



Coping with deployment

This guide is written to help parents to cope when their partner deploys. It draws from the experiences of a wide range of people, including mums, dads and children.

As a service family, you know that being in the armed forces is a special job. The armed forces train to deploy. It is at the heart of what they do. Most families cope well with it and may even grow stronger. But it brings special challenges that test how we can cope with change.

Questions children might ask

Some children might have questions about where mum or dad is going and what it will be like there. Schools often have pictures supplied by the unit. Unit staff may come into the school to talk to the children and tell them how they can stay in touch. Children need to know that going away is a vital part of their parent's job. It may help to tell them that mummy or daddy's training will help keep them safe while they are away.

Routine

Though the absence of a parent will cause some changes at home, the parent left behind with the children should try to stick to normal routines. Children should go to school as usual as a vital part of this. Boredom can allow children time to become anxious, so you should help them to keep up friendships, clubs and hobbies too.

As much as you might be tempted to 'bend the rules' to keep your children happy, it really is best to stick to your normal family rules. This will help to maintain balance and harmony in the home when your partner returns.

Coping while your partner is away

Life as a forces family can be tough, so friendships are key. Your unit's welfare team can help with setting up social and community events. There are plenty of support services out there when things get tough, such as the Army Welfare Service. But there is a lot you can do to keep mind and body fit, such as eating a balanced diet. And regular exercise can help prevent low moods.

When your partner comes home on R & R, this is a great chance to spend time together. But it can also be hard, as there is little time to adjust and your partner will have to go away again. Do talk about your feelings, but try not to burden children with your worries.

Adjusting to reunion

The end of the tour is likely to be both joyful and stressful. It can take time to settle back into 'normal' life and to adjust to changes. Each family will adjust in its own way and at its own pace. Try not to put pressure on yourselves for things to be perfect. They almost certainly won't be.

Each child will respond to the return of a parent in their own unique way. The age of the child will play a big part in this. Some may take it in their stride, while others will struggle. Remember that this is a *process*, and work as a team to adjust slowly.

Lastly, it is normal to make a fuss of the parent who has been deployed. Celebrate their return, of course, and what they have achieved. But it is just as crucial, for you and for your children, for the returning parent to acknowledge how well their partner has coped, and how much they have achieved.