

HOW YOUR KIDS MAY REACT

Reunions are exciting, but they can be stressful for kids. The reunion may not be how you envisioned it—little kids running into your arms, squealing with delight, or older ones acting thrilled to see you. (Nothing personal; it just doesn't look cool!) Although they may be happy to have you home, your arrival will be a major change for them. Knowing what is typical at different ages will give you a heads-up about what you might expect. It may also reassure you that their reactions to your return are more universal than personal.

Here's what child experts say might occur:

Under Age 5

- If you've been away a long time, very young children may not recognize you or be comfortable with you at first.
- They may be angry that you went away (and even feel they're to blame for your absence).
- They may act demanding, whiny, or clingy with you or your spouse, or be just plain difficult. These behaviors may be their way of getting your attention for themselves, rather than sharing it with the rest of the family.
- They may go back to younger behaviors or have temper tantrums.

Ages 5 to 11

- School-age children may test your limits as a way of looking for attention.
- They may compete with your spouse for your attention.
- They may express pride at your being in the military.
- They may be eager to fill you in on what has happened in their lives while you've been gone.
- They may feel concerned about whether and how you will discipline them.
- They may feel angry at you for going away or afraid that you will leave again.

Ages 12 to 18

- Adolescents are likely to act indifferent even if they're not.
- They may be rebellious and unwilling to listen.
- They may worry that they have disappointed you.

 Have you noticed any of these reactions? Write down what you have seen.

How do their reactions make you feel? Check the answers that best describe your emotions:

- I get it, but it doesn't make me feel any better.
- I'm hurt.
- I'm annoyed and upset that I have to deal with this.
- It makes it tough to focus on other things, like work and family finances.
- I'm angry. Do they think I liked being away from them?
- I realize that their responses are normal and it will take time for everyone to feel comfortable.
- I'm frustrated. Why does this have to be so hard?
- I'm jealous of how close my children and spouse are.
- I'm surprised. I knew my return would affect them, but I didn't realize it would be this difficult.
- I feel alone and overwhelmed.

Anything else? Write down other feelings you have had.

