

Military Deployment Stress

You Can Win the MDS War

While deployed soldiers take up the duty of actively defending their country, their loved ones at home are dealing with their own challenges. Military deployment stress (MDS) affects active reservists and military personnel as well as those back home. However, MDS can be successfully managed through education and preparation.

Fight for the Home Front

By preparing for departure and your time apart, you will better deal with separation issues in a positive way. The best gift you can give your loved one is the reassurance that you will be able to maintain a stable, happy home environment during the separation.

The Home Front Strategy

How well will you and your family cope during your loved one's military deployment? If you answer "no" to any of the following questions, you may benefit from the steps we provide later.

- ◆ Are you able to continue to be productive at work during the absence of your loved one?
- ◆ Does your family continue with scheduled activities and responsibilities that keep everyone on track and upbeat?
- ◆ Do you have a "game plan" for welcoming your loved one home and bringing the family back together following deployment?

Ten Steps to Win the Battle

1 Before Deployment. Although you may be eager to have family projects completed before deployment, the service member may be preoccupied and "mission focused." Limit "to-do" lists. Honor

the necessary preparation. Don't take detachment personally. Be supportive and positive as you prepare the family for time apart.

2 Communication Is Key. Determine what type of communication will be effective during the absence. Letters, emails, telephone calls, and care packages can help keep you connected. Contact your telephone carrier for military overseas discounts. Stay in touch with your local base command, and join a phone tree or email list, if available.

3 Familiar Routines. Family routines can provide much-needed structure for the family. Understand that you may be filling two roles during deployment, and realize that this is temporary. Discuss responsibilities with the entire family.

4 Dealing with Emotional Issues. Recognize unusual tension, angry outbursts, or withdrawal for what they are—military deployment stress. Stop and identify the issue and possible solutions. Don't hesitate to seek support from family, workplace, or community resources.

5 Limit Media Information. Of course you are eager for news about your loved one. However, too much media exposure can worsen MDS. Use good judgment, especially with children, in determining how much TV is allowed.

6 Dealing with Children. While children may be anxious about the safety of the absent parent, it can also be helpful to stress that the parent has been properly trained for this mission. Point out that the child can help by doing well in school. Enlist teachers' aid

in recognizing any changes in children's behavior so that potential problems can be promptly addressed.

7 Importance of Self-Care. Help your family by taking good care of yourself. Not sleeping? No appetite? Be vigilant and discuss any variations with your doctor. Get regular exercise and leave time for recreational activities with friends and family. Sharing time with other families can reduce stress and develop a sense of togetherness and purpose. After all, you have a great reason to be proud!

8 Plan the Homecoming. When your loved one returns, don't expect everything to revert to how it was before deployment. The soldier may need time to decompress and so will you! Be sensitive about reassigning roles too quickly. Avoid persistent questions about the war experience. This is the time to carefully bring the family together in a spirit of renewed love and understanding.

9 Ongoing Vigilance. Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a bona fide illness. It is not uncommon following active duty, but it is highly treatable. It must be recognized in the early stages, however. Encourage your loved one to seek help. Do not try to "tough it out" or deny it. By accessing available help, you can get your family back on track more quickly. Helpful Web sites can be found at <http://www.sgtmoms.com> or www.militaryonesource.com.

10 What the EAP Can Do. Each of the steps above has its own challenges. The steps are a recipe for managing MDS, but they are not necessarily simple to implement. The EAP or Military Counseling Office can help you implement these steps and troubleshoot roadblocks along the way.

For confidential and caring assistance, contact a local IAM District 141 EAP coordinator. You can find a complete list of union coordinators at: www.iam141.org/eap/staff.html

