



Transitioning to and From Active Duty: Readjusting to Life at Home and Work

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Introduction

An unprecedented mobilization of the National Guard and Reserve units has put increased demands on employees and their family members. This handbook was created in response to these demands.

The handbook contains articles for military service members who are either preparing for a deployment or returning from active duty. It includes information on predeployment processes, support for family members of those who are deployed, reintegration back into the workplace after deployment and readjusting 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®.

Employees

The materials in this handbook can be used as a guide to prepare for deployment and to help in re-acclimation to life at home after active duty ends. It includes information about predeployment responsibilities, support for family members during a deployment, and taking care of your mental health and relationships after a return from active duty.

Also, your employer has partnered with ValueOptions® to offer mental health and substance abuse services to help you and your 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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Emergency Deployment: Quick Checklist for the Deployed Employee

- Is your emergency wallet information card up to date? A data card should include key information about you: date of birth, full name, Social Security number, health insurance, contact phone numbers, blood type, primary care doctor's name and number, family/significant other contact information, etc.

Finances

- How are you going to pay your bills? Will any bills come due while you are away?
- Do you need a general or special power of attorney to give permission to someone (parent, sibling, or friend) to handle those bills or any issues that arise?

Housing and personal concerns

- Is your house/apartment/condominium secure? Will someone check on things while you are away
- Have urgent home repairs been completed and needs met? Does your spouse have contact information for service people to call if a need arises while you are away?
- Have you put a hold on your mail with the post office?
- Is your phone disconnected or forwarded?
- Is your stereo equipment, computer, bicycle, etc. secure? Are they covered by insurance?
- If you have a vehicle, have you arranged for continued payments, safekeeping of keys and paperwork, and vehicle storage?
- Will you need an absentee ballot for an upcoming election?

Caring for others

- What kind of support and information will your "significant other" need in your absence? Please check with your supervisor, HR advisor, or your employee assistance program (EAP) counselor for ideas and help.
- If you have pets, have you made arrangements for their care? Do you have their medication, shot records, appointments, and veterinarian's telephone number readily available?

Contact information

- Do you have addresses for family and friends you intend to stay in touch with? Do they know how to reach you?
- Does your family/significant other:
 - Have your complete mailing address and phone numbers?
 - Know your work location and hours information?
 - Know the name and telephone number of your supervisor?
 - Have your health insurance information (e.g., Social Security or ID #, toll-free phone number for the health insurance company)

Return arrangements

- Have you thought about your homecoming/return? Possible date of return? Will someone meet you at the airport, etc?

For assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, contact your behavioral health benefit.

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Family Readiness Checklist

Service members are given extensive worksheets, which cover personal history, employment records, automobile information, insurance, property ownership and safekeeping and financial management. Review these forms with your spouse. Familiarize yourself with the information and clarify any questions that you may have. These forms may be invaluable to you during an extended training or deployment.

This family readiness checklist targets tasks you should accomplish before your sponsor deploys. Take the opportunity to check your readiness. Customize the list to meet your family's specific and individual needs.

It is important to have the documents and items listed below available for day-to-day living and in case of an emergency. Keep your important papers in a safe place so that you and your spouse and someone outside of your house (family member or trusted friend) know where they are.

Medical

- Are you and all the family members enrolled in DEERS? Contact (800) 538-9552 (in California: 800-334-4162).
- Do you know about your TRICARE benefits? Check www.tricare.osd.mil for information on benefits and other health care information. The Web site contains the toll-free number that corresponds to your region (e.g., TRICARE Northwest, Mid-Atlantic, etc.).
- Do you know the status of your spouse's civilian employer health and/or dental coverage?
- Do you have medical or dental benefits from your employment?
- Are immunizations for each member of the family up-to-date?
- Are the names and numbers of the medical facilities, physician, and dentist readily available?
- Do you have a medical power of attorney?

Personnel/administrative

- Do you have a current military ID card?
- Does every eligible family member have a current military ID card?
- Do you know where to go if you need to replace an ID card, or if one is lost?
- Do you have copies of your spouse's military orders?
- Do you have a copy of your sponsor's Family Care Plan (FCP)?
- Do you have pertinent unit information: names (points of contact), telephone numbers, address?
- Are you listed in the unit family readiness group (FRG) telephone roster?
- Do you have the name and phone number of the key caller who can provide you with unit information?
- Do you know the names and telephone numbers of the unit family readiness program?
- Do you have a Power of Attorney to take any necessary action on important family matters?
- Where do you keep your Power of Attorney? Is it stored in a safe, secure, or fire-proof location?
- Do you have a copy of every family member's birth certificate? Where are they kept?
- Do you know where your marriage certificate is kept?
- Where are all of the important papers kept (e.g., adoption papers, Court Orders, divorce decrees, etc.)? Are they stored in a safe, secure, and fire-proof location?
- Does every family member have a Social Security number? Where are they kept?
- Do you know where the federal and state tax forms are kept?
- Do you know where to go for tax assistance (if applicable)?
- Where are insurance papers kept?
- Where are stocks, bonds and securities kept?
- Do you have an up-to-date will? If so, where is it kept?
- Does your spouse have an up-to-date will? Where is it kept?
- Do you have a set of duplicate keys for your residence?
- Where are the keys kept?

- Do you have a list of important people and telephone numbers readily accessible that are not listed elsewhere (family members, attorneys, business associates)?

Finance

- Will there be money immediately available and on a continuing basis during your spouse's absence?
- Is your name on the bank account where his/her military pay is deposited?
- What type of accounts does your family have?

Type of Account	Name/Location	Comments
Checking		
Savings		
Money Market		
Other (specify)		

- Where are the bank books located? Do you know the account numbers?
- Does your family have a safety deposit box? If so, where are the box and key located?
- Are all credit card numbers written down and in a safe place?
- What are the companies' numbers and address in case of loss or theft?

Name of Credit Card	Account No.	Telephone No. and Address

- Are you ready to take complete control of all of the accounts?
- What payments must be made? When and to whom should the payments be made?

Type of Payment	Account Number	Address	Phone Number	Comments
Mortgage/rent				
Telephone				
Water and sewage				
Electricity				
Trash				
Insurance				

Type of Payment	Account Number	Address	Phone Number	Comments
Taxes				
Gas (home heating)				
Credit cards (listed above)				
Other debts (automobile, furniture, etc.)				
Other (specify)				

- Do you know who to contact regarding direct deposit problems or other military finance issues?

Transportation

- Are you familiar with the responsibilities for the automobile(s)?
- What is the name and address of the company holding the lien on your vehicles (if applicable)?
- Where are the title(s) kept?
- Is a copy of the registration in the vehicle(s)?
- Do you have (need) a Department of Defense (DoD) or military installation sticker on your vehicle(s) so that you can access services?
- When is the renewal date for the license plates and safety inspections?
- Do you have a duplicate set of keys? If so, where are they located?
- Do you know where to go for emergency repairs on the vehicle(s) (e.g., flat tire, dead battery, etc.)?
- If you do not have a driver's license, or do not drive, what transportation arrangements have been made for you and your family?
- Who can you call for emergency transportation?

Housing

- Do you know where and how to use the electrical control box?
- Do you know the location of water control valves to shut off in case of an emergency (broken or leaking pipe)?
- Do you know the location of the gas control valves for shut off in case of an emergency (leaking pipes or fire)?
- Do you know the names and telephone numbers of individuals to call in case repairs are needed?

Source: Guard & Reserve Family Readiness Programs Toolkit

National Guard and Reserve Predeployment Family Financial Checklist

Check off before deployment:

- appropriate allotment applied for
- joint accounts are in place for both checking and savings

Spouse has the following:

- account numbers for checking and savings accounts
- bank ledger for listing written checks
- checkbook(s) for all accounts
- automatic teller card(s) and personal identification numbers (PINs)

Spouse knows the following:

- amount due on loans (college tuition, child support, etc.)
- monthly payment dates
- addresses and phone numbers to loan companies

Spouse is aware of routine monthly bills and budget:

- rent or mortgage
- utilities
- cable TV/newspaper/magazine
- insurance payments and all insurance policy information
- grocery and family needs
- spouse has access to copies of federal income tax and name of person who prepared them

Spouse knows where to go for financial assistance in times of crisis:

- Army Community Service; Army Emergency Relief; Rear Detachment; Family Assistance Center; Guard Family Program Coordinator

Source: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, and the 49th Division, Texas National Guard

Stages of Deployment: What You Should Know, for Yourself and Your Family

Predeployment stage

- **Preparation time:** Varies—usually very little advance warning given the nature of natural disasters.
- **Needs that arise:**
 - Training up—resulting in longer work hours
 - Getting your affairs in order
- **Considerations:**
 - Anticipating the loss vs. denying the upcoming deployment
 - Mixing arguments with being close
- **What to do:**
 - Plan and organize—use the tip sheet for getting prepared.
 - Communicate in a business-like fashion.
 - Strategize, don't catastrophize.
 - Talk about the emotional side. Include and inform the children.
 - Beef up support from friends and extended family.

Deployment stage

- **Length:** Varies—completion date may be a moving target.
- **Needs that arise:**
 - Staying in touch with home/the deployed employee
 - Problem-solving and brainstorming when new issues arise
- **Considerations:**
 - Initial period of disorientation and feeling overwhelmed:
 - Don't be surprised by feelings of numbness, jealousy, frustration, anger, hurt, sleep disturbance
 - Loss of trust and rumors
 - Sustaining and adapting:
 - Establishing new routines and sources of support. Lessening of initial negative reactions
- **What to do:**
 - Keep communicating—using alternative means: cell phone, email, etc.
 - Recognize the “uni-directional” nature of calls—feeling “trapped” at home not wanting to miss a call
 - Stay confident (“I can do this”)
 - Pace yourself—the length of the deployment might change
 - “Hot topics” for the family or the marriage—consider putting them on hold until the deployment ends
 - Avoid overspending/alcohol
 - Avoid over-investing in a set date of return

Post-deployment stage

- **Length of readjustment:** Several days to several weeks
- **Needs that arise:**
 - Logistics of adjusting to being back together—who does what?
 - Having enough time being back together as a couple and family
 - Recouping physically and mentally—getting rest
- **Considerations:**
 - “Honeymoon” period—a big up period followed by a return to normality
 - Independence of the spouse who remained at home vs. deployed spouse reasserting their role in the family
 - Need for “own space”
 - Renegotiating routines, chores and responsibilities
- **What to do:**
 - Keep communicating and keep the faith.
 - Go slow. Adjustment does not occur overnight.
 - Enlist the help of others including counseling.
 - Allow the old roles to be reestablished but also adjusted and adapted.

Negative Changes in Children				
	Ages	Behaviors	Moods	Remedy
Infants	< 1 yr	Refuses to eat	Listless	Support for parent, pediatrician
Toddlers	1-3 yrs	Cries, has tantrums	Irritable, sad	Increased attention, holding, hugs
Preschoolers	3-6 yrs	Potty accidents, clingy	Irritable, sad	Increased attention, holding, hugs
School-age	6-12 yrs	Whines, body aches	Irritable, sad	Spend time, maintain routines
Teen-agers	12-18 yrs	Isolates, uses drugs	Anger, apathy	Patience, limit-setting, counseling

Adapted from “The Emotional Cycle of Deployment: A Military Family Perspective,” by LTC Simon H. Pincus, USA, MC, COL Robert House, USAR, MC, LTC Joseph Christenson, USA, MC, and CAPT Lawrence E. Adler, MC, USNR-R
www.hooah4health.com/deployment/familymatters/emotionalcycle.htm.

For assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, contact your behavioral health benefit. Resources include individual and family counseling and substance abuse counseling services.

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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 5 years may leave be denied; however, there are certain exceptions in the Act for this 5-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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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. Your military contingency officer and your employee assistance program can provide you with child care referrals, including before- and after-school programs and in-home care.

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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Back to Work: Information for 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 6 months or longer, so a return to work can sometimes be a tough transition for the individual and workplace.

Tips for service members

If you are a reservist or in the National Guard, here are some tips to ease your readjustment to your regular place of employment:

- **Contact your supervisor.** Before returning to work, ask for a briefing on the current situation, including issues such as how your responsibilities were handled during your absence, changes in personnel, and new policies and projects.
- **Ease into your return to work.** Focus on communicating, being patient, anticipating and accepting changes, and using this time as an opportunity to start fresh all over again.
- **Avoid “taking charge.”** Recognize that your absence may have forced co-workers to take on some of your responsibilities, and they may resent it if they feel you’ve come back to take control or criticize them. Be supportive of decisions that were made, and ease back into your previous role gently and with open communication.
- **Consult with your commanding officer.** He may have experience advising others with similar transitions, or may be willing to speak to your employer on your behalf to address any concerns or to ensure a supportive environment for you when you return to work. Also, make contact with a transitional assistance program. Many branches of the service offer transitional assistance programs, although they vary in scope and quality.
- **Talk about it.** By talking with others, particularly other reservists going through the same process, you will relieve stress and realize that other people share your feelings. Reach out to trusted relatives, friends or faith leaders. If your employer provides a behavioral health benefit, take advantage of it. Such programs often provide excellent resources for making the transition back to work—as well as home and family—a healthy one.
- **Take care of your physical health.** Getting plenty of rest and exercise, eating healthfully, as well as avoiding drugs and excessive drinking will help you manage stress more effectively.
- **Know your rights.** You are protected by the federal Uniformed Services Employment and Re-employment Rights Act (USERRA), which applies to all employers regardless of their size, and protects those in the reserve forces of the army, marines, navy, air force, coast guard, national guard and public health service commissioned corps. Your rights include the following:
 - **If you are a permanent employee, you must be reinstated to a comparable position** (e.g., similar seniority, pay and status), and if you can no longer perform the job, your employer must use reasonable efforts to help you upgrade or update your skills.
 - **Unfortunately, employers do not have to continue paying for health insurance while you are on active duty, although many large companies do so.** When you are returning to work, and transitioning back from TRICARE or COBRA, make sure your health coverage is reinstated promptly.

If you feel overwhelmed by the return or are unable to function at work or home, seek professional help from a mental health professional. Talking with others about your experiences and what you're feeling can help. It's not a sign of weakness.

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Deployment: Tips for Returning Home

Coming home after deployment can be both joyful and stressful. Here are some tips to ease the transition.

- Understand your re-employment rights and how much time after military leave the Uniformed Services Employment and Re-employment Rights Act (USERRA) gives you to return back to work. Set aside quality time for yourself and with each of your loved ones individually.
- Relationships upon your return may be a little strained. Understand that some friends or family members may feel angry or sad that you left, and may show that resentment when you return.
- Consider revoking or updating any power of attorney you may have granted a friend or family member while away.
- Budget for changes in pay when you are no longer on military leave.
- Talk to your bank and other financial institutions about changing services set up before you left. For example, if you modified your auto insurance because your car was in storage, remember to re-instate coverage before you drive. Review your life, home and other insurance policies as well.
- Update the contact information in your military service record and your forwarding address maintained by the Benefits Center.
- For emotional support, call to receive free and confidential counseling through your behavioral health benefit. Following the call, you may be referred to a counselor in your geographical area.

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Returning Home From Military Deployment: Making the Adjustment

Reunions and homecoming are a time of celebration and change. If your spouse or partner has been away a long time, it is easy to remember only the very good things and set high expectations for his or her return. Everyone wants to have a picture-perfect homecoming. Realistically, however, reunions and homecomings bring an adjustment of roles for everyone. The transition from your picture-perfect homecoming to reality is not always smooth. Try to be realistic and understanding. It is normal to feel the very same feelings of apprehension and fear as you did for the deployment, along with great relief and hope. It is quite common for communication between you and your spouse or partner and the family to be strained at first. You are getting reacquainted and re-established as a couple. Separation and time have changed you both.

Adjusting takes time

While change can be good, it always takes some time to adjust to change. It is important to remember that your children have grown and changed both emotionally and physically. It is common for children to experience a variety of feelings and reactions both before and after their parent comes home. They may become firmly attached to the returning parent, wanting their full, undivided attention. Or they may seem distant and withdrawn and pretend that they do not care. They may be worried about things they have done. Ultimately they will be happy that their family is back together, but there will be a period of adjustment. Show them you care. Give them extra attention and time to adjust. Tell them how much you love them. Include your children in the process of creating your new “after-the-separation” family.

After weeks or months of being apart, it takes time to acclimate to being together. When your partner or spouse comes home, give him or her time to adjust. Do not spout off a list of problems or concerns as soon as he or she gets home. Allow him or her some time alone. Roles and responsibilities in the household have undergone a big change. Family dynamics are different. The role reversal of changing back to predeployment responsibilities can impact strongly on your relationship. You may like some of your new responsibilities and may have developed skills and new ideas as to how things should be done. Your mate’s only frame of reference is “how it used to be.” It can take several weeks to re-establish the newly agreed upon roles and responsibilities.

Try hard to maintain an attitude of mutual respect and appreciation for each other’s contributions to the relationship. Talk to each other. Encourage individual family members to discuss how they felt about the separation. Communication between family members is an essential element in reunion. Focus on happy memories. Discuss the difficult memories or events that happened, but try to focus on the positive aspects and outcomes. Turn your negative experiences into learning experiences. We all grow from the experiences we have and share.

For some couples, counseling may be helpful in gaining insight into the relationship and may assist in rebuilding roles and lines of communication. Do not address your marital issues in front of your children. A military chaplain or your clergy member can be a helpful resource for advice and counseling. Military installations also offer counseling in various clinics. Your employee assistance program is also a good resource for counseling and support. Seeking help for your relationship can be very insightful and can help to enrich your marriage.

Your spouse or partner will also undergo a transition to his or her regular job. It may have changed. His or her responsibilities may be different. Be a sounding board, listen to feelings, and give him or her time and space to adapt to all that is happening.

Stages of reunion

Before a deployment or training mission, your spouse has a sense of “mission.” It is an extremely busy time and there are many preparations to make in his or her military and civilian life. Emotions run a broad spectrum between high and low. Then there is goodbye. Goodbye has conflicting meanings: “Be safe” “Will I ever see you again?” “Will you miss me?” “How will you manage without me?” and “What will this (separation and deployment) be like?”

During separation due to military service, your mate is a full-time service member serving his or her country. That is his or her main mission and focus. He or she may have a sense of international significance. He or she will build strong bonds and friendships through the teamwork of the mission. It will probably be a milestone in both his or her personal and military life.

Returning home is a mixture of extreme happiness and apprehension. Your partner may have dreams and a concept of the perfect homecoming. He or she is excited to see family and friends and tell them about the deployment experiences. He or she is ready to return to the routine civilian life in the community with his or her family.

Once he or she returns to a civilian position, his or her job may be entirely different. Although law protects your spouse’s employment rights, an employer may change your spouse’s responsibilities and status. There will probably be new employees and work processes to adjust to. Colleagues and peers may or may not be interested in hearing about the deployment.

At home, the family has changed. The children are older. New family routines may have been established. There may be new family friends. Role adjustment is the most significant element to adapt to at home. Things are different than they were before the deployment.

Re-acclimation strategies

What are the best ways to help your spouse adjust to the changes? Think and act positively. Praise your spouse, and praise the children. A positive attitude is contagious. Negotiate your new roles. Flexibility and compromise can go a long way in meeting everyone’s needs.

Make time for all the important people in your life, especially your children and extended family. Thank your support group. Many people—family, neighbors, teachers and members of your faith community—have been there for your family. Let them know you appreciate and value their contributions.

Be patient with the adjustment process. You did not change overnight when your spouse was gone. Do not expect the adjustment phase to happen immediately.

Support the positive changes in your family and acknowledge ways to make improvements. Do not be surprised by tension or irritability. It is very normal—and it’s OK. Expect unusual feelings and questions such as, “Where do I fit in?” Use active listening and communicate openly with your spouse or partner, your children and your friends.

Seek help from professionals when you need it: Your EAP is a great resource for free, confidential support, and can help with relationship, parenting, and work concerns and family communication. Share your experiences and ideas with others in the unit and family readiness group.

Source: Adapted from the Guard & Reserve Family Readiness Programs Toolkit

After Duty, Returning Home: When the Letdown Doesn't Let Up

After the initial celebration is over, most returning service men and women experience some sort of an emotional letdown. This is part of the transition back to everyday life. It simply means you're no longer operating in high gear and that things are beginning to settle down. Or, it can mean that your homecoming was not everything you'd hoped it would be. Occasionally, the letdown can become a more serious problem that requires professional assistance.

Here are some signs that mean it's time to get help:

- **Long bouts of depression.** If you feel down for longer than 2 weeks or so, you may be clinically depressed. With clinical depression, people often feel hopeless, lack interest in day-to-day activities or loved ones, and experience changes in eating and sleeping habits. There may even be thoughts of death or suicide.
- **Frequent bouts of anxiety or panic.** Feeling afraid, even when there's reason, is a normal reaction after experiencing extremely stressful events. But, when you still feel this way several weeks after the event, you may have something called an anxiety disorder.
- **Flashbacks and frequent nightmares.** Traumatic events, such as combat, often trigger nightmares and vivid, sudden memories called flashbacks. If they persist for several weeks or months, you may have posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It can make you feel indifferent, avoid people and responsibilities, become "jumpy" or have panic attacks.
- **Frequent alcohol and drug abuse.** When people are in pain, they sometimes try to "self-medicate" with alcohol and drugs. This almost always results in even worse trouble.
- **Domestic violence/abuse.** When troubled by your feelings or experiences, you may feel like lashing out at your family members.
- **Previous mental health problems or past trauma.** You may experience the symptoms of your disorder or see new ones emerge.

If you are experiencing any of these, you should seek help. With professional help and support you can overcome these problems. Everyone needs help from time to time in dealing with the stresses of life. It's also best to act on these problems as early as possible. You have many options to choose from: support groups, anger management classes, your faith leader, a service chaplain, a family services counselor or mental health professional. Asking for help is 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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War-zone-related Stress Reactions: What Veterans Need to Know

Traumas are events in which a person has the feeling that he or she may die or be seriously injured or harmed, or events in which he or she witnesses such things happening to others.

Traumatic events are of course common in the war zone, but they are common in the civilian world too, so that in addition to war zone experiences, many military personnel will have experienced one or more traumatic events in their civilian lives.

When they are happening, traumas often create feelings of intense fear, helplessness or horror. Often in the days and weeks that follow trauma, there are longer-lasting stress reactions that can be surprising, distressing and difficult to understand. By understanding their traumatic stress reactions better, Iraq War veterans can become less fearful of them and better able to cope with them. While reviewing the list of effects of trauma below, keep in mind several facts about trauma and its effects:

- It is very common to have problems following exposure to war or other trauma. But traumatic stress reactions often become less frequent or distressing as time passes, even without treatment.
- Veterans with PTSD often worry that they are going crazy. This is not true. Rather, what is happening is that they are experiencing a set of common symptoms and problems that are connected with trauma.
- Problems that result from trauma are not a sign of personal weakness. Many mentally and physically healthy people experience stress reactions that are distressing and interfere with their daily lives at times.
- If traumatic stress reactions continue to cause problems for more than a few weeks or months, treatment can help reduce them.

Traumatic war experiences often cause many of the following kinds of (often temporary) reactions in veterans:

- **Unwanted remembering or re-experiencing:** Almost all veterans experience difficulty controlling distressing memories of war. Although these memories are upsetting, the memories provide an opportunity for the person to make sense of what happened and gain mastery over the event. The experience of these memories can include:
 - unwanted distressing memories as images or other thoughts
 - feeling like it is happening again (flashbacks)
 - dreams and nightmares
 - distress and physical reactions (e.g., heart pounding, shaking) when reminded of the trauma
- **Physical activation or arousal:** The body's fight-or-flight reaction to a life-threatening situation continues long after the event is over. It is upsetting to feel like your body is overreacting or out of control. However, on the positive side, these fight-or-flight reactions help prepare a person in a dangerous situation for quick response and emergency action. Signs of continuing physical activation, common following participation in war, can include:
 - difficulty falling or staying asleep
 - irritability, anger and rage
 - difficulty concentrating
 - being constantly on the lookout for danger (hyper-vigilance)
 - being startled easily for example, when hearing a loud noise (exaggerated startle response)
 - anxiety and panic

- **Shutting down: emotional numbing:** When overwhelmed by strong emotions, the body and mind sometimes react by shutting down and becoming numb. As a result, veterans may have difficulty experiencing loving feelings or feeling some emotions, especially when upset by traumatic memories. Like many of the other reactions to trauma, this emotional numbing reaction is not something the veteran is doing on purpose.
- **Active avoidance of trauma-related thoughts and feelings.** Painful memories and physical sensations of fear can be frightening, so it is only natural to try to find ways to prevent them from happening. One way that most veterans do this is by avoiding anything—people, places, conversations, thoughts, emotions and feelings, physical sensations—that might act as a reminder of the trauma. This can be very helpful if it is used once in a while (e.g., avoiding upsetting news or television programs). But when avoidance is used too much, it can have two big negative effects:
 - It can reduce veterans' abilities to live their lives and enjoy themselves, because they can become isolated and limited in where they go and what they do.
 - Avoiding thoughts and emotions connected with the trauma may reduce veterans' abilities to recover from it. It is through thinking about what happened, and particularly through talking about it with trusted others, that survivors may best deal with what has happened. By constantly avoiding thoughts, feelings and discussions about the trauma, this potentially helpful process can be short-circuited.
- **Depression:** Most persons who have been traumatized experience depression. Feelings of depression then lead a person to think very negatively and feel hopeless. There is a sense of having lost things: one's previous self (I'm not the same person I was), a sense of optimism and hope, self-esteem and self-confidence. With time, and sometimes with the help of counseling, the trauma survivor can regain self-esteem, self-confidence and hope. It is important to let others know about feelings of depression and about any suicidal thoughts and feelings, which are sometimes a part of feeling depressed.
- **Self-blame, guilt and shame:** Many veterans, in trying to make sense of their traumatic war experiences, blame themselves or feel guilty in some way. They may feel bad about some thing(s) they did or didn't do in the war zone. Feelings of guilt or self-blame cause much distress and can prevent a person from reaching out for help. Therefore, even though it is hard, it is very important to talk about guilt feelings with a counselor or doctor.
- **Interpersonal problems:** The many changes noted above can affect relationships with other people. Trauma may cause difficulties between a veteran and his or her partner, family, friends or co-workers.

Particularly in close relationships, the emotional numbing and feeling of disconnection that are common after traumatic events may create distress and drive a wedge between the survivor and his or her family or close friends.

The survivor's avoidance of different kinds of social activities may frustrate family members. Sometimes, this avoidance results in social isolation that hurts relationships.

Others may respond in ways that worsen the problem rather than help recovery. They may have difficulty understanding, become angry with the veteran, communicate poorly and fail to provide support. Partners and families need to participate in treatment; by learning more about traumatic stress, they can often become more understanding of the veteran and feel more able to help.

Some kinds of traumatic experiences (e.g., sexual assault) can make it hard to trust other people.

These problems in relationships are upsetting. Just as the veteran needs to learn about trauma and its effects, people who are important to him or her also need to learn more. As the survivor becomes more aware of trauma reactions and how to cope with them, he or she will be able to reduce the harm they cause to relationships.

- **Physical symptoms and health problems:** Because many traumas result in physical injury, pain is often part of the experience of survivors. This physical pain often causes emotional distress, because in addition to causing pain and discomfort, the injury also reminds them of their trauma. Because traumas stress the body, they can sometimes affect physical health, and survivors may experience stress-related physical symptoms such as headaches, nausea or other stomach problems, and skin problems. The veteran with PTSD will need to care for his or her health, seek medical care when appropriate, and inform the doctor or nurse about his or her traumas, in order to limit the effects of the trauma.

Source: National Center for PTSD, www.ncptsd.va.gov/war/war_veteran.html

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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