

- The absent parent should write separate letters to each child.
- Try to have letters arrive for young children as soon as possible after separation-perhaps by posting such letters a day or two before departure.



ADF MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

If you or someone you know feels they need support during any phase of a deployment please do not hesitate to contact a chaplain, psychologist, social worker or the Duty Officer/Officer of the Day.

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Local Medical Centres Your local medical officer can provide immediate assistance and referrals as required.

Psychology Support Section All Psych Support Sections offer a 24 hour emergency service that can be accessed through your local Duty Officer/Officer of the Day.

Defence Community Organisation www.dco.dod.gov.au Provide 24-hour assistance to members and families in crisis situations in all military locations and will help with appropriate referrals if required during office hours. For after hours service contact your local Duty Officer/Officer of the Day.

Chaplains Unit Chaplains can provide support and appropriate referrals.

The Family Information Network for Defence (FIND) <1800 020 031> a confidential service available to every Service person and family anywhere in Australia.

Lifeline <131 114> If you, or a friend, need to talk to someone about a problem immediately, you can call Lifeline for the cost of a local call.

Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service (VVCS) This service is available to veterans of all deployments and their families. VETLINE – 24 hour emergency line (Sydney/ Canberra) <1800 011 046>

Defweb Address <defweb2.defence.gov.au/dpedhs/>

Internet Address < www.defence.gov.au/dpe/dhs>

Email <ADF.MHS@defence.gov.au>

separation

FACT SHEET





When ADF members leave home on deployment the period of separation can be particularly stressful for their loved ones. It is helpful to realise that the thoughts and feelings each person in the family may experience could be normal responses to the stresses associated with separation.

THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS DURING DEPLOYMENT

Common thoughts and feelings can be associated to stages of separation. The stages of separation are pre-separation, separation, and homecoming.

Pre-Separation Thoughts: Is he/she really going to leave me with all this? He/she won't talk properly to me about the separation. How am I going to cope? His/Her job must be more important than mine! Where is he/she going exactly? Will he/she be safe? Feelings: restlessness, irritability, anger, resentment, hurt, fear, and depression.

Separation Thoughts: If I love him/her why am I relieved he/she has gone? I just don't feel like mixing socially just yet. What am I going to do with this hole in my life? Feelings: numbness, aimlessness, anger, indecisiveness, overwhelmed, withdrawn, feelings of independence.

Homecoming Thoughts: Why should I give that up just because he has returned? He/She doesn't understand the difficulties I've had. He/She thinks life here was exactly the same while he/she was away. He/She has changed a lot. Feelings: excitement, happy but distant, resentful and wary at the same time.

SUGGESTIONS FOR COPING WITH THE SEPARATION

People can do more than they realise to help themselves. People have found the following suggestions helpful:

Pre-Separation: Cry, this can be a way of releasing pent up emotions such as worry, upset and uncertainty. Talk matters through. Disputes are sometimes a means of preparing for separation, allowing emotional distancing. Try to resolve any problems or family conflicts before departure. Face Emotions. Discuss possible short and long term effects of separation on the family. Understanding and reassurance can affirm trust and help resolve worries. Develop a support network

Separation: Share your concerns with others, don't bottle things up. Try to solve those problems you can deal with as this may boost your confidence. Enjoy yourself when possible. You have every right to do so. Help and support others when you can. Helping others can help you by making you aware that you are not alone. Allow yourself to be upset at times, but don't allow the separation to dominate your life. Ask for help; it may surprise you that people more often than not like to lend support.

Homecoming: Beware of your expectations. They might not be realistic. Accept everybody in the family will have personally changed. Be careful and avoid making insensitive statements. Renegotiate relationships and roles. Be patient with each other and be prepared to accept change. Accept family reintegration is a process of adjustment and will take time and effort. Be alert for delayed stress reactions.

CHILDREN

Children may experience a sense of insecurity during a parent's long absence. Their world "normally" comprises a mother, a father and a home, which creates a strong basis for security. Remove one, and the children have lost a part of their security. The effect of this can show up in many ways, often in varying degrees of unacceptable behaviour.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DEALING WITH CHILDREN

During the separation children need added support and attention. Perhaps the most important step to minimise adverse effects on children is to keep the absent parent part of the family's emotional life.

- Give each child some undivided attention, though admittedly this can be difficult for only one parent.
- Keep roughly the same rules for the children during Dad's/Mum's absence.
- Photographs of the absent parent can be kept beside children's beds and used as part of the going-to-bed routine, for example "say goodnight to Daddy/Mummy"

