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## COMING HOME!

Before you're reunited, you'll want to prepare as much as you can. There's likely to be a whirlwind of emotions, with excitement, nervousness, and perhaps irritability among them. Under the best circumstances (no physical or mental injuries), this period requires readjustment for both spouses.

Here's what the pros say:

**Assume it will take time.** Start slowly. Get to know each other again. It may be months before you're truly adjusted to each other and the returning spouse has gotten accustomed to life back home. There may (or may not) be a period of awkwardness as a couple. Have realistic expectations. Remember what you missed about your spouse when you were apart.

**Postpone extended family reunions** until you've had some time to be together as a couple and/or an immediate family.

**Recognize that roles may shift.** The one who has temporarily held down the fort at home and assumed new tasks (for example, paying the bills, or dealing with the house and the kids) might not want to relinquish them. Decide who would do the best job of each task rather than automatically returning to who used to do them or continuing who is currently doing them.

**Make an ongoing effort to check in with each other emotionally.** Being honest and empathetic are key. The returning service member may feel angry or sad about having missed important family events while away.

**Discuss expectations.** At first, everyone will probably be on their best behavior, but after a while, old and new issues come up. Talk openly about what to expect.

**Expect things to be different.** Everyone has changed—the kids have gotten older, the service member has seen and experienced life-altering events, and the at-home spouse may feel more independent.

 What did you think the time after deployment would be like for your marriage?

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What has it really been like?

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What is one thing you can do to improve your relationship?

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Name the issues that you are most worried about during the time following reunion.

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What can you do to anticipate these issues?

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Ask three people you know through the military what one piece of advice they would give about handling the time after reunion with a spouse. Write down their answers:

1. 

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2. 

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3. 

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Set aside time each week to discuss your relationship. Ask each other:

- How are you doing?
- What is it like for you?
- What do we both need?
- How are we going to get it?
- What can we each do or say to the other to help the situation and strengthen our marriage?