

COMMUNICATE HONESTLY. Be honest about your feelings and expectation for the reunion. Encourage your Soldier to do likewise. Remember the part about being understanding.

Avoid blunders. Communicate!



DON'T PUSH. Homecoming is joy mixed liberally with stress. Your Soldier may have seen and done things that he or she won't want to talk about. Don't rush things. Your Soldier needs time. Your Soldier may never want to talk about some things. Let your Soldier decide how much he or she wants to talk about the deployment and the duty. Especially at homecoming time, let it be. Don't be in a hurry. yourself as well. You can't really make up for lost time, so don't try too hard. Just use your time together wisely and lovingly. Take time to get used to being together again. Take time for yourself as well.

BE SUPPORTIVE. Did your Soldier get deployed to a combat zone? Any time spent in this environment will be stressful. Coming back home is the first opportunity to start letting go of that stress. Don't remind Soldiers of this stress upon their return. It is just the same for you. Your time spent apart was filled with stress as well. Remember to talk about the good things that took place first! Start letting the stress of the challenges you faced fade away. Everyone has a transition to make. Show your appreciation, and ask those in attendance to do the same. Again, not everything will be perfect. Remember that this is reality, not fantasy. And the reality is that there is often so much stress after the homecoming that someone may need counseling. **If you need it, get it. It will be there for you.**

HAVE FUN! Yes, there will be some solemn moments, but remember that this is a celebration. Laugh, love, and loosen up. Smiles and laughter should rule the day. The homecoming of a Soldier is a joyous occasion. Be a fun part of the homecoming. Don't overdo the alcohol. Have designated drivers.

Be safe.

Be happy.

You've earned it!



TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL REUNION



MOBILIZATION & DEPLOYMENT READINESS

772-0470



SHOW YOUR PRIDE. A positive attitude is crucial. If your Soldier's unit has a ceremony for returning Soldiers, attend it. If your Soldier is not returning as part of a unit, create your own ceremony. Invite friends and family. Tie some yellow ribbons around the place. Hang some bunting. Hold up a banner. Give the kids some small flags to wave. Heck, give everybody flags! Have some people say a few words. It's OK to be corny and sentimental. It doesn't matter what the ceremony is as long as you show your love, your appreciation, your gratitude and your pride. Soldiers understand ceremonies. They will appreciate it. A banner is always a great addition. It is also a great activity to get the kids involved. Go to a party store and get some military or patriotic cups, plates and napkins. Add some streamers, balloons and confetti. If anything, this is the easiest part. A quick web search will turn up lots of ideas for decoration themes.



FOOD, REFRESHMENTS & PREP. These are a must, even for a short celebration. People will be waiting, probably longer than you plan. Have something to drink and something to nibble on, and a decorated cake is a great idea. Remember the kids. Give them something that does not have TOO much sugar or they will be bouncing off the walls. You might want to have some games or activities to keep them occupied until the festivities start.

DO IT RIGHT. Your Soldier may or may not know much flag etiquette, but they will notice when things are just not right. Never let a flag touch ground. Don't give flags to tiny tots. They will just drag them on the ground, and that disrespects the flag. If you hang a flag, the blue field with the stars always goes to the upper left, whether you hang it vertically or horizontally. The national flag always goes to the right of or above other flags. Right is the position of honor, and so the U.S. flag is positioned behind and to the right of the head table or speaker as he or she sits or stands facing the group. Instead of flags for decorating tables and hallways and doorways and such, it is really a good idea to use plastic or paper bunting, that decorative material with the stars and stripes. There are no "rules" to follow for bunting, and it looks great.



DO IT ONCE. Have one big homecoming celebration. Your hero needs to figure out what it means to be normal again. There may be TV coverage at the airport, but the family should do just one welcoming celebration. After that, start finding out what the new normal is. Your Soldier will appreciate some home cooking, some of the simple things in life. Your Soldier's life and the Families life have not been simple for a while. Let yourselves come down to earth.



INCLUDE YOUR SOLDIER IN YOUR PLANS. It is OK to make the homecoming celebration a surprise, but involve your Soldier as soon as possible in the reunion process. What is comfortable? Where do the kids and parents fit in? How do friends fit in? Plan for rest and relaxation. Your Soldier has likely been stressed for some time, so he or she will need time to decompress.

