



# Understanding the Emotional Cycle of Deployment

## Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. Distribute copies of the *Emotional Cycle of Deployment* worksheet to each participant. Ensure that each participant has something to write with.
2. Display slide one (*The Cycle of Deployment*) and explain that, in a military unit, the cycle of the deployment experience is fairly consistent and has five distinguishable stages. These stages, along with the relative timeframes are as follows:
  - a. Pre-deployment – starts when unit receives notice and ends when unit actually deploys (Time Frame: variable)
  - b. Deployment – initial time of separation from home and family (Time Frame: first month after departure)
  - c. Sustainment – second month to approximately one to two months prior to return (Time Frame: varies depending on length of tour)
  - d. Re-deployment – preparation for return (Time Frame: one to two months prior to return)
  - e. Post-deployment – once unit returns (Time Frame: three to six months after return)
3. After the stages have been explained, ask the participants to answer question number one on their worksheet, which asks them to identify what stage of deployment they are currently experiencing. (Depending on your group, it is possible that not all are in the same stage.)
4. Display slide two (*The Emotional Cycle of Deployment*) and explain that during the physical, concrete stages of deployment, those who are affected by deployment experience an emotional cycle. This emotional cycle is often an overlooked reality driven by deployment and can affect the service member, spouse, family members, and other loved ones. (Using the animation in the slide, explain each stage and the characteristics as they appear one-by-one on the screen. Ask questions and seek examples

**Group Size:** All

**Time Needed:** 20 minutes

**Goal:** To develop an understanding of how individuals might react to the different stages of a military deployment and to determine helpful ways to work through challenges

**Audience:** National Guard couples, service members (without the family member) or family members (without the service member) during any phase the deployment cycle

**Special Considerations:** None

## Resources Needed:

- ✓ PowerPoint capabilities
- ✓ *Emotional Cycle of Deployment* PowerPoint slides
- ✓ One copy of the *Emotional Cycle of Deployment Worksheet* for each participant
- ✓ Pen/pencil for each participant

along the way to allow the participants to be involved. Encourage them to write the names of each stage in the blanks on question 2.)

5. Describe that the following outline explains the stages and characteristics of the emotional cycle of deployment from the perspective of the spouse or other family members. However, the service member and others affected by the deployment may have very similar reactions.

Stage 1: Anticipation of Loss (Pre-deployment: one to six weeks prior to departure)

- Denial: “You’re not really going, are you?”
- May experience tension/arguments/fears
- Clinginess/increased demands on time or even distancing behavior may occur

Stage 2: Detachment (Pre-deployment: one week prior to departure)

- Withdrawal from deploying person
- Aggression/Bitterness: “If you have to go, just go.”
- A time of great pride and patriotism mixed with fear and worry

Stage 3: Disorganization (Deployment: first month after departure)

- Overall confusion about what to expect
- Mixed emotions (relief, despair, anger, fear, pride)
- Difficulty maintaining family roles and routines (compensating for deployed person)

Stage 4: Stabilization (Sustainment: during time of departure)

- Roles and routines in home negotiated and mostly effective
- Often increased and consistent communication with deployed person
- “Hey, I’m/we’re doing OK!”

Stage 5: Anticipation of Return (Re-deployment: 1 month prior to return)

- Excitement to see and be with deployed person
- Apprehension or nervousness about reunion and changing roles
- “Will he or she be different?” “Will he or she like the changes in me?”

Stage 6: Reintegration (Post-deployment: up to six months after return)

- Renegotiation of roles and routines
- Can have conflict: “Hey, I managed things just fine without you, and now you want to take that role back? You’re messing up MY system!”
- Probably the most important stage to navigate for long-term relationship health

6. After explaining the emotional cycle of deployment, ask the participants to take a few moments to complete the rest of the worksheet.
7. Engage the group to find out what stages they classified themselves in (question #3) and what are some examples of challenges in each stage (question # 4).
8. Knowing that there are challenges in each stage and that there are also resources available, ask the group to identify some things that are helpful to their families (question #5) and what resources they would encourage others to access (question #6).

**Process:**

Ask the participants to offer any final helpful insights they have gained for their particular situation.

**Conclude:**

Tell the group that it is not just the service member experiencing deployment. This affects the couple relationship, too. Being informed and prepared for the possible emotional responses during the various stages of deployment can be normalizing and help family members cope with both their current situation and what's to come in the next stage(s). Identifying resources early on can empower the participants when they need help the most. Thank the participants for their participation.