

Supporting Military Families

A military family is one that has a member serving on active duty or in the reserves or National Guard. The duties and responsibilities of military members vary greatly depending on their specialty or chosen career fields. Although they will normally have set duty hours, they are subject to recall 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They are also likely to experience periods of family separation ranging from a few days to many months, especially during periods of international tension or war.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to help Church members who are serving in the military understand some of the challenges they and their families will face and identify resources available to help them.

The pamphlet addresses such issues as:

- Military deployments and the subsequent challenges associated with family separation.
- Ways to remain connected and involved with family members while physically separated.
- The importance of being true to covenants and avoiding temptations during periods of loneliness.
- Problems that can surface after returning home, including signs of post-traumatic stress disorders.
- The long-term family needs if the military member is killed, wounded, or missing in action.
- The resources available through the military and Veterans' Affairs.

Although the pamphlet addresses challenges specific to Church members who are serving in the United States Armed Forces, the basic principles—when followed with the guidance of the Spirit—have worldwide application.

Preparing for Deployment or Other Periods of Separation

The military provides extensive briefings to help prepare service members and their families for the pending family separation, covering issues such as health care, life insurance, powers of attorney, communications with loved ones back home, and organization of personal affairs. The following are some additional issues that service members and their families should address or be aware of before deploying.

Serving as a Service Member Group Leader

As soon as possible, service members should notify their bishop or branch president that they will be leaving for an extended training exercise or will be deploying in response to international tension or wartime operations. The stake or mission president should call a worthy Melchizedek Priesthood holder to preside over the service member group and hold Church services at the deployment site. Guidelines for calling group leaders and their responsibilities are outlined in the

Church Handbook of Instructions, Book 1 (page 138) and in the [Serving in the Church](#) section of LDS.org. Occasionally, a service member may be the only Church member at the deployed location. If this is the case and if the service member holds the priesthood, he should ask his bishop or branch president for authorization to bless and partake of the emblems of the sacrament on his own.

Renewing Temple Recommends

If the temple recommend of an endowed military member is likely to expire while he or she is deployed, the member should renew it before departing. It is very challenging to arrange for temple recommend renewal in isolated areas.

Receiving and Giving Priesthood Blessings

Service members are encouraged to request a priesthood blessing from their home teachers or priesthood leaders before deploying. This can be a source of comfort and strength for the family as well as the service member. If the service member holds the Melchizedek Priesthood, he is encouraged to give his spouse and children priesthood blessings before departing. Home teachers or priesthood leaders should be asked to provide priesthood blessings to the family members if the service member does not hold the priesthood. It is also appropriate to provide a blessing on the home where the family will reside during the period of separation.

Ordering Additional Garments

Endowed service members can purchase desert sand-colored military garments through Church distribution centers. If military units require a different colored T-shirt to be worn with the uniform, the member may purchase the T-shirts from their military clothing stores and send them to the distribution center for marking. Order forms are available from the Church's [Distribution Services](#) or Military Relations at PST-Military@ldschurch.org or (801) 240-2286.

Receiving Church Magazines

The *Ensign* and other wholesome reading materials and videos can be a great source of strength to the military member. Families are encouraged to send such materials to deployed members to help them avoid peer pressure to view inappropriate materials. See www.ldscatalog.com to order magazines or other Church materials.

Obtaining Contact Information for Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders

It is important that service members obtain the phone numbers and e-mail addresses of their home and visiting teachers and priesthood and auxiliary leaders before deploying. With improved communication between deployed members and their families, it is likely that the service members will know of family needs before the priesthood leaders. Whenever possible, service members should contact their home teachers and priesthood leaders to make them aware

of family needs and ask for assistance.

Dealing with Family Separation

One of the main factors distinguishing a military family from other families in the Church is the frequent and sometimes prolonged periods of family separation associated with military duty. Spouses who remain at home with the children face challenges similar to those of single parents. The family's challenges may be spiritual and emotional but can also include "everyday" temporal issues such as car repairs, lawn care, snow removal, transportation, finances, child care, work, and school. While the family at home is confronted with these issues, the deployed service member must focus on the military mission.

Families at home will benefit greatly by asking visiting teachers or other Church members to help relieve some of the pressure by providing breaks and activities that can uplift the spouse who remains at home. Relief Society programs, activities, and sisterhood can be a great help for the wives of military members during these times. In families where the military member is a son or daughter who has deployed, letters of encouragement from ward leaders and members can have a profound impact on deployed members and strengthen them in their resolve to live the gospel.

Although family separations are never easy, positive experiences can take place in the lives of those affected as they strive to grow closer to the Savior and increase their spirituality.

Maintaining Communication

Communication between service members and their families is extremely important to ensure that family members stay connected and involved in each other's lives. Deployed members generally will be able to communicate through e-mail messages, telephone calls, letters, and in some cases, Internet video communications; however, it may not be possible to communicate each day. Regular communication helps alleviate family anxiety and concern over the welfare of the deployed member. Although written or e-mailed letters may take longer to prepare, they carry a special meaning to family members and are read and reread, while telephone calls and other forms of communication tend to fade from memory more quickly. Also, letters from home can be a great source in helping the service member remain faithful and resist temptation. Many in the military have commented that receiving inspiring e-mails and letters from family and other Church members helped them resist temptations and remain active in the Church.

Although not physically present, the deployed member can help in preparing family home evening lessons, holding family councils, studying the scriptures, and participating in family prayers through e-mail, telephone, and other forms of communication. Sharing journal entries is another good way to stay close while physically separated. When a deployed service member has maintained regular communication while away, families experience fewer problems upon his or her return.

Helping Children Cope

During periods of family separation, children may have feelings of abandonment, loss of love, and resentment. Deployed members must communicate frequently with each child, not just with their spouse. Showing pictures of the deployed member while sharing messages from him or her can help young children stay connected. Also, doing activities with other ward members can be very helpful, especially if the families have children of similar ages. The more love that can be shared with the children, the better they will handle the separation.

It is important for the parent at home to maintain the family's structure and routines. Lax discipline or supervision can lead to undesirable behavior patterns and habits. In spite of a parent's best efforts, sometimes children and youth exhibit unusual behavior while a parent is away from home for extended periods of time. These behavior problems can be manifested in such ways as being disruptive, withdrawing, developing nervous tics, crying, being continually depressed, or seeming to reject love and kindness. Seeking assistance from youth leaders and teachers can be a great resource to the family during this critical time to help prevent youth from seeking unhealthy associations outside the home.

Managing Financial Challenges

Military families can have unique financial challenges during the deployment. Generally the day-to-day management of the budget is the responsibility of the spouse at home, who may not be accustomed or prepared to handle the family finances. Family budgets may need to be adjusted, especially in the case of reserve and National Guard members, whose military pay may be significantly less than what they received in their civilian jobs. If the need arises, members should seek help from the bishop or branch president.

Sometimes both the spouse at home and the deployed member can exhibit financial irresponsibility. Some may go on spending sprees that can cause serious financial hardships. Others may feel that they need to be rewarded or compensated for enduring the increased responsibilities associated with family separation. There is also a tendency for the spouse at home to indulge the children while the service member is away, rationalizing that such indulgences are compensation for the loss of daily interaction with the deployed spouse. These indulgences can cause serious financial and emotional problems and can be a source of discord when the service member returns. Members should be aware of these tendencies and strive to avoid them.

The pamphlet *[One for the Money: Guide to Family Finance](#)* (item no. 33293), available through Church distribution centers, is an excellent resource to help families get out of debt and establish good financial discipline. Also, to help ensure financial well-being, service members are encouraged to take advantage of the military's briefings and resources regarding power of attorney and Servicemen's Group Life Insurance.

Avoiding Temptation and Sin

The greatest safeguard against temptation and sin is for members to hold fast to the covenants

they have made with the Lord. Temptations come in various forms, such as peer pressure, family disharmony, boredom, loneliness, suggestive movies, pornography, Internet chat rooms, and other enticing attractions. In addition, involvement with alcohol and other addictive substances can lead to more serious transgressions.

Wherever possible, service members should attend Church meetings and be involved in wholesome activities. Military Relations at PST-Military@ldschurch.org or (801) 240-2286 can assist deployed members in identifying where Church services are held and who the group leader is at their deployed location. Members will find strength to do what is right as they associate with other Church members, and having opportunities to serve and be involved in Church activities will help dispel the feelings of loneliness and despair that can often lead to inappropriate behavior or relationships.

Sometimes when newly married couples are separated due to military duty, there can be a tendency for the spouse at home to reestablish association with single adults who were friends prior to the marriage. Marital status does not change because the military member is away for a time. Activities should continue around those who are married—not with single adults. Married spouses should refrain from individual activities with those of the opposite sex, whether married or single.

Female Church members serving in the military may experience unwanted advances by male service members who don't share their moral standards. Church members should avoid compromising situations and should not allow themselves to be intimidated by the person's position of authority. Members should not be afraid to say no to such advances and report cases of sexual harassment to appropriate authorities.

Avoiding Pornography

Service members and their families must be vigilant to avoid pornography and other materials that abase the sacred nature of intimacy between husband and wife. Viewing pornography robs individuals of the companionship of the Holy Ghost, adversely affects intimate relations with their spouse, and frequently leads to the development of sexual addictions. When Internet pornography is inadvertently seen, members should take immediate action to exit such sites or turn the computer off so they do not become entangled in the web of addiction. Although there is some protection from Internet pornography in the military computer network system, many service members still get access to such material through DVDs, magazines, private Internet subscriptions, and other sources. Often these materials are viewed in shared living quarters during off-duty hours, making it difficult to avoid inadvertent exposure. For service members who are required to live under such conditions, it is important for them to remember that the Lord will bless and strengthen them in their righteous desires. Through their example, they may be the means of helping others avoid pornography and choose more wholesome activities to occupy their free time.

The service member is not the only one who is likely to be exposed to pornography. Caution must be exercised at home by the spouse and children. See the LDS.org Gospel Topic entries "[Internet](#)," "[Media](#)," and "[Pornography](#)" for helpful information and resources on safeguarding

what is viewed in the home and on helping those who struggle with the effects of pornography. Bishops and branch presidents can recommend additional resources available from the Church.

Resolving Transgressions

If already burdened with previous sins, Church members are encouraged to meet with their bishop or branch president and make every effort to begin the repentance process before they deploy. The group leader or LDS chaplain at their deployed location can assist them in the repentance process but does not hold the keys as a judge in Israel, so members will need to discuss the matter with their home ward bishop or branch president where their membership records reside. Sometimes members delay talking to their bishop until after they deploy. This can complicate matters, but the steps to follow are still the same. Members will need to begin by confessing to their bishop and follow the steps of repentance as outlined by him. Certainly the Atonement of Christ is available to all who seek forgiveness through sincere repentance.

Reintegration Challenges and Resources

The military provides many resources to help deployed service members understand and cope with readjustment issues following extended periods of family separation. Many states and military units have specialized programs for returning service members to help with family reintegration. One such program available to military families is the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program, designed to help couples improve communication skills and work through readjustment challenges before they become insurmountable. Military One Source at www.militaryonesource.com and Veterans' Affairs (VA) at www.va.gov are excellent resources as well.

In addition to family reintegration issues, reserve and National Guard service members face the challenge of transitioning back to civilian employment. U.S. federal law requires that employers must reemploy returning veterans. This provides some level of job security for those who had civilian employment before being activated, but some returning members may have to seek new employment during this turbulent time.

For most service members, reintegration with families occurs without major problems. However, some have serious reactions to their war experiences that can continue after they return home. Statistically, 30 percent of returning war veterans will have ongoing reactions to their traumatic war experiences. Untreated, these difficulties can progress into a condition known as post-traumatic stress disorder.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is also often referred to as combat stress. It is a cluster of psychiatric symptoms that can occur following a traumatic event in which there was threat of injury or death to the service member or to someone else close to him or her. PTSD may occur soon after a major trauma, or it can have a delayed onset from months to years after the event. When it occurs, the symptoms often subside on their own in months, but some people experience a longer-lasting form of the condition that can require professional treatment. A good social

support system can help to protect service members from developing more chronic and severe cases of PTSD.

Symptoms of PTSD fall into three general categories:

1. Repeated “reliving” or "reexperiencing" of the traumatic event. These symptoms can disturb day-to-day activities and include recurring distressing memories or intrusive thoughts of the event, recurring dreams of the event, flashback episodes in which the event seems to be happening in the present moment, and bodily reactions to situations that remind the person of the traumatic event.
2. Avoidance responses. These include symptoms such as difficulty remembering important aspects of the trauma, lack of interest in normal activities, feelings of detachment, the sense of having no future, emotional “numbing” or seeming not to care about anything, reduced expression of moods, and avoidance of places, people, or objects that remind the person of the event.
3. Heightened sense of alertness. Typical symptoms include irritability or outbursts of anger, sleeping difficulties, difficulty concentrating, exaggerated response to things that startle the person, and hypervigilance.

All of the military services have plans and resources for assisting those with PTSD through the local military treatment facility or hospitals. Those discharged from the service or in the National Guard or reserves who have returned from deployment to war zones should contact the nearest VA facility to determine eligibility. The VA has seasoned clinicians with a wealth of experience in dealing with problems related to wartime service. An excellent resource for individuals and families to learn more about PTSD can be accessed at www.ncptsd.va.gov/war/guide/index.html.

Spiritual Healing

In addition to the mental and emotional challenges of war, the demands of war can challenge the member’s spirituality in ways he or she may not have anticipated. Counseling with a bishop or branch president about these spiritual concerns can be essential to a member's overall recovery. Recognizing the impact such experiences can have in the lives of service members and their families, the Church produced a DVD titled *Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled* (item no. 54616), which is available through the Church's [Distribution Services](#). It is highly recommended that all returning service members and their families view this DVD.

Missing in Action or Prisoner of War

During periods of war, a deployed service member would be categorized as missing in action (MIA) if the whereabouts of the member is not known. The family can experience a roller coaster of feelings from optimism and hope to fear and despair. It may take weeks to years to finally determine the service member’s status. Hope for the member being found alive fades as the days pass. If service members are captured by the enemy, they are categorized as prisoners of war (POWs). The lack of closure for families in either circumstance adds additional stress and uncertainty to their lives. Families are encouraged to seek counsel from their priesthood leaders as they face these difficult challenges.

Wounded or Injured Service Members

The likelihood of a service member being wounded or injured in war is certainly higher than during peacetime operations. The severity of the injury could vary greatly from a small wound that requires a few stitches to life-changing injuries that may incapacitate the member, requiring extensive periods of hospitalization and long-term care. If the injury results in a permanent disability, the service member will likely be medically retired and awarded disability pay and benefits ranging from 10 to 100 percent. Besides the physical trauma, many suffer psychologically and emotionally while adjusting to the new situation. This can have a profound effect on the family as they strive to deal with these life-changing situations. Love and support from Church members and extended family members can be a source of strength for the family during this transition period.

Death of Service Member

Although death and dying are a part of mortality, the loss of a loved one while serving in the military is sudden and painful. Even with a knowledge and testimony of the plan of salvation and the atoning sacrifice of the Savior, family members will experience sadness and loneliness as they face life without their loved one. These and other feelings are part of the grief process.

If a deployed service member is killed in action (KIA) or dies from other causes, a military Survivor/Casualty Assistance Officer (SAO/CAO) will notify the family before the information is released publicly. The SAO/CAO will assist the family with processing military and life insurance death benefit claims, since military pay stops at the death of the service member. The officer will work closely with the family to ensure that proper military honors, memorial or funeral services, and burial of the deceased service member are provided for the family. The family should contact their bishop or branch president as soon as possible so he can coordinate with the family, the mortuary directors, and military officials to ensure that funeral services are planned appropriately and serve as a source of comfort to the spouse, children, parents, and other relatives of the deceased. Depending on the nature of the deceased member's injuries, it may not be appropriate to have an open casket viewing before the funeral services. Since it is customary for military members to be buried in their military uniform, it is important to coordinate with the mortuary director to ensure endowed members are buried in their temple clothing. If it is not possible to clothe the deceased member's body in his or her temple clothes, the temple clothes should be laid inside the casket for burial.

Additional Questions or Assistance

It is impossible to address every situation that could occur in the lives of military families, but hopefully the pamphlet titled *[Supporting Military Families](#)* will answer many questions and serve as a valuable resource. In addition, the [list of military and other resources](#) can be extremely helpful for military families. If service members have additional questions or need further assistance, they can contact Military Relations at 801-240-2286 or by e-mail at PST-Military@ldschurch.org.

Military and Other Resources

Resource	Web Site or E-mail Address	Phone Number
Military OneSource (great resource for active duty, National Guard, reserves, and their families)	www.militaryonesource.com	800-342-9647 (consultant will provide assistance 24/7)
Army Families Online (resource for Army families)	www.armyfamiliesonline.org	
U.S. Army Family Web site (additional resources for Army families)	www.myarmylifetoo.com	
U.S. Air Force Home Page	www.af.mil	
U.S. Marine Corps Home Page	www.usmc.mil	
U.S. Navy Home Page	www.navy.mil	
U.S. Army Home Page	www.army.mil	
U.S. Army Reserve Page	www.armyreserve.army.mil	
National Guard Home Page	www.1800goguard.com	
Troop and Family Counseling Services for National Guard and Reserves		888-775-9355
Veterans' Affairs (VA benefits and facilities)	www.va.gov	800-827-1000
Tricare (active-duty medical care)	www.tricare.osd.mil	

Resource	Web Site or E-mail Address	Phone Number
Family Support/Readiness Groups (FSG)/(FRG) (family support at local unit level)	Each military unit will have an e-mail address for the FSG/FRG	Each unit will have a phone number for the FSG/FRG
National Military Family Association (NMFA) (educates families concerning their rights, benefits, and resources)	www.nmfa.org	
Church Military Relations (support for members serving in the military, chaplain opportunities, group leaders, and so on)	www.lds.org (click Serving in the Church , then Military Relations)	801-240-2286 or toll-free 800-453-3860, ext. 2-2286
American Red Cross (provides emergency communications that link military service members with their families)	www.redcross.org	
Mental Health Resource Foundation	www.mentalhealthlibrary.info	800-723-1760
Provident Living	www.providentliving.org	

Glossary of Military Terms

American Red Cross—A U.S. service agency that can make contact with the deployed service member through military channels and request that emergency leave be granted in cases of serious illness, imminent death, or death of a close family member. The service member generally will not be allowed to go on emergency leave without verification of the illness or death by the Red Cross. This agency is known for its benevolence throughout the world. It is also responsible to provide assistance during natural disasters and emergencies.

Chaplains—Chaplains are military officers from various faith groups who advise their commanders on moral, ethical, and spiritual matters. Their primary responsibility is to ensure that free exercise of religion is afforded to all service members and their families regardless of their religious affiliation. They may serve on active duty or with the reserves or National Guard.

Deployment—A military unit that mobilizes for contingency operations, usually in conjunction with wartime operations, United Nations peacekeeping operations, humanitarian operations, or training exercises. The length of the deployment can vary from a few days to many months.

Family Readiness Group (FRG)—The Family Readiness Group is a formally recognized and sanctioned volunteer group of unit family members and loved ones supported by unit officers and enlisted personnel. The group provides information to and support for families and members of the unit, especially during periods of separation.

National Guard—The National Guard is a unique state-based military force shared by the state and federal government. Members of the Army and Air National Guard perform duty a minimum of 39 days per year but often much more. They can be called upon to augment active military forces in times of national emergency and serve their states and local communities when natural disasters and other contingencies occur. When on state duty—and some state and federal shared duty—they are under the tactical and administrative control of the governor. When mobilized or performing strictly federal duty, they are under the control of the president.

Reserves—All branches of service have a reserve component that is similar to the National Guard. However, their annual minimum required duty days may vary. Unlike the National Guard, they are under the tactical and administrative control of the federal government, not the states. Reservists may be mobilized and deploy in response to national emergencies.

Survivor/Casualty Assistance Officer (SAO/CAO)—A military officer assigned to notify the family or next of kin of the death of a service member. The SAO/CAO plays an integral role in the funeral and burial plans of the deceased service member. He should be consulted and work in close contact with the bishop or branch president who presides at the services and with the funeral director.