



Preparing Airmen, Guardians, and Families

A Family's Guide to Thriving Through Reintegration



BRIDGECHAT
DISCUSSION GUIDE

Reunion is the beginning, not the finish line, and for many, the real challenges may begin in the weeks and months after their service member returns. Your patience, steadiness, and connection as a service member and as a family set the tone for reintegration.

Shift Focus: From "Homecoming Event" to "Readjustment Phase"

COMMUNICATION — NAVIGATE EXPECTATIONS PROACTIVELY

Family routines may have shifted during deployment. Communicate those changes proactively to navigate expectations together and determine which routines will remain and which will return to their pre-deployment posture. Some examples include:

- Determine how the family's time will be spent in the days, weeks, and months following the member's return, while acknowledging the member may be less interested in social activities or busy schedules at first
- Discuss who will manage the household bills and how payments will be made
- Reestablish how decisions about children are made (screen time, curfews, chores, discipline)

INTENTIONAL COMMUNICATION (FIRST 90 DAYS)

When	What's Happening	What Helps
Week 1	Homecoming "high," excitement	Keep it light, rest, no big talks
Weeks 2–4	The natural "dip" as routine returns	Patience; observe and understand before making changes
Months 2–3	Roles and rhythms rebalance	Honest check-ins; share roles gradually

The "dip" is normal — not a sign something is wrong.

FIVE PRACTICAL SKILLS FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

- **Practice Daily Self Check-Ins:** Stop periodically to ask yourself, "How am I feeling?" and "What am I telling myself?" Recognize both the positives and give any negative self-talk a reality check.
- **The Observation Week:** Watch and learn the household rhythm before suggesting changes.
- **Let Your Tone Match Your Message:** Delivery matters as much as content. A tone that doesn't match your feelings sends mixed signals and leaves room for misread intentions.
- **Low-Pressure Check-Ins:** Avoid heavy "we need to talk" moments in week one. Reconnect on walks, car rides, or over coffee.
- **Acknowledge Experience, Don't "Fix":** Simple acknowledgment can lower stress and open the door to honest conversations.

QUICK TIP:

Boost Your Mood: 6 Tools for Reframing Negative Thoughts

FAMILY TALKING POINT: "Readjustment takes time for all of us. We don't have to get it perfect — we just have to keep showing up for each other."

Understanding the "New Normal" at Home

AWARENESS — RECOGNIZE WHAT REACTIONS ARE NORMAL AND TEMPORARY

The Honeymoon Phase: The homecoming "high" usually lasts 2–14 days. A natural "dip" often follows once routine returns — this is expected, not a sign of trouble.

Role Renegotiation: The at-home partner managed the household, finances, and parenting. Re-take roles gradually and recognize both partners' contributions.

Children's Reactions: Withdrawal, testing boundaries, or "rejecting" the returning parent are normal and temporary. Patience and consistency rebuild trust.

The "Silent" Member: Silence often reflects processing, not disengagement. Daily concerns may feel small after deployment — give room to readjust.

Most reactions in the first few weeks are common, expected, and temporary — reassure each other that these do **not** mean something is wrong. It's equally important to recognize the signs that Airmen or Guardians may need additional support.

WHEN TO REACH OUT FOR SUPPORT OR MAKE A REFERRAL

Indicator	Look for	Refer to
Persistent Withdrawal	Unusual social isolation from trusted support networks, avoiding previously enjoyed activities, appearing "checked out"	Military and Family Life Counselor (MFLC) for short-term, confidential non-medical counseling
Sudden routine changes that are uncharacteristic	Hygiene decline, substance use or alcohol abuse, sleep changes	Medical/Mental Health, Chaplain, Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment (ADAPT)
Conflict Escalation	Safety concerns, threats, altercations	IMMEDIATE: First Sergeant, Family Advocacy Program (FAP). If in immediate danger, call 911.

FAMILY TALKING POINT: "Reaching out early is not overreacting — it's looking out for each other."

*** Any thoughts of self-harm act immediately:**
Contact the Military/Veterans Crisis Line (Dial 988, then Press 1)

Family Reintegration Isn't Just for Married Folks

COMING HOME — HOWEVER YOU DEFINE "FAMILY"

When people talk about "coming home," the conversation often centers on spouses and children. But if you're single, reintegration matters just as much — your "family" may be parents, siblings, a partner, close friends, or the battle buddies you came home with. Here are three tips for reconnecting well.

- **Reconnect at your own pace.** You don't have to say yes to every gathering or explain everything at once. Small, steady check-ins often work better than one big reunion.
- **Communicate honestly.** The people who care about you can't read your mind. A simple "I'm still adjusting" prevents a lot of misunderstanding.
- **Reset expectations.** Naming what you need — space, connection, or just normalcy — heads off the disappointment and pressure that most often strain reunions with family and friends.

You don't have to reintegrate alone. Leaning on your people — however you define family — is part of the mission of coming home well.

QUICK TIP: [Build Your Own Reunion & Reintegration Checklist](#)

FAMILY TALKING POINT: "Say what you need — space, connection, or just normalcy. Don't make loved ones guess."

Referral Resources *Connect Airmen, Guardians, and families with the right support at the right time.*

Resource	What it Provides
Military & Family Life Counselor (MFLC)	Non-medical counseling, no records, short-term support
Chaplain	100% confidential, spiritual and emotional support
Mental Health Clinic	Clinical assessment and treatment for active-duty members
Family Advocacy Program	Couples counseling, marriage or family concerns, and family violence prevention and treatment
First Sergeant	Command involvement for serious concerns; point of contact for the unit's Key Support Liaisons (KSL)
Military OneSource	24/7 confidential support, counseling, all life challenges
Military & Family Readiness Center (M&FRC)	Provides comprehensive support to service members, families, retirees, and DoD civilians across all deployment phases to enhance readiness, resilience, and quality of life
KSL	Supports families through all deployment phases, normalizes the transition, and provides referrals as needed

*** Military/Veterans Crisis Line: Dial 988, then Press 1 or Text 838255**

YOUR NEXT STEP: PICK ONE TALKING POINT AND USE IT THIS WEEK.

Have these two critical resources ready: **Military OneSource (800-342-9647)** and your local MFLC. Coming home well is a team effort — it starts with one conversation.