Supporting Our Troops and Their Families Left Behind

When someone you love is preparing to deploy, life can be filled with uncertainty, but you are NOT alone! There is much support and information available – you just need to know where to look. We hope the few minutes you spend here, reading suggestions given from women who have been where you now are, will help you find additional support and strength and remember…You are not alone!

Be involved with your Family Readiness Group

_MilitaryOneSource.com_ is a website which contains a vast summary of resources available to give support to you and your family. If your soldier is in the army or reserves, they can go to _ArmyOneSource.com_.

These links will guide you to find a FRG (Family Readiness Group Leader) assigned to your unit. I recommend this as the **most important** connection you can make, and your biggest asset throughout the deployment. She will disseminate

- Accurate, timely, official information concerning your soldier’s unit abroad
- Information about gathering or activities for the support group here
- Any local connections (business and private) offering help, support, and discounts to military families. These range from tickets to an event or someone offering to help with lawn care and snow removal.

The emotional support shared in this group is priceless. No one else will quite understand what you are going through better than the other wives/mothers/spouses that are associated with your unit. Meet them! Gather with them and share a meal! There is no better way to realize you are not going through this alone! There can be great strength in numbers!

Preparing for deployment

Before your soldier deploys, some preparation steps can help to make a big difference in your year:

1. Be sure to attend all the briefings with your soldier, when family is invited; they can be helpful and informative. Invite your visiting teacher or home teacher to the farewell ceremony... so they can more fully understand what military life is like and what you are facing.

2. If you have children, you may want to record some fun family videos to re-watch with your family. Record your soldier reading bedtime stories. You can also make a recording of night time songs to be played at bedtime to keep Dad a part of this
special daily routine. Hallmark has some wonderful books, especially for Christmas that can include Dad’s voice at special times of the year. They can even be shipped to him to record and ship back.

3. Sit down together and map out a detailed budget; this can be a marriage saver. Deployment can mean an increase in military pay. Plan ahead together and set goals concerning how that should be used. Getting some fun things to bring joy to each of you can be a nice bonus, but paying off debt and planning for the future brings great satisfaction at the end of the year. It may be most beneficial for you both, to have whoever stays in the US be the one with the responsibility to pay the bills. If this does not suit your situation, explore the option of online bill pay to make it easier for your soldier.

4. Purchase additional life insurance for the soldier in addition to the SGLI (Service Member’s Group Life Insurance) and then cancel it upon his arrival home. This is recommended especially if the soldier is married, has a child or has debt.

5. Attend the Yellow Ribbon events. They are informative, and helpful. You may learn that your city may pay all or a portion of your family utility bills while you are deployed, or you may benefit from the Servicemen’s Civil Relief Act which will require all creditors to offer you no greater than a 6% interest rate while deployed. You cannot receive benefits such as these unless you know what is offered and how to receive them.

**Showing support to your loved one while they are away**

Care packages sent to your soldier are wonderful; once or twice a month can keep him/her physically connected to family. Organize family and friends to help the contact be consistent throughout the year. Boxes can include favorite treats, fun current holiday goodies, (for whatever the monthly occasion is), canned or non-perishable food. This would break up the monotony of chow hall food, and MRE’s. Make sure you send a can opener!

VERY IMPORTANT – we sent pictures to help them feel a part of family life. And not just pictures online, but real hard copies that can be carried on their person. We had the kids make things to send so that they felt like they were helping their dad. Stay in contact with your soldier to see what they need. Storage space may be an issue, so sending only what they need and can use may be important to your soldier. The US Postal service will provide free boxes and a discount shipping rate for military flat rate boxes.

Your soldier may also need a reminder that with the Internet, they too can surprise a loved one in the US with something thoughtful on their doorstep! Speaking of doorsteps, I once saw that a soldier was shipped some American soil and Kentucky
blue grass seed. (Flat rate boxes cost the same to ship regardless of weight.) This grass was grown and kept by the door of his temporary home. It became a tradition for his men to walk across the American soil before going out on a mission.

**Keeping in touch: Internet, web cams, face book**

The Internet is a great tool to keep separated family members close.

1. Figure out a time of day, considering the different time zones, that works for both of you to connect with each other daily. If talking on the phone is the preferred method of communication, remember to video chat often also. This is especially helpful to keep children connected to their parent. Skype is free and a great asset to a family that is temporarily separated. You just need a web cam and a free [Skype account](#).

2. Blogging has many benefits. My son watched his son’s first steps, first haircut, first meal, first tooth, and first birthday from a beautifully kept blog. It was priceless, contains pictures and video clips and also gave his wife an important activity that she enjoyed doing while it kept them connected.

3. [Facebook](#) is also a great tool to help feel connected and up-to-date with friends and family while separated.

4. Soldier dolls are also available to insert your soldier’s face to a doll in uniform. This is a wonderful way to help a child feel close to a parent that is away.

5. Create a picture book for children to look through often.

**Shouldering the load at home/Stress management**

1. Spouses who remain at home with the children face challenges similar to those of single parents. Family challenges may be spiritual and emotional, but can also include everyday temporal issues such as car repairs, lawn care, snow removal, transportation, finances, child care, work, and school. While the family at home is confronted with these issues, the deployed service member must focus on the military mission. If Visiting and Home teachers are made aware of these additional burdens, they can help lighten burdens and offer aid.

2. If the work load being left on the shoulders of the spouse at home is large, it may be wise to look into hiring out some yard work, pre-arranging some trusted assistance, or even a property manager.
3. Your FRG may also have access to local offers of assistance. It is surprising how many people want to help lift your burden!

4. Keeping busy with regular planned events such as little or big trips, nights out with the kids as rewards for being good, can help as positive re-enforcement. Staying busy and planning things can serve as mile markers, or a countdown calendar, helping time to fly.

5. It's hard to suddenly have the full responsibility of being the sole disciplinarian, the only one to say “no”, so devising a reward system can help to promote good behavior, and give you something positive to focus on when guiding your children to make right choices. This will help you to not always feel like the bad guy. I used small marble jars. They started out with 5 marbles a day and if they were good all day they got to keep all 5, and some days when I knew they had to put forth extra effort they earned more. When they had filled the jar (every 1-2 weeks) they would get to go to the dollar store and I would place a sticker on their jar. After they filled their jar 6 times they got to choose a big event as a reward. They liked to stay in a hotel with a swimming pool and order pizza. Obviously it can be done in any way you want, but saved me from a lot of frustration. I would just have to kindly ask if they wanted me to take a marble away, and I wouldn’t lose my temper, and they generally would re-think their choice.

Church Support

1. Latter-day Saints can find a wealth of resources on classic [lds.org, Serving in the Church>Military Relations](http://classic.lds.org/pa/display/0,17884,4701-1,00.html). Or use the following link: [http://classic.lds.org/pa/display/0,17884,4701-1,00.html](http://classic.lds.org/pa/display/0,17884,4701-1,00.html). The military relations program helps ensure that the blessings of Church participation are available to members who serve in the military. Here you can find videos, talks, support information, and pamphlets designed to help your family through military deployments and the subsequent challenges associated with family separation. For example:

   - Ways to remain connected and involved with family members while physically separated
   - The importance of being true to covenants and avoiding temptations during periods of loneliness
   - Problems that can surface after returning home, including signs of post-traumatic stress disorders
   - Long-term family needs if the military member is killed, wounded, or missing in action
• Resources available through Military and Veterans’ Affairs

2. If you are not LDS, know your chaplain. The chaplain should be aware of all deployed soldiers’ families and can offer great support and strength.

Helping children cope with deployment

There are many places to find help and support as you face this challenge.

1. Visit this site: survivingdeployment.com. It is FULL of wonderful information to help children and teens to cope with a deployment. It has lots of great ideas.

2. Ourmilitarykids.org is a great site to guide families concerning “grants” for children ages 3 yrs to 12th grade. The grant may be up to $500 per child 2X per year of deployment. This money can be used for anything from piano lessons to tutoring lessons.

3. Find someone who can occasionally watch your children. Sudden single parenthood can be overwhelming. Plan for some welcome “Me” time away from the demands of the children, this can be a great way to let off some steam, re-fuel and refresh you.

4. Take the opportunity to visit family. Visit your sister, use this year’s vacation to visit your mother, maybe a choice that your soldier doesn’t enjoy as much as you do! Ah, a silver lining!

5. Think outside the box. One new mother decided to move back home with her new baby to live with her parents while her soldier deployed. They rented in their home to other soldiers for the year. This brought emotional support for a new mother and financial benefits for their family.

Preparing for their return

1. The last two months of deployment can feel like the longest. To help these months pass, use them to set goals together that you both would like to accomplish in the first year back together after deployment.

2. Talk with your family, about their return, and allow your children to plan the party, or the things they want to do when their loved one gets home, and share those plans and ideas with your service member. Get ideas from your service member so it helps everyone look to the future, and have something to be excited about.
3. Keep in mind that some issues should not be discussed until you are reunited with each other. Most issues can be resolved by talking to each other while separated. But there are some, more delicate issues, that should be put on pause until the soldier returns home and communication can occur face to face.

**Becoming a family again/Adjusting after the return**

1. A counselor can offer an unbiased and independent viewpoint to help to sort through difficulty or emotion as you prepare to welcome your soldier home and after his/her return.

2. Take some time apart; give yourself some time to adjust to the reunion. It’s been a year, don’t expect to adjust overnight.

3. Stepping back in and completely taking over old responsibilities may not be the answer. Compromise! You have each developed your own ways to deal with life over the past year. Work together to find the new best way.

4. Re-learn the art of communication. The past year has been full of solving things on your own. Start from scratch and talk about everything. As a spouse be willing to just be a set of ears, so that you can be a source of release, when they need to talk. Sometimes it’s not easy to hear about the lives they had to live while they’ve been gone, but you can be a safe resource for support in processing the events that they experienced. Give them time, and realize that they have changed, and so have you.

5. My last suggestions are to the husbands and wives that are trying to bring a family back together. Take a few (that means more than ONE) nights to spend together, without your children in your bed, or on the other side of the door, or even down the hall. You need to reconnect as husband and wife before you can pull everyone together. This helps to ease your service member back into the swing of things, (a little at a time is very important.)

When parents are reunited with their children, there are a few things that can ease the transition. First be willing to put forth EXTRA effort in the patience department, (that goes for both of you). If the service member can take a little bit of time and be what I call the "DISNEYLAND PARENT", or the fun one, and allow the one that's been running the show to keep doing things as usual, then easing into parenting again helps everyone adjust, and helps the parent that has been gone to experience how things have been going. Don’t just jump in and change things around, it would be a shock to everyone. Come up with a plan or a code word that your service member can use to help you understand if your fuse is gone, and you need a break before you lose it. It may be difficult on the
children to suddenly shift from one parent’s disciplinary style to the returning service member’s. Remember to ease back into parenting so everyone has time to adjust.

In conclusion dear sisters, you have within yourself the strength necessary not only to survive the coming deployment of your loved one, but also the ability to thrive. As you draw closer to your Father in Heaven, drawing upon the resources around you, you will strengthen your children and give comfort to your soldier. His burden will become lighter as he feels all is well at home.

Time will continue to march on; this year will pass. And you will find as you reach the end, that this experience has refined you. Sacrifice and effort always does. It can help your marriage and family to be even stronger than it is today. May our Father in Heaven continue to bless our great country, and all who sacrifice for the cause of freedom, both those who serve and their families who are left behind.