For Single Service Members Coming Home

Coming home from deployment as a single service member? Here are some helpful tips for returning home after deployment. It highlights suggestions that manage your expectations (as well as those of your family and friends), as well as ideas for easing back into “normal” life, establishing an at-home schedule, increasing your support system, and other important aspects to consider.

I just found out I'll be going home soon after a long deployment.

**Strategy #1: Plan ahead.**

Will you be coming home to family and/or close friends? Or do you have little or no built-in support system back home? Either way, think ahead to what support you’ll have when you get home, and foster the ones you have or think of a plan for creating some when you get there. Also, think about how you want to celebrate your return, as well as basics such as where you will live, how you will get around, and getting your things from where you’ve been storing them.

I can’t wait to get home, but I’ve heard that coming home can sometimes be disappointing and difficult.

**Strategy #2: Take time to readjust.**

Readjustment can be unsettling. Expect to feel unsettled. Being lonely, angry, sad, or tired can be normal parts of readjustment that should smooth out once you adjust to your new life. However, if the feelings remain, grow, or impact your ability to function well and/or you feel that experiences from combat are impacting your life at home, seek out extra support (chaplains, counselors, support centers).

I’m not sure how I’m going to fit in with my family and friends again when I get home.

**Strategy #3: Talk.**

Don’t expect your family and friends to be able to read your mind. Talk about what you are feeling or what you want; don’t expect your family and friends to be able to know how much you do or don’t want to hang out, how you are feeling, or what you want from them.

I don’t have any close family or friends at home, and I’m going to miss my buddies from deployment.

**Strategy #4: Connect.**

Stay connected to your buddies through social media, phone calls, and emails. Don’t wait for them to contact you. Also, try connecting with places or organizations where you can meet new friends and establish a support network. Try your local church/religious institution, a local sports club, online community, take a class, or find a new activity where you can have fun and meet people. Real Warriors highlights programs for single service members in each branch in this article, which describes the importance of building a Personal Support Network. So be open and reach out.

I’ve kept in touch with some family members and friends, but now that I’m coming home I’m worried that they’ve left me behind in some ways.

**Strategy #5a: Be patient.**

Go slowly, as things may have changed. It could take some time to adjust to new situations.
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**Strategy #5b: Take it easy.**

Try not to over-schedule yourself your first few weeks back. Your family and friends may have changed while you were gone (got married or divorced, had babies, moved, got closer to other friends), so take some time to get to know them again and adjust to the changes—and to make some new friends.

**After being around the same people all the time on my deployment, I’m looking forward to some alone time when I get home.**

**Strategy #6a: Don’t isolate yourself.**

It can sometimes feel appealing to just be on your own after deployment, but don’t spend too much time alone. Remember to spend some time to get out there and cultivate old and new friendships, make new memories, find fun activities to do, enjoy life, and foster your relationships.

**Strategy #6b: Don’t make alcohol your buddy.**

Limit your use of alcohol. It was probably restricted during deployment, so your tolerance may be lower. So go slowly with the booze.

There’s a lot to do when I get home: people to see and time to catch up on. I’m not sure if I’ll have time for it all.

**Strategy #7a: Balance yourself.**

If you do have close friends and family where you are assigned, do give some focused attention to them. They were probably worried about you while you were gone and want to make sure you’re okay now. But balance your desire to see the people you missed while you were gone with your own inner needs.

**Strategy #7b: Create a routine.**

Take some time to adjust to your environment, new schedule, and any changes in your life. Then get into a good routine that includes enough sleep, proper nutrition, and regular exercise.

I can’t wait to get back stateside so I can go to my favorite restaurants and stores.

**Strategy #8: Chill your spending.**

Don’t go crazy spending your paycheck. If you were away, you may want to check your credit report and create a budget now that you are home. Many service members make more money when deployed, so coming home can mean fewer dollars each month than you’re used to. For help with budgeting, HPRC highlights some great resources to check out, including articles about how to create a budget and how to protect yourself from identity theft.

Now that I’m home and have some more time, I’m ready to tackle something new. What should I do?

**Strategy #9: Improve yourself.**

Once you’ve settled in, maybe now’s the time to tackle a goal in your life that can enhance your resilience and/or performance. Military OneSource has a free Health and Wellness Coaching Program where you can tackle goals such as weight management, resilience, stress management, walking, quitting smoking, and more. Or peruse other sections of HPRC’s website to get innovative ideas on a variety of topics such as stress management.

Now that I’m back, it’s hard to plan ahead since I don’t know when I’ll be deploying again.

**Strategy #10a: Be flexible.**

Learning to live with indecision can be a great skill to cultivate because your next orders, deployment location, and timeframe are likely to be unknown or change. You can learn new strategies for quieting your mind and going with the flow from the Mind-Body Skills section of HPRC’s website.

**Strategy #10b: Focus on the positive.**

After deployment, you may need to make a conscious effort to shift your thinking now that you’re back in a peace zone. You may need to remind yourself to think more positively instead of assessing for risk so often. For help changing how you think, check out HPRE’s Performance Strategies for “Reframing Your Thinking Traps.”