Emotional Cycle of Deployment – for Service Members and Families

Stressors for service members and military families can begin before deployment and last into the post-deployment phase, and they can be different for everyone. Common stressors occur during both combat and non-combat related deployments.

Knowing the common stressors during all phases of the deployment cycle (and the resources you can turn to) could be helpful during this period of uncertainty.

**PRE-DEPLOYMENT STRESSORS:** From notification to deployment (timeframe varies)

**SERVICE MEMBER**
- Marital disagreements and feelings of detachment from one’s family
- Preparing home and family for extended absence
- Financial concerns
- Training up/long hours away
- Uncertainty
- Fluctuating emotions

**SPOUSE & CHILD(REN)**
- Marital disagreements and feelings of detachment from service member
- Preparing home and family for spouse’s extended absence
- Anticipation of loss

**DEPLOYMENT STRESSORS** (1st month of deployment)

**SERVICE MEMBER**
- Irregular communication with home
- Combat and operational stressors
  - Sleeping less than 7 hours a night
  - Workload “op-tempo” extremes
  - Emphasis on force protection
- Redefining roles with spouse
- Financial concerns
- Sadness over missing family events, milestones, etc.

**SPOUSE**
- Redefining roles with spouse
- Sole responsibility for household and childcare
- Feeling disoriented and overwhelmed
- Sleep difficulties
- Irregular communication
- Providing emotional support to children
- Lack of understanding about deployment from community members
- Sadness and loneliness

**CHILD(REN)**
- Observing parental stress
- Fear of parental loss
- Assuming more household responsibilities
- Sadness over parent missing family events, milestones, etc.

**SUSTAINMENT STRESSORS** (2nd – final month)

**SERVICE MEMBER**
- Mission focus, staying safe
- Nostalgia for home

**RE-DEPLOYMENT STRESSORS** (Final month)

**SERVICE MEMBER**
- Anticipation vs. apprehension about returning home
- Workload “op-tempo” extremes

**SPOUSE**
- Anticipation of loss
- Redefining roles with spouse
- Sole responsibility for household and childcare
- Feeling disoriented and overwhelmed
- Sleep difficulties
- Irregular communication
- Providing emotional support to children
- Lack of understanding about deployment from community members
- Sadness and loneliness

**CHILD(REN)**
- Observing parental stress
- Fear of parental loss
- Assuming more household responsibilities
- Sadness over parent missing family events, milestones, etc.

**POST-DEPLOYMENT/REUNIFICATION STRESSORS** (3-12 months after deployment)

**SERVICE MEMBER**
- Homecoming experience vs. expectations
- Physical intimacy vs. emotional distance
- Conflict regarding role in the family
- Conflict regarding family issues
- Irritability
- Sleep issues
- Adjustment and renegotiating routines

**SPOUSE**
- Conflict over changing role in the family
- Conflict over changing relationship with the service member
- Adjustment and renegotiating routines
- Resentment over loss of independence

**CHILD(REN)**
- Apathy and anxiety around parent returning
- Confusion about parental roles

**DEPLOYMENT RESOURCES**
- **Policy & Oversight:** Defense Health Agency, Public Health Division, Deployment Health Branch
  information and guidance can be found at: https://info.health.mil/hco/phealth/deployment_health
  /DeploymentHealthProductLine/Forms/Allitems.aspx (CAC required)
- **Military and Family Life Counseling (MFLC):** Counseling is available to address improving relationships at home and work, stress management, adjustment difficulties, parenting, and grief or loss
- **Military chaplains:** Consulting with your chaplain is strictly confidential

Source: Pincus et al., 2011
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