The Handbook for Military Families: Before, During and After Deployment

The best way to support your service member before, during, and after deployment is by taking care of your own emotional health and that of your children. The Handbook for Military Families: Before, During and After Deployment can help families prepare for and handle all phases of deployment. This valuable handbook was created with input from military families and validated by leading military and mental health experts.

- **Pre-deployment:** includes advice for involving young children in deployment preparation and getting couples to feel closer as they prepare to say goodbye.
- **Deployment:** includes tools for minimizing the strain that a service member’s prolonged absence can place on the entire family.
- **Post-deployment:** discusses ways to deal with the delicate process of family reintegration and service member readjustment to a non-combat environment.

Nothing can completely take away the stress of a deployment, but understanding and preparing for the emotional challenges can give family members greater peace of mind and make them feel stronger.

To sign up for information about our toolkit and campaign for military families, join our community at: [www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife](http://www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife).
This Emotional Life is a multifaceted project that explores how we can all lead happier, fuller lives and bring hope to those dealing with challenging issues. The centerpiece of the project is a three-part television series which premiered on PBS in January 2010. Check local listings for future broadcasts.

The first episode in the series investigates our relationships with our families, friends, and those in our communities, and how these connections can affect our happiness. The second focuses on coping with negative emotions, such as depression, grief and fear. The final episode takes a look at how we can become more positive, resilient individuals.

In the series, the filmmakers were given intimate access to the struggles of ordinary people from all walks of life, including three brave veterans and their families. The film includes interviews with dozens of experts working to better understand the science behind our emotions and help individuals overcome challenges to emotional wellness.

In addition to the television series, the website – www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife – contains valuable resources for all families on how to deal with issues ranging from deployments and reintegration.

Learn more: www.apbs.org/thisemotionallife

Keeping Your Family Strong Throughout Deployment

The highs and lows of the deployment cycle are addressed in a new toolkit for military families, produced in conjunction with the PBS documentary series This Emotional Life. The Family Guide to Military Deployment provides insights, tips and resources to help families prepare for and handle all phases of deployment.

As a military family, you are fully aware of the stresses, strains, and positive aspects associated with the deployment cycle. Newer military families and some seasoned ones can often have feelings of sadness, guilt, fear, and frustration. These emotions are perfectly normal. Consider these tips and ideas:

- Expect a certain degree of emotional distance from your spouse before, during, and after deployment. Service members often seem distant and preoccupied as they prepare for deployment and perhaps shortly after they return. Understand that this is part of the process and not intended to hurt you and your family.
- Find activities you enjoy that burn energy. Physical activity has been proven to be one of the most effective ways to maintain a feeling of well-being and combat negative emotions.
- Remember you are not alone. Identify people or groups who are in the same situation as you, or who you can talk to about your feelings. Visit www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife to find Meet Up groups that share your interests or concerns. Look for military chat groups online and learn about military family organizations like Blue Star Families at www.bluestarfam.org.
- Children are affected by the deployment cycle in ways that are not always easy to understand. Changes in sleep, eating, friendships, school performance, behavior, mood, interests...any of this may signal that a child is struggling. Sometimes just helping a child talk about his/her experience can help tremendously. If you can’t answer their questions, speak to a school counselor, school liaison officer, or a mental health professional, or visit www.militarychild.org for advice.
- laughter really is the best medicine, so stay close to people or activities that bring you joy. Although you may not feel that it is appropriate to “have fun” while your service member is in a combat zone, laughing can balance your emotional state during an otherwise difficult time, and in turn help everyone around you.

Create a Memory Kit for the service member, your children, and you. This kit can contain mementos and items of personal significance and should be left in plain view so that you can see it every day to feel more connected to your loved one.

Come up with a plan on how to handle communication blackouts. Communication with service members can be very sporadic when troops are in remote areas with little infrastructure. Reach out to friends and other military family members to talk through your fears. Knowing that communication is not something you can control will help you set expectations for your family.

Find people to whom you can turn for immediate support in the event of an emergency. By doing so, you can prevent scrambling for help when you are already stressed out.

When your spouse returns from deployment, be patient with yourself, your children, and especially your service member. It will take some time for the family to acclimate to the return of their deployed loved one.

Be vigilant for signs of combat stress or traumatic brain injury in your service member. When in doubt, ask for help.

Most importantly, if you become concerned about yourself or anyone in your family, speak to a professional who understands the stress of deployment. Visit www.MilitaryOneSource.com or www.giveanhour.org, or call Veterans Chat at 1-800-273-TALK for anonymous counseling.