

**Family Readiness Group  
Computer-Based Training**

**Module 16: Deployment Cycle**



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## **1. MODULE 16: DEPLOYMENT CYCLE**

Deployment is a challenging time for everyone involved. There is a predictable cycle, however, that occurs with each deployment. Understanding this five-phased cycle, and the accompanying emotions of those affected, is critical for FRG Leaders in order to effectively assist families with managing deployment.

### **Lessons**

- Emotional Aspects of the Deployment Cycle

- Pre-Deployment

- Deployment

- Re-Deployment

- Post-Deployment

- Sustainment

In this lesson, we will discuss the following FRG Leader responsibilities:

- Understanding emotional cycles.

- Understanding the Rest and Recuperation (R&R) leave policy.

- Assisting in identifying high-risk Soldiers and families.

- Collecting contact information related to individual and family R&R plans.

- Conducting reunion activities.

- Coordinating reintegration activities.

### **1.1. Emotional Aspects**

#### **1.1.1. The Deployment Cycle**

The term "deployment" refers to the movement of Soldiers, including active duty and Reserve Component (RC) Soldiers mobilized to active duty, away from their home base for training exercises and/or operational missions.

For the FRG Leader, understanding the emotional aspects of the deployment cycle is vital knowledge. The activities and events of the FRG during each phase of the deployment cycle should correspond to the emotional needs of the FRG membership at that time.

Effective FRGs meet the needs of their members and change as those needs change with each stage of the deployment cycle.

There are distinct emotions associated with each stage of the deployment cycle. Each stage is characterized both by a time frame and specific emotional challenges, which must be dealt with and mastered by each family member.

Providing information about what to expect, especially for families who have not endured a lengthy separation before, can go a long way towards "normalizing" the deployment experience.

Furthermore, promoting understanding of the stages of deployment helps to avert crises and minimize the need for command intervention or mental health counseling.

### *1.1.2. Phases*

#### Phase 1: Pre-Deployment

The weeks and sometimes months leading up to deployments are often stressful as preparations begin for the approaching separation. Common emotions during this phase include tension, anger, anxiety, fear, denial, and excitement.

Soldiers often spend longer hours away from home due to increased workloads and required training. There may be more arguments between family members and an increasing mental distance. Families will be focused on getting affairs in order, which often includes discussing difficult issues such as life insurance, wills, and guardianship for children.

#### Phase 2: Deployment

When the Soldier leaves, each family member must discover a personal balance. In the initial month following deployment, family members may have mixed emotions to include feelings of numbness, sadness, anxiety, and possibly even relief.

These normal emotions will usually subside within a few weeks as coping skills develop. Family members will establish new routines, acquire new sources of support, and generally feel more in control. Independence and confidence develop.

#### Phase 3: Re-Deployment

Re-deployment is an exciting time; however, reuniting can be every bit as stressful and confusing as separating. The anticipation and excitement of a long-awaited homecoming can be tempered by apprehension of changes. Family members may have bursts of energy and difficulty making decisions. Reunion with children may be especially challenging.

#### Phase 4: Post-Deployment

The post-deployment phase will last anywhere from three to six months after the homecoming. While there may be a honeymoon period, families will also need time to readjust and find a new equilibrium after deployment. Routines will be renegotiated, roles may be challenged and even changed, and sometimes there will be a need for "space" while the Soldier reintegrates into the family.

#### Phase 5: Sustainment

Sustainment is an on-going process of training and preparing for the next mission. This process begins as soon as the Soldier returns to duty following the deployment and continues until the next mission, whether that mission involves a deployment or not. The sustainment phase is the time when family life is at its normal level of activity. During this phase, Soldiers and family members are more focused on daily routines and life's ups and downs than with deployment.

### **1.2. Pre-Deployment**

When the unit receives notification and moves from the sustainment phase to the pre-deployment phase, the FRG must also change its mode of operation. The FRG should have volunteers in place in order to respond to the emotions associated with the upcoming deployment by emphasizing calm, orderly preparations.

In the pre-deployment phase, the focus of the FRG should be ensuring FRG readiness and assisting with family preparations by providing accurate and timely information.

#### *1.2.1. FRG Readiness*

Effective FRGs require advanced preparation and planning. During the pre-deployment phase, the FRG Leader should meet with the unit commander to:

- Meet and establish a working relationship with the Rear Detachment Commander (RDC).

- Develop a plan of action for preparing families for deployment and for supporting families during deployment (i.e., specifying responsibilities).

- Plan with the unit commander and RDC the process to be followed in the event of casualties in the unit.

- Determine methods by which the command and FRG Leader will maintain communication during deployment.

- Set up or update the Virtual FRG website (vFRG). Visit <http://www.armyfrg.org> for more information.

In addition, the FRG Leader should make sure the FRG telephone and email trees are current and active. Gather and verify roster information and collect Family Readiness Information forms. Notifying families about pre-deployment activities and briefings is a good time to “test” the accuracy of contact information and for the Key Callers to establish contact with family members.

FRGs may also plan meetings that focus on preparation and information, perhaps featuring guest speakers from local community resources. Guests may include ACS to speak on financial readiness, the chaplain’s office to offer tips on stress management or children’s issues, or the Legal Assistance Office to discuss powers of attorney and wills.

These meetings can also include a social component to build family and FRG camaraderie. During this phase, FRG Leaders should share information on preparing for deployment with family members to encourage preparation. Visit [www.myarmylifetoo.com](http://www.myarmylifetoo.com) for resources, particularly the “Deployment Survival Handbook” for active-duty, National Guard, and Army Reserve Soldiers.

#### *1.2.2. Pre-Deployment Briefings*

Pre-deployment briefings provide useful information to help Soldiers and family members cope with the upcoming separation, to acquaint them with unit plans, and to introduce them to community resources.

These briefings are a common way to share valuable information with Soldiers and family members in a condensed timeframe. They are important even for those who have experienced deployments in the past.

The command team will typically plan and coordinate the pre-deployment briefing for the unit.

Two types of issues should be covered:

1. Some material should deal with the emotions associated with family separation such as:
  - Stress
  - Communication issues
  - Children's needs
2. The other information should focus on the practical aspects of deployment such as:
  - Standard procedures
  - Readiness checklists
  - Community resources

The FRG should actively participate in disseminating the time, date, location, and childcare information of the pre-deployment briefings to family members. Key Callers should be ready to "sell" the importance of the pre-deployment briefing; some family members will not understand why it is vital to their family's readiness.

FRG Leaders and key volunteers should also attend pre-deployment briefings. Attendance is important because it provides the opportunity to obtain important information to pass on to families, introduce the FRG and FRG Leader, collect accurate family information, and meet Soldiers and families.

### **1.3. Deployment**

The FRG is responsible for keeping critical information flowing between the command and families, a primary duty during deployment. Supporting families, especially during long and dangerous deployments, is a demanding task and another focus of the FRG's efforts at this phase of the deployment cycle.

To support families adequately and effectively requires the FRG remain connected with families, help families solve problems and become resilient, and provide social activities and other means to reduce isolation and boost morale. In addition, the FRG Leader will need to establish and maintain connections with key military and community individuals and agencies that can serve as resources for and support to the FRG.

Providing accurate, timely information to families throughout the months of deployment is essential. Information helps families cope with the stresses of deployment and provides a connection to the unit and FRG. Don't forget to contact and involve new family members as replacements are added to the unit.

#### **1.3.1. Communication**

Communicating with families and Soldiers during deployment involves the following activities:

Disseminating information about unit and FRG to families. Use a variety of methods, such as phone calls, emails, FRG newsletters, FRG activities, and the vFRG website. Remember to maintain contact with caregivers who are responsible for children of single parents and dual-military couples.

Providing families with appropriate informational and educational materials. Give out resource information so families can seek help and pass this information on to other families with whom they may be in contact. Make referrals as needed to community resources.

Encouraging families to provide the FRG with contact information if they move or leave the area for an extended time. It's impossible to communicate with families if you don't know where they are.

Providing information, once it is available, on how families can contact Soldiers while deployed. Encourage frequent contact with Soldiers and communicate the availability of computer and video-teleconference equipment, if applicable.

### **Identifying High-Risk Families**

As an FRG Leader, one of your primary missions is to help families solve their problems at the lowest level possible so that these problems do not overflow to the deployed Soldier. You will be an important resource for families who are uninformed, who have financial or marital problems, or who are overcome by the situation. You are an important part of the information loop with the RDC as you identify issues and make referrals to appropriate resources.

Consider implementing a tracking mechanism of issues and resolutions at the beginning of the deployment in order to follow trends and to address potential training needs. This tracking system will also assist you in identifying the high-risk family members with on-going problems, more complicated issues, or issues that require more intensive follow-up and involvement of the command.

Examples of high-risk indicators might include:

- traffic violations
- criminal charges
- alcohol or drug abuse
- child abuse
- money mismanagement or financial debt
- mental health issues
- threats of suicide
- housing eviction notices

Identifying high-risk family members is not intended to label anyone as a "trouble maker" or a "problem." It simply allows the command team to ensure that the people who need help will get help. Also, problems that are identified and addressed in their early stages will hopefully not grow into more serious problems or events.

As issues are identified, remember to "resource, not rescue" the affected family member.

"Resourcing" means finding the right place to direct your FRG member and connecting them with that agency.

"Rescuing" means you try to do it all yourself.

### *1.3.2. Leave and Support*

#### **Rest and Recuperation (R&R) Leave**

Once the Soldier leaves, family members will often begin looking forward to the opportunity to reunite through the Rest and Recuperation (R&R) Leave Program. As an FRG Leader, you should be ready to share accurate information about this important deployment program. Once unit Soldiers begin R&R Leave, FRG Leaders, in coordination with the rear detachment, should be actively involved in collecting contact information related to family R&R plans.

The U.S. Central Command's R&R Leave Program provides the opportunity for service members and Department of Defense (DOD) civilians who serve in the combat theater for one year to take up to 15 days of leave during their deployment. The program provides a break from the stresses associated with the combat mission and allows participants to focus on family and friends when they return home.

Service members and DOD civilians who meet the following conditions are eligible:

- Assigned to a 12-month tour of duty in the Central Command area.
- Reservists must be on a one-year mobilization and serve at least 270 days of continuous duty within the theater.

- Serving in an area specifically designated by the DOD as an area authorized Imminent Danger and Hazardous Duty pay.

Generally, Soldiers may begin taking R&R leave after two or three months in theater and prior to the eleventh month in theater. Additional restrictions, however, may be in place.

R&R leave is charged to the Soldier's normal leave account. Leave does not start until the day after arrival at leave destination. Leave ends the day before travel begins to return to the theater of operations.

The Government pays airline costs from the airport nearest the duty location to the airport nearest the leave destination, and return. There is no restriction on the leave location.

For more information, visit the Rest and Recuperation Leave Program website at [www.armyg1.army.mil](http://www.armyg1.army.mil).

### **1.4. Re-Deployment**

Re-deployment is the point in the deployment cycle when Soldiers prepare to return and out-process at a deployment site or in the theater of operations. It is generally a brief period of time ranging anywhere from five to 30 days. Re-deployment also refers to the time when individual Soldiers return mid-tour for R&R leave.

#### *1.4.1. Communication*

Communicating with Families - Techniques

- Notifying families of impending return flights.

- Disseminating information about upcoming reunion briefings, homecoming activities, and other information as allowed using the telephone tree, vFRG website, and e-mail.



Understanding and disseminating accurate information about the unit's leave and pass policy, as is governed by AR 600-8-10, Leave and Passes. For example, families should be aware that Soldiers do not take block leave immediately upon re-deployment. There is a period of reintegration time, where Soldiers participate in structured tasks prior to block leave in order to ease the transition back home.

Encouraging families to attend upcoming reunion and homecoming events.

Providing families with appropriate informational and educational materials about reunion and reintegration issues. Use the FRG newsletter, vFRG website, and guest speakers at FRG meetings as forums for talking about these issues. When presenting this information, be sure to identify resources where Soldiers and families can get help if needed.

#### *1.4.2. Reunion and Homecoming*

Open lines of communication are crucial in order to establish realistic expectations concerning the reunion. Encourage Soldiers and family members to start talking and writing about some of their expectations in the weeks prior to the reunion.

Through two-way communication, a picture of reunion expectations should emerge from both parties, and then discussion can begin on how to satisfy both parties – even if the expectations are widely differing. Two-way communication throughout the separation and especially just prior to the reunion can cross many barriers and minimize problems during reunion.

Remember several important points and share often with FRG family members:

People change during a separation. Accepting change is a major factor in reestablishing relationships with the Soldier after a separation.

Problems will not magically disappear. All the expectations and fantasies about reunion may not happen. Reality will probably be different from the expectations.

The expectations of the spouse or significant other will probably be different from the expectations of the Soldier. Children's reactions will further complicate the mix. There is no way to predict what reunion will really be like.

### **Reunion Training**

Reunion is an essential part of the redeployment process; however, returning home can be every bit as stressful and confusing as leaving. Reunion, or reintegration, training can help both Soldiers and family members to be aware of these stressors and to be better prepared to manage them.

As Soldiers prepare for re-deployment and sometimes demobilization, the Army's Deployment Cycle Support (DCS) program outlines specific tasks designed to assist Soldiers in transitioning from the realities of the deployment to being back home. For Soldiers, tasks include mandatory health screenings, stress counseling, critical incident sessions, reunion training, and several other tasks. These structured tasks are in addition to all the normal things the Army does when re-deploying, such as

maintenance, sensitive items checks, and inventories. Specific information on DCS is available from Army G-1 Human Resources: Deployment Cycle Support.

Preparing families for re-deployment is an integral part of the DCS process as well. To support the DCS program, FRGs should work with the rear detachment to accomplish the following tasks:

- Explain the purpose and benefits of the DCS program to family members.

- Brief FRG members on DCS tasks specific to family members and care providers.

- Coordinate and/or promote family member attendance at reunion training to prepare them for the return of their deployed Soldier.

- Coordinate community support agencies to participate in the training tasks recommended for spouses and families of Soldiers redeploying.

Reunion training should commence for those on the home front about four weeks prior to the unit's return date. About this same time, the rear detachment and FRG will most likely begin to see a rise in anxiety and excitement levels. Reunion training for family members should help to curtail stress and manage some of the associated emotions.

Coordinate with community resources in order to offer the most appropriate and up-to-date training available. Seminars can be conducted by the unit chaplain or by personnel from on-post support agencies, such as Army Community Service, the Family Advocacy Program, or the American Red Cross. Subject matter experts from these community agencies may have pre-designed reunion training. Use the expertise from all available on-post community resources.

Reunion training can be presented at special times or during regularly scheduled FRG meetings. Consider scheduling both daytime and evening classes in order to ensure the greatest number of participants. Ensure the widest dissemination of the training's content and scheduled dates.

Training is also available through Army Family Team Building (AFTB).

Topics include:

- Problem Solving

- Stress Management

- Communication

In many locations, AFTB can schedule specific classes suited to the needs of the individual unit and FRG. AFTB training is also available online for family members who cannot attend classroom training. AFTB online training can be accessed at [www.myarmylifetoo.com](http://www.myarmylifetoo.com).

Don't forget to include even the youngest family members in the reunion training. Children react to deployments and the separation from parents in different ways. They need to be supported during this time with age-appropriate information and events. A series of children's workbooks to help adults deal with children's issues during deployment and reunion is available at [www.myarmylifetoo.com](http://www.myarmylifetoo.com).

Take advantage of the Child and Youth Services' (CYS) materials and programs that are designed to help children and parents during this time.

### **Homecoming Activities**

Homecoming activities can be simple or elaborate. Just remember the purpose of the homecoming: to reunite Soldiers and family members as quickly as possible.

FRG Leaders may be involved in coordinating appropriate, meaningful homecoming activities with the rear detachment. One of the most important considerations for the FRG is communicating arrival and homecoming information to family members in a timely manner, particularly when plans may be changing quickly and without notice. Developing a plan to manage those communications and sharing it with FRG members will help to alleviate stress and worry.

Encourage the FRG to be involved by making and posting signs and decorations. Decorating is a great way to encourage participation by even the youngest family members.

Don't forget about the single Soldiers. Not everyone will have a family member to greet them at the homecoming. FRGs might consider creating welcome bags for the single Soldiers, which could include sample toiletry items, snacks, and sodas.

The bags remind the single Soldiers that they are important to the unit's family and allow them to relax rather than rush to a store for basic necessities. Another idea is to contact single Soldiers' families and encourage their long-distance participation by sending a welcome home sign or other items for the homecoming.

### **1.5. Post-Deployment**

As Soldiers reintegrate back into home life, interest and participation in FRG activities may decrease; however, the FRG's role of supporting families with accurate information and resources is still very much alive. It is important to maintain periodic communications with families to monitor their well-being and to sustain camaraderie.

#### **1.5.1. Reintegration**

##### **High Risk Families**

After the redeployment, the FRG leadership and the command leadership, from the lowest to the highest levels, should be listening closely for possible issues or problems. Family relationships should regain normalcy in the months following the redeployment. However, if problems existed prior to the deployment, they will likely still be there after the deployment.

If a Soldier and/or family member continues to have problems adjusting after a reasonable time period, encourage them to seek assistance through the chaplain's office, Army Community Service, Military OneSource, installation medical programs, or other appropriate assistance offices.

As problems surface with the stress of post-deployment, identify additional high-risk Soldiers and family members as necessary. Once high-risk families are identified, the FRG Leader, in close coordination with the unit commander, should develop a

plan of action to assist in their successful reintegration into normal life. Be sure to follow up with high-risk individuals by contacting the individual periodically to ensure compliance with the plan of action.

### **Information and Referral**

An important mission of the FRG is providing family members with the tools and support necessary to educate, enable, and empower them to be resilient. The post-deployment phase also requires sharing information with families and offering appropriate referrals as required. Some FRG activities may include:

- Providing families with appropriate informational and educational materials about reintegration issues. Use the FRG newsletter, vFRG website, and guest speakers at FRG meetings as forums for talking about these issues. When presenting this information, be sure to identify resources where Soldiers and families can get help if needed.

- Communicating the services of community resource providers and Military OneSource and offering specific referrals as appropriate.

- Maintaining communication and connection with families in order to identify potential problems and issues.

- Conducting social activities as needed to relieve stress and encourage camaraderie.

#### *1.5.2. Combat Related Stress Disorders*

### **Recognizing Combat Stress and PTSD**

FRG Leaders should understand the signs and symptoms of Combat Operational Stress Reaction (COSR) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Communicate this information to family members so that they are aware of them and prepared to deal with them if necessary.

COSR, or battle fatigue, is a natural result of heavy mental and emotional work when facing danger in tough conditions, such as during a deployment. Like physical fatigue and stress, handling combat stress depends on the level of the Soldier's fitness and training. Many Soldiers experiencing combat stress still function normally. Combat stress can come on quickly or slowly, and it usually gets better with rest and replenishment.

If symptoms become extreme, the family should seek help for their Soldier. For more information, contact the local medical treatment facility, the nearest Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) hospital or clinic, or the local Veteran Center. All have counselors available to assist. Additional help, available 24-hours a day, is offered through Military OneSource.

Physical symptoms of combat stress may include:

- Aches and pains
- Fidgeting
- Pounding heart

- Light-headedness
- Tingling of fingers and toes
- Stomach and bowel upsets
- Lack of energy

Mental and emotional symptoms may include:

- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Inability to focus or remember details
- Sleeplessness
- Grief
- Anger
- Loss of self-esteem

PTSD is a psychiatric disorder that can occur following the experience or witnessing of life-threatening events such as military combat, natural disasters, terrorist incidents, serious accidents, or violent personal assaults. PTSD is marked by clear biological changes as well as psychological symptoms.

It is complicated by the fact that it frequently occurs in conjunction with related disorders such as depression, substance abuse, problems of memory and cognition, and other problems of physical and mental health.

The disorder also impairs the person's ability to function in normal life. It can affect work and may result in marital problems, family discord, and difficulties in parenting. It can impact every aspect of a Soldier's life, which will, in turn, affect those closest to the Soldier.

PTSD probably will not go away on its own. It needs to be treated. If a Soldier experiences four or more of these symptoms regularly, encourage professional assistance. Local assistance includes the chaplain's office, Army Community Service, mental health facilities, medical treatment facilities, and Military OneSource.

Symptoms of this disorder include:

- Depression: chronic numb or flat feeling
- Isolation: feeling withdrawn from family and friends
- Alienation: absence of meaningful contact with others
- Avoidance of feelings: inability to feel or express feelings
- Rage: bouts of unexplained anger; may be internal or acted out
- Anxiety: unexplained nervousness, tension or hyper-alert feelings
- Sleep disturbances: insomnia, nightmares, etc.
- Intrusive thoughts: recollections of traumatic experiences that appear for no apparent reason
- Startle responses: unusual, involuntary reactions to loud noises, i.e., automobile backfire

## **1.6. Sustainment**

### *1.6.1. Sustaining the FRG*

For the FRG, the focus of the sustainment phase is to deal with transitions and prepare for the next mission. During this time, there are often changes in unit leadership, Soldiers and family members, and FRG leadership due to Permanent Change of Station (PCS) orders or other reasons.

Certain activities need to be performed to sustain the FRG and to plan for the next deployment cycle. True family readiness comes from a series of minor tasks accomplished well in advance rather than a sudden “crash” program begun after receiving an unexpected deployment notice. Last-minute rushing produces needless family worry and stress. It causes many parts of the family readiness plan to be left undone.

While the level of activities may be reduced, FRGs should operate on an ongoing basis rather than starting from scratch with each deployment. Work to preserve the FRG’s accomplishments so that new FRG leadership can build on the systems, procedures, and programs in place. FRG leadership should focus on maintaining tasks such as telephone trees, Key Caller protocols, newsletters, and regular meetings.

It is also important to continue to welcome new Soldiers and families into the unit and to maintain communication with all unit families to ensure unit cohesion. Families who are comfortable with the FRG during the sustainment phase are more likely to continue to participate during the other deployment phases.

Also, be sure to recognize your volunteers and say thank you in a meaningful way. It will not only make them feel appreciated but also will make recruiting new volunteers an easier task.

### *1.6.2. Lessons Learned*

As an FRG Leader, it is important to share your successes with others and to continue to learn new lessons. After surviving a deployment, be sure all your lessons learned are documented. The “Lessons Learned” section of this training focuses on after action reports, continuity books, and documenting lessons learned.

Your diligence here will ensure that the FRG will be ready to incorporate the lessons learned from this deployment into the next deployment cycle. Use sources such as the Center for Army Lessons Learned at <http://call.army.mil/> to share your lessons and learn from other leaders.

Sharing your successes, as well as your challenges, makes the unit and the Army family stronger. Maintaining family readiness is easier than building it.

### **1.7. Deployment Cycle**

Deployment is a challenging time for everyone involved. There is a predictable cycle, however, that occurs with each deployment. Understanding this five-phased cycle, and the accompanying emotions of those effected, is critical for FRG Leaders in order to effectively assist families with managing deployment.

Lessons include information regarding the emotional aspects of the deployment cycle in each of the stages:

Pre-Deployment

Deployment

Re-Deployment

Post-Deployment

Sustainment

#### **Resources**

The Emotional Cycle of Deployment: A Military Family Perspective by LTC Simon H. Pincus, USA, MC, COL Robert House, USAR, MC, LTC Joseph Christenson, USA, MC, and CPT Lawrence E. Adler, MC, USNR-R; located at [www.HOOAH4HEALTH.com](http://www.HOOAH4HEALTH.com)

[www.MyArmyLifeToo.com](http://www.MyArmyLifeToo.com), links to a variety of deployment resources under "Managing Deployment" section

Rest and Recuperation (R&R) Leave Program website located at [www.armyg1.army.mil/WellBeing/RRLeave/index.htm](http://www.armyg1.army.mil/WellBeing/RRLeave/index.htm)

AR 600-8-10, Leave and Passes

Specific information on DCS is available from Army G-1 Human Resources: Deployment Cycle Support

Army Family Team Building (AFTB), located from the [www.MyArmyLifeToo.com](http://www.MyArmyLifeToo.com) website

[www.militaryonesource.com](http://www.militaryonesource.com), links to Military OneSource