



# From Active Duty to the Workplace: Strategies for Supporting Employees



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## Introduction

An unprecedented mobilization of the National Guard and Reserve units has put increased demands on companies and their human resources professionals. This handbook was created in response to these demands.

The handbook contains articles for managers and human resources representatives who supervise workers who are active duty service members or National Guard members. It includes information on predeployment processes, supporting the family members of those who are deployed, reintegrating the worker back into the workplace after deployment and re-acclimation to life at home, including signs that a person may need help coping with posttraumatic stress disorder.

These and other military-related articles are also available on Achieve Solutions®.

You may customize this introduction, and the articles, to fit your audience. Two introductions to the package are available for use and appear below.

- **Human Resources representatives**

ValueOptions® recognizes the need for employers to have the appropriate materials available to them to handle military deployment and a worker's reintegration to the workplace after deployment. Please distribute the articles in this handbook to managers who need information about deployment and reintegration processes.

- **Managers**

The articles in this handbook can help you to provide effective leadership for your employees through the process of deployment and reintegration to work and can help you to identify what to expect from employees after they have returned to work.

It is important for human resources professionals and managers to educate themselves about the symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder and to refer employees to their behavioral health benefit to get help. If a human resources representative or a manager notices personality changes in an employee, substance abuse problems or becomes aware of the employee's overreaction to people or a situation, a referral to the behavioral health benefit may be necessary. Early detection and early treatment lead to the best results.

Your employer has partnered with ValueOptions® to offer mental health and substance abuse services to help you, your employees and their family members cope with the changes associated with military deployment, separation and returning to the workplace. Help is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by calling your behavioral health benefit.

## **Predeployment Guide: A Tool for Coping**

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

### **Preparedness is the key**

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 lifestyle changes brought about by separation. Adequate preparation for all family members is the key to minimizing the problems that will inevitably arise during a duty separation. Sometimes families avoid talking about things that 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.

### **Ready to go vs. ready to part**

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 paycheck is late. It will also provide you and your spouse with information about services available through your family support center and other base agencies.
- 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.
- 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.

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## **Military Leave Obligations**

Our nation's involvement in any battle may result in employees temporarily leaving their civil employment to serve in the uniformed services. The Uniformed Services Employment and Re-Employment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA or the Act) is the primary federal law that governs employers' obligations to employees during military leaves of absence and employees' rights to re-employment upon return from service. All civilian employers, whether private or public and regardless of size, are covered by USERRA. The Act supersedes state laws unless the state laws provide for greater rights. Under USERRA, service in the uniformed services means voluntary or involuntary duty in the Armed Forces, the Army National Guard, the Air National Guard, the commissioned corps of the Public Health Service and any other category of persons designated by the President of the United States in time of war or national emergency.

### **Prior to leave**

An employee should give advance written or oral notice to the employer of the employee's need for leave for military service. No specific time is set for giving advance notice and no notice is required if doing so is impossible or unreasonable because of military necessity. Written proof of the need to take military leave cannot be required. Only if the combined length of an employee's prior military leave is more than five years may leave be denied; however, there are certain exceptions in the Act for this five-year cumulative leave requirement.

### **During leave**

An employer should consider the employee on military leave to be on furlough or leave of absence. In general, this means the employee is entitled to all rights and benefits that are provided to other employees on an unpaid leave of absence. For example, if an employer provides employees on other types of unpaid leave with insurance benefits, then the same benefits must be provided to the employee on military leave.

### **Pay during leave**

USERRA does not require pay during military leave. However, employers may voluntarily pay employees on military leave or may pay only the difference between the employee's regular salary and military pay.

### **Vacation**

An employee on military leave has the right to use any vacation or other leave with pay that was accrued prior to the military leave. An employer cannot require the use of vacation time for military leave (unless the absence coincides with a period, such as a plant shutdown, when all employees are required to take vacation). In addition, employees returning from military service must be permitted to use any vacation that had accrued before the beginning of their military service.

### **Health benefits**

Employers must provide COBRA-like health benefit continuation for their employees who are on military leave, even if the employer, due to its size, is not covered by COBRA. If an employee's health plan coverage would terminate because of an absence due to a military service, the employee may elect to continue the health plan coverage for up to 18 months after the absence began, or for the period of service, whichever is shorter. If the absence from military leave is less than 30 days, the employee cannot be required to pay more than the employee's normal share of any premium. If the military leave lasts more than 30 days, the employer may require the employee to pay up to 102 percent of the cost associated with continued coverage (the usual COBRA premium).

## **Other benefits**

Employees on military leave are entitled to participate in any benefits, not based on seniority, that are available to employees with similar seniority, status or pay who are on nonmilitary leaves of absence.

## **Replacements**

An employer can fill a vacancy left by an employee on military leave. However, a returning service member is entitled to the re-employment position required by USERRA even if returning the employee to the required position results in "bumping" a current employee.

## **Return from service**

In general, an employee who has taken military leave is entitled to return to the employee's civilian job without loss of seniority or benefits. The re-employment right is, to some extent, based on the duration of the military service.

## **Time for application for re-employment**

If the employee served less than 31 days, the employee must return by the beginning of the first regularly scheduled work period after the end of the last calendar day of duty, plus the time required to return home safely. If the service was 31 to 180 days, the employee must apply for re-employment no later than 14 days after the completion of the service. If the service was for more than 180 days, the employee must apply for re-employment no later than 90 days after completion of the military service.

## **Health and welfare benefits**

An employee is entitled to participate in health benefits with no waiting period or exclusion because of the absence due to military leave.

## **Pension benefits**

No break in employment is considered to have had occurred because of military service and no forfeiture of benefits already accrued is allowed. In addition, an employer is required to make any contribution to the returning employee's pension plan that the employer would have made if the employee had not been absent for military service.

## **Job protection upon re-employment**

Upon return to employment, an employee who has been absent on military leave may not be terminated, except for cause, during a defined period of time after the employee returns. The length of the protected employment term depends on the amount of time the employee spent in the service. State laws may provide benefits in addition to those provided by USERRA. Employees should consult with counsel to determine the effect, if any, of state law in the various states in which they operate.

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## Predeployment Considerations

It is important for companies to have information on any employees who are in the military (reserves, National Guard, etc). As part of routine evaluations or meetings with supervisors, include questions about the possibility of deployment and encourage the employee to let you know at first indication that deployment might occur.

Also, let the employee know that the company has processes in place to support him and his family in preparing for deployment. This is also a good time to remind the employee of their behavioral health benefits and the Web-based resources available through Achieve Solutions®. Let the employee know that the counseling services may be helpful to him and his family and can provide support and coping strategies.

### Notification of deployment

When an employee lets you know she is to be deployed, arrange a predeployment meeting. Let the employee know that this is her opportunity to review benefits considerations and to collect some information regarding plans and options that might suit her preferences.

Ask the employee to bring any documentation on his deployment and any information he has on the duration of his deployment. (This procedure may be something to consider including in your company's Policies and Procedures.)

### The meeting

During the meeting, you should take time to express the company's support and gratitude to the employee for her service to our country. You should remind the employee of the laws concerning military deployment and employment, including reemployment rights outlined in the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA).

Review the employee's current salary and benefits package and explain the changes that will take place when he is deployed. It may be helpful to provide the employee with a spreadsheet that shows current benefits/salary and deployment benefits/salary. If there are options available to the employee and his family regarding life insurance, disability or other benefits, review these with the employee, provide the information in writing and give the employee time to discuss these options with his significant supportive other before making decisions. Agree to a time by which the employee must respond to you with his preferences.

Let the employee know that the company would like to remain in contact with his spouse/family to check in and offer support through telephone calls or e-mails. Allow the employee to confirm how often this contact could occur, possibly quarterly, during holidays, or on dates the employee prefers. Provide the employee with a family contact sheet that includes members of the family, who he would like to designate to receive such calls, and their contact information. Give the employee the option to refuse this contact if he wishes.

Have a discussion with the employee about how and when she would like to let co-workers know of her impending deployment. If it is customary in your company's culture to plan an event to acknowledge the employee's departure, mention the possibility and make sure the employee feels comfortable with it. This may be a good time to mention to the employee that the company and fellow employees will do everything possible to make the transition to and from active deployment as smooth as possible.

### **Last day of work before deployment**

On the employee's last day of work, take a few minutes to meet and make sure that he does not have any questions. Provide him with an information card with the company name, address, telephone numbers and key contacts. This card should include a simple statement that the employee should contact the workplace upon returning from active duty. Wish the employee well and let him know that you are available to him and his family during his time of deployment.

By Liz Danielian  
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## **Coping When a Family Member Has Been Called to War**

When a family member goes to war, the impact upon those left at home can be daunting. There is often tremendous uncertainty about the dangers that exist where the loved one is being deployed and about when he or she will return. In addition to having to adjust to the loved one's absence, the families of those who have been deployed may live in constant fear of harm to their loved one.

### **The emotional cycle of deployment**

When a loved one is deployed, fluctuating emotions such as pride, anger, fear and bitterness can add to the distress of uncertainty. Various emotions continue during the person's deployment, based upon changes the family encounters as they adjust to the departure and absence of their family member. The following is a typical cycle of emotions:

- The cycle begins with a short period of intense emotions, such as fear and anger, when news of deployment is released to the family.
- As departure grows closer, a period of detachment and withdrawal may occur. In preparation for the physical separation, family members may experience intense emotions.
- A period of sadness, loneliness and tension begins at the time of departure; this can last several weeks or longer.
- Following the first weeks of deployment, families begin to adjust to a new routine without the deployed service member.
- As the end of the deployment period draws near, tension continues as the family anticipates changes related to the return of the service member.

### **When families have difficulties**

Deployment will be a challenging time for family members who are left behind:

- In addition to patriotism and pride, feelings of fear and anger are also common. The mixture of these feelings may be confusing, particularly for children.
- If a family already has difficulty communicating with one another, such problems may worsen during times of stress, and add strain to the family.
- Those deployed may downplay the potential for danger in order to protect the family from excessive worry, which can make family members feel their feelings of fear are being invalidated.

When there is an impending crisis such as a war deployment, some families may need to become more aware of their style of relating to and supporting each other.

- Emotions can run high during the deployment, and people can turn fear, anger and other emotions against those they care for the most.
- When certain family members, particularly children, do express their fear or anger, families should not view these feelings as too sensitive or as an annoyance. Instead, realize that those feelings may be emotions that everyone shares, but perhaps not everyone has acknowledged those feelings yet.

- Alternatively, it is possible that members will feel as though their emotions are numb during the time before a departure. This is because these individuals may be preparing emotionally for the separation from the family; it does not mean these family members don't care. Sometimes the stronger the numbing, the stronger the emotions underlying the feelings.

### **Changes in family structure**

A spouse left at home during deployment will be faced with work tasks that she or he may be unfamiliar with. Juggling finances, lawn care, car and home repair, cooking and raising children can lead to stress overload and exhaustion. Families that are flexible regarding roles and responsibilities are better able to adapt to deployment stresses. It's important for family members to support each other in these new responsibilities and to get outside help as much as possible.

### **Special concerns when the primary caretaker is deployed**

Many more women are now participating in war-related deployments. During Operation Desert Shield/Storm, more than 40,000 women were deployed, thousands of them mothers with dependent children. Research on work-family conflict among active duty women indicates:

- The struggle between work and family duties is a source of parenting distress.
- Women who were supported by their husbands in their marital and parenting roles had fewer work-family conflicts, less distress or less depression.
- Families that are flexible regarding roles and responsibilities are better able to adapt to deployment stresses.
- Getting information about difficult issues, such as separation anxiety, discipline, raising adolescents and sibling rivalry, may help make care easier.

### **Special concerns for reservists**

Reservists have added concerns pertaining to the families and jobs left behind. In some cases, military deployment can create financial hardships due to a loss of income. Sometimes the household financial manager is the one who is deployed and the remaining head of the household is left to manage the finances, perhaps without much practice. The government has developed many services and programs to assist you and your family with these challenges during the predeployment, deployment and reunification stages. There are groups that can help with the development of family emergency plans, family care plans and personal financial management.

### **Suggestions for families of those going to war**

The following are suggestions to help you manage the stress of having a family member deployed for war-related duties:

- **Take time to listen to each other.** Know that deployment will be a painful and frightening time, particularly for children. Spend time listening to family members without judging or criticizing what they say. People may need to just express themselves during this time. The more family members can communicate with one another, the less long-term strain there will be on the family.
- **Limit exposure to news media programs.** Families should minimize exposure to anxiety-arousing media related to the war. When children worry about war, let them know that the war is far away. Acknowledge children's fears, and let them know that parents, teachers and police are here to protect them.

- **Remember the deployed member is still a part of the family.** Find ways to keep a symbolic representation of the deployed member visible to the family. Keep photographs of your loved one in prominent locations. Get children's help in keeping a family journal of each day's events for the deployed member to look at when he or she returns.
- **Understand feelings.** Emotions such as fear, anger and feeling "numb" are normal and common reactions to stress. Family members need to make sure these emotions aren't turned against one another in frustration. It will help family members manage tension if you share feelings, recognize that they are normal, and realize that most family members feel the same way.
- **Spend time with people.** Coping with stressful events is easier when in the company of caring friends. Ask for support from your family, friends, church or other community group.
- **Join or develop support groups.** Forming support groups for the spouses of deployed military personnel helps spouses cope with separation from their loved ones. Peer-support groups, led by spouses of deployed service members, can be a tremendous aid to family functioning. Spouses can share ideas with each other, trade child care or other responsibilities, and encourage each other if they are feeling taxed.
- **Keep up routines.** Try to stick to everyday routines. Familiar habits can be very comforting.
- **Take time out for fun.** Don't forget to do things that feel good to you. Take a walk, spend time with your pets or play a game you enjoy.
- **Help others.** It is beneficial for everyone to find ways you and your family can productively channel energy. Helping other families and organizing neighborhood support groups or outings can help everyone involved.
- **Self-care.** The more emotionally nurturing and stable the remaining caretaker is, the less stress the children will feel. However, trying to "do it all" can lead to exhaustion. Signs of caregiver stress include feeling as though you are unable to cope, feeling constantly exhausted or feeling as though you no longer care about anything. It is especially important for caretakers to devote time to themselves, exercise and get plenty of rest.
- **Get professional help if needed.** When stress becomes overwhelming, don't be afraid to seek professional help. Ongoing difficulties such as exhaustion, apathy, worry, sleeplessness, bad dreams, irritability or anger-outbursts warrant the attention of a professional counselor. The military employment assistance program provides free counseling for family members impacted by the stress of deployment. Contingency planning personnel are available on bases around the country to help families handle stress related to deployment.
- **Use military outreach programs.** Military outreach programs are in place to help families prevent social isolation. Interventions for military families are especially important for younger families and those without a prior history of deployments. Group leaders are trained to
  - assist in the grief process that a family goes through when a spouse is deployed
  - teach coping skills to deal with indefinite separations
  - help spouses plan a family reunion

Source: A National Center for PTSD Fact Sheet by Julia Whealin, PhD and Ilona Pivar, PhD

## Insensitive Comments: When Civilians Don't Understand

Being called to active military duty can be a wrenching experience for the service member as well as the family. As a member of the military—reservist, active duty person or family member—you know deployment is possible at any given moment. But when the time comes, that knowledge doesn't make it any easier.

Being deployed or having a loved one mobilized means shifting roles and changing responsibilities while trying to maintain a stable family life. It can leave you emotionally drained. Having civilian co-workers make matters more difficult by saying the wrong things to you—no matter how well intentioned—is especially challenging and can lead to tension and ill-feelings at work.

### Military and civilian perspectives

Keep in mind that the reality of military life reinforces a sense of separateness and “being different” from civilians. Most civilians cannot fully comprehend and appreciate what it's like to live inside the military world. Military people sometimes are seen as outsiders from the civilian community.

There are inherent differences in values, perspectives, loyalties and experiences between military families and civilians. For example, civilians do not easily understand 2 central components of the “military identity”—*service and sacrifice*.

One thing that rankles military families is that civilians often seem to overlook a central truth military families can never afford to forget: that at any moment they may be called upon to give their lives—or lose a loved one—to serve the ends of government.

Why are these points so important? It is inevitable that Americans will discuss their viewpoints and express their opinions, even at work. While this is every American's right, some civilians may make inappropriate comments about military intervention in Iraq or ask insensitive questions about deployment with little understanding of and appreciation for your position as a member of the military community.

It is no wonder that military people are offended when civilians make insensitive comments. It's easy to take those remarks personally when you and your loved ones sacrifice a great deal in the course of doing a job that, ironically, protects their right to make those comments.

More often than not, civilians send mixed signals to military people. They may respect the military mission but underestimate the amount of personal sacrifice involved by military families—for example, as when they make glib remarks about having another “CNN-televised war,” as if it is merely a media event.

Even when civilians appreciate the stresses and sacrifices military families are required to endure during times of deployment, they may not be skillful at expressing themselves. In any situation involving personal loss and suffering, some individuals are better than others at saying the “right thing.” Most of us feel inadequate and awkward about knowing how to give support to a person in distress.

### Suggestions for handling civilian insensitivity in the workplace

- Keep in mind that most civilians appreciate the sacrifices made by military families, even if they oppose certain U.S. policies.
- Try to view criticism of U.S. involvement in Iraq as an American's right to self-expression rather than as a personal attack on you and your family.
- Realize that stereotypes are based upon ignorance. Either ignore insensitive comments or take the opportunity to enlighten the person with accurate information.

- Do not feel obligated to respond to all personal questions. Simply thank the person for her concern and interest and let her know you would rather not discuss your personal situation.
- Appreciate that most insensitive comments and questions are well intentioned. Give the person the benefit of the doubt, but then gently let him know how his remarks affect you.
- Seek out support and understanding from those civilians and members of your military family with whom you feel most comfortable.
- Consider seeking professional help during difficult times like these.

By Karen S. Dickason, LCSW, CEAP  
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## Active Duty to Civilian Life: How to Ease the Workplace Transition

Civilian soldiers—reservists and National Guard members—leave families and stateside jobs to serve half a world away to help fight the war on terror. They face risks their co-workers can only imagine, and they experience directly what their co-workers see only secondhand, if at all. When they return, they can come back profoundly changed to a workplace that has stayed more or less the same.

For reasons like these, it's not always easy to make the transition back to civilian life and employment. Under federal law, they have the right to their old jobs, if their employers are still in business. But even if that part of the re-entry goes smoothly, the emotional side may be rockier. Workplaces contain social networks, with relationships and roles that can be disrupted by someone's long absence. Co-workers need to be aware that a civilian soldier's return from a long tour of duty is nothing like coming back from a vacation. And they can do certain things to help the returning soldier re-adjust.

### Be ready to talk—and listen

One of the dangers for a returning soldier is isolation, which makes returning to normal life more difficult and can make other problems—alcohol abuse, family conflicts, stress—harder for others to detect and deal with. And it's not hard to see why someone who has spent a year in a theater of combat would feel little in common with old colleagues who spent that time at their desks.

Ken Mroczek, a team leader at the Tucson Vet Center of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, says returnees have “left their workplace and their friends, and they have had this pretty impactful experience that is much different from what their co-workers have experienced. They come back feeling different—feeling like they've changed and the people behind them have stayed the same.”

Just as these different experiences create a gap, communication can help close it. Co-workers should be ready to talk and, most of all, listen. They should make it clear that they are interested in what the returning soldier has to say about his experiences. And the soldier has to see that they are comfortable hearing the stories.

Developing a truly receptive attitude may take some effort, says Mroczek, a psychologist and Vietnam veteran. This may be a particular hurdle for co-workers who don't approve of the soldiers' mission. “If you're uncomfortable with hearing about combat, or with some aspects of the war, you're not going to be receptive,” Mroczek says.

What about talking politics? With something as controversial as the United States' mission in Iraq, opinions around the office are bound to differ. But co-workers need to remember that, whatever their own views, the returning soldier has seen firsthand what they have only seen through the filter of the news media. Soldiers often comment that what they've seen in the field is radically different from what they see on the news. Whatever their views, civilians should at least be respectful listeners.

### Roll out the welcome mat

Like anyone returning to a familiar place after a long absence, soldiers want to know if people are glad to see them return. Co-workers should let them know, without having to be asked.

Kelly Barnett, a psychologist and counselor in civilian life and a chaplain in the Army National Guard, says the first step in helping soldiers re-adjust to civilian life “is to express appreciation in some sort of way.” Just how to do this depends on the individual, Barnett says. “Some soldiers need more of a pat on the back than others.” Also, Mroczek says the show of appreciation has to fit the personality of the person being celebrated. Some may love being the object of an office party. Others may be embarrassed. But Barnett and Mroczek say it's important to make the point that co-workers are happy to have their old friend back, and that they're grateful for the sacrifice the soldier made.

## **Recognize that “normal” life isn’t normal yet to the returning soldier**

Civilian life can take some getting used to. What people take for granted can be a shock, even if pleasant, to the returnee. After his tour in Afghanistan, Barnett remembers being amazed at the multitude of choices on a typical restaurant menu; it was quite a change for someone who had been in a place where the choices boiled down to two—either eat what’s given to you, or don’t eat at all. He says returning soldiers may also have trouble at the workplace in adjusting to a new idea of “normal.”

A soldier may have been accustomed to giving orders when on active duty, and now has to get used to taking them. Military life can either be highly structured or highly fluid and unpredictable. In either case, the soldier may come back to a different type of workplace. Even the pace of work might be a shock. Barnett says a soldier in the field may have learned to work at a deliberately slow pace to avoid being hurt, and then has to re-adjust to a workplace where rush jobs are routine. In this case, co-workers should be understanding and give the soldier some time to relearn the civilian work style.

## **Recognizing signs of trouble**

How can co-workers tell if a soldier is having a rough transition? Barnett says trouble may show up as outbursts of anger, difficulty focusing on tasks or isolation from co-workers.

On the other hand, Mroczek says too much attention to possible trouble can lead to problems. “If you’re in an environment where you feel you are being watched, that can make you uncomfortable.” And if co-workers do think something is wrong, he says, the soldier may only listen to those who are close friends.

What every returning soldier should know is that, when and if they need it, help is available. In addition to the workplace and behavioral health benefits, there are veterans’ centers that are open to returning veterans. Barnett says co-workers can also call a local National Guard or reserve office—or other soldiers they may know—to get advice on helping a returning soldier who seems to be going through a rough patch.

## **Resources**

*Back From the Brink* by Don Catherall. Bantam Books, 1992.

Veterans’ centers provide readjustment counseling and other services to returning veterans. For a directory of the more than 200 veterans’ centers nationwide, go to [www.va.gov/rccs/VetCenterDirectory.htm](http://www.va.gov/rccs/VetCenterDirectory.htm). The Department of Veterans Affairs also has a Web page specifically for veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan operations at [www.seamlesstransition.va.gov/index.asp](http://www.seamlesstransition.va.gov/index.asp).

Sources: Ken Mroczek, PhD, team leader, Tucson Vet Center, Tucson, Ariz.; Kelly Barnett PhD, director, Granberry Counseling Centers, Monroe, La.

By Tom Gray  
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## Returning to Work: Tips for Employers of Reservists and Members of the National Guard

While many remain on duty in Iraq, some reservists or members of the National Guard have begun to return home to their predeployment jobs. These soldiers may have been on active duty for six months or longer, so a return to work can sometimes be a tough transition for the individual and workplace.

If you are a supervisor or employer of an individual returning from active duty, here are some tips you can use to ease her transition back into the workplace.

- Create a welcoming environment. Prior to the employee's return, meet with her colleagues to discuss any concerns they have about the impact on their responsibilities, as well as to promote the importance of being supportive as their colleague readjusts. If appropriate, consider organizing a welcoming event, such as a breakfast or cake break.
- Update the employee. As soon as possible, meet with the employee to update him about the status of the workload, policy and personnel changes, and any other changes that occurred during the absence.
- Give the employee time to readjust. Be aware that some people may need a little time to get back into the swing of their former routine. Encourage them to ask for the guidance or support they need.
- Support the employee if the transition proves difficult. If an employee is having significant trouble readjusting to the workplace, you can note and discuss changes and expectations in work performance, as well as listen to the employee's response and concerns. If you think there are personal issues, including anxiety or depression, related to the transition back to work, do not diagnose a suspected mental health problem. Suggest that the employee seek consultation from your organization's behavioral health benefit or a mental health professional. Reminding the employee of available benefits provided by your organization at this time can be helpful as well.

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# Preparing a Reintegration to Work Meeting When an Employee Returns From Active Duty



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WHEN AN EMPLOYEE RETURNS FROM MILITARY DEPLOYMENT, THERE MAY BE questions from managers/supervisors or co-workers about how to reintegrate him back to work and how to make him feel welcome. The reintegration to work meeting can help worksites, managers/supervisors, and the employee plan for these concerns and address them before they become problematic.

## Meeting objectives

The purpose of the meeting is to discuss issues related to the employee's resumption of job responsibilities and promote her successful reintegration to work. Use this time to update your employee on events that occurred at work in her absence and to identify her concerns about returning to work. Review work performance issues that may have existed prior to the absence, and establish expectations for future performance.

## Plan the meeting

Contact the employee by phone, explaining the meeting's purpose to promote a successful reintegration to work. The meeting can be conducted by phone or, preferably, in person. Include the employee, his manager/supervisor and human resources. During the phone call, get information about the employee's transition so far. Follow up the phone call with a letter detailing the agreed-upon meeting time and date.

## Meeting basics

Open the meeting by expressing your pleasure that the employee has returned as well as your appreciation for her service. Let her know that she is valued by the organization. Encourage the employee to discuss any questions or concerns about returning to work.

Provide the employee with information and an opportunity to ask any questions relative to returning to the workplace. This discussion may include benefits/compensation information; schedule; changes in the organization; job roles, responsibilities and expectations; and possible work accommodations.

Let the employee know that you would like to meet with his immediate work group prior to his return. Review the content of what will be discussed and offer to mention any information or preferences that the employee has.

End the meeting by reviewing the plan for the employee's return to work, including who is charged with any particular tasks, and follow-up to the meeting. Let the employee know that, in the event of difficulties, the workplace and their behavioral health benefit are there to provide support and resources.

By Liz Danielian  
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# Preparing the Workforce for an Employee's Return From Active Duty



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AN EMPLOYEE'S IMMEDIATE WORK TEAM MAY EXPERIENCE SOME ANXIETY IN anticipating his return from active duty. They may worry about how to treat the person, what to say to him, and how his return will affect their roles and responsibilities. Therefore, it is recommended that the work team be given some education and information. Schedule a meeting to discuss the return with existing employees.

## Meeting basics

This meeting should take place after the service member's reintegration meeting. Inform the work team that the employee in question is aware that this discussion will take place. Provide general information about the return-to-work plan and any other information that the employee asked you to share.

## Advice for the team

As you encourage the team to welcome the returning employee, these suggestions may help ease the transition:

- **Let the employee decide how much or how little she wants to share** about her deployment experience.
- **Be aware that the experience may have changed the employee.** Someone who used to be very talkative might be less so; someone who used to be very fast paced may work more moderately.
- **Be respectful.** Regardless of your feelings or political beliefs, be aware that this person has made significant sacrifices on behalf of all Americans.

- **Be sensitive.** If you see that this person is having a hard time or you notice behavior that causes you concern, ask how you can be helpful. Or, if you are not comfortable talking directly to the employee, you can take your concerns to human resources or to a supervisor in confidence and they can determine how best to handle the concern.
- **Be flexible.** Understand that the return of the employee is a major adjustment for everyone.

Please remind your employees to use their behavioral health benefits if they need additional help. Confidential assistance is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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## After Duty, Returning Home: How to Get Back to “Normal”

Whether you're a reservist or full-time military person, your return from war means the embrace of family and friends, and resuming everyday life. Even before the rejoicing over your safe return subsides, you'll be trying to find your way back to what's normal again.

Here are some tips to help you through this time of transition:

- **Realize the reunion is more than just coming home.** It's a major event for the people in your life—maybe even bigger than the separation. In fact, research shows that reunion can cause more stress in people's lives than deployment. That's not to say that returning service members and their family and friends aren't happy about the homecoming. They're usually ecstatic. The stress comes from the changes that have taken place and concern for what life will now be like.
- **Spend time with family and friends.** For months, the people who are closest to you have been living with the fear of losing you. Make a special effort to spend time with them or, if they are far away, call often to support and reassure them.
- **View stress as normal.** Returning to your everyday life is a major change, and change always creates stress. If accepted and handled constructively, stress can be turned into a source of excitement and enthusiasm about new beginnings with family and friends.
- **Go slowly.** Take time to ease back into your routine. Make a list of those things that must be done—such as banking, making living arrangements, contacting friends and relatives—and take them one by one. Trying to do too much too soon will only add to your stress level. Consider putting off major decisions until you've had plenty of time to readjust.
- **Communicate with others.** Talking with others about your experiences and what you're feeling can help relieve stress. It's not a sign of weakness. Talk with a trusted relative, friend, faith leader or family services staff member. Military chaplains can be helpful, as most receive training in pastoral counseling and crisis.
- **Take care of your physical health.** Get plenty of rest and exercise, eat properly, and avoid drugs and excessive drinking.
- **Do things you find relaxing.** Go fishing, attend a concert or take a long soak in the tub. Be kind to yourself.
- **Watch what you spend.** Now that you're back, the urge to spend will be strong. Don't spend more than you can afford.
- **Start the rebuilding process together.** Do it as a family. Make the decision that this time will serve to make you and your family even stronger. Get involved in positive activities that encourage togetherness and reassurance.
- **Expect something of a letdown.** Most, if not all, service members experience it. It simply means that you're no longer running on pure adrenalin and that things are beginning to settle down. Or, it may mean that the homecoming hasn't solved all the problems that existed before the mobilization. Possibly, your reunion didn't go the way you thought it would. Whatever the reason, it's perfectly normal to feel this way. However, if this feeling doesn't go away, it could be a sign of something more serious.

If you feel overwhelmed by your homecoming, seek help. It's not a sign of weakness. Nearly every military installation has a Family Service Center, Family Support Center or Army Community Service Center where you can access information, referral, counseling and crisis intervention services. In addition, all military families, including those of national guard and reserve members who are activated for more than 30 days, are eligible for medical and mental health care either at a military medical treatment facility or at a civilian facility through TRICARE.

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[www.mentalhealthamerica.net/reunions/infoBacktoNormal.cfm](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/reunions/infoBacktoNormal.cfm)

## Signs and Symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

There are three main kinds of symptoms that clinicians look for when diagnosing posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These include re-experiencing symptoms, avoidant symptoms and symptoms of increased arousal.

Re-experiencing symptoms include ways in which the person persistently re-experiences the traumatic event. These symptoms may include the following:

- intrusive memories of the traumatic event
- recurrent, distressing dreams about the traumatic event
- acting or feeling as if the traumatic event is reoccurring
- mental and physical discomfort when reminded of the traumatic event (e.g., on the anniversary of the traumatic event)

Avoidant symptoms are ways in which the person tries to avoid anything associated with the traumatic event. These symptoms may also include a “numbing” effect, where the person’s general response to people and events is deadened. Avoidant symptoms include the following:

- avoiding thoughts or feelings, people or situations (anything that could stir up memories) associated with the traumatic event
- not being able to recall an important aspect of the traumatic event
- reduced interest or participation in significant activities
- feeling disconnected from others
- showing a limited range of emotion
- having a sense of a shortened future (e.g., not expecting to have a normal life span, marriage or career)

Symptoms of increased arousal may be similar to symptoms of anxiety or panic attacks. Increased arousal symptoms include the following:

- difficulty concentrating
- exaggerated watchfulness and wariness
- irritability or outbursts of anger
- difficulty falling or staying asleep
- being easily startled

By Dan J. Stein, MD  
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## Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Self-quiz

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can be described as the nightmare that won't end. Being a victim or witnessing a violent event, serious injury or death of another, normally produces feelings of fear, horror and helplessness. For those with PTSD the emotional wounds remain red and raw and feelings of fear and helplessness persist long after the event. These intrusive recollections can produce clinically significant symptoms of depression, anxiety and even panic. Not everyone who experiences a traumatic event develops PTSD; it's often a matter of degree. If you have experienced trauma and are not sure how you are coping, take the PTSD quiz and see how you rate.

Answer the following questions, recording the indicated numeric score for each response.

- 1. Do you have recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections or thoughts of a traumatic event?**  
(Yes=1, No=0)
- 2. Do you have recurrent distressing dreams of the event?**  
(Yes=1, No=0)
- 3. Are there times when you act or feel as if the traumatic event were recurring, or experience distress when something reminds you of the event?**  
(Yes=1, No=0)
- 4. Do you try to avoid activities, places, or people that remind you of the trauma?**  
(Yes=1, No=0)
- 5. Are you substantially less interested in participating in activities that are important to you?**  
(Yes=1, No=0)
- 6. Do you feel detached from or distant from others?**  
(Yes=1, No=0)
- 7. Are your feelings more restricted than they used to be (e.g., not being able to have loving feelings)?**  
(Yes=1, No=0)
- 8. Do you expect to have a normal career or marriage or life span?**  
(Yes=0, No=1)
- 9. Do you have difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep?**  
(Yes=1, No=0)
- 10. When you are startled or hear an unexpected loud noise, are you likely to have an exaggerated reaction?**  
(Yes=1, No=0)

### Results

Total your score. If your score is:

**7-10:** You have reported many of the symptoms found in people with PTSD. Your trauma continues to cause you anxiety and emotional upheaval. You should consult with a psychiatrist, psychologist or mental health professional who can evaluate your condition and discuss options for treatment. Your primary care doctor may be a good place to start.

**4-6:** Your score indicates that you have some of the symptoms consistent with PTSD. You should learn more about posttraumatic stress disorder and consider consulting with a physician or mental health professional that will be able to evaluate your condition.

**1-3:** Your score indicates that you may have some risk factors or symptoms associated with PTSD. You should learn more about PTSD to see if you are in need of further evaluation.

**0:** You endorsed none of the items associated with PTSD.

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