

VALCARTIER MILITARY FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE

The Treasure Chest

One Thousand and One Tricks to
LIVING WELL DURING AN ABSENCE



CRFM
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This tool was developed by a committee of volunteers who are military spouses and have experienced a prolonged absence, or are preparing for one, like you.

This tool is simple and accessible. It was designed to help you prepare for the different stages of this absence.

In our work, one thing stood out: despite the fact that a prolonged absence causes a lot of different emotions, it may ultimately be a very rewarding experience, one which allows us to discover our strengths, to improve our self-confidence, and to highlight some skills we have always underestimated.

Happy reading!
The Spouse's Committee

Special thanks to the volunteers who worked on this project.
Thank you for your involvement!

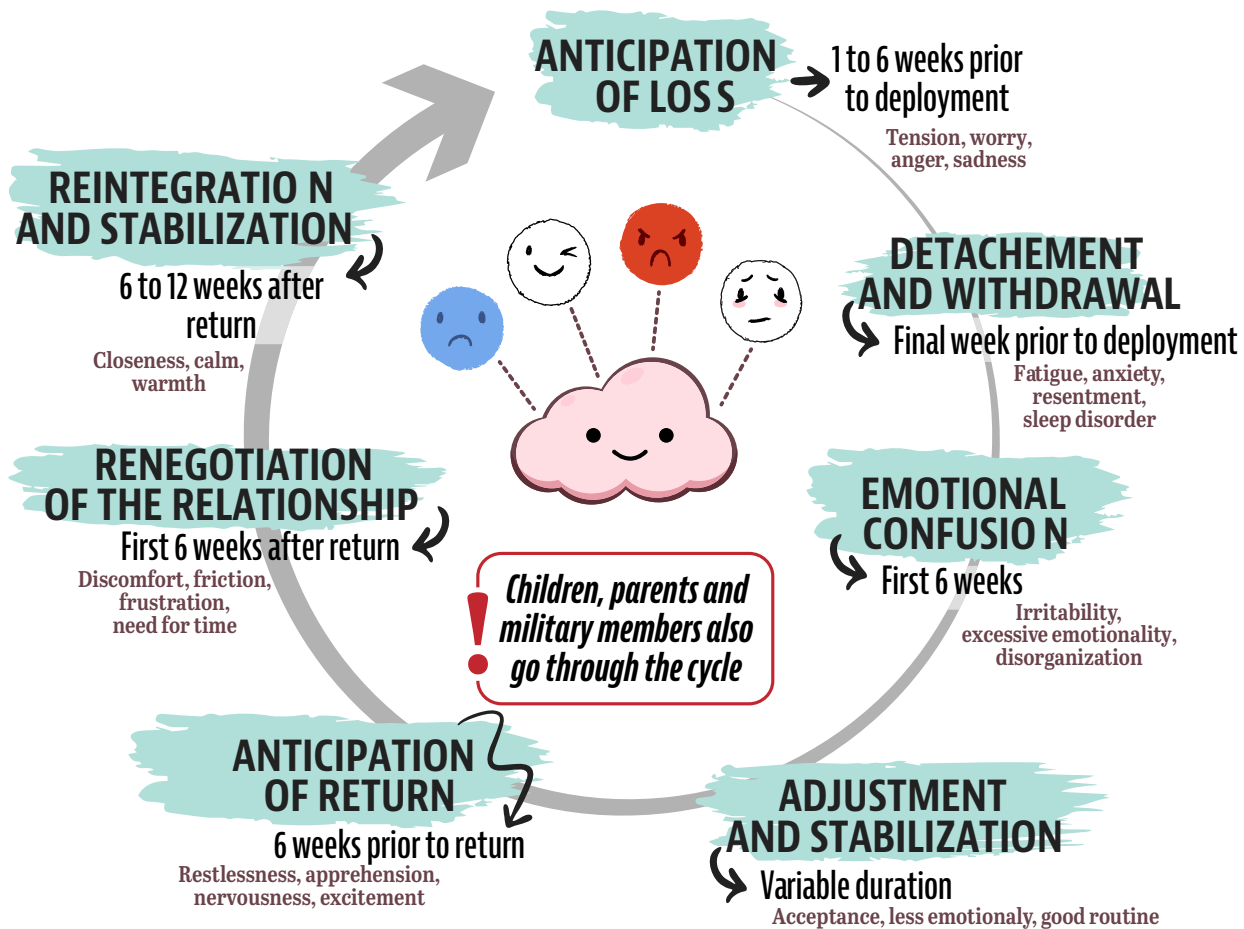
*NOTE: In this document the word "spouse" is used to simplify the text. Please adjust the information according to your personal situation.

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Emotional Cycle of Deployment

An absence can cause a variety of emotions, both for the military member and the family. A better understanding of the different stages of the absence and the realization that these feelings are normal can help you cope with the situation. Here is a short summary :



Source: Kathleen Vestal Logan

The Highs and Lows of Prolonged Absence, and the Emotions it can Cause

STAGE 1 "I'M HAVING TROUBLE ACCEPTING IT".

It's hard to accept being left behind with an entire household to manage. That's why, from the moment the departure is announced, even mundane things can seem overwhelming. There may be tension in the relationship, since both people spend their time trying to be as productive as possible: repairs, arrangements, and organizing other details before the departure.

All reactions observed at this stage can help transform the surplus of emotions into action, and can be constructive. They are a way to establish an emotional distance between the spouses and prepare them to live apart.

STAGE 2 "I HAVE NO CHOICE"

Shortly before the departure, decision making becomes more and more difficult. There is a lack of energy, tiredness, and a desire to enjoy the last moments together, and refuel, but something feels "off", and the couple is unable to do so.

They don't dare get too close, because the departure is so near, and they can't give an inch. There is less talk about thoughts and feelings in order to avoid conflict or guilt. The couple has started to separate on an emotional level. On either side, the spouses say, "If you have to go, go", and, "I have to leave". They are trying to cut ties themselves, instead of having them imposed on them. The important thing at this stage is to try not to see the lack of intimacy and connection as rejection. It's a normal reaction to the circumstances of the departure.

STAGE 3 "I'M NOT READY!"

Departure day always comes as a shock, whether it is prepared for or not. The goodbyes can hurt, and at the same time bring relief—and guilt for feeling that way. There is also the feeling of lacking a purpose or direction. Old routines are disrupted and new ones have yet to be established. There may be a lack of desire to see friends, and a sense of being crushed under the weight of responsibility. There can be difficulty sleeping, or sleeping too much. The root of these feelings is: "What will I do to fill this void in my life?"



STAGE 4 "I'M FINALLY GETTING USED TO IT"

Gradually, the realization that the household is doing well sets in. A new way of life is established, and it fits in well with the new routine. The reorganization of roles and shared responsibilities begin to feel more comfortable. Every experience that results in success helps to increase self-confidence. Help from friends, work, support groups, etc., is accepted more easily. Complicated things (like elaborate meals) are put aside for simpler and more practical things.

This stage has some advantages for the person left behind, such as the chance to take part in new activities and develop new skills. Of course, some people may continue to experience stress and have difficulties adapting. However, overall, there is a new sense of independence and freedom, and pride in one's ability to fend for oneself.

It is at this point that many soldiers come home on leave. During the leave, the emotional cycle of deployment is experienced at an accelerated rate. His or her return is anticipated, his or her presence during the leave is adapted to, and upon re-departure, the routine has to be picked up again. This stage does not necessarily reflect the final return, because during leave the soldier may not completely disengage from the mission. He or she knows that they must return shortly.

STAGE 5 "HE'S COMING BACK ALREADY?"

"My goodness, he's coming home soon and nothing is ready". The long to-do list hasn't been completed. Things are piling up. There are feelings of joy and excitement at the thought of living together again, as well as a certain apprehension that is hard to talk about. It is as if, during the absence, the union was re-evaluated.

It's hard to know what effect the return will have on both spouses, and on the new arrangements made during the absence. Are the changes understood and accepted? Will decisions made during the absence be approved of? Will new independence cause friction? Will adjustments have to be made?

The returning soldier is also anxious: Will he or she be welcomed? Will the children recognize him or her? Will the family still need him or her?

STAGE 6 "SOMETHING HAS CHANGED BETWEEN US"

Although the couple is together again physically, they might not be together emotionally. The verbal contract of the union, the assumptions and expectations on which the couple has based its actions, seems compromised. Sexual relations may not be what was imagined.

The relationship is not what it was before the departure. The spouses have lived through several different events, and the resulting effects should be taken into consideration.

The couple needs an adjustment period as spending too much time together can lead to friction. The spouse who stayed behind might resent that the other spouse is now making decisions that they were in charge of during the absence, and might wonder if it's necessary to give up activities they took part in while the other was gone. The returning spouse may wonder why they feel like a stranger in their own home.

This step can be difficult and enjoyable at the same time. It provides the opportunity to evaluate the changes that occurred in each partner, to determine the direction in which they wish to grow together, and how to rebuild and refresh their relationship.

STAGE 7 "WE'VE FINALLY FOUND EACH OTHER!"

A few weeks may be required for the couple's new routines to be established, so that everyone feel comfortable again and can relax together. Gradually, the feeling of being a couple will return. Spouses rely on each other emotionally and can enjoy the warmth and support of being together.

***Adapted from the article "Emotional Cycle of Deployment" by Kathleen Vestal Logan.

The Departure is Approaching Fast!

Before Departure

Several issues have to be resolved before the departure of the military member. There is a "Checklist" to help you prepare for a prolonged absence available at the Valcartier Military Family Resource Centre (VMFRC). Don't hesitate to get one; it could be very helpful to you. In the meantime, here are some key things to look into with your spouse :

- Create a budget to avoid unpleasant surprises and major oversights (license renewal, insurance, mortgage, taxes, etc.).
- Plan the use of the deployment bonus. Don't spend it before it's received, as the absence can be cancelled or shortened! The military member may be repatriated or unforeseen costs may force you to review your expenses.
- Make sure you have the authorization to act on behalf of your spouse. For certain operations, a letter written and signed by your spouse is enough. For others, a notarized power of attorney or a proxy from your financial institution is required. We strongly suggest getting a notarized power of attorney, which is valid everywhere and will help you avoid many inconveniences.
- Ensure that documents and information relating to credit cards, bank accounts, insurance, RRSPs, mortgage, and taxes are easily accessible.

Be Sure to

- Know who is identified as “next of kin” on the emergency form used by the military unit.
- Know the rank, service number, unit and section of the military member. This can make it easier to contact them in case of an emergency at home (serious illness, death, etc.).
- Have your original birth certificate or a valid passport onhand in case you need to travel out of the country to be with your spouse.



A Few Suggestions to Help Prepare for the Absence

Remember that your feelings are normal. Be patient with yourself and your family.

Participate in information sessions and activities before the absence.

Record your thoughts, feelings, events, etc. Start keeping a journal, or, if you are more artistic, a scrapbook.

Participate in special activities together to create a bank of happy memories.



Avoid demanding commitments or ones that require a lot of time during the week of the departure.

Ask your spouse to leave messages before the departure (stories for the children, love notes hidden throughout the house, etc.).

Have pictures taken as a couple or as a family.

Tips for Planning Harmonious Communication

- Clarify your needs, your expectations, and what is important to you during the absence. Also, take the time to listen to the needs of your spouse. Expect that you may have to compromise—your expectations may not be the same!
- Come up with an agreement on how and when the military member can reach you during the absence. For example, routine communications can be handled by email, leaving your phone time available for chatting.
- Ask your spouse if there are things he or she doesn't want to talk about while he or she is away, such as problems that have already been solved, a loved one who is sick but not in danger, etc.
- For discussions, choose a time when both spouses have the time and energy to focus on the conversation and situations that need addressing.

The Day of Departure

Planning how the day of departure will unfold and making sure nothing is forgotten is essential to reduce the intense stress of an extremely emotional day.

- Create a list of people important to you both who should be with you at the departure (parents, children, friends...).
- Decide as a couple the place you think is most appropriate to say goodbye (at home, at the military member's unit, at the airport). It is important to discuss your respective expectations for this day.
- To limit the number of calls from people asking how you are or whether your spouse has left yet, it can be useful to designate a contact person who can pass this information on to people who are interested.

This is an important day, because you will not see each other for a long time. This is not an ideal time to bring up issues that can cause stress and discord between you and leave you separated on a sour note.

Planning some activities or how your time will be occupied before and after the departure will make the transition go more smoothly.

The Highs and Lows of an Absence

A Few Suggestions for Living with an Absence

Keep track of daily events using a diary, daily record of events, or a memory box so you can share it with the military member once he or she comes back.

Beware of rumours!
Always check with official information sources.

Use your new skills and take advantage of your freedom.

Participate in information sessions before the return.

Remind your spouse of your love and commitment.

A few days before the return, confirm the date, time, and place with your spouse.

If possible, offer support to others going through the same situation.

Don't be afraid to seek professional help if you are overwhelmed by feelings of depression or anxiety.



Tips for Harmonious Communication

- During a phone call, reduce distractions (turn off the TV, computer, etc.).
- Begin and end phone calls on a positive note.
- Do not hesitate to ask questions when you do not understand something.
- Do not assume, because it can cause confusion and increase misunderstandings.
- Be open about sharing what you are experiencing and to listen to what your spouse is going through without comparing your situation.
- If you are overwhelmed or too tired, you have the right to say so and tell your spouse that now is not a good time to talk. Plan another time to talk in order to avoid misunderstandings or arguments.
- Express both your positive and and negative emotions.
- If telephone time with your spouse is limited, use other means of communications, like letters or emails, to express yourself more fully.
- If you have a concern, discuss it with your spouse. Do not wait for leave or for the return, because time can amplify the problem.
- Talk about your needs and expectations concerning the return, and ask your spouse to talk about theirs.

Tips for Managing Stress

WHAT TO DO ?	SIMPLE WAYS TO DO THIS
Reduce the number of daily tasks, focus on what is important.	Use pre-made meals, have groceries and pharmacy orders delivered, etc. Hire a housekeeper for a few hours a week. Divide chores throughout the week.
Manage your time.	Follow an agenda or timetable, keep a copy on the fridge, and make a To-Do list.
Eat well.	Give yourself clear and realistic objectives. Reduce your caffeine intake. To combat sugar cravings, keep fresh fruits and vegetables on-hand.
Exercise regularly.	Take a few moments to go for a walk, do some yoga, etc.
Spend some time with people who make you laugh and make you happy.	Visit or call family or friends, participate in activities organized by or the Family Centre.
Make time to relax.	Take a bath, read a book, listen to your favourite music, watch some TV, meditate, go for a walk, enjoy a massage, go out to eat, etc.
	Stop seeing people that drain your energy.
Use the community resources that are available to you.	Get in touch with the Family Centre.

Tips for Taking Care of Yourself

WHAT TO DO ?	SIMPLE WAYS TO DO THIS
Give yourself 4 little treats throughout the day.	Read a funny story on the Internet, take the time to enjoy a cup of coffee, wear your favourite perfume, hang your sheets out on the clothesline, listen to birds sing, watch a sunset, etc.
	Sleep with a t-shirt belonging to your spouse, and spritz it with their cologne once in a while.
Eat foods you enjoy.	Make meals that you love, but that your spouse doesn't.
Have dinner with friends.	Invite your friends over for a dinner party, go to a restaurant, or host a pot-luck.
Ask for help from the people around you.	Have meals prepared for the freezer, have the kids babysat when you need a break, ask for help with housework, etc.
Find a release for your emotions.	Watch a sad movie and let yourself cry.
Go out once a week.	Have someone look after the kids. Exchange babysitting nights with other spouses or friends, and go to the movies, shopping, etc.
Pamper yourself.	Have a bath with candles, get a manicure, a new hairdo, a facial, etc.
Have some fun.	Organize a few get togethers : movie night, a pyjama party, or just chatting with friends.

How to Keep in Touch During an Absence

TELEPHONE

Depending on where he or she is assigned, the phone used may affect the call's reception quality. Access to a phone is sometimes limited and may be restricted by the authorities.

TRICKS FOR SUCCESSFUL TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS:

- Set the time of calls in advance whenever possible (ex: not when you're cooking dinner or during bedtime routines).
- Come up with code words to be able to exchange private information more easily.
- Set a clock to your spouse's time zone and place it near the phone.
- Make a list of the things you want to talk about or questions you want to ask your spouse during the next call, and keep it near the phone.

INTERNET

Generally, when installations have become permanent or more structured, Internet-equipped computers are available. Time for use is limited and varies from one location to another.



Keep a message from your spouse on your answering machine for times when you need to hear their voice.

LITTLE TRICKS:

- Internet stations are available in most Military Family Resource Centres.
- Create a mailing list to easily inform friends and family what's happening in your life and your spouse's.
- Create a blog as a family (on Facebook, Twitter, etc.) that your spouse can have access to. This way, friends and family can keep up with news and events. Make sure the blog is only accessible to members of your family and close friends.
- For your security, avoid publicly announcing on social media, Facebook, etc., that your spouse is absent or when you are going on vacation.

PACKAGES AND LETTERS

Several package and letter drop-off sites are available for the families of military members:

- Vacartier Family Centre (Building 93);
- Sainte-Foy: Valcartier Military Family Resource Centre Satellite office (2630 Blvd Hochelaga);
- Valcartier Garrison: Mail Room (Building 200);
- Many Reserve units throughout Quebec (It is recommended that you contact them before dropping by).

You must include the following information on your letters and packages: Name and rank of the military member, initials, section, and the mailing address. For more information, including the rules for what can and cannot be sent, please contact the VMFRC.

LITTLE TRICKS:

- Number your letters or packages, and make sure your spouse does the same. That way, if you receive more than one at once you'll know in what order they should be opened!

The Day-to-Day Military Routine : A Very Different Reality from Ours !

His schedule is full. He is constantly at his workplace where there is always lots to do.

His primary focus is on the task at hand, mainly the mission.

He lives in a group setting and is building strong ties with his companions.

He has become hyper-vigilant in order to react immediately to danger, ensuring his security and the security of others. At times, this might give you the impression that he is not paying attention to what you are saying or does not show interest in your daily life. You may want to know everything about his military life and his deployment. Be aware that he cannot give you detailed information about operations in progress for security reasons. However, he can tell you about his leisure activities, daily routine, social life, etc., although his time for talking will be limited. Over time, the routine takes over and he finds his daily life less interesting to talk about.

For all information relating to the mission and military living conditions, contact the absences counsellor at the Valcartier Military Family Resource Centre and the Family Information Line. You may also go to the Website of the Canadian Forces at www.forces.gc.ca.

In the Event of a Critical Incident

MEDICAL SERVICES

CF members have access to medical services and moral support during the mission (nurses, doctors, chaplains, social workers, etc.). In the event of an injury, medical assistance is offered at each camp.

However, if the CF member requires care that is even more specialized, the member may be transferred to an outside hospital selected ahead of time according to the location of the mission. When possible, it is preferable for the CF member to contact his family personally to tell them about the state of his health. If not possible, representatives from the chain of command will travel to the home of the member's next of kin (chosen by the member and written in his file).

Furthermore, some of the next of kin, identified on a form intended for this purpose, may, in some cases, be able to travel to the hospital where the member is receiving care to be with him. If you do not have a passport, it is possible to obtain one quickly if you go to a passport office in person.

An attendant designated by the unit may offer you support, if applicable.

IF THE CF MEMBER DIES

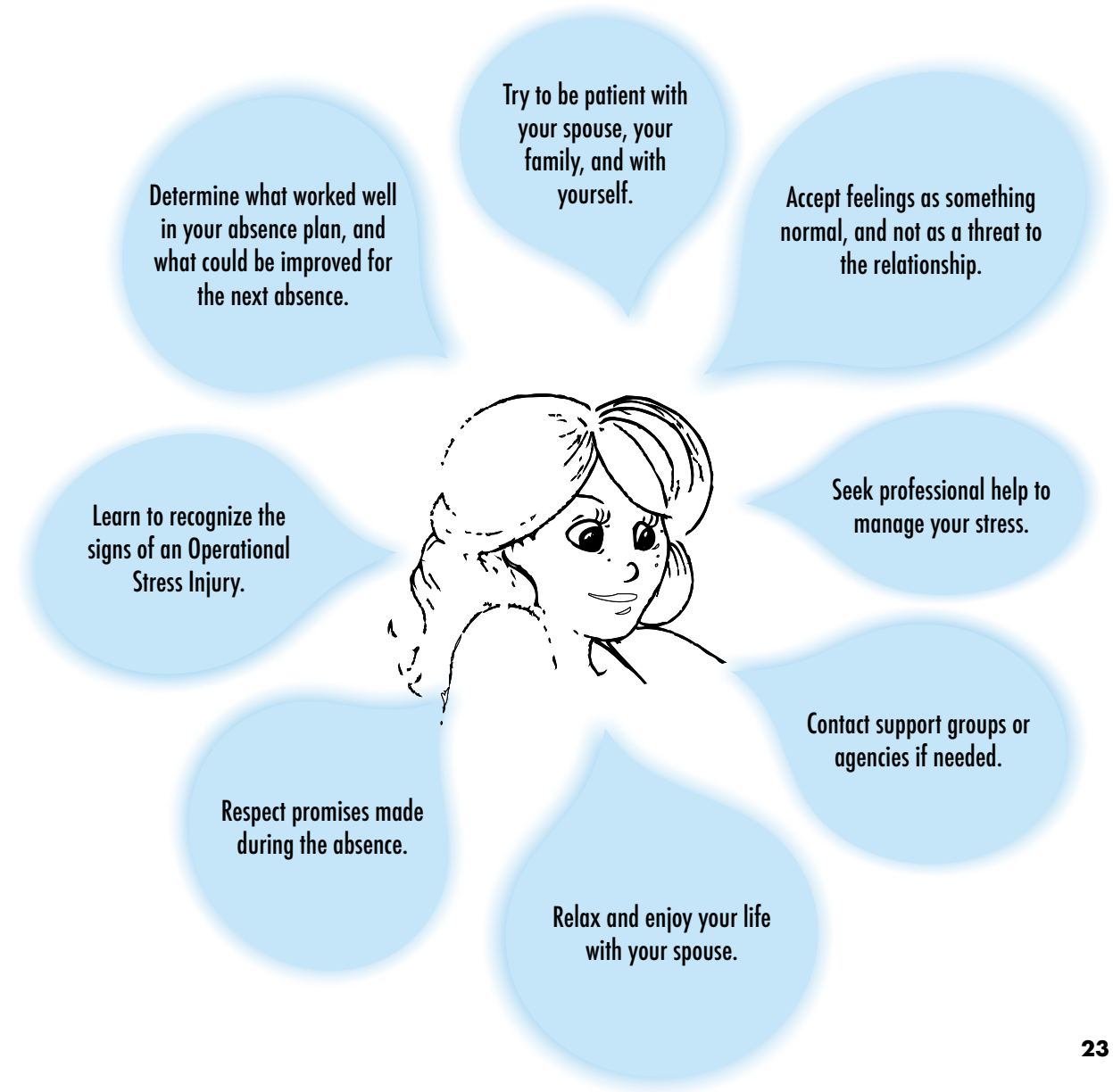
In the majority of cases, a chaplain and a representative from the unit visit the home of the next of kin (as chosen by the member and identified in his file) to inform them. In certain instances, the news is given by a parish priest or a civilian police officer.

In order to make the process easier, the family will be assisted by a designated attendant for as long as is necessary.

Normally, after the member's immediate family has been informed, the name of the deceased CF member will be released to the media.

Preparing For Return

Some Suggestions for Adapting to the Return



Tips for Harmonious Communication to Help Ease the Transition

- Before the return, discuss your needs and expectations. Take each other's realities into account.
- Communicate often and honestly with each other. Present the journal or artistic project that you put together during the absence.
- Share what you learned during the absence with each other.
- Negotiate the redistribution of tasks gradually, remembering that both of you developed habits during the absence. A guide to sharing household chores is available at the Valcartier Military Family Resource Centre.
- Allow everyone to talk about their experiences at their own pace. It is normal for some topics to be avoided.
- Take your time!

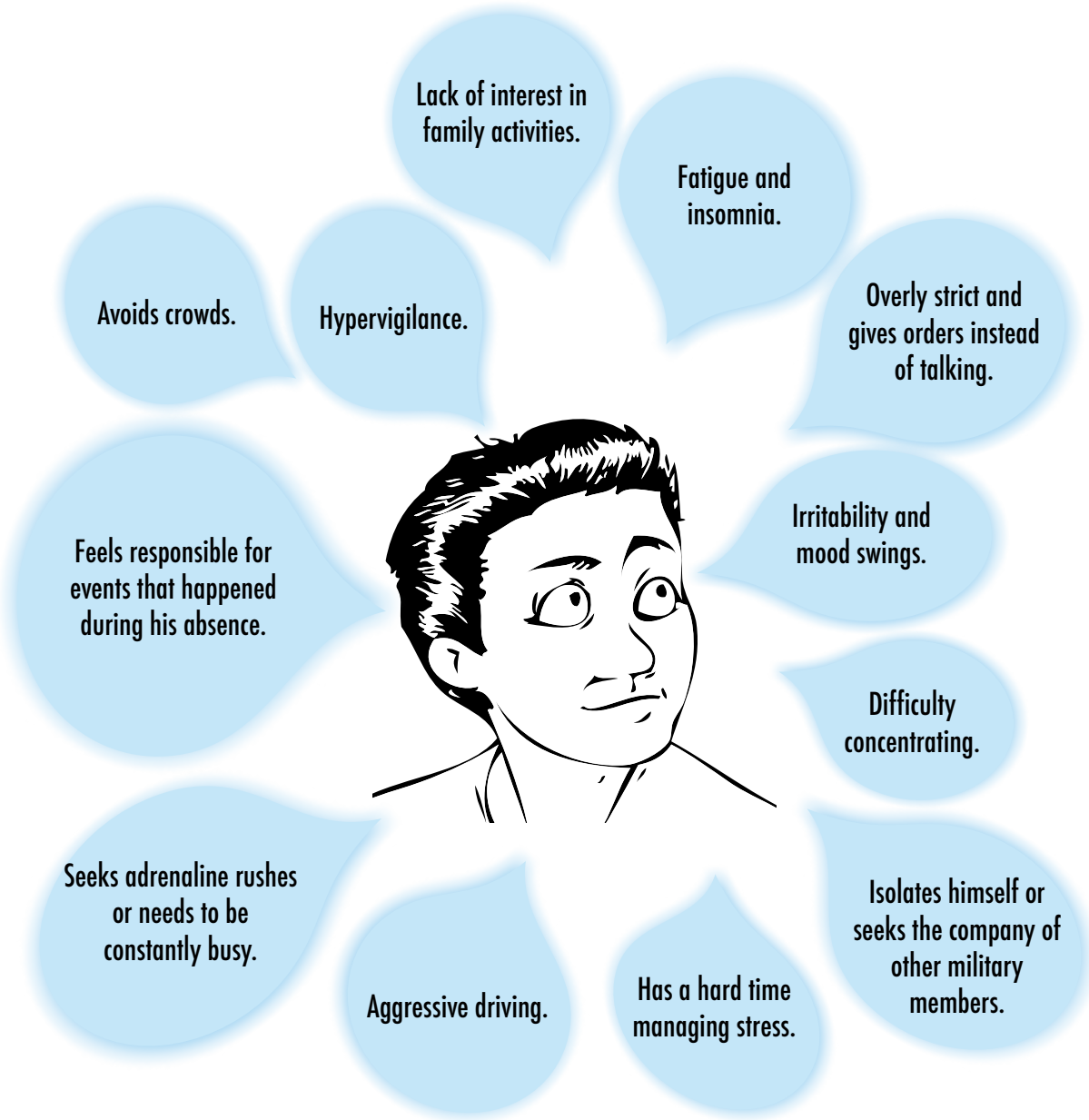


Adjusting to the Return

The return is a time of both celebration and stress. The military member has been changed by his experiences, and so have you. You both need time and space to adjust to the return. Together, discuss how you should organize the return. It is important to seek the opinion of the CF member, and to take into account their choices. It's possible that he will want to reconnect with others to celebrate his return, or he may simply want to take it easy.

The return may require a transitional period, which is very normal. The military member needs to readapt to a very different situation and way of life, re-learn that his survival techniques are no longer necessary in Canada (i.e., driving aggressively or dangerously), and re-integrate several roles (personal, social, family, marital, professional, etc.). He may feel that nobody else understands what he went through, and may be more likely to talk with his military colleagues. You may have a lot of questions about the mission that he might not be ready to talk about. Respecting his limits and remaining available are the best things to do. When you ask a question, keep in mind that the answer you get will not necessarily be the one you expect.

After the return, he may experience reactions similar to those of someone suffering from an operational stress injury. It may take some time for them to start to go away. Here are a few:



Military members on a mission live with operational stress. It's intense and continuous, and common to all soldiers.

But it is important to know that not all soldiers who have experienced operational stress and who are having difficulty adapting to the return home will develop an operational stress injury, which is a medical diagnosis.

To better understand operational stress injuries and their impact on the family, you can refer to "Signs of an Operational Stress Injury (OSI) and the Family". This guide can also help you determine whether the military member is still in an adjustment period, or whether he might have an operational stress injury.

Adaptation can take 5 to 7 months. If you notice that the military member's behaviour intensifies, persists, and interferes with daily life, encourage him or her to consult specialized resources. It is not uncommon for the military member to be the last to notice changes, and it can be necessary to use different strategies to convince him or her to get help.

As a Spouse, Here's What You Can Do!

- Inform your spouse of the changes you see in him or her, and identify situations that cause him or her to react, without attempting to avoid the situations or eliminate them from your routine.
- Pay attention to the positive things, and highlight the efforts being made by your spouse.

Sometimes the spouse can feel powerless during this period, but unfortunately you can't do everything for your partner or force him or her to get help. The military member needs to be actively involved in the process. This is why you need to take care of yourself by seeking out resources for yourself.

If you need more information on this subject, don't hesitate to contact the counsellors at the Valcartier Military Family Resource Centre.

An absence is a situation in which you experience a variety of emotions, and all these emotions are normal. This experience can allow you to enrich your "treasure chest" and keep these "riches" for the future adventures that military life can bring. Remember that you are not alone in this situation, and don't feel shy about discussing things with the team at the Valcartier Military Family Resource Centre.

Resources

VALCARTIER MILITARY FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE (VMFRC)

418-844-6060 / Toll free: 1-877-844-6060

www.crfmv.com

- Support During Absences
- Support During Postings
- Psychosocial Services
- Volunteering and Community Activities
- Childcare Services
- Early Childhood Services
- Youth Services
- Information and Referral
- Employment and Education Support
- Veteran Family Program

FAMILY INFORMATION LINE (FIL)

1 800 866-4546

Counsellors available 24/7.

MEMBER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (MAP)

1 800 268-7708

Short-term counselling services for CF members and their families.

CHAPLAIN SERVICES

418 844-5000, ext. 5473 (business hours)

ext. 2544 (after hours)

Other Resources :

Local community organizations: CIUSSS, Maison de la Famille, Centre de crise de Québec, listing of community resources: 211, etc.

Documents You Can Find at VMFRC:

- Check List: To be better prepared during an absence.
- TOOLBOX for parents of children aged five and under, who are or will be coping with the absence of a family member.
- THE PASSPORT for parents of 6- to 12-year-olds who are or will be experiencing the absence of a family member.
- STORY: Joey's mom going away.
- STORY: A father to be Proud of.
- STUDENT DEPLOYMENT JOURNAL.
- DEPLOYMENT guide for PARENTS OF CF MEMBERS.
- EVERYONE HAS UNAVOIDABLE CHORES! Best to share the load!
- STORY: Leo and Lily don't understand what is wrong with their dad!
- GUIDE: Signs of OPERATIONAL STRESS INJURY (OSI) and the FAMILY.

You can find these documents on our website in the documentation section:

www.crfmv.com/documentation

Documents You Can Find at the Bookstore :

LE COMBAT D'ÉDOUARD

Author: Katherine Bourdon
Publisher: Châteaufort
Year: 2011

HURRY UP AND WAIT

Author: Dianne Collier
Publisher: Creative Bound
Year: 1994

MY LOVE, MY LIFE

Author: Dianne Collier
Publisher: Creative Bound
Year: 2004

NO LIFE, LIKE IT! MILITARY WIVES IN CANADA

Author: Deborah Harisson et Lucie Laliberté
Publisher: Lorimer
Year: 1994

WHILE YOU WERE AWAY: 101 TIPS FOR FAMILIES EXPERIENCING ABSENCE OR DEPLOYMENT

Author: Megan Egerton-Graham
Publisher: Egerton Graham consulting
Year: 2009

DEPLOYMENT JOURNAL FOR SPOUSES

Author: Rachel Roberson
Publisher: Elva Resa Publishing LLC
Year: 2008

MARRIED TO THE MILITARY

Author: Meredith Levy
Publisher: Rev Upd
Year: 2003

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