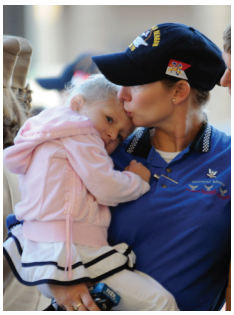
Returning to **Children**
Strategies for **Single Parents**

If you're a single parent in the military, you may experience some unique concerns about reuniting with your children. Consider:

Reunion is an exciting time, but also can be confusing for children. Remember:



- Go slowly. Give yourself and your children time to readjust.
- Be realistic. Expect that your children have grown physically, emotionally, and socially.
- Be flexible. Expect things to have changed.
- Communicate! Discuss your feelings, thoughts, and concerns.
- Readjustment can take four to six weeks. Each child is unique and manages stress and change differently. If you have concerns, seek professional help.

If you're a single parent in the military, you may experience some unique concerns about reuniting with your children. Consider:

- If you're a custodial parent, then your children probably have been living with someone else for several months. To the extent this has been a satisfying relationship, the bond between this caregiver and your children has strengthened. Your children's increased loyalty to their caregiver may be painful for you. You may initially feel unneeded or even jealous. Remember that this attachment is positive. It allowed your children to grow and thrive.
- Involve the caretaker in the transition. Forcing your child, especially a young one, to suddenly separate can be traumatic. Your children need to maintain their ties to the caregiver.
- Recognize that you and your children will need to adapt to living with each other again. Give yourself and your children adequate time to "shift gears." The adjustment period, which may take several weeks, can at times be awkward.
- Focus on communicating both with the caregiver and your children. Learn about how things were done while you were gone.
- Ask your child about his or her feelings. Allow him/her to have input in decisions. Children need to feel that they have some control over their lives.
- Your children had different rules and procedures. Take time to compare these rules to the rules of your home. As you're doing this, seek your children's input. They need to feel included in the process of re-establishing the structure and spirit of your home environment. This will help your children ease back into your rules and schedule.
- If you are a non-custodial parent, your children's living situation was probably not impacted by your deployment. Your visits with your children have, however, been curtailed. As you re-establish these visits, remember you and your children have grown and you will need to take time to get reacquainted.

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