

6 TIPS ON REUNION & REINTEGRATION

Reunion: The reunion marks the highly anticipated moment of reuniting with the deployed family member after a period of separation. It's a time of joy and relief as family members come together again.

Reintegration: Reintegration is the gradual process of adjusting to life as a cohesive family unit following the reunion. This phase involves recalibrating routines, renegotiating roles, and addressing the emotional, psychological, and logistical challenges that arise as everyone settles back into daily life together.

1. Prioritize Communication and Support:

- **Open Dialogue:** Create a safe space for children to express their thoughts, feelings, and concerns about the reunion and reintegration process.
- **Age-Appropriate Discussions:** Have age-appropriate conversations about what to expect during the reunion and how routines may change during reintegration.
- **Validate Emotions:** Validate children's emotions and reassure them that it's normal to feel a range of emotions during this time.

2. Prepare for Changes and Transitions:

- **Set Expectations:** Help children anticipate changes in routines and family dynamics by discussing potential adjustments that may occur during reintegration.
- **Routine Reestablishment:** Work together as a family to establish new routines and rituals that accommodate the returning family member while maintaining stability for the children.
- **Transition Period:** Recognize that it may take time for children to adjust to the changes and transitions that come with the reunion and reintegration process. Offer patience and understanding as they acclimate.

3. Foster Connection and Reassurance:

- **Quality Time:** Prioritize one-on-one and family bonding time to reconnect and reassure children of their place within the family unit.
- **Reassure Safety:** Address any fears or concerns children may have about the safety and well-being of the returning family member. Provide reassurance and age-appropriate explanations to alleviate their anxieties.
- **Encourage Expression:** Encourage children to express their feelings through creative outlets such as drawing, writing or storytelling, as a way to process their experiences and emotions.

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4. Empower Children with Choices:

- **Involvement in Planning:** Involve children in decision-making processes related to reunification and reintegration, such as planning welcome home activities or setting up the returning family member's living space.
- **Offer Choices:** Provide children with choices and autonomy whenever possible to empower them and help them feel a sense of control during times of change.
- **Validate Preferences:** Respect children's preferences and boundaries as they navigate their own unique experiences and reactions to the reunion and reintegration process.

5. Seek Additional Support if Needed:

- **Utilize Support Networks:** Tap into support networks within the military community, such as counseling services or support groups specifically designed for children of deployed parents.
- **School Resources:** Communicate with teachers, school counselors or other educational professionals to ensure children receive additional support and understanding at school during the reunion and reintegration period.

6. Practice Self-Care as a Family:

- **Family Activities:** Engage in activities that promote family bonding and relaxation, such as outdoor adventures, game nights or shared hobbies.
- **Model Healthy Coping:** Demonstrate healthy coping strategies and self-care practices as a family, emphasizing the importance of taking care of one's emotional and mental well-being during times of transition and change.

By implementing these strategies and providing support tailored to children's needs, parents can help their children navigate the reunion and reintegration process with resilience and ease.