) military families share what has worked for them during their reunion. Their advice includes:

- Talk about your expectations—how you see the arrival, first day, first two weeks, what you each want it to be like.
- Be selfish with your time for each other. Include only those closest to you in the first few days. Plan time alone to help yourself reflect and gather your thoughts and energy, time as a couple, time with parents, time with each child and person who is close to you.
- Service member: Make a conscious effort to look for and comment on positive changes you notice. Tell family members you are proud of them. Show your appreciation for the extra work your spouse took on while you were away. Your family made good choices and decisions in your absence—respect that even if it's not how you would have handled it.
- Remember that it's common for people to overreact as they adjust to being together after a separation. Take a moment to think about how the other person might be feeling before you speak or react.
- Parents: During reunion, continue to find tangible ways to connect with children, such as designated parent-child activities, one-on-one conversations, or notes slipped into a lunchbox or pocket.
- Don't expect homecoming to be perfect. It's not a movie.
- Don't expect life to be like it was before. Each of you and your lives together have changed during this deployment. Look forward to the future together.

More tips for a happy reunion from Karen Pavlicin, author of *Life After Deployment*:

- Communicate openly and honestly.
- Accept each other and the changes that have taken place. Express pride in each other's accomplishments.
- Appreciate and encourage further growth.
- Make changes slowly. Don't be too quick to take over or give up a responsibility. Take time to understand how your family or the circumstances have changed since you were last together. If you need to change children's routines or discipline rules, do so gradually.
- Take care of yourself. Eat healthy foods, get sleep, exercise.
- Limit criticism. When needed, keep it constructive. To resolve conflicts, stay on the subject.
- Reaffirm your love and commitment. Jealousy is often caused by insecurity.
- Take your time relating deployment stories. Get to know your family again and work the stories in gradually.
- Stick to a budget. It doesn't have to be expensive to be fun or romantic.
- Be patient and flexible. People may look or act differently, but they are the same people you know and love.
- If you think anyone in your family would benefit from talking with a chaplain, doctor, or other professional, do not hesitate to seek that guidance. Everyone wants each of you to be healthy and happy.