

DEPLOYMENT

This bulletin is for all families that have to deal with lengthy absences by Canadian Forces members, including deployments. Such separations are a part of military life and we hope that what you read here will help you make this experience a positive one as well as an opportunity to develop your resiliency.

What is a deployment?

A deployment is a temporary unaccompanied posting of a Member. For the family, this involves two events:

- **Separation:** the Member departs, leaving behind the rest of the family.
- **Homecoming:** the deployment ends and the family is reunited.

Why prepare for a deployment?

Because deployment can be stressful. It has physical and emotional consequences for the Member and for his/her spouse and children. If you know what to expect, it may be easier to prepare and find ways of dealing successfully with this major event in your life.

During the deployment, your family will have to:

- **Adapt emotionally:** separation may lead to unfamiliar feelings for the Member and the rest of the family, such as loneliness and anxiety.
- **Take on new responsibilities:** while the Member is away, tasks will have to be redistributed.

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Planning

As with any major event in life, deployment requires preparation and planning if it is to go well. Here are some points you should bear in mind as you plan:

Emotions

- **Express what you feel** often and openly. Use loving, reassuring words when you speak of your fears and doubts about what is going to happen.
- **Encourage** the other members of your family to say how they feel. Children may have trouble finding the right words to express their feelings, so you should help them. You will see the beneficial effects right away.
- **Plan a pleasant family activity** before the Member leaves. Take pictures and videos to look at later when you are finding it hard to cope with his/her absence.

Changes in roles and responsibilities

- **Prepare a list** of contacts in case of an emergency in the home.
- **Assign** the Member's household chores to the other members of the family.
- **Have ready to hand** a list of military resources you can draw on during the deployment (DSG, MFRC, Mission Information Line, etc.).
- **Discuss with your spouse** how you will handle the children (discipline, routine, etc.).

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During the deployment

While the Member is away:

Keep in touch

- It's important to preserve a feeling of togetherness and closeness through letters, telephone calls, videos, email, photos, etc.

Redistribute chores

- **Regularly** review the daily workload and share out chores
- **Be fair and realistic.** Consider the age and abilities of each member of the family when sharing out chores.
- **Choose your battles:** make certain tasks priorities while dropping others. Cut yourself some slack: you can't do everything!

Do not forget feelings

Feelings may be intense before and after the deployment, but don't neglect the feelings you experience *while* the Member is away. They are just as important.

- **Try to understand** and spell out your doubts and fears. Don't try to ignore them or conceal them.
- **Tell** someone you trust what you are going through.
- **Join** your MFRC's workshops on deployment and contact MFRC when you feel the need for support.

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- **Ask for help** from a professional if you feel that your emotions are getting the upper hand or if a member of the family seems to be having emotional problems.
- **Listen to your children.** They often find it difficult to verbalize their emotions but their behaviour can tell you a lot about what they are going through: bed wetting, regression to earlier behaviours, aggressiveness, frequent tearfulness and frequent fits of anger. These things are normal after the parent has left and before he/she returns. If the problems last more than a few weeks, seek professional help.

Advice for spouses

Here are some tips for looking after the household while your spouse is away.

Take good care of yourself:

- Eat properly.
- Get proper sleep and exercise.
- Once in a while, do something special for yourself.
- Do at least one thing you enjoy every day.

Remember that you have to feel good in body and soul if you want to be able to look after the other members of the family.

Look after the children:

- They too need to eat, sleep and exercise properly.
- Try to spend a little time alone with each child.
- Organize special activities just for them.
- Write up a schedule of the deployment, with help from the children if possible. This will make it easier for them to visualize the parent's return.
- Talk about the absent parent with them, as much as they want. Help them put their feelings into words and do not trivialize their feelings.

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Think about security:

- Don't tell everyone that your spouse is going to be away for a long time.
- Discuss with the children what they will say about their parent being away when they answer the telephone.
- Make sure emergency numbers are visible at all times.

Ask for help if you need it:

- Don't feel obliged to be a super-hero. Don't try to do everything yourself without help.
- Keep in touch with relatives and friends.
- Make use of the support groups that are available in the military community.
- Go to helping professionals if you feel the need.

To conclude

Don't forget that your spouse's deployment can also be enriching because it brings family members to discover their strengths, help each other and develop a special connection with each other. Also remember that asking for help is not a sign of weakness. It means you love your family and want the best for them.