

POST-DEPLOYMENT



Following a return from deployment, all military members and their families go through a period of readjustment. Some members and families seem to have no problems readjusting at all, whereas others struggle to “get back to normal.” It is important to realize that the process of readjustment for you and your family might be different from the process of your friends and colleagues. When readjusting to life back in the U.S., you will need to do those things that work best for you.

Common experiences of returning deployers

Most returning deployers experience a number of problems and concerns in the weeks following their return to the U.S. The most common symptoms reported by returning deployers are listed below. You might notice that you are experiencing some or all of these common symptoms:

- Sleep problems
- Anxiety or stress
- Headaches
- Irritability
- Relationship / family problems
- Depression or feeling sad
- Anger problems
- Fear or nervousness
- Nightmares
- Disturbing memories

In all cases, **your medical team and behavioral health consultant (BHC) can help you to address and reduce these problems**, usually in over the course of only a few appointments.

Common “bothersome thoughts” of returning deployers

Many returning deployers feel that something is wrong with them because they are experiencing symptoms now that they are back. They often believe that the transition back to the U.S. should be easy, and life should “get better.” This is not a very realistic expectation, however, and can actually make the adjustment more difficult.

Unrealistic expectations are caused by “bothersome thoughts,” which cause us to feel more stressed, anxious, and depressed. Below are some common bothersome thoughts that returning deployers experience.

“I just want things to be how they used to be”

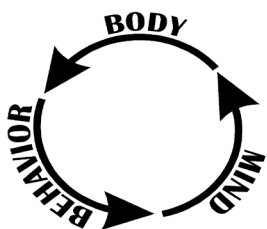
You might notice that a lot has changed while you were gone: the jobs that you used to do around the house are now being done by someone else; your coworkers have changed the way things are done; the things you used to enjoy no longer interest you. These changes might contribute to you feeling left out and unimportant, or like you don’t matter.

“When will I get back to normal?” or “I want to be the person I used to be”

Many returning deployers wonder how their experiences overseas will fit with their life back here in the U.S. It is important to realize, however, that you might not be the “same” person you used to be because you have experienced an important life event.

“Things will never be the same”

This belief is actually a very accurate statement, but many deployers believe that it must be bad that things will never be the same, which is not accurate. We want things to be the same because it is familiar and makes us feel safe. Although it might be difficult to see at first, “different” is not the same as “bad.”



Overcoming bothersome thoughts

It is hard for us to recognize that “life goes on” while we are deployed, because we are so busy and working so hard—especially if we were deployed to a dangerous place. An important step for many returning deployers is learning to accept change.

1. Identify your bothersome thoughts

Bothersome thoughts can make your readjustment more difficult. The first step in accepting change is to identify your own bothersome thoughts. Circle any bothersome thoughts you might be having, or write down one or two not on this list:

- I want things to be how they used to be.
- When will I get back to normal?
- I want to be the person I used to be.
- Things will never be the same.
- I wish I had never left.
- Everything got messed up while I was gone.
- I can't stand this.
- I've got to get out of here.

2. Use balanced statements

Changing your bothersome thoughts by replacing them with more calming or supportive statements can help to reduce your stress and help with your readjustment. Some common helpful coping statements are listed for you. Circle any that apply to you, or write down a new positive statement that works best for you:

- It's okay that things have changed.
- I don't like what has happened, but I can accept it.
- I can feel like this and still be okay.
- Change has happened before, and I was okay. I'll be okay this time, too.
- I can be upset and still deal with this situation.
- I have grown as a person because of my deployment.
- I experienced a lot while I was deployed, and I've learned a great deal from it.
- I can use what I learned while I was deployed to improve how I do things.

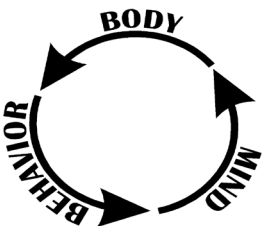
Post-deployment growth

You are “not the same” because of your experiences while you were deployed. You have learned many things that can help you grow as a person:

- Acquiring new skills
- Meeting new people
- Developing new opinions or worldviews

These experiences and lessons are a part of who you are now, and have shaped how you view yourself and the world. Returning deployers face a very difficult choice: (1) allow your experiences to interfere with doing the things you value in life, or (2) embrace what you have learned and integrate these experiences into who you are. Choosing the second option can be a very difficult process, but can lead to significant personal growth.

A wide range of agencies and resources are available in the community to help you pursue your course of personal growth following your deployment. *Ask your BHC for help in developing additional skills, accessing resources, and considering options for continued personal growth.*



Tips for readjusting after a deployment

The following list includes strategies that are most helpful for reducing symptoms or problems associated with the adjustment back to the U.S. after a deployment. Circle 2-3 that you can do this week, then write down what you will do. Make sure you are specific by including days and times!

1. **Take care of yourself physically.** Visit your PCM as soon as possible to address any physical symptoms or illnesses, eat well-rounded meals, get plenty of rest, and remain physically active.

To improve my physical health this week, I will:

2. **Do things you enjoy.** Spend time with your family and friends, eat out at your favorite restaurant, go see a movie, engage in your favorite hobby, etc.

A fun activity I will do this week is:

3. **Exercise.** You don't have to go to the gym for an intense workout every day (unless you want to); a simple 15-minute walk is sufficient to relieve stress, help sleep problems, and improve physical health.

I will engage in the following physical activity this week:

4. **Take some time off.** Don't jump right back into work. Take care of yourself before you worry about taking care of others. If you don't care for yourself first, you won't be very effective at helping others.

I will spend at least one hour to myself doing:

5. **Realize that change is okay.** Things will be different...you will be different. This is okay. Remind yourself that it is natural and makes sense that things would change. Remind yourself that although change might be uncomfortable, you have adjusted to change in the past and you can do it again now.

One thing that has changed that I can work on accepting this week is:

6. **Ask for help early.** If you are having any symptoms or problems after returning, talk with your PCM or other medical providers for assistance. The sooner you ask for help, the easier it is to fix any problems, and quicker to return to health.

I will contact the following person to schedule an appointment:

