The initial reunion is often a very happy time and there will be many changes that involve the entire family. Although the reunion is incredibly special for the deployed service member and the non-deployed parent or caregiver, your preschooler may be excited and/or nervous about the reunion. Since your preschooler is starting to be able to think about the future in the short-term, start talking to your preschooler about what will happen when the service member comes home. As plans become more solidified about when specifically the service member will be coming home, be sure to adjust any time-marking activities as needed (the number of jelly beans in the countdown jar or number of paper loops on the paper chain). This can help to avoid disappointment or confusion. Looking at photos and videos of the deployed service member can help your preschooler feel more safe during the reunion. Keep in mind that your preschooler has been going through many changes during the deployment. Be sure that the deployed service member knows that it will take time for him or her to learn about all the changes that have happened, and to be patient! Lastly, let your children know how proud you are of them—deployment has been difficult for them too!

### Tips for Preparing your Child

There are many things the non-deployed parent or caregiver can do to help prepare your preschooler for reintegration.

1. If possible, communicate with the deployed service member using Skype or over the phone during times when your preschooler can also participate.

2. Your child may have lots of questions—be sure to answer them as best you can so they feel more secure.

3. Slowly transition caregiving responsibilities to be sensitive to your child’s needs.

4. If possible, have the deployed service member bring a special gift to the reunion to give to your preschooler.

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**Your Preschooler:**

- Has an active imagination, and can become confused about what is real and what is imaginary
- Imitates parents and peers often
- Is learning about concepts like opposites, shapes, and colors
- Likes to be outside and learn about nature

**Parent Tips:**

- Remember that it will take time for things to feel “normal” in your family again. It is best to slowly transition into new routines and caregiving roles. For example, drive your preschooler to daycare together for a few weeks and then slowly transition to letting the service member do more caregiving over time.

- Pay attention to your preschooler’s behavior and respond accordingly. It’s okay if they do not want to talk very much at first, it may take time for them to open up to the deployed service member again.
More Information about the Homecoming

Homecoming is a big change, and change can sometimes be scary. Here are a few things to keep in mind about the reunion and reintegration:

1. **It’s OK to be nervous.** Both the service member and the non-deployed spouse or partner have experienced big changes during the deployment. It’s normal to feel a little nervous, and it is okay if things do not feel normal for a few weeks.

2. **Be realistic.** Keep an open mind to the idea that the reunion may not go exactly as planned. Everyone has been anticipating this day for a long time. It helps to keep a sense of humor if things are awkward for a little while.

3. **Accept that things will be different.** Weight may have been gained or lost, hair may be longer or shorter, and people may seem different. Be patient—the newness will wear off.

4. **Expect a little letdown after homecoming.** This is a very exciting time for you and your family. It is normal for everyone to feel a little drained after the reunion or after a celebration. This is okay.

5. **Avoid shopping sprees or big financial decisions.** It’s not uncommon for the returning service member to feel the need to go shopping or make a big purchase. Let things settle for a few weeks before making a big financial decision (like buying a house). Sticking to your budget can help prevent financial headaches!

6. **Focus on the positive.** The whole family had to adjust during deployment and now during reintegration. Be sure to express appreciation and how much you love each other!

ADAPT is gearing up for the next wave of the project. You can help us better understand reintegration in military families and have a say in future resources and services provided to reintegrating military families!

If you live in Minnesota, are a parent of a 5-12 year old, and have been deployed (or your spouse/partner has been deployed) since 2001, we want to hear from you!

To learn more about the ADAPT project, go to www.cehd.umn.edu/fsos/adapt. For more information, you can call us at 612-624-4830 or e-mail us at adapt@umn.edu.

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Upcoming Topics Volume 9

Preparing for Reintegration: Service Member

http://www.cehd.umn.edu/fsos/adapt