



Óglaigh
na hÉireann
IRISH DEFENCE FORCES



Overseas Service Guidance Booklet for Defence Forces Families



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Pre-Deployment



SECTION 1

PRE-DEPLOYMENT

INTRODUCTION

Throughout their careers Defence Forces personnel are required to serve away from their families for a variety of reasons for varying lengths of time. The term “deployment” usually brings to mind Peacekeeping, although our personnel are “deployed” at other times as well for operations and exercises.

When a soldier is preparing for deployment overseas to any part of the world there are more than just the Military aspects of preparation to be dealt with. The needs of families and extended families must be taken into account before, during and following a mission. The issues covered in this section apply equally to both serving members and their spouses/partners and are directed towards both. So you should both carefully read what is outlined and discuss the issues that are of concern to either one of you and, together, make decisions that will help you both. Single serving members will also benefit from the contents of this booklet much of which equally applies to them.

Pre-deployment issues for both serving members and their families can be broken into four (4) key areas;

- **Personal Matters**
- **Financial Management**
- **Preparing for Separation**
- **Resources available**

PERSONAL MATTERS

Pay Issues

The following are matters for each soldier to take responsibility for, as necessary. However, it will be useful for you to be aware of them also. Have you both discussed this matter and have you both come to satisfactory decisions regarding how his/her pay will be handled while your spouse/partner is overseas? Are you aware of the arrangements for receiving his/her pay and when the first payday will be after deployment?

Family Documents

Are all your family documents in a safe and accessible place, and do you know how to gain access to them?

Wills

Has your spouse/partner made out a will and decided who will be the executor of it? Where is the will being held and how would you have access to it? Do you know who the Executor and Solicitor are and how to contact them?

Insurance Policies

What kind of insurance policies are in place for you and your family? Are they Civilian or Military arranged? What Company are they with and how are the premiums paid? Most importantly, where are the actual policy documents located, and do you have easy access to them? Also, how are the premiums paid and when are they due for payment?

Other issues to be considered in relation to Civilian Life Assurance policies are as follows:

- Is your spouse/partner definitely covered while serving overseas?
- Is the Insurance Company aware that he/she is a member of the Defence Forces?
- Will the policy premium be loaded for the period he/she is serving overseas?
- Does the Insurance Company need to be notified before your spouse/partner departs overseas?

It is advisable that soldiers contact the Insurance Company concerned and discuss the issues mentioned above. It would be even more advantageous to have the Insurance Company concerned answer these questions in writing, as this can alleviate difficult situations later, for example if the company decides to put a loading on a policy premium for the duration of overseas service.

Military Insurance Policies GANBO/CAFNBO and CAOGA.

Again there are some practical steps soldiers should take in relation to these policies before departure:

- Has your spouse/partner named the correct beneficiary on his/her documentation?
- If a soldier has been married, separated or divorced since entering the scheme, is the beneficiary now the correct person?

Relationships

Personnel who are experiencing domestic relationship difficulties should address these issues before departure. Problems do not go away just because you go overseas. They will still be there for both of you when your spouse/partner returns. In fact, if left unresolved they can worsen. So it is better for both parties to sit down and come to some mutual agreement so that the difficulties you may both be experiencing will be less stressful on you both during the deployment period. This also applies to difficulties concerning relationships with your children.

Legal Issues

If for any reason your spouse/partner is due to appear in Court (Family matters, driving offences etc.) and would not be able to attend due to being overseas it is advisable that he/she contact the Solicitor and attempt to have the Court date changed if possible. If a Solicitor is not involved the Court Clerk of the appropriate Court should be contacted in plenty of time to explain the situation, to see if the date can be brought forward or put back. Unless a Court hearing involves both of you, this will be your spouse/partner's responsibility to arrange. Discussing it with the Court clerk or Solicitor in good time will be your advantage in the end.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Family finances are important as we are all aware and lack of planning in this area may cause concern or difficulties. To prevent this it is important that couples devote time to this area prior to departure and devise a solid plan in relation to family finances. This takes time and should not be left to the last minute.



Some guidelines for financial arrangements prior to departure are:

- Estimate from previous bills how much will be required to run the family home.
- Consider any change in income or savings that may result from going overseas.
- Establish a system for paying bills: - Direct Debit / Payment at Local Offices.
- Do you need to start separate savings accounts to save for unforeseen circumstances?
- Decide on how Credit Cards will be used: -
 - Who will use them?
 - Is there a spending limit?
 - How do you inform each other of transactions made by shared credit card?

Once you have outlined a broad plan you can then best deal with the more detailed aspects of family finance. How much will be required for,

- Rent - Mortgage.
- Food.
- Clothing.
- Utilities - ESB / Gas / Phone / Cable TV / Fuel.
- Car maintenance.
- Car Insurance / Car Tax..
- Home maintenance.
- Childcare.
- Recreation.

So with these issues considered you can complete a checklist prior to deployment to ensure that both of you know your own financial situation.

FINANCIAL CHECKLIST

Joint Accounts for Current and Savings Accounts

You have the following Account Numbers

- Bank / Credit Union Books
- Cheque Books
- ATM Cards and PIN Numbers
- On line banking code

You Know the

- Amount of all Loans
- Payment Dates
- Address and Phone No's of Loan Companies

You are aware of routine monthly / weekly bills

- Rent / Mortgage
- Utilities (gas, electricity, water charges etc.)
- Insurance Accounts
- Groceries
- Family Needs

You know where to go to for assistance

- Personnel Support Service (PSS)
- Parent Unit Liaison Officer
- Bank / Credit Union
- Chaplaincy Service

PREPARING FOR SEPARATION

The weeks and days prior to deployment overseas can be stressful for serving members and their families. Preparation and consultation between both parties may help deal with the situation where both of you are wondering what the future will hold. Even the best planning will not relieve all the stress and apprehension that you both may be feeling. It is important therefore that both parties communicate with each other at this time and express how they are feeling.

Some of the symptoms of pre-separation stress are:

ANGER

A primary emotional reaction

DENIAL

Why us? Why You?

ANXIETY

What will I do while you are away? What will the future hold.

OTHER FEELINGS

Fear, Resentment, Sadness, Clinging, Distancing.

Some of the ways to help reduce and cope with these stresses are:

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Communicate | Family and one-to-one discussions. |
| Develop | Develop plans together for staying in touch.
(Letter / Phone / E-mail) |
| Prepare | Prepare family members for his/her departure. |

Communication between family members, spouses/partners and children is vital if you are to help reduce pre-separation stress. Having family conversations where feelings and emotions are clearly communicated are helpful for all. This will give the serving member a chance to explain his/her mission to the family, tell them exactly where he/she is going, what he/she will be doing and who he/she will be with. This also gives you and your children a chance to ask questions of your own and express things that may be of concern to you.

Pre-Deployment

This is a time for the whole family to work together, help each other to understand what's going on and, to explore fears and anxieties. If members of the family are having difficulty expressing their fears and emotions, especially children, be patient and understanding, encourage them to talk and most importantly both of you taking the time to listen to them.

The easiest and cheapest way to stay in touch is by Email, Video Calls (Skype/Facetime) and letter. In many cases there is nothing nice that receiving a letter and this can be very good for both the sender and receiver.

Children should be encouraged to write and post their own letters and to include photos and drawings in them. There is nothing more special to a child than to receive his or her own letter, so do encourage your spouse/partner to write to your children individually and tell them what you are up to and ask them questions so this will help them when they reply to letters.

Phone/Video calls are wonderful things and hearing and seeing your spouse/partner can be reassuring and relaxing. Phone/Video calls should be encouraged where possible but once again remember the cost factor as International phone calls can be expensive. So try and plan for this by arranging a time and date for the phone call and having all the family together when the phone call comes. This can help in two ways:

- Family and extended family can meet and keep up to date.
- It saves on expense of having to ring people individually.

Working together and communicating, both spouses/partners, children and families can prepare for the separation. Communication and proper planning cannot be emphasised enough.

One of the best coping strategies both of you can adopt is to take good care of yourselves. Taking good care of yourselves makes sense as it helps you to be better able to take care of you family and your personal affairs.

One very good technique for both spouses/partners is the 4 M's. **Maintain, Manage, Monitor, And Manoeuvre.** These can be used before, during and after the deployment overseas.

Maintain

- Stay in good physical condition.
- Eat balanced meals.
- Get plenty of sleep.
- Keep in touch with positive people.
- Avoid things that make you feel worse.
- Avoid spending sprees.
- Set realistic goals.

Manage

- Manage your life.
- Manage your time.
- Know your limits.

Monitor

- Be aware of the early signs of stress.
- Ask for help when you need it.

Manoeuvre

- Relieve stress - do some relaxation exercises, something that makes you feel good.
- Do a little daydreaming.
- Use coping strategies that work for yourself and your family.
- "Stop and smell the roses".

Pre-separation stress is normal and nothing to be afraid of. The most important thing for the both of you to remember is to talk about how you feel and what your concerns are. Take time to listen to each other and respect what is said.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE

Each of us within ourselves have the resources to cope with most things but there can come a time when these resources are not enough and we need some help. Within the Defence Forces we have a number of resources available to serving members and their families, which are there to assist them:

Parent Unit Liaison Officer

Each home unit with personnel overseas has a Unit Liaison Officer. Contact name and number is on the Inside cover of this booklet.

Personnel Support Service (PSS)

There is a PSS office in each barracks and post. The PSS consists of the following:

- A trained member of the Defence Forces in each barrack/post, he/she is known as the BPSSO (Barrack Personnel Support Officer)
- An officer in each Brigade/Service known as the SO PSS (Staff Officer Personnel Support Service)
- A civilian social worker covering each Brigade/ Service
- Principal Social Worker based in McKee Barracks
- Director PSS based in McKee Barracks



Chaplaincy Service

Each barrack/post has a chaplain assigned to the location.

These resources are there to help soldiers and spouses/ partners (incl. guardian of a child) whenever they are required. If you feel that you need the help of any of the above do not hesitate to contact them.



Resources outside the Defence Forces include family, extended family, good neighbours and close friends. Contact and communication with these can be most helpful and reassuring.

You should never feel that you have no one to talk to because there is always somebody there, be you at home or overseas.

Coping with life at home



SECTION 2

COPING WITH LIFE AT HOME

Introduction

Separation of family members due to overseas service, as we have said already, can be stressful. Individual family members can react differently as they are often subject to different worries, fears and anxieties before, during and after these separations.

You might experience any number of different feelings or a mixture of feelings, some of which may feel contradictory. This is common. Accept your feelings as normal reactions to challenging circumstances, and not signs of rejection. These feelings include:

- Emptiness
- Loneliness
- Fear
- Anger
- Grief

Accept your feelings as normal reactions to challenging circumstances, and not signs of rejection.

COPING STRATEGIES

Here are some things you can do to help yourself and family members to cope with the separation;

Family and Friends

It is important to learn to cope and accept help from friends and relatives. Increase rather than decrease contact with your family and friends. Do not withdraw from social contact. Your family will be your biggest support system while your spouse/partner is away.

Neighbours

Aim to know at least three neighbours. You may need their help in an emergency, and they can offer day-to-day support.

Work

If you work full-time, work out in advance what plans need to be put in place for school holidays etc, if both of you usually share responsibility for this.

Social Contact

The company of children is not enough to satisfy the social needs of an adult no matter how busy one is. Social contacts must be kept with other adults. You as a person cannot be expected to exclude yourself from social activities because your spouse/partner is overseas. If you are used to your social life being mainly linked to your spouse/partner, use the time apart to try some new activity on your own.

Routine / Relaxation / Interests

It is a good idea to organise a regular routine and to take account of the changed situation in the home. This includes organising time for yourself “to put your feet up” and relax. Some other things you can consider are:

- Try to find a baby-sitter occasionally, or ask family to help out; take the time to do something enjoyable for yourself.
- Try to get involved in some ongoing activity within the community, or make time to keep up an activity you already enjoy.
- Consider taking a part time job or course while the children are at school.
- Maintain existing hobbies / interests where you can or if you don't have one take up something new.

COPING WITH YOUR CHILDREN

Children in the family may react differently to the absence of a parent. The important thing is to understand these reactions. You can then do something about them.

Tell the children's teachers that Dad or Mum is going abroad on overseas service so they will have more of an understanding of behavioural reactions and will be able to help and identify possible problem areas.

Children in the family should be encouraged to share their feelings about their Dad or Mum's absence. Unexpressed feelings often appear disguised as aggression and inappropriate behaviour. The more the feelings can be



voiced, the easier it is to accept them and function normally. At different times, they may express sadness, anger, loneliness and resentment. Don't ever demand that they be "strong" and hide tears. Listen to them, and reassure them that whatever they feel, it is okay and normal to feel that way.

Young children can be unable to express their sadness so they could "act it out" by having temper tantrums, refusing to go to school, performing less well at school, clinging to Mum/Dad, or fretting. The important thing is to understand these reactions.

Routine is important. Keep the same rules and family schedules as best you can. Children need the stability of unbroken routines.

- Avoid letting an older child slip into the role of the head of the household.
- Avoid school changes.
- Keep the child in its own bed.

Reminding. To help the family to keep the absent parent in mind, you could do the following;

- Put photos of Dad/Mum in suitable places around the home.
- Give your children a photo of Dad/Mum for themselves.
- Pin up a map of where Dad/Mum is stationed.
- Mark on a wall calendar when Dad/Mum went abroad, if and when he/she will be home on holidays and when he/she is coming home at the end of the tour of duty. Relate the remaining days to tangible events in the child's life.



Constant chat about a parent who is away is important even though it may be slightly upsetting.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

Good communication is essential in times of separation and plays a critical role in maintaining an emotional presence of the person not physically present. Try to keep in touch regularly through letters, email, social media and/or video calls using skype or facetime. When writing, tell of any achievements and progress made in any project you have planned.

Encourage your children to write to their parent and to include drawings or pictures too, as this will help them to maintain their relationship with him/her. Remember that e-mail facilities may be limited, with soldiers competing to use them. Soldiers tend to equate the amount of mail they get with how much they are loved. Spouses/Partners should be realistic about the mail. Deployment areas are notorious for lousy mail service, especially early in operations. Spouses/Partners should also agree on the writing schedule and when to expect post, or simply understand the writing habits of the other. Love letters tend to avalanche at the beginning and then gradually taper off to more realistic frequencies.

Try to arrange a particular time and day for video/phone calls. It can be helpful to make a list of the points you want to talk about, between your last and your next phone call. Unexpected, non-emergency phone calls can be a worry for the person receiving them who may think there is something wrong. Keep this in mind as the serving member may not be near a phone, PC or Tablet and may have to make arrangements to get to one in order to ring you back.

If any serious incident is reported in the newspapers or radio or TV news do not allow any rumours to cause you unnecessary worry. It is always advisable in these cases to contact the Parent Unit Liaison Officer who can give you the most up to date news.

Take care with mobile phone access. If coverage is available in the overseas mission area, it is a great help for families keeping in touch. However, sometimes it is “too instant”, and problems are passed on immediately whereas they may end up being sorted out quite easily. The person away, or at home may be left worrying unnecessarily and feeling powerless to sort out something which ends up being blown out of proportion.

Whatever difficulties or emergencies you may experience, or whenever you feel the need to talk with someone who understands your situation, contact your;

- Parent Unit Liaison Officer
- Personnel Support Service
- Chaplain



The Reunion

SECTION 3

THE REUNION

Introduction

Personnel returning from an overseas tour of duty or going on leave from the mission area usually experience feelings of excitement, anticipation and sometimes anxiety. This section of the booklet is designed to make members of the Defence Forces and their families aware that difficulties may occur on the return of a family member from overseas service but that these difficulties can be managed. It will offer some suggestions as to how the reunion may be managed so as to cause as little upheaval to family life as possible.

People, both those returning from overseas and their families at home, often share some common reactions to the homecoming. Some examples of these are an increased level of activity and energy, disruptions to sleep and appetite, a lack of concentration, feelings of joy, apprehension, impatience, and excitement. Some people may experience difficulty in renewing relationships. Some of the common reactions that people have are experiencing difficulty in re-establishing intimacy, emotional as well as physical. Some people may experience grief at the loss of independence. This applies to both returning personnel and the family members at home.

You should realise that these feelings are a normal reaction to the change in lifestyle that you are experiencing. Listed in the next few pages are just some suggestions to help make the homecoming a less stressful time.

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS BEFORE THE REUNION

Share your expectations of the homecoming. Some families will prefer to have as many extended family members as possible at the reunion while others might prefer spouse/partner and children only.

Think realistically about the homecoming. Don't build a fantasy homecoming in your head. Include children in the planning of the homecoming.

Reassure your partner of your love and commitment. People can be very anxious about obvious changes such as hair or weight and may need

reassurance and acceptance. View the reunion as an opportunity to put into practice some positive changes in family relationships.

There will be times that you may feel that you don't have enough space. This can be a strange feeling as both of you have been used to coping alone. It may take time to get used to living together again as you both have been independent people. Take time to discuss these issues with your spouse/partner when they arise and express your feelings and thoughts to each other. You will find that you will come to a compromise and this will cut out unnecessary arguments. For some people starting to live together again after a period of absence is like starting their relationship all over again.

Suggestions for Returning Member

- Only inform your family of officially confirmed information of your return. (Date, time etc.).
- Listen to how you speak. Language that you may have used in a military environment while you were away may not be appropriate at home.
- Express to your family your appreciation for their support for you while you were away.
- Look for signs of growth and development in your children and comment favourably on it.
- Curb the desire to leap in and take over the reins;
- Go easy spending your money – think and plan
- Be prepared for discussions on changes in family/domestic responsibilities.
- Support good things your family has done.
- Take time to talk to your spouse/partner and family.
- Make time for Individual children and your spouse/partner.
- Go slow to re-establish your place In the family.
- Previous problems may crop up again – do something about them this time.
- Include your family in any socialising.
- Be prepared to make some adjustments.
- Romantic conversation can make re-entering love relations easier.
- Go easy on the parties.

The Reunion

Suggestions for Spouse/Partner at Home

- Ignore rumours and only rely on official information in relation to the homecoming (date, time, etc.).
- Remember that your children may be experiencing confusing feelings in relation to the homecoming.
- Avoid organising too many homecoming activities. The normal routine of a busy household may be challenging enough for your returning partner.
- Go slow on making adjustments.
- You and your spouse/partner may need time for yourself.
- Remind soldiers they are still needed in the family.
- Discuss splitting up family chores.
- Stick to your budget until you have had time to talk it over.
- Along with time for the family, make individual time to talk.
- Patients is a key to re-building a relationship.

THE REUNION

Suggestions for Returning Member

- Reaffirm your bond with your children through attentive listening and play.
- Try to resist the urge to take control of situations.
- Remember that your family took time to adjust to your leaving so allow them time to adjust to your return. Try to renegotiate your roles and responsibilities- the workload can again be shared, but perhaps in a new way.
- Make yourself aware of any family rituals that may have changed while you were away (bedtimes, mealtimes, etc.). Celebrate together the personal growth each has achieved during the separation.
- Take time to be reacquainted with your partner. Some couples will need time to reconnect emotionally before resuming sexual intimacy.
- Do not take it as a comment on your partner's love for you if he or she is not ready when you are.
- Remember that it is you and not your family who has been exposed to a different culture for the preceding months.
- Seek professional help (PSS, Chaplain, Medical Corps) for continuing signs of Critical Incident Stress or other concerns.

Suggestions for Spouse/Partner at Home

- Remember that your partner has been living in a different culture while away and may see things differently.
- There may be some tension and awkwardness between you and your partner. If you don't feel ready to resume the intimate part of your life together suggest a courtship period in order to become reacquainted.
- Enjoy being in a partnership again. Allow yourself some "time out" occasionally and let your spouse/partner experience the joys and frustrations of parenting alone.

Sexual Relationships

As partners you must work to create understanding about how you feel regarding your intimate relationship with each other. This is hard work. Don't take anything for granted. Your partner's needs may not be the same as yours. It is important that you both take your time in re-establishing your total relationship of which intimacy is a vital part. It is important that neither partner should feel under pressure to perform just because one partner wants to. The adage "it takes two to tango" is just as valid here as anywhere else.

It takes time, patience and understanding to acclimatise to being at home together again, adjust to new boundaries and re-establish intimacy as partners. But whatever the case communicate with your partner in an open and honest manner about what you feel your needs are and be equally sensitive and aware of your partner's needs.

Establish good communication and trust. Intimacy involves a physical and psychological presence. After a period abroad don't expect things to be exactly the same as they were when you left. Time apart can allow doubts and fears to creep into a relationship. Your expectations and those of your spouse/partner can vary so don't assume everything will magically fall into place the way it was before. Like any jigsaw the emotional jigsaw requires time and patience to re-establish the emotional fit. It is not magical, it is hard work and it is rewarding.

The Reunion

Don't expect too much the first time. Enjoy the process of getting back together. Tune in to your partner. Have patience, give reassurance and show respect. Establish intimacy (talking and trust). Do special things - dinner, a flower, a hug. Comment on special things - dinner, personal appearance, etc.

- Practice makes perfect - give it time.
- Tell each other your expectations.
- Talk about any problems (e.g., orgasm, too fast for mutual satisfaction).
- Have fun.

Roadblocks to Satisfying Sex:

- Jealousy (not talking honestly).
- Anxiety (about performance or other matters such as fidelity).
- Going too fast/too slow (not being sensitive to partners cues).
- No 'courtship' (no romantic talk, no foreplay, no attempt to meet each others needs, no after play).
- Children in the house.
- Visitors/relatives around.
- Anger/resentment.
- Illness/fatigue.
- Too much alcohol.

CONCERNING THE CHILDREN SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS

Parents should remember that a reunion may be a stressful time for children. Children have fewer life experiences and are therefore less aware of the coping mechanisms that we all have. Parents should be patient with their children. Welcome rather than demand affection and attention from them.

- Don't force your child to hug, kiss or play. Give them time.
- If you have a young baby play with him/her while your partner holds him/her.
- Be affectionate and playful with your spouse, young children will join in.
- Reinforce your love for your children - tell them that you love them unconditionally.

- Express an interest in your children's pursuits.
- Praise them for their efforts during the separation.
- Ask them for their opinions and listen to what they have to say.
- Review their schoolwork with them.
- If you have teenagers respect their privacy and their friends.
- Encourage teens to share their experiences while you have been away and share some appropriate experiences of your own.



Common Reactions of Children

A child's reaction to a parent's return from a long absence is primarily determined by age and stage of development. Other important factors may be the quality and nature of the parent-child relationship prior to departure on overseas duty and the degree of contact during the separation.

0-1 Year: Crying and clinging to the at-home parent. Non-recognition of returning parent. Turning away from returning parent. A change in the child's eating and sleeping habits.

1-3 Years: Shyness, clinging to the at-home parent. Resistance to being held by the returning parent. Fearful that parent may disappear again.

3-5 Years: Child may feel angry or guilty that parent went away. May want to test limits with returning parent.

The Reunion

5-12 Years: Child may feel guilty or angry about what they did, or didn't do, while parent was away. Non-stop talking to the returning parent. The child may want to show off the returning parent to friends and peers. May demand more of your time than other children.

12-18 Years: Teenagers may feel guilty about not living up to expectations. They may feel ambivalent towards the returning parent because it imposes another set of changes in their lifestyle. They may focus more on peer relationships and want to be with their friends instead of family. They may be torn by loyalties to the spouse/partner who remained.

SINGLE MEMBERS

For a lot of young members this may have been their first prolonged absence from their family and home. They may have undergone significant changes (physical, emotional, spiritual, and psychological) during their tour overseas. Patience and tolerance will be required to accept and integrate these changes.

Suggestions for Returning Single Members

Be aware that you may feel on a high for a few days, full of bravado, an increased sense of physical and mental strength. This is normal - you have spent a long period in a strange and tense operational area and now you are in a familiar and peaceful one. It will pass. You will come down to earth soon enough.

Concentrate on restoring family and friend relationships. Don't be surprised or disappointed if family and civilian friends do not understand what you've been through. In fairness how could they? Don't become a bore. Get into what's happening at home. Keep the war-stories for an appropriate time.

You may feel lonely and miss the overseas experience and the people you met there. Maintain contact with colleagues from your overseas trip. Talk to them about your homecoming and benefit from their support. Don't overdo this contact at the expense of other friendships - you'll be back together again when your leave is over.

- Maintain financial plans you may have made and don't go on spending sprees.
- Maintain a proper diet. Try to keep fit. Get enough sleep. Don't overdo the parties. Be aware of your alcohol consumption.
- Talk to trusted people about any problems you may be experiencing.

Suggestions for Parents/Families of Single Members

- Be patient and let the person returning from overseas know that you are interested in hearing about their experiences when they are ready to talk.
- Show that you accept and support signs of their increasing independence and maturity.
- If possible have contact with the families of other personnel serving overseas. You may be able to share your concerns or frustrations with people who are probably having similar experiences.
- If you identify readjustment problems talk to someone early so that guidance or assistance can be provided to you and your family as soon as you need or want it. You may contact some or any of the personnel mentioned below who are in place in the Defence Forces to assist you.

Parent Unit Liaison Officer

Each unit with personnel overseas has a Unit Liaison Officer

Personnel Support Service

There is a PSS office in each barracks and post.

Medical Corps

Chaplaincy Service

SLEEP

Sleep is essential for your health, memory, concentration, and energy. Without sleep, people find it hard to work and get things done. Most of us do things around bedtime that make us sleepy and ready for bed. Some people use warm milk, a favourite book, or late-night TV to help them settle down. Others don't like TV or reading close to bedtime, and won't find it relaxing. The things you do before bedtime (especially the last hour beforehand) strongly effect your ability to sleep. Different people need different amounts of sleep to stay healthy, so there is no definite amount of sleep you should have.



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Dreaming and traumatic grief

As well as adding to your physical well-being, sleep also allows us to dream. We use dreams to make sense of our emotions, organise our memories, and prepare ourselves for the day to come. Dreams can be senseless, enjoyable, or utterly terrifying, but they all have a use. Nightmares and upsetting dreams are normal following a shock or sudden event. Some dreams might be about what happened or about a person who died. These usually become less frightening and more general as you come to terms with what happened.

Sometimes dreams can be so vivid or upsetting that they wake you up. Other times someone else might wake you up because you are having a nightmare. Dreams that don't end naturally are the most distressing and least helpful because they are more likely to be remembered. If you start remembering your bad dreams, spend time thinking about their underlying causes, or ask other people not to wake you up even if you are having a bad dream.

What are sleep disturbances?

Sleep disturbance can be:

- difficulty getting to sleep
- difficulty getting good quality sleep
- difficulty staying asleep - nightwaking or waking very early in the morning

Usually people are able to work out their ideal sleeping pattern by themselves, but sometimes our sleeping habits will change. Everyone has difficulty sleeping at some stage in their lives. Usually this is temporary, most likely caused by one of the following:

- stress or difficulty relaxing
- background noise
- high or low temperatures
- changing where you sleep (sleeping in a different room/bed)
- change of sleeping hours or bedtime
- side effects of medication, drugs, or alcohol

What makes sleep disturbance worse?

- Drinking tea, coffee, and caffeine drinks at night
- Drinking alcohol
- Smoking before you go to bed
- Lack of exercise
- Napping during the day
- Not having a regular bedtime
- Watching TV throughout the night
- Changes to your bedtime routine
- Worrying about not sleeping

Long term or chronic sleep disturbance can be harder to overcome, and will affect your emotions, concentration, work, appearance, and health.

Sleep disturbance is normal following a traumatic incident. With time, your sleeping patterns should return to normal without any outside help; however, there are some things you can do which help many people overcome their sleeping difficulties.

Improving sleep

You may find that, following a traumatic incident, you cannot relax or get to sleep like you used to. Relaxation, exercise, diet, and planning are ways of improving sleep that do not carry risk and are useful in the long and short term. (Some people find that sleeping pills, alcohol, etc. can help them get to sleep quicker in the early stages. In the long run these make it more difficult to sleep and feel refreshed.)

Awareness and Preparation – there are hundreds of cures for sleep disturbance: it is important you decide on what works for you. Some people need to sleep with music on and some people need total silence. Only you can make these individual choices. Try out different things and see what works for you.

Remember that your sleeping habits change over time. For example, it is normal to be uneasy for a while after a traumatic incident, and you may want to sleep with a light on or in a room with someone else. These are natural feelings, and not being alone or in the dark helps people to relax and get to sleep quicker. However, in the long term, going to sleep with a light on is not always practical or useful, so you may gradually want to go back to sleeping in the dark.

Distraction – thoughts and memories of what happened can sometimes stop you getting to sleep (or back to sleep). These thoughts can be brought on by a dream or nightmare, by something that reminded you of what happened, or sometimes at random. Distraction is a good way of dealing with these thoughts if they prevent sleep. It involves:

- switching your attention away from images or thoughts that are keeping you awake before they can play out in your head.
- focussing on a sensation, image, memory, or action (e.g. counting backwards from 100) to block out all other thoughts.

Prepare and practice a way to distract yourself at night. Some people like to keep soft music in the background (low volume), other people use relaxation (see later in the book).

Relaxation – most people are good at finding at least one or two relaxation techniques that they find calming. However, not every relaxation technique will work for you, and you may find that the ways you used to relax don't work as well anymore. Some people will benefit more from regular exercise (which is also a good for reducing stress). The following are some popular ways of relaxing:

- Taking a bath
- Watching TV/Video
- Playing sport
- Talking with a friend
- Listening to music
- Muscular relaxation
- Relaxation tape
- Reading a book
- Taking long walks
- Exercising
- Prayer/Meditation
- Deep breathing
- Positive thoughts/images

Once you know how you want to relax:

- Make sure that you get enough time to relax during each day or week;
- Practice your technique so that you get the full benefit;
- Have at least one way of calming down quickly (e.g. deep breathing).

It is a good idea to learn at least one formal relaxation method such as controlled breathing, positive imagery, or progressive muscular relaxation.

Guidelines

Take a flexible approach – your needs and emotions change as you work through the changes in your life. Be flexible and creative in helping yourself.

- What works for one person may not work for another
- What works at one time may not work later on
- Men and women are likely to have different coping methods
- Be prepared to try different approaches

The Reunion

Develop a bedtime routine – a bedtime routine is useful for letting your body know it should get ready for sleep. Preparing for sleep can start either much earlier than bedtime (e.g. avoid caffeine, nicotine, or alcohol 4-6 hours before sleep) or five minutes beforehand (e.g. drinking warm milk) depending on your needs. If you have high levels of muscle tension or stress take at least a half an hour to unwind before going to bed (e.g. take a warm shower/bath, listen to music).

Staying in bed when you cannot sleep can make things worse. If you cannot sleep after you've gone to bed, get up and keep yourself occupied. Do something relaxing that doesn't make you more alert. Avoid eating, turning on bright lights, and listening to loud or exciting TV/music. Once you feel sleepy, go back to bed.

- Identify your favourite ways of relaxing at night
- Avoid doing things that make you more alert (drinking tea/coffee, clock-watching, computer games)
- Get up and do something relaxing if you cannot sleep (make warm milk, listen to low music)
- Try not to nap or lie in bed during the day
- Getting restful relaxation is almost as good as sleep, so try not to worry about it if you stay awake

Distract yourself – if you can't sleep because you are thinking about what happened, do something to keep your mind occupied. Try low level music, relaxation exercises, or some other pleasant, calming activity.

- Try different distractions until you find one that works well for you
- Practice using your favourite distraction
- Use relaxation at night or exercise during the day to reduce stress

Make time to think about what happened – set some time aside every day or week to think about what happened. Do this during the day and give yourself time afterwards to relax. You may want to spend this time in private, with a friend, or with a member of PSS, or chaplain or a therapist/counsellor. Many people use this time to create a diary or scrap book to help work through their feelings and concerns.

- Make time for reflection in your daily or weekly routine
- Plan what has to be done in this time (e.g. thinking, writing)
- Allow time afterwards for relaxation

Practice relaxation – relaxation is the quickest way to prepare for sleep. You can practice it alone or with a partner or friend, preferably in a quiet place that you find peaceful. Spend at least ten to twenty minutes a day practicing relaxation until you feel comfortable doing it. Keep practicing even after you understand the basics, as your body will learn to relax quicker and quicker. There are three relaxation methods given at the back of this booklet that are suitable for most people.

- Choose your favourite method of relaxation and practice it regularly
- Make time during your day to practice (not just at bedtime)
- Try using more than one technique (e.g. muscular relaxation and then controlled breathing)
- Decide whether to guide your own relaxation or to have instructions played from a tape or read out by a friend.
- Involve a friend or family member to help you

The future

Most people will have some sleep disturbance following a traumatic incident. Sleep usually returns to normal after a time. If sleep disturbance affects your work, education, family, health, etc you may want to carry out some of the suggestions included in this booklet to help you get back to your normal routine. People whose sleep does not return to normal should consult their MO/ GP for further information on sleep disturbance or help with related difficulties (such as anxiety or intrusions). Sleep disturbances relating to a traumatic incident can appear immediately or after a number of years. Be prepared for sleeping habits to change in the future in response to further life changes, anniversaries, or other reminders, and refer back to the guidelines for advice.

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

Deep breathing

One of the main reasons many of us are tense is our breathing. Most people breathe very shallowly, using only the top part of their lungs. Deep breathing allows you to use your entire lungs, providing more oxygen to your body. It is probably the most effective and beneficial method of relaxation around.



1. Lie on your back or sit in a relaxed position.
2. Slowly relax your body, starting with your feet and moving through every part of your body until you have reached – and relaxed – your face and head.
3. Check over your body to see if there are any remaining areas of tension. If so, relax them.
4. Slowly breathe in:
 - a. first fill the very bottom of your stomach
 - b. then your entire stomach area
 - c. then your chest
 - d. and finally the top of your lungs almost up to your shoulders
5. Hold for a second or two, and then begin to exhale. Empty the very bottom of your lungs first, then the middle, then finally the top. Continue this breathing for 4 or 5 minutes. Don't force your breathing; it's not a contest to see how much air you can take in. Just do it in a relaxed, peaceful manner. Deep breathing is the basis of a lot of relaxation techniques, and once mastered, can be used with either progressive muscular relaxation or guided imagery to help further relaxation.

Progressive muscular relaxation

One of the most common reactions to stress is muscle tension. Deep muscle relaxation helps to relax your entire body from head to toe by first tensing, then relaxing various muscle groups. The whole process takes about 15 minutes and can be done almost anywhere.

1. Sit or lie down and close your eyes.
2. Tense the muscles in your hands by making a tight fist.
3. Hold for 5 seconds.
4. Relax your fist and feel the difference between tension and relaxation in these muscles.
5. Move on to the forearms and upper arms (both sides separately), then feet, calves, thighs, buttocks, belly, lower back, chest, shoulders, neck, and face (e.g. jaw and forehead).

By the time you have focused on all the areas of your body, your muscle tension will have drained away and you'll feel relaxed. Use deep breathing or other relaxation technique to maintain this state.

Visualise somewhere peaceful

Lie in bed with your eyes closed and imagine you are in your favourite, most peaceful place. It may be on a beach, a hilltop, a garden, or somewhere you feel peaceful. It does not have to be a real place, as long as you can picture it in your mind. Imagine you are there now. You can see your surroundings, hear the peaceful sounds, smell the fragrance of the flowers, and feel the warmth of the sun or whatever sensations are there. Just relax and enjoy it - and drift off to sleep.

Once you've found a place that's especially peaceful and effective, you'll find that the more you use it, the more you can count on it to help you relax and get to sleep. Its comfort and familiarity will make it more and more effective.

PARENT UNIT

Address _____

UNIT LIAISON OFFICER

Name _____ *Rank* _____

Unit Phone Number _____

Emergency Number _____

OVERSEAS UNIT _____

Overseas Unit Address _____
