

## THE IRAQ WAR: HINTS FOR HAPPY HOMECOMINGS

### Why Do I Have Mixed Feelings?

Homecomings bring out all sorts of feelings. Spouses, children, and parents are happy to have their loved ones return. It is usually easy to experience and share this happiness and other "positive" feelings.

However, many people are surprised by the appearance of "negative" feelings that often accompany homecomings. Anger, confusion, and anxiety are normal reactions (which may be more difficult to acknowledge and express).

For example, before the reunion a spouse at home may resent the impending loss of newly gained freedom and independence. Family members may be anxious about whether others will approve of decisions made during the separation.

### Why Isn't Everything Perfect Now That He/She Is Home?

During the war everyone dreams that the return of (or to) loved ones will mark the beginning of a perfect life. However, old family and personal problems tend to reappear and new ones may surface.

Returning military may expect home life to be like it was prior to the war. They may be confused and upset by the changes made in their absence. They may even wonder if they are really needed. The family who stayed at home may have similar feelings.

It takes time for a family to start functioning again as a unit. This can be stressful and may cause conflict. Arguments may be more common; intimacy and sexual relations may be strained.

It is helpful to know that these difficulties are normal and usually pass. It is also helpful to talk openly and keep a sense of humor. This period of renegotiation can be an opportunity for a marriage to grow and become more solid.

### How Long Before We Return To Normal?

The time needed to adjust to being together again varies from family to family. Within several weeks most families have gradually settled into routines. Some of these may be different from those established before the war.

Consider that counseling or therapy may be appropriate for any of the following: 1) unusual depression or anger, 2) self-destructive behaviors (such as drug or alcohol abuse), or 3) an unusually long period of time taken to readjust.

### Can A Support Group Be Helpful Now?

Yes. Support groups give people an opportunity to learn that their "strange" feelings are often normal and are shared by many others.

Support groups also give people a place to share resources and learn new ways to deal with problems (such as unemployment, drug abuse, and domestic violence).

Speaking of support, realize that only those who have been in battle can really understand what it is like to be in the line of fire. Veterans can provide a unique type of support for returning military personnel. Family (especially spouses) need not be upset when they find out that they can't be all things to their loved ones.

### How Do We Say "Thank You?"

Parades are good public ways to let soldiers know that they are appreciated. However, these are one time events and are often planned for those who return first.

Design a welcome program to include all soldiers regardless of when (or from where) they return. Make the program flexible. Some people may be uncomfortable participating in public events or may prefer a more private welcome. Consider giving every soldier a memento (such as a thank you note from a child at a local school).

### One Last Word

Above all, be good to yourselves. You and your loved ones have been under tremendous strain. Give yourselves time to heal.