

ASSESSING FAMILY SUPPORT NEEDS DURING REUNIFICATION

Helping Parents During Reunification

As part of the reality of multiple deployments, many of the families you serve will be reuniting at some point with a service member. Families may experience a range of emotions: while they are thrilled that their loved one is returning home, they may also be anxious about how this homecoming will change the routines they have established during the service member's absence. It is quite normal for both the parent who has been deployed and the parent who has been at home to feel tense and insecure.

For the young children in these families, homecoming means big changes. There is someone "new" at home to get to know. At the same time, the adult at home whom the child has depended on all these months may be preoccupied with this transition, too. Familiar routines are probably changing. This can impact a child's sense of security and result in behavior changes.

As the family's health care provider, you are a very important source of support during this time. Parents trust and value your insights and perspective. Simply ask how they are doing with this change, validate that it can be a challenging time, and point them toward resources that can provide additional support in helping parents feel less alone and better equipped to care for their young children.

This algorithm provides a suggested road map for addressing these changes during your encounters with families.

Copyright © 2010 by ZERO TO THREE. All rights reserved.

ZERO TO THREE gratefully acknowledges The Florida BrAlve Fund administered by The Community Foundation in Jacksonville for its support of Strong Foundations in Pediatric Care.

Writers: Claire Lerner; Michele Mitchell

Photo credit: Allisen Silberberg

Models in images are for illustrative purposes only.



National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families

Is a parent or caregiver returning from deployment?

Yes



- Use the reunification handout to highlight ways parents can support their child prior to and immediately following the homecoming.
- Convey the importance of parental self-care. Point out and suggest parents read the *What It's Like for You* section of the handout.
- Validate what the experience can be like for the returning parent. Point both parents to the *What It's Like for the Returning Parent* section of the handout.
- Direct parents to community resources.
- Remind parents of the importance of routine health maintenance/immunizations and well-child visits.

- Schedule a follow-up appointment with family or have staff check in after homecoming.
- Encourage family to come to the next visit together to promote the newly returned parent's role in the child's growth and development, as well as to provide family members with opportunities to discuss any successes or challenges they may be experiencing during reintegration.