



Welcome Home...but “Home” Ain’t What it Used to Be!

Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. If you have media capabilities, show several videos of welcome home ceremonies where service members are reunited with their families. Highlight the excitement and discuss what emotions they can identify in the videos. Ask if what they see on the videos is similar to the emotions they felt or to their reunification experience.
2. Ask the couples what it was like when they or their service members arrived home. This was likely a day that was much anticipated. Did they experience any sort of welcome home ceremony? What sort of preparations did the family make? Did the ceremony start on time or was the arrival delayed? What was the service member most looking forward to? What was the partner who stayed home most looking forward to? Did anyone have any concerns or anxiety? Make sure to hear from both service members and their partners when discussing their experiences and emotions.
3. Point out that the welcome home is one of the most exciting parts of the deployment cycle. It is a time worthy of celebration; however, National Guard couples often experience difficult transitions when the excitement settles down. Ask the couples in what areas they have had to transition since the return.
4. Explain that some National Guard families attribute the difficulties of the transition to the amount of time that passed during the deployment; others attribute it to the shifts that took place as a result of the service member being absent. During that time, one or more family members' views may have changed on any number of issues, including how finances or schedules are managed within the family system, or in daily roles and responsibilities. The discrepancy of how things once were to how things are now is evident upon the return, and some changes are so profound that it may not even feel like home to the service member, or at least the home that he or she remembered.
5. Talk about change in terms of *natural* versus *deployment* change. Some life changes occurred naturally because of the time span between when the service member left and when he or she arrived home –

Group Size: All

Time Needed: 30 minutes

Goal: To acknowledge the life and family changes experienced when Service members return from deployment

Audience: National Guard couples who have experienced deployment

Special Considerations: None

Resources Needed:

- ✓ Two flipcharts and markers
- ✓ Identify welcome home or reunion videos online (optional)
- ✓ Capabilities to show online videos or to convert videos to a movie file (optional)

changes that would have occurred regardless of the deployment (such as children growing up). Other life changes occurred as a result of the *deployment* - changes that simply would not have taken place if the National Guard member was not deployed (such as a change in roles and responsibilities).

6. Describe how change is not always negative. Many families can point to positive changes that occurred during the deployment. Some families believe the time apart created a new appreciation for what they have together and for the roles they had prior to the deployment. (For example, spouses may realize how much the service members contributed to the family in areas they previously took for granted.) Others describe growth they experienced because of the separation. Ask each participant to think of the most significant change they experienced.
7. Divide the class into two groups. One group will consist of just the National Guard members. The other group will consist of the spouses or partners who stayed behind. Give each group a flip chart. Be sure there is enough space between each group so that conversations cannot be easily heard by the other group.
8. Once the groups are in their places, instruct them to pick one person to act as a scribe for the group. Ask the scribes to set up their flip chart pages in the following way:

Life & Family Changes		
Change that Occurred	+ or - (or neutral)	Natural or Deployment Caused

9. Once they are ready, have the groups discuss some of the changes they noticed after returning from the deployment. The scribes should capture the thoughts on the chart by listing in the first column the change that occurred. In the second column have them rate whether it had a positive, negative, or neutral effect on their family. And in the third column, have them write whether it was a natural change or a change caused by the deployment. Give the groups several minutes to complete this activity.
10. Once the groups are complete, have one member of each group explain some of the documented changes.
11. After both groups have shared, invite the participants to return to their seats, and thank them for their participation in the activity.

Process:

Ask the group what particular insights they picked up during the activity. Were there many similarities in the changes listed? Were some changes positive for some individuals, but negative or neutral for others? Ask if it helped them to know that others had experienced similar changes.

Conclude:

Express that while some of the life and family changes may remain intact, the effects of the changes (especially the negative ones) can fade over time. How we choose to make adjustments personally and work through obstacles as a couple can affect this greatly. Encourage couples to be very intentional about this adjustment period or revisit what this period was like for their family. Respect, understanding, multiple conversations, and great problem solving skills are necessary for making the adjustments as a team. Many resources are available through the National Guard as well as in the community that can help make the transition easier. And others simply might need even more help from a professional counselor—that is OK! Your relationship is worth the hard work! The deployment time may have been difficult. So don't be disappointed if extra attention is needed to transition back together.