



Anticipating Your Child's Reactions

Here are some key points to remember about coming home and reintegration in general:

Your child has grown and changed

One challenge of returning after any absence is learning to know your child as they are now rather than how they were when you left. Your child's age will impact how they react to your return. Be sure to check out the developmental charts from earlier in Module 1 to learn about the typical behaviors and emotions you can expect from your child today!

Each child will react differently

Some children will joyfully welcome you back into their lives. Other children, especially older youth, may take a "wait and see" approach. This is normal. Regardless of their attitude, they are all glad you are home safe. Be patient and don't take their reactions personally. They, too, are doing the best they can to adjust to having you home.

Follow their lead

Take your cues about interacting from your kids. Some kids will want many hugs. Babies, preschoolers and adolescents initially may be less comfortable with physical contact. Babies often respond to gentle touch and a soothing voice. With toddlers, get down on their level, speak in a soft voice, and play silly games such as "this little piggy." Use words to connect with older children. Tell them you appreciate all their hard work and sacrifice during your absence. Ask them about what is going in their lives now.

Expect strong emotions

Both on your reunion day and often long after, expect your children to have strong emotions about your absence and return. Expect intense feelings, such as joy, relief and worry all mixed together. Over time, older children may express anger and resentment about the things you missed in their lives. Let your kids know all of their feelings are ok. Reuniting is an emotional experience and both kids and parents can have intense reactions.

Children have different needs

If you have more than one child, make sure you pay attention to each of them individually. Each child will need something different from you, either because of their age or their personality. There is no "one size fits all" when it comes to meeting the needs of your children, either at the reunion or beyond.

Expect questions

Be prepared for questions from your children about your deployment. Even years later kids likely are still wondering about why you left and what you did. Figure out how to respond to their questions within your comfort zone. Ask them what THEY think first about the topic. Use their questions as a "window" to understand and talk about their real concerns and worries.