

The 7 Emotional Cycles of Deployment

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Despite the many who claim otherwise, the military spouse leads a different life from most. This harsh truth becomes most evident when your family prepares for a deployment. A deployment is a scary, emotional, yet liberating journey for the spouse left behind to take care of a home, finances, and a family.

There are 7 identifiable stages that the majority of military spouses go through.

Pre-Deployment: Anticipation of Loss (6 weeks prior)

Your spouse is **working late** to ready the unit and you are left at home **knowing he or she will be leaving**. You are moody and depressed, and this causes **friction** between you and your spouse. You are a tight little ball of stress and anxiety, and hate yourself for feeling this way. You and your spouse are **at each other's throats even when you know in your heart you should be cherishing each day** left together.

Whether you're a **man or a woman, it is PMS multiplied by a factor of deployment.**

Pre-Deployment: Detachment and Withdrawal (1 week prior)

As the final week before deployment approaches, all those feelings you have had for weeks rise to a peak. You can **think of a million and one final thing to do before the deployment**, but can find neither time nor energy to complete even the smallest tasks.

All the **arguing has taken its toll on your level of intimacy**. You appear to have lost all interest in physical contact with your spouse and have more interest in actually sleeping between the sheets than anything else. You **distance yourself from your spouse without consciously knowing it**.

These emotional times happen. The important thing to remember is that you are human. We all want the final weeks before a deployment to be perfect, but life seems to throw us a different fate. But the closer you come to understanding each cycle and its inevitable side effects, the closer you come to changing certain aspects of your life. If there is time, take part in some of the services offered to you on base. There are always people on base who can assist you. Reach out to your unit chaplain for guidance and support.

During Deployment: Emotional Disorganization (2 – 3 weeks)

After your spouse leaves and all the initial tears have been shed, you wake up. The house is all yours. Even if you have children, it is yours. You can stay up late, eat cookies in bed, and watch your favorite TV channels all day without a single complaint from anyone. It's almost like a vacation.

This is a **fun time**; a chance to do all those things you didn't have time to do before. There are no uniforms to wash, no entertaining, and no work-related phone calls in the middle of the night. **Relief!**

The first few weeks have flown by. All that time you thought you would be crying, you were enjoying yourself. Then you look at the unmown lawn, the pile of clothes in the hamper, the refrigerator with only ice cream and diet cola inside, the stack of bills on the desk, the car that needs an oil change, tune-up, and car wash, etc. Then guilt sets in. Here you are **having a grand time while your spouse is** possibly in harm's way and you seem to have lost sight of your household responsibilities. You sit in a heap on the floor in the kitchen and sob. You suddenly feel alone.

During Deployment: Recovery and Stabilization (3 – 4 weeks)

Your two favorite words! By this time, you have probably **heard from your spouse via e-mail or telephone**. The phone calls and e-mail inspire you to find strength you never knew you had. You take on all your newfound responsibilities with passion. You are now able to fix that broken dryer; you bake cookies and write letters. You make Martha Stewart look like she hasn't a clue. This time is an opportunity that is truly a gift of the military lifestyle. During this time, you will discover **your independence, your abilities, and your enduring strength**.

During Deployment: Anticipation of Homecoming (4 – 6 weeks before reunion)

The few weeks before the deployment comes to an end, there is excitement, along with questions. You fear your newfound independence will vanish once your spouse steps through the front door. You wonder what changes will happen and where your marriage will fit into the equation.

You are happy your spouse will be home soon, but there is much concern about the homecoming. There may be only sporadic phone calls or e-mail, leaving you too much time to worry about the future. You begin to do things just to keep your mind occupied. You clean like mad. You organize financial papers, get the budget back into shape, get the kids ready for school, and juggle doctor appointments and soccer practice.

The final days before homecoming are full of phone calls to other spouses, to the Ombudsmen, and to the party stores. Decorations and signs are made and you are giddy with excitement and anticipation.

After Deployment: Renegotiation of the Marriage Contract (2 – 4 weeks after reunion)

After the initial joy of having your spouse home, reality sets in. Changes need to be made to the lifestyle you had just become used to, and they are not easy. You feel stifled, at first, over the loss of your independence, but the feeling will pass in time, with some adjustments. Communicate openly with your spouse about your needs and wants, and use any marital services available on base that can help you both reconnect after your time apart. In time, loving intimacy returns and you find a way to work together again as a team.

After Deployment: Reintegration and Stabilization (6 – 12 weeks)

Breathe a sigh of relief -- stability has returned. By the time the first couple of months post-deployment have passed, you and your spouse have hammered out the details of your marriage. You are used to having him or her home and actually enjoy the fact that they still hog all the blankets in bed.

You feel relief knowing you are not solely responsible for the household chores anymore. Knowing you can fix the dryer by yourself is liberating, but not having to fix it is another story. It is on one of those days that you glance at your spouse sitting beside you on the sofa, reading the paper, and suddenly all you can remember about the deployment was being in his or her arms the day they left. It feels like it was yesterday.