

Reuniting After Deployment

A Handbook for Military
Members & Their Families



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Introduction

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Who is this guide for?

This guide is designed to assist military personnel and their families navigate the challenges of deployments or prolonged absences. You will find helpful information on how to prepare your family for reunion, maintain mental wellness, and learn about how the PEI MFRC can support you through this process.

What is Deployment?

A deployment is anytime a military member is away from home for an extended period of time due to an operational commitment.

Deployments are sometimes referred to as family separations or work-related absences. Examples of deployments include being away on a course, training exercises, imposed restrictions, or being away overseas, within Canada or the U.S.

When most people hear the word "deployment," they think of prolonged absences on operations overseas. However, some families experience longer but more infrequent absences, while others experience shorter, more frequent absences. All deployments, regardless of length and location, are demanding for military personnel and their families.

Introduction

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What is a Military Family?

The PEI MFRC recognizes that military families are diverse and come in all sizes. A military family includes all Canadian Armed Forces' personnel, Regular and Reserve Force, and their spouses, children, parents, relatives, or people who the military member self-identifies as part of their family. Family members and persons of significance to Canadian Armed Forces personnel who pass away while serving remain part of the military family community in perpetuity.

How Can My Family Access the PEI MFRC's Services?

When you arrive in PEI, please ensure that you complete our Family Intake Form so your family can access our services. If you are preparing for a deployment, you will also complete our Deployment Family Information Form so we can support your loved ones during your absence. To download a fillable PDF copy of these forms, visit www.PEIMFRC.org and select either "Family Intake Form" or "Deployment Family Information Form." If you need further assistance, please visit the MFRC or call (902) 892-8999.

Family Reunions & The Emotional Cycle of Deployment

Family Reunions

Many families find the first few weeks after the military member's return from deployment at least as stressful as the separation. Just as it is difficult to adjust to a new routine when a CAF member leaves, it is equally difficult to readjust to the previous arrangement when the member returns home. Families become accustomed to new habits and may be reluctant to alter their well-established routines. The initial reunion is easy; however, the adjustment period can be challenging in the following s and weeks.

Once the excitement has passed, there is a period of renegotiation in determining the roles, responsibilities, and relationships in the household. The partner at home may have become more independent and established new household rules or routines. It can take some time (often four to six weeks) for feelings of intimacy, closeness, and confidence in the relationship to reappear. As routines shift, family members begin feeling more relaxed and eventually stabilize.



Family Reunions & The Emotional Cycle of Deployment

The Emotional Cycle of Deployment

Families often experience a "cycle" of emotions during the deployment process. Understanding the different responses that may arise across the deployment cycle can assist you, your family and your friends to understand behaviour changes and emotional reactions. This model illustrates the various stages that you, your family and friends may progress through across the deployment.

The Emotional Cycle of deployment is based on experience and research with military families who have experienced a more traditional, long-term separation. Families find understanding and reassurance in this model and the suggested coping strategies, with the knowledge that many others share similar responses to this challenging experience.

Although there are timeframes listed, this will vary depending on the length of deployment, and families may spend more or less time in each stage. The model is designed to provide a general understanding, and not everyone will progress systematically through each phase. **This handbook will primarily address strategies to help families cope with stages 6 and 7.** As you will see in the following diagram, family stress levels tend to be highest in stages 3 and 5.

Family Reunions & The Emotional Cycle of Deployment

Pre-Deployment:

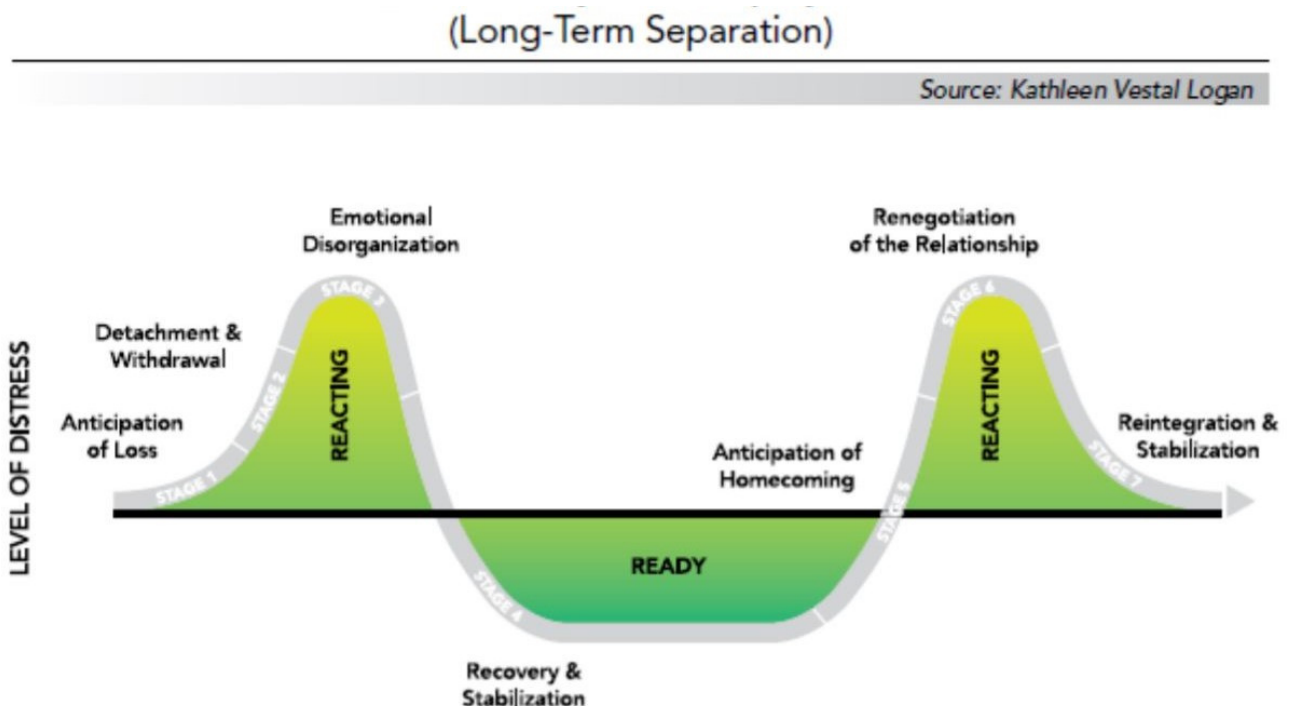
- 1.) Anticipation of Loss: 1–6 weeks before departure
- 2.) Detachment and Withdrawal: Last week before departure

During Deployment:

- 3.) Anticipation of Loss: 1–6 weeks before departure
- 4.) Detachment and Withdrawal: Last week before departure

Post Deployment:

- 6.) Renegotiation of Relationships: First 6 weeks home
- 7.) Reintegration and Stabilization: 6–12 weeks after returning home



Family Reunions & The Emotional Cycle of Deployment

Stage 6 – Renegotiation of Relationship

Common Reactions:

- Difficulty re-establishing emotional and sexual intimacy
- Feelings of excitement, happiness, disorganization, resentment, frustration
- Grieving loss of freedom and independence
- Role confusion

General Suggestions:

- Communicate as openly and honestly as possible. Accept your feelings as normal and not a threat to the relationship.
- Try to be patient with yourself and your partner.
- Renegotiate your roles and responsibilities. The workload can again be shared, but perhaps in a new way.
- Celebrate together the personal growth each has achieved during the separation.
- Continue to participate in a support group/network.
- Seek professional counselling (social worker, doctor, psychologist, chaplain) for continuing signs of stress or other concerns.
- Both partners should know the signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and the deployed partner should be encouraged to seek help if necessary.

Family Reunions & The Emotional Cycle of Deployment

Stage 7 – Reintegration & Stabilization

Common Reactions:

- Feelings of intimacy, closeness, confidence in the relationship(s)
- Acceptance

General Suggestions:

- Relax and enjoy spending time with your family.
- Reflect on what worked well and what could have been improved.
- Begin preparation and planning for the next deployment, if applicable.
- Remember to follow through on promises made during deployment.
- Share lessons learned with other families.

Questions to Ask Yourself Before Reunification – Partner at Home:

- What are my expectations in my relationship?
- What are my expectations of my partner's attitude towards our children?
- What are my expectations about household tasks?
- What are my feelings towards my partner's homecoming?

Family Reunions & The Emotional Cycle of Deployment

Questions to Ask Yourself Before Reunification – Military Member:

- What are my expectations in my relationship?
- What are my expectations about my children's attitudes towards me
- What are my expectations towards my reinstatement in the household tasks?
- What are my feelings towards my return with my family?

Remember: Times of stress can foster family growth and resilience. Resiliency develops when we overcome our hardships and bounce back stronger than before. The challenges of separation and reunion provide opportunities for your relationships: evaluate the changes that have occurred within and between partners, redefine roles and responsibilities, and move forward with all you have learned.

Positive Changes

Periods of separation are not always a negative experience. The difficulties explored in this guide do not always occur. Both those overseas and those at home can profit from the new experiences that separation tends to foster. Some of the positive changes that often occur are:

- Feeling more capable for having dealt with major challenges during the separation.

Family Reunions & The Emotional Cycle of Deployment

- Being able to say things to their loved ones that they couldn't before – for example, how proud they are of them.
- Returning service members may be more able to relate closely to one or both parents when previously they could not.
- Trivial things no longer cause much worry.
- Family members learn to support each other through periods of stress.
- Feeling a sense of purpose in their life that previously wasn't there – their experiences have clarified their goals in life.
- Becoming less self-centred, more patient, more 'worldly,' more willing to help those in need.
- Gaining a renewed appreciation of Canadian culture and lifestyle.
- Gaining a deeper appreciation of life in general and the value of life.
- Appreciating just how much loved ones mean to them.

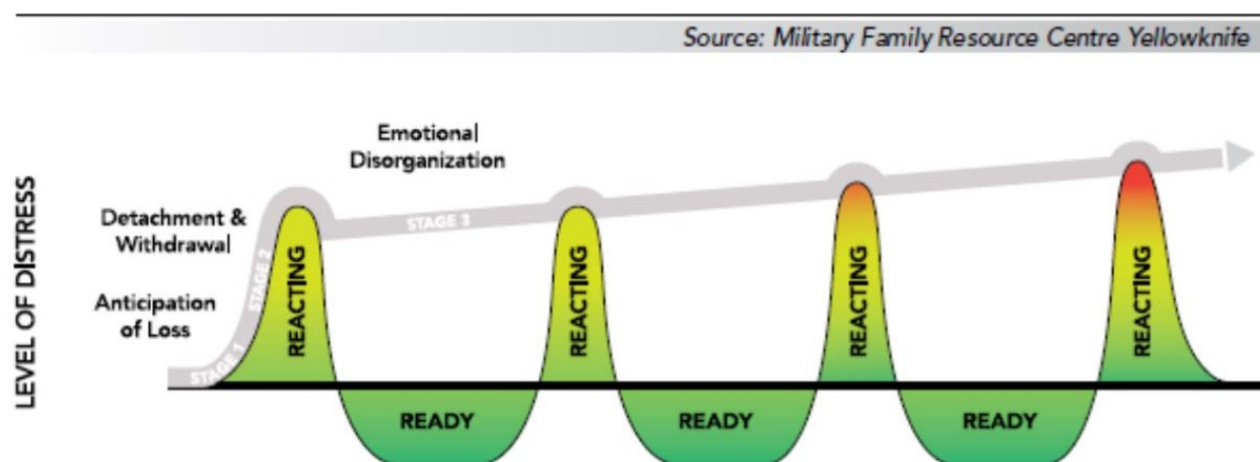


Family Reunions & The Emotional Cycle of Deployment

Short-Term and Frequent Separations

Short-term deployments or absences that are more frequent and less predictable in nature can be just as disruptive and demanding on the family. Constant and continuous periods of separation and reunion may be more difficult to manage given the short period required to readjust from one absence to the next. Many families who experience frequent short-term separations and reunions experience an ongoing sense of emotional disorganization, testing their ability to act and react.

The challenge for families during these types of deployments is that they must constantly adjust and move through the stages at a much more rapid pace without the benefit of time to adjust emotionally. The general coping strategies provided in this handbook can help families deal with the absence of a loved one, regardless of the type of deployment.



Preparing the Military Member

Anticipation of Homecoming

In the period leading up to homecoming, the service member will frequently encounter a range of positive and negative emotions. There is often a great degree of excitement encountered from the opportunity to be reunited with loved ones. However, a degree of anxiety about the reunion can be quite common.

Both you and those at home will have hopes and expectations about the homecoming. These thoughts can be idealistic at times, so the reality of the situation needs to be placed into perspective. Emotionally preparing for going home allows you to think about the challenges and discuss plans with loved ones and friends.

Common Challenges for the Member:

- You may have different expectations from your family and friends about the reunion. Ex: You may want to rest while they want to celebrate.
- You may feel emotionally distant or have difficulty enjoying certain activities.
- Routines may be disrupted or changed.
- There may be disagreements over things that have (or have not) been done while you were away.
- Sexual intimacy may be awkward at first, as you both may have different hopes and expectations. Talk openly and respectfully about this issue.

Preparing the Military Member

- You may have developed habits that are not appropriate at home. (Ex: use of bad language or increased levels of smoking.)
- Your tolerance of alcohol might be considerably lower than before your deployment.

Common Emotional Reactions:

- Frustration, anxiety, sadness, restlessness, confusion, impatience, irritability.
- Sleep and appetite disturbances.
- Spending/gambling binges.
- Increased use of alcohol and drugs.

Suggestions for Preparing for Homecoming:

- Maintain focus on your work to ensure that you complete all taskings on time.
- Communicate the details of your homecoming well in advance, including possible options if the times and dates change at the last moment.
- Include your children in planning for the homecoming celebration
- Share your needs, emotions, and expectations of homecoming with your family.
- Leave your bad deployment habits in the Area of Operations (AO), i.e. swearing, excessive smoking etc. — they may not be appreciated back home.

Preparing the Military Member

- Make plans before your homecoming concerning how you would like to spend your first weeks back home. If you communicate openly beforehand, there will be fewer opportunities for disagreements and misunderstandings later on.
- Having to constantly catch up with many family members and friends when you first get home can be draining. If possible, try to organize one large gathering to reduce the number of engagements you may feel obliged to keep.

Jet Lag

The feelings of disorientation encountered as a result of crossing time zones are known as jet lag and can impact the success of your homecoming. When arranging your homecoming activities, consider the symptoms of jet lag.

Characteristics of jet lag include fatigue, general tiredness, disorientation, grogginess, loss of concentration, nausea, upset stomach, headaches, sinus irritation, insomnia, irregular sleep patterns, dehydration, loss of appetite, irritability and irrationality. The severity of symptoms may be worse two to three days after arrival than on the day immediately following disembarkation. Symptoms then gradually decrease but can still be acute at particular times of the day.

Preparing the Military Member

Tips for Dealing with Jet Lag:

- Sleep well the night before the flight.
- Limit alcohol consumption on the flight.
- Drink plenty of water on the flight to combat dehydration.
- Try to walk around on the plane.
- Do your best to follow local time; force yourself to stay awake until your usual bedtime.
- If you absolutely must get some rest, take a short nap only.
- Use sunlight to your advantage. If you feel sleepy during the , go outside.
- Establish a sleep/wake routine quickly on return.
- Participate in light exercise on return.
- Activity and social contact during the day help in accelerating the adaptations.
- Follow your regular meal schedule in local time.

The Day of Reunion

The day you arrive back to be reunited with your loved ones and friends is generally a very special and rewarding time. It often involves the outpouring of a lot of emotion that has been built up throughout your deployment. Tears, excitement, and happiness are quite common reactions. Some members might also experience a sense of loss and feelings of discomfort or uncertainty associated with the transition from the deployment environment back into the Canadian culture. Such feelings usually dissipate within a couple of days, but there are some things you can do on the day of the reunion to ensure a smooth transition.

Preparing the Military Member

Suggestions for the Day of Reunion:

- **Your Arrival:** On most occasions, when service personnel arrive at the reunion location, their partner/family/friends are there to meet them. However, changes in scheduling, missed messages and other unforeseen circumstances may mean that there is no one waiting for you when you arrive. If this is the case, be prepared to experience disappointment, but understand that there will invariably be a justified reason for their lateness, and they do want to see you.
- **Be Prepared for Changes:** When you first arrive, you will be aware of changes to the home, the relationship, social arrangements, friends and other things that you cherish — that changes occurred during your absence. Take the time to look for the positive aspects of these changes and only make positive remarks about them until you have adjusted to the new environment.

Accepting Change & Adapting to Homecoming

The period of readjustment can affect people in different ways. Due to differences in culture and lifestyle while overseas, your return to Canada can be quite unsettling. Some military personnel find little difficulty readjusting to “life at home.” However, be aware that this is not always the case, and it may take some time. For example, you may have difficulty adjusting to what appears to be little things like city noises and traffic, the wide range and large amounts of goods in supermarkets, having to use money, the sense of time/urgency, and perhaps the relative lack of friendship or purpose in Canadian society.

Preparing the Military Member

However, often what is most annoying are minor changes in the home like new locations for kitchen utensils, a new coffee table that you had no say in purchasing, or a new layout in the living room. It seems that sometimes such “little things” register just how much home has changed.

General Tips for the Returning Military Member:

- Talk to each other (partner, friends, family, children) and listen.
- Support good things your family/friends have done.
- Be patient with your partner. They have been managing the household independently and have undertaken extra stress and responsibilities.
- Be prepared for your partner to be envious of your trip and consider bringing back a gift.
- Similarly, go easy on stories about where you've been/what you've done.
- Do not try to involve yourself in the finances too quickly. Your partner has likely taken good care of it.
- Expect your partner to be different, independent, and confident. However, the fact that they can manage without you does not mean your partner does not need your assistance.
- Avoid spending your savings too quickly.
- Be prepared to make some adjustments.
- Go slowly when re-establishing your place with family/friends.

Preparing the Military Member

- Curb the desire to take control.
- Make individual time for partner/children/family/friends.
- Discuss openly how the family will reallocate chores.
- Do not ignore problems of readjusting – talk to someone.
- Remember that the separation was difficult for both those at home and those abroad.

Returning to Work

There are many potential frustrations associated with returning to your unit. It is not unusual to experience reduced motivation after returning from deployment, and normal work may seem to be an anti-climax. You could find the steady routine of your usual job to be boring. There may be more supervision and more regulations compared to your job conditions overseas.

Some colleagues may appear disinterested in or envious of your time overseas and either avoid any discussion of it or make frequent cynical comments such as 'medal chasing', or 'swan trips'. Your best friends may have been posted during your absence. Some colleagues who remained in Canada may have gained promotions ahead of you. You may feel that you seem to have been forgotten. You may hold some grudges against the 'system' for a perceived lack of support for you or your family during your deployment.

Preparing the Military Member

Tips for Returning to Work:

- Allow readjustment time before making any major decisions — all good career moves take a degree of planning and execution. Take several weeks to readjust, talk to work friends and career counsellors first and then decide on possible options.
- Make sure you mentally distance yourself from the operational role. You now have another role to play.
- Try to avoid comparisons between your effectiveness and that of others if you are replaced in a rotation.
- Enjoy the reduced intensity.
- Remember that a real Military is a training Military.

Intimacy

Intimacy involves a combination of emotional and physical togetherness. These connections may change during the absence, and there may be difficulties regaining previous connections upon reunion. When a couple has been separated, an emotional and physical disconnect may occur. This is especially true if the separation was stressful. It may take some time for the couple to return to their usual levels of emotional and physical intimacy when they reunite.

Tips for Effective Intimacy:

- Openly and honestly discuss your expectations, fantasies or desires with your partner.
- Make time to spend time alone to rediscover each other.

Preparing the Military Member

- Set aside time for romance.
- Use open communication to discuss your feelings towards intimacy and your reactions to the reunion. Encourage your partner to do the same.
- Emotional intimacy is renewed with communication and trust.
- ‘Tune in’ to your partner and try to pick up on signs of discomfort.
- Have patience; reassure them of your respect.
- Don’t expect too much on the first reunion.
- Do special things for each other, such as commenting on positive changes in your partner.
- Give each other time to settle back into life together.



Preparing the Partner at Home

Understanding your Deployed Partner's Experience

Just as you will have adjusted to a new set of circumstances and challenges, your deployed partner will have done the same. While they have received specific training to perform within an operational context, they are frequently exposed to stressors. Recognizing that both of you have experienced challenges as a result of the deployment is the first step to a successful homecoming and ensuring that the experience is positive for both you and your partner.

Stressors your Deployed Partner May Have Faced:

- Working in harsh climates/terrain.
- Living situation – close living quarters and uncomfortable conditions.
- Limited opportunities to maintain hygiene.
- Excessive noise.
- Long days and inadequate rest.
- Ambiguous roles and taskings.
- Interpersonal problems with peers.
- Fear of death or injury.
- Exposure to violence, death, injury, devastation.
- Limited recreation opportunities.
- Boredom.



Preparing the Partner at Home

Suggestions for Preparing for Homecoming:

- **Homecoming details:** Ensure you know when your partner is arriving and where. While this seems like quite a simple step, details such as the correct terminal and the arrival time often get mistaken in the excitement of your partner returning.
- **Make backup plans:** As flight details often change, ensure there is a backup plan or another person who can be there to meet your partner when they arrive. This includes details such as how the service member will get home if you cannot make it, contact phone numbers where you can be reached, and how children can be looked after if you need to travel.
- **Plan something special:** It only takes something as simple as a welcome-back meal or a small gift to set the right path to a successful reunion.
- **Be understanding:** Manage your expectations about the reunion and be forgiving if the reality of the reunion does not match your plans and hopes.

The Day of Reunion

The reunion day is often very rewarding, and your expectations may be high and romanticized. Therefore, there can be a degree of disappointment for both the returning service member and the partner. It is important to temper your expectations and view the reunion as the beginning of a process of adjustment rather than the event itself.

Preparing the Partner at Home

Suggestions for the Day of Reunion:

- Take your time to get reacquainted, and don't try to cover several months of adjustment in several days.
- Accept that your partner may be different.
- Reassure your partner that they are needed and that you are happy they have returned safely.
- Seek help for family members, if needed.
- Be calm and assertive, not defensive, when discussing events that have taken place during the separation. Your partner may need to hear that it wasn't the same doing these things alone, that you are glad they are back, and that you'd like to discuss problems and criticisms calmly.
- Prepare children for homecoming and involve them in reunion activities.
- Ensure you both have time set aside to rest and schedule social events and activities accordingly.
- Limit your use of alcohol. Remember, alcohol was likely restricted during your loved one's deployment, and their tolerance is lowered.

The First Few Weeks After Reunion

While the initial reunion can be a positive emotional experience, the initial days can seem somewhat of a relearning process.

While you have certainly missed your partner, you both must re-establish your relationship and reallocate roles and tasks. The whole family unit must work at readjusting, stabilizing and accepting the serving member back into the group.

Preparing the Partner at Home

Considerations for the First Few Weeks After Reunion:

- **Don't over-schedule the first days after return.** After several months of regimentation and routine, serving members often seek relief from constant responsibilities and scheduled activities. It is normal for the returning partner to “need space” upon their return.
- **Don't expect your partner to take up their previous role straight away.** Often the return trip from an area of operation leaves most service members in need of rest to adjust to jet lag.
- **Set time aside to communicate.** You have both been through separate experiences during your partner's deployment, and you have both changed in some ways as a result. Talking can help you get to know each other again, regain the intimacy you had before, and rebuild family routines that include you both.
- **Expect your children to test the rules now that both parents are home.** Whenever there is a change in a family, children work to find out whether it might mean a loosening of limits. Talk with your spouse to explain any new rules you have set so that you can present a united front.
- **Don't give up activities that you enjoy and that help you relax.** If you have adopted an exercise routine, taken up a hobby you like, or joined a club, don't give it up just because your partner is home. You may need to be flexible to fit these activities into the new family schedule, but do your best to find a way.

Preparing the Partner at Home

- **Prioritize time for your immediate family.** Postpone visits to relatives and friends until you both have settled into a comfortable routine at home.
- **Accommodate children's reactions.** Children may be feeling the same confusing things you and your spouse feel and they may be unsure of what to expect from the parent who has returned. They may feel uncomfortable or think of them as a stranger. Allow children to give and receive the attention they need from the returning parent before you try to have quiet time alone with your partner.

General Tips for Partners at Home:

- Discuss family members' new and old responsibilities; clearly redefine each person's role.
- Leave room for spontaneity. The deployed partner was probably receiving orders under a strict routine, and they may not want a pre-organized schedule of events.
- Give each other a little space.
- Be patient with your partner. They may need time to decompress and relax at home when they arrive.
- Your partner may experience sleep disturbances if they are used to a smaller bed or sleeping with others in the room.
- If this is your first time through the deployment process, expect your partner to be surprised that you can manage on your own.
- Reassure your partner that you need their assistance without giving up or minimizing your independence.
- Stick to your household budget, and do not overspend while planning a celebration for your partner.

Preparing Children

Reunion is often very stressful for children because they have less life experience and fewer coping mechanisms than adults.

Parents must talk to their children, especially older ones, before the reunion and encourage them to share their feelings. Listen and validate their concerns.

Age and stage of development primarily determine a child's reaction to homecoming. The returning parent should be patient and gentle, welcoming rather than demanding affection. While you might expect children to welcome you back with open arms, it is not uncommon for them to be shy or even scared. Most children have a mixture of positive and negative feelings toward a returning parent. However, some children's reactions can be emotionally devastating for the returning parent. Babies will probably not know you and may cry when held. Toddlers and preschoolers may not seem to recognize you and may even appear fearful, flinching away from a homecoming kiss. Expecting these behaviours and knowing how to respond appropriately will be beneficial.

The following list provides suggestions on how returning parents can make the reunion process easier for children, depending on their age.

Infants (Birth to 1 Year)

Typical Behaviours:

- Crying or pulling away from you.
- Clinging to the other parent or caregiver they know.

Recommendations:

- Participate as a couple in child care that meets their basic physical needs (bathing, changing, feeding, etc.).
- Try to be relaxed. Infants are intuitive.

Toddlers (1 to 3 Years)

Typical Behaviours:

- Shyness.
- Clinging to the other parent or caregiver they know.
- Crying and temper tantrums.
- May not recognize you.
- Regressing to behaviours they have outgrown.

Recommendations:

- You may need to give them space to warm up to you again.
- Be affectionate and playful as a couple – toddlers will then join in.
- Start a game with them, as this emphasizes sharing and fun.
- Sit on the floor and wait for your child to approach you.

Pre-Schoolers (3 to 5 Years)

Typical Behaviours:

- Crying and temper tantrums.
- Appears demanding and whiney.
- Acting out to get the returning parent's attention.
- Regressing to behaviours they have outgrown.

Preparing Children

Recommendations:

- Listen carefully and accept the feelings they express.
- Reinforce unconditional love.
- Express interest in your child's interests (games, books, songs).
- Play activities that they choose.

School-Aged (5 to 12 Years)

Typical Behaviours:

- Energy and excitement
- Acting out to get the returning parent's attention
- Testing limits of discipline
- Expressing guilt if they misbehaved during the parent's absence

Recommendations:

- Praise children for coping with the separation.
- Listen to your children – ask for opinions and preferences.
- Review school work and what they learned during your absence.
- Express interest in their hobbies.
- Share souvenirs, scrapbooks, pictures, etc.

Teenagers (13 to 18 Years)

Typical Behaviours:

- The response of teenagers is often a lot more complicated, especially if they have gone through significant changes while you were away.

- Feelings of guilt about not living up to standards are not uncommon, as are concerns about rules and responsibilities.
- They may be unwilling to change plans to spend extended time with you upon your return.

Recommendations:

- In comparison to the tips above, you need to adopt more mature methods in renewing your relationship with teenagers.
- Sharing your appropriate deployment experiences is quite useful and encourages them to share their experience of you being away.
- You may need to re-establish boundaries that might have changed. Try not to be judgmental.
- Respect your teens' privacy and friends.
- Listen attentively and non-judgementally to teens' attempts to share current interests/activities.

Other Behaviours:

- **Jealousy:** While you were away, children may have formed very close bonds with the parent who remained at home. They may be overprotective, clingy and resent your return.
- **Possessiveness:** Some young children may become very protective of you on return, such as refusing to let go of your leg or constantly seeking your attention. Such behaviours might be reinforced the next time you are separated – such as when you return to work. Reassurance and brief calls from wherever you have gone can assist children in adjusting.

- **Discipline:** School-age children may initially be happy and loving towards you, but this may change if their established routine is disrupted too quickly and/or harshly. Parents may need to discuss discipline and any new boundaries that have been set for the children before developing new ones or re-establishing old ones.

General Suggestions for Returning Parents:

- Expect both positive and negative reactions from children and try to show understanding of the negatives.
- Remember that young people may experience significant changes (physical, emotional, etc.) during the deployment, particularly if this was their parent's first prolonged absence from family and/or Canada.
- Be patient and let the children set the pace for getting to know you.
- Spend as much time as possible with the family for at least a week after your return.
- Encourage children to talk about what happened during the separation.
- Enter the family structure gradually.
- Don't give in to demands because of guilt.
- Show acceptance and support signs of increasing independence and maturity.
- Accept change and do not disturb a family organization that functions well without you.
- Devote quality time to each child.
- Be sensitive about showing favouritism.

Preparing Children

- Try not to apply excessive discipline towards your children at the beginning of your return.
- Maintain contact with other returning personnel and their families. Share concerns and frustrations.

For Single Parents

Single parents encounter unique challenges when preparing for homecoming and it can be a very lonely and difficult time. However, they can experience many of the same issues relating to children and common reactions that married members' may face on homecoming. On eventual return to Canada, accommodation is a high priority. During your absence you may have arranged for a friend or family member to look after your children at your house or, alternatively, your children may have lived with the nominated caregiver. Perhaps you require a new residence altogether. Once "housekeeping" has been established, you will be able to focus your attention on reunion with your children, friends and family.

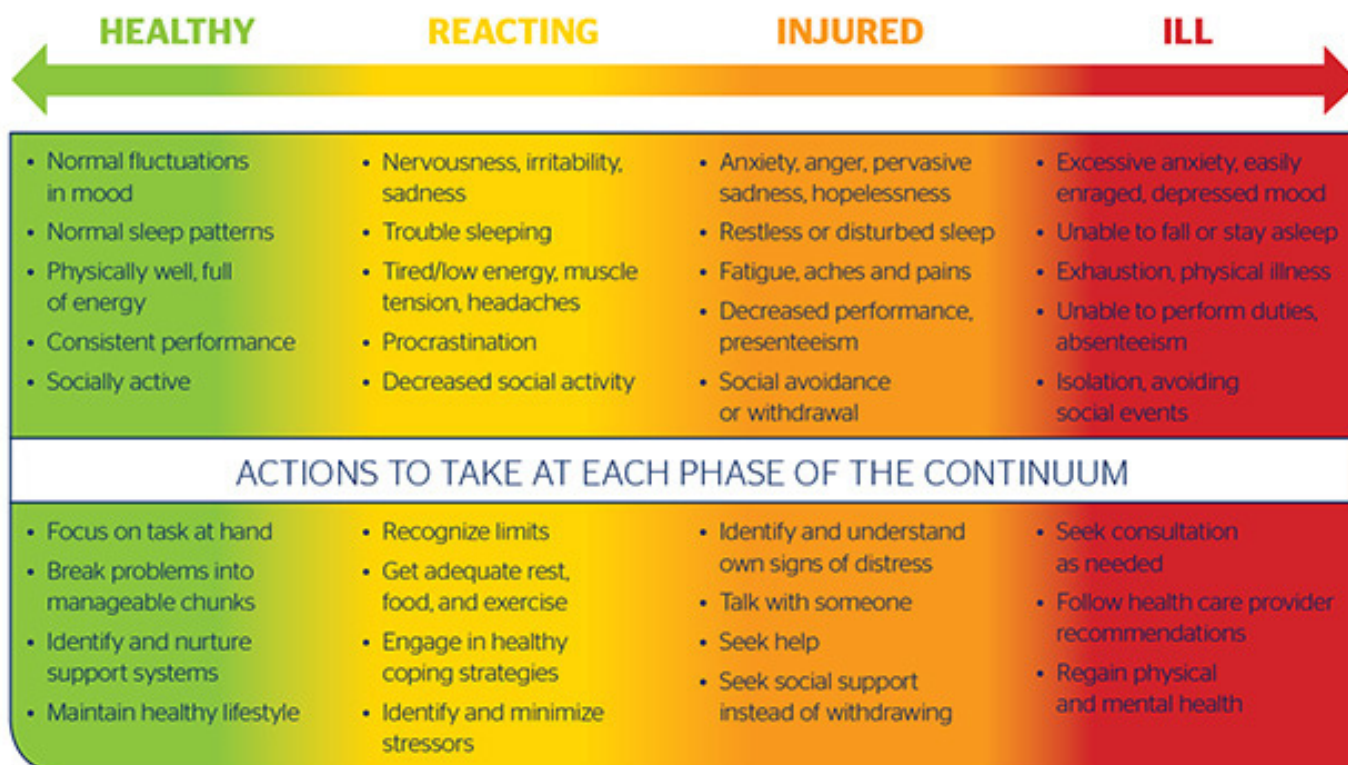


Maintaining Mental Wellness

The Mental Health Continuum

It is critical for military families to maintain their mental health during the pre-deployment phase. The mental health continuum model explains the spectrum of how well someone may be coping with life stressors. The left side represents mental wellness and strong coping strategies, while the right side represents mental illness and an inability to cope. Ideally, one would recognize when they are slipping into the "reacting" zone and implement the proper skills and support before becoming injured or ill.

MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM MODEL



Maintaining Mental Wellness

Recognizing Signs of Stress

We all experience stress in our life; at our work, at home, when we play sports, etc. It is not necessarily a bad thing; we all need a certain amount of stress in our lives to motivate and increase performance. It is important to identify when stress is becoming problematic so you can take action. As previously discussed, military members and their families will likely experience intense emotional responses and high-stress levels before deployment. Therefore, It is imperative to recognize your individual signs of stress. Read through the list below and notice how your body and mind respond to stress.

Physical:

- Nausea
- Headaches
- Muscle tension
- Sleep disturbances
- Digestion issues
- Excessive sweating
- Changes in appetite

Behavioural:

- Social withdrawal/isolation
- Increased substance use
- Problems dealing with others
- Overreacting
- Increased risk-taking
- Increased spending
- Neglecting responsibilities

Emotional:

- Fear
- Rapid changes in mood
- Low motivation
- Irritability/short temper
- Anger
- Sadness/apathy

Thinking:

- Poor judgement
- Trouble concentrating
- Lowered self-esteem
- Memory problems
- Anxiety/worry
- Impaired decision-making skills

Maintaining Mental Wellness

Stress Management Strategies:

- Eat a healthy, balanced diet. Focus on eating a few servings of fruits and vegetables each day and limiting excess fast food.
- Exercise regularly and move your body each day. Do a form of exercise you enjoy and try to get outside whenever possible. Even a few minutes can make a difference!
- Get enough sleep. Most adults need 7 to 9 hours per night.
- Practice time management by prioritizing tasks, avoiding procrastination, and using your rest time for leisure, not work.
- Limit caffeine, alcohol, and tobacco intake.
- Talk to family, friends, and colleagues to vent or to help develop a solution to a problem.
- Keep a journal to write about your thoughts, feelings, and stress triggers.
- Use humour to ease tension. Watch a funny video or laugh with friends.
- Set aside personal time to yourself to partake in hobbies you enjoy.

Relaxation Techniques

Regularly practicing relaxation techniques is very beneficial in helping you cope with the stress of day-to-day life. Relaxation techniques are not mysterious, and you do not need specialist qualifications to carry them out. Anyone can practice relaxation just about anywhere and at any time. The key to practicing relaxation techniques is that they can be self-administered and, with a little practice, most people find them easy to master.

Maintaining Mental Wellness

Abdominal Breathing

The level of tension carried in your body is reflected in the way that you breathe. If you are tense, your breathing tends to be shallow, rapid and occurring high in the chest. If relaxed, your breathing tends to be fuller, deeper, and from your abdomen. It is difficult to be tense and to breathe from your abdomen at the same time.

- 1.) Take a moment to note how tense you are feeling, then place one hand on your abdomen just beneath your rib cage.
- 2.) Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose into the 'bottom' of your lungs – send the air as low down as you can. If you are breathing from your abdomen, your hand should rise. Your chest should move only slightly.
- 3.) When you've taken a full breath, pause for a moment and then exhale slowly through your nose or mouth. Make sure you exhale fully. As you exhale, try to relax your body fully.
- 4.) Now do ten slow, full abdominal breaths. Keep your breathing slow and smooth. It may help to count to four on the inhale (1-2-3-4) and then again on the exhale. Remember to pause briefly at the end of each inhalation.

If you begin to feel light-headed during the exercise, stop for 15–20 seconds and then start again. With practice, you may be able to do several sets of ten full abdominal breaths. Five minutes of abdominal breathing can have a very beneficial relaxing effect.

Maintaining Mental Wellness

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation (with tension) works on the theory that a muscle can be relaxed by first tensing it for a few seconds and then releasing it. Tensing and releasing various muscle groups throughout the body can produce a deep state of relaxation. The idea is to squeeze each muscle group hard (not straining, however) for about 10 seconds and then let it go suddenly. You then give yourself 15–20 seconds to relax, noticing the difference in the muscle relaxed, as opposed to when you tensed it, before going on to the next muscle group.

You can also practice progressive muscle relaxation without tensing and releasing the muscles. The idea is basically the same. You work your way progressively through the different muscle groups in your body, consciously relaxing each one as you go. The only difference is that you do not tense and release each muscle group. It may help to say to yourself something like “I am relaxing” or “Letting go” during each relaxation phase between muscle groups. Maintain a focus on your muscles during the exercise and stay keenly aware of your bodily sensations.

The following general guidelines apply:

- Make sure you are in a quiet, comfortable setting.
- Tense each muscle group for 7–10 seconds vigorously without straining, then release suddenly,
- Allow all other muscles in the body to relax and focus on one group at a time.

Maintaining Mental Wellness

- If a muscle group feels particularly tense, you can tense and release it 2–3 times if necessary. Just make sure to rest for 20–30 seconds between each cycle.
- The entire sequence should take about 30 minutes to complete the first time. As you get better, you may find you can work through it quicker.

Seeking Mental Health Assistance

There are times when we can't do it alone in regards to stress and stress management. Seeking professional help is not a sign of weakness but rather a recognition that the situation is beyond our normal resources to cope. At the end of this handbook, you will find mental health and addictions services located in Charlottetown and Summerside. The following list is not exhaustive but is indicative of circumstances suggesting that you may need to seek assistance with stress management:

- You are experiencing ongoing signs of stress.
- Ongoing sleep disturbances or nightmares.
- If you have no one with whom you can talk
- Your work and social relationships appear to be suffering
- You are having frequent accidents and difficulty concentrating
- You have noticed changes in your emotions or behaviours that are worrying you.
- You are having suicidal thoughts or urges to self-harm.

Maintaining Mental Wellness

Delayed Stress Reactions

Most overseas deployments are moderate to highly stressful for the participants. Traumatic experiences (for example, experiences with death) are not uncommon, and encounters that appear life-threatening do occur. Such events usually elicit stress responses in the individual. These responses may range from momentary physical reactions such as profuse sweating or trembling to long-term emotional conditions such as anxiety and depression. Often it is not only the dramatic stressors that cause stress reactions. Language barriers, lack of mail, unusual living conditions, limited access to communications facilities, bureaucratic red tape, lack of recreational opportunities and the prolonged separation from loved ones can cause extreme frustration. This can ultimately result in various stress reactions such as headaches, poor appetite and difficulty sleeping. These reactions are not abnormal or a sign of weakness.

Sometimes stress responses do not subside quickly but may continue for weeks or months, long after the incident(s) that caused them. Sometimes stress responses do not seem to emerge until the person leaves the stressful environment — that is, upon returning home. This is unfortunate as the homecoming period has enough of its own inherent stressors without needing to be further complicated by delayed stress responses.

Maintaining Mental Wellness

Alcohol Consumption and Returning Members

Some deployments are dry, while others include social opportunities where alcohol may be served. In either case, your tolerance to alcohol will be lowered, and therefore it is recommended that you moderate your alcohol consumption on your return. It is not uncommon for people to celebrate their homecoming by having a few drinks with family and friends; however, it is also the case that many people 'self-medicate' with alcohol when they are feeling upset, angry, or stressed. Drinking at risky levels can have a negative impact on all areas of your life including family, relationships, social, health, and career. This will ultimately aggravate the issues that caused you to drink in the first place.

The Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines, developed by the (Canadian) Centre for Addictions and Mental Health (CAMH), provide information to help you make decisions about your alcohol use that will lower the risk of alcohol-related harm. To minimize health risks, **men** should have no more than **2 standard drinks a day** on average and not exceed 14 standard drinks a week. **Women** should have no more than **2 standard drinks a day** on average and not exceed 9 standard drinks per week.

The figure below provides information on what constitutes a standard drink.

Maintaining Mental Wellness



Celebrating Safely

Although it is recommended that you curtail your alcohol intake on homecoming, it is realistic to expect that alcohol will feature prominently at many of your homecoming celebrations. If you are going to consume alcohol, here are some practical strategies for celebrating safely and reducing potential risks associated with alcohol use:

- Have a plan for where you are going, who you will be with, how much you will drink, and how you will get home. What do you need to do the next day?
- Remember that the effects of alcohol vary from occasion to occasion (e.g. are you taking medications? have you eaten recently? are you tired or angry?).
- Start with a non-alcoholic drink to quench your thirst before you start drinking alcohol.

Maintaining Mental Wellness

- Be sure to eat something before you start drinking. Eating after you start drinking doesn't help.
- Know your limit. Overdrinking can be unsafe and unhealthy.
- Drink one drink at a time, pace yourself and drink slowly.
- Make sure you drink water between drinks and before you go to sleep to rehydrate.
- Do something else while drinking, such as playing pool or dancing.
- Don't leave your drinks unattended.
- Look out for your friends and make sure that they look out for you.
- Don't drive. Take a taxi, public transportation, walk or decide who will be the designated driver before the party starts.

Sleep

It is not uncommon for the returning member to experience sleep disturbance on homecoming. Normally, it will only be a matter of readjusting to your surroundings – new bed, noises, someone else in the bed with you – and your sleep routine should return to normal within a few weeks. However, should you continue to suffer a sleep disturbance, you should seek early assistance from your mental health provider. Sleep is a basic necessity, and it is just as vital to our health and well-being as diet and exercise. Sleep helps renew your body, clear your mind and maintain mental and physical efficiency. The amount of sleep needed to operate effectively is different for everybody; however, somewhere between 7–9 hours per night is a good guide.

Maintaining Mental Wellness

Sleep Diaries

Keeping a Sleep Diary for a few weeks may help identify behaviours that contribute to your sleep disturbance. Record when you wake up, go to sleep, drink caffeinated beverages, exercise, eat, drink alcohol, and other suspected sleep stealers. Simple changes in your daily routine may be surprisingly effective in improving your sleep quality.

Tips for Good Sleep:

- Try to maintain a regular sleep pattern.
- Make sure your bed and bedroom are quiet and comfortable – you may need to wear earplugs or use a white noise machine, like a fan, to block other noises.
- Develop a bedtime routine and try to unwind before going to bed (read, have a bath, listen to music).
- Practice relaxation exercises.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine at least 4–6 hours before bed.
- Refrain from exercise at least 4 hours before bedtime.
- Only use your bed for sleeping and sex – don't eat, read or watch TV in bed.
- If you find yourself tossing and turning, get out of bed and rest in a comfortable chair until you feel tired.
- Avoid daytime naps.
- Don't 'activate' your brain by using your phone or working on your laptop right before bed.
- Lower the room temperature. A cool environment improves sleep.

How Can the PEI MFRC Help?

PEI MFRC Services

The PEI MFRC offers many services and programs to support military members and their families during all phases of deployment. The best way to stay informed about our current events is to **follow our website, Facebook page, and subscribe to our newsletter.** Our services include:

- **Helpful resources** on military lifestyle topics.
- **An on-staff registered social worker** who can provide counselling on individual, couple, and family challenges related to the military lifestyle.
- **Social opportunities** for military families.
- **Information briefings** to military organizations, community groups, and family members.
- **Satellite offices** in Summerside, Cardigan, and Alberton.
- **Volunteer opportunities** to support the PEI military community.
- **Respite and emergency childcare services** for family members of a service member who is deployed or on extended training.
- **Monthly coffee time** where staff, military members, families, and volunteers can socialize.
- **Assistance and referrals** for military spouses looking to gain skills and/or employment.
- **Mental health** and stress management resources.
- **Training for military units** on communicating with military families.
- **Virtual programming** for PEI's military families.

How Can the PEI MFRC Help?

Deployment Services Coordinator

Our Deployment Services Coordinator provides outreach, information, support, and assistance to military families experiencing separations over 24 hours due to CAF operational requirements (e.g. Courses, training, taskings, IR postings, and overseas deployments.) We help families prepare for deployment, to stay busy during deployment, and provide support throughout the reunion process. For more information, contact our Deployment Services Coordinator at Tammy@Pei-Mfrc.org or call (902) 892-8999

Services May Include:

- Support for immediate and extended family
- Warm line calls
- Road to Mental Readiness (R2MR) Program
- Respite child care
- Social support and gatherings
- Free Morale Mail program
- Emergency support

Warm Line Calls

Warm Line Calls are telephone outreach calls provided by PEI MFRC staff to the family members of deployed military members. It is a way for us to stay connected, provide information on upcoming events, activities or services, and check in to see how you are coping. It is also a way for us to provide you with referrals to other areas within the PEI MFRC to support you the best way we can.

How Can the PEI MFRC Help?

Deployment Dinner and Chat

Open to parents, spouses, and loved ones of a CAF member away on a training or deployment. This is a great opportunity to meet other parents/families and learn more about the MFRC. Most importantly, we want you to have social support while your loved one is away. Sometimes we even host our dinners potluck style! Pre-registration is required, and these dinners are free to attend. Contact Tammy@Pei-Mfrc.org or follow our Facebook page to find out when we are hosting our next Deployment Dinner and Chat!

Newsletter and Social Media

For information on social events, satellite hours, and our monthly coffee time, subscribe to our newsletter by visiting this link: <https://mailchi.mp/be028943c224/pei-mfrc-newsletter> or calling the MFRC at (902) 892-8999. You can also follow the PEI MFRC on Facebook and Twitter to stay informed about our current events.

Information Briefings

Our staff is available to talk to military family members about

- The MFRC and our services.
- Ways to support the troops
- Communicating with military families
- Communicating with CF members about supporting their families
- Local initiatives hosted by the MFRC.
- The military in PEI.

How Can the PEI MFRC Help?

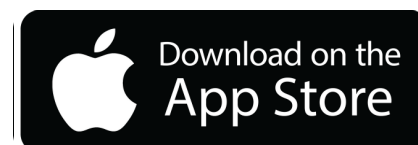
Road to Mental Readiness Program (R2MR)

R2MR is a program we offer to all families who may, who are, and have experienced a deployment. The program helps to build resiliency in military families to better cope with separations due to deployments, training courses, or IR postings. The GMFRC offers this program which mirrors the training our CAF members receive when they prepare for deployments.

R2MR will help you by providing the following:

- Recognize and understand the different phases of deployment and what you can expect during each phase.
- Identify some challenges you may encounter before, during, and after a deployment.
- Learn about the Mental Health Continuum.
- Give you new tips, tricks, and tools to manage stressors that may arise.
- Talk about how to support children through a deployment.
- Provide information about additional resources available.
- Remind you to also have FUN!

You can download the R2MR App from the Google Play Store or Apple Store to browse at your leisure and to see what some of the topics are! If you want more information on R2MR, please contact please contact Tammy@Pei-Mfrc.org or call (902) 892-8999.



How Can the PEI MFRC Help?

Morale Mail

Morale mail is a Department of National Defense program providing free one-way mail service to deployed soldiers from their families and friends. Sending a package to your loved one overseas is a great way to keep in touch, show you care for your loved one, and satisfy your need to “do something” to show your support to the deployed member. Bring your parcel to the PEI MFRC, and we can help get it wrapped up and addressed, including the Canada Post mailing label that must be affixed. Make sure to have a list of contents and the approximate value of the items included. We have all the wrapping and labelling supplies available for you!

Please remember that the items are not trackable, and delivery timelines are not guaranteed. Morale Mail schedule will depend on operational tempo. Please contact us at (902) 892-8999 or Info@Pei-Mfrc.org to find out how often morale is being sent from the MFRC. **It may take up to six weeks for parcels mailed overseas to reach their destination.** Please review the link below for Morale Mail Guidelines.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/contact-us/write-troops/instructions-for-mailing-overseas.html>



How Can the PEI MFRC Help?

Emergency Child Care

You may access our Emergency Child Care Service if your spouse is deployed, either on course or overseas, and your regular caregiver is unavailable. Our Emergency Child Care is there to offer assistance in highly stressful situations. We can also help you fill out an Emergency Child Care Plan.

Our Emergency Child Care Service is designed to help Canadian Forces families on a short-term basis to bridge the gap between having no child care provider and having a regular child care provider. Please understand that there are limitations to the Emergency Child Care services that we can provide.

What Circumstances Constitute an Emergency?

- A Canadian Forces member is away on duty, and their spouse/caregiver is unavailable due to illness or family emergency.
- A Canadian Forces member is required to report for duty on short notice, and the spouse/caregiver is unavailable.
- The caregiver is a single parent or both parents are Canadian Forces members, and duty requirements are such that the regular childcare provider is unavailable.
- A child is ill, and the parent cannot access their usual child care arrangement when the Canadian Forces member's presence at work is critical to the military operation.
- Other circumstances not covered above, but where emergency child care is deemed necessary.

How Can the PEI MFRC Help?

Respite Child Care

Respite childcare supports families of deployed members and relieve some of the stressors of parenting alone during a deployment. If a situation arises that is not considered an emergency but child care is essential for the family's continued health and well-being, a period of respite may be available for military families.

For more information on our child care services, contact (902) 892-8999 or Info@PEI-MFRC.org

Emergency Cell Phone: (902) 314-9860

Social Events and Programs

It is important to stay connected to a community of peers while your military member is deployed. One of the main ways we support military families in PEI is by offering an outlet for fun, family time. We host various family events throughout the year, such as a holiday party in December, summer BBQs, and bowling nights. Here at the MFRC, we realize that you often face challenging times, and we want to provide a way for your military family to connect with others in similar situations. Plus, we like to laugh and have fun, too!



How Can the PEI MFRC Help?

Child and Youth Drop-In Socials

It is also critical for your child to keep busy during a deployment to minimize social isolation, sadness, and separation anxiety. We regularly offer drop-in socials for youth aged 8+. These events allow kids to connect with other military youth, play games, do crafts, and enjoy time with one another. Drop-in socials are free to attend, but we ask that parents register their children by emailing Registration@Pei-Mfrc.org or by calling the office at (902) 892-8999. Follow our Facebook page or newsletter to find out when we are hosting our next youth drop-in social!

Parent and Child Drop-In Socials

We also host drop-in socials for parents/caregivers and their children! Children can have fun playing and learning together while parents can chat and socialize with their peers. These events, are free and pre-registration is not required.

Monthly Coffee Social

Join us for coffee, cookies, and great conversation! Free to attend and open to all military members, Veterans, RCMP, and families.



**MONTHLY COFFEE
SOCIAL FOR
MILITARY MEMBERS,
VETERANS, RCMP, +
FAMILIES!**



How Can the PEI MFRC Help?

Mental Health Services & Counselling:

Your mental health needs to be a top priority throughout all stages of deployment. The PEI MRC offers short-term intervention and crisis counselling to military families. We provide confidential support for any topic you need to discuss, and we assure complete discretion. We can connect you to the resources you need through referrals to community and military support agencies. To access our counselling services, email Mary-Jane@Pei-Mfrc.org or call the Centre at (902) 892-8999.

Our social worker can offer:

- Marriage/couple/family counselling.
- Depression/anxiety disorder treatment and recovery.
- Adjustment to life transitions (e.g. relocations or deployments).
- Self-esteem and communication skills for successful relationships.
- Childhood anxieties, behavioral, and attentional difficulties.
- Blended families, divorce/separation, support for children.



How Can the PEI MFRC Help?

Family Liaison Officer

The Family Liaison Officer (FLO) is a social worker who supports military families by advocating on their behalf and helping them navigate community resources. **Our FLO can help your family prepare for deployment by providing mental health support.**

You can also request a referral to a social worker in the community through the CAF Members Assistance Program at 1-800-268-7708. To contact our FLO, email Mary-Jane@PEI-MFRC.org or call the MFRC at (902) 892-8999.

Our Family Liaison Officer Can Provide the Following Services:

- Confidential, short-term counselling.
- Crisis support.
- Assistance for families with an ill or injured CAF member.
- Follow-up and ongoing support.
- Personal growth and wellness activities.
- Self-help and peer support groups.
- Referrals to community resources.
- Help families to navigate through relevant programs and services.
- Assistance in developing positive coping strategies using a strengths-based approach.
- Help families access emergency housing.
- Advocate on behalf of families.

How Can the PEI MFRC Help?

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Employment Services

Looking for employment as a military spouse or family member can be challenging. In partnership with PEI Career Development Services (CDS), the PEI MFRC can help you find employment.

CDS is a confidential, free and welcoming space where you can:

- Search for a new job & prepare for job interviews.
- Get help with your resumé and cover letter.
- Learn about different careers & the local labour market.
- Explore training & funding opportunities.
- Discover your skills and abilities.
- Request career counselling.
- Access free internet, computers, printers, and photocopiers for job searching.

For more information or to request services, visit the CDS website at www.CdsPei.ca or contact one of their offices.

Charlottetown Office: 160 Belvedere Avenue, (902) 626-2014 or Chtown@CdsPei.ca

Summerside Office: 674 Water St. E. (902) 436-0706 or Sside@CdsPei.ca



How Can the PEI MFRC Help?

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Second Language Training & Rosetta Stone

We strive to provide second language training (SLT) to military dependents and give them opportunities to learn either of Canada's official languages. To do so, the PEI MFRC has Rosetta Stone licenses available to CAF family members. Rosetta Stone's simple and intuitive approach allows participants to learn a new language using a method that combines listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Learning a new language is a great hobby to try while your military member is deployed, and you can do it online!. For more information, contact the MFRC at (902) 892-8999 or Info@Pei-Mfrc.org

Virtual Programming and PEI MFRC YouTube Channel

We connect Canadian Forces families in Prince Edward Island with those around the globe through virtual programming and video resources. You can access information on topics relevant to military families from the comfort of your home. Topics may include:

- Supporting children through deployments
- Scholarships
- Budgeting
- Military discounts
- Online job networking
- Other financial, social, and employment-related topics



To learn more, visit our website at WWW.PEIMFRC.ca or subscribe to our YouTube Channel called "PEI CAFConnection."

CAF Supports

The Canadian Armed Forces offers many services to assist military personnel and their family experiencing deployments.

Family Information Line

The Family Information Line is a bilingual service offering support, information, referrals, reassurance, and crisis management to the Canadian Armed Forces community, including families (immediate and extended), military members, veterans, and the extended military community. You will connect with empathetic, experienced professionals who are well versed in the CAF community and the programs, services, and general information you may need. Counsellors can also connect you to helpful local and national resources. Family Information Line counsellors are available 24/7. **Call 1-800-866-4546**



The graphic is a vertical rectangular poster with a blue-to-purple gradient background. At the top center is the 'Family Info Line' logo, featuring a red maple leaf and a signal icon. To the right of the logo is a red circle with '24/7' in white. Below the logo is the phone number '1-800-866-4546'. Underneath the number are three icons: a telephone, an envelope, and a video camera. Below these icons is the text 'ANY TIME FOR ANY REASON' in bold white capital letters. Underneath that is the text 'Connect with the Family Information Line to access personalized support'. Below that is the text 'INFORMATION • REFERRAL • EMOTIONAL SUPPORT'. At the bottom of the graphic is a red maple leaf and the 'Morale & Welfare Services' logo, which includes a red maple leaf and the text 'Morale & Welfare SERVICES' and 'Services Bien-être à moral FC'.

Family Info Line
24/7
1-800-866-4546

☎ ✉ 📺

ANY TIME FOR ANY REASON

Connect with the Family Information Line
to access personalized support

INFORMATION • REFERRAL • EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

FIL@CAFconnection.ca
Virtual sessions (contact us to book a time)
International 00-800-771-17722

Morale & Welfare SERVICES
Services Bien-être à moral FC

Strongest Families Institute

The Strongest Families Institute helps military families through the challenges associated with military life, such as deployments and postings. They offer support in the comfort and privacy of your home (online and telephone coaching) at convenient times. Strongest Families offers programs for depression, anxiety, behavioral issues, and bedwetting. Contact the MFRC Mental Health Team, who can refer you to the Strongest Families Institute. Call (780) 973-4011 ext.6300.

Crisis Text Service for Kids of CAF Families

The Crisis Text Line powered by Kids Help Phone is confidential and available day or night. Children, youth and young adults from military families can access free mental health and well-being support by texting the keyword **CAFKIDS at 686868** for service in English. Kids from military families might need help with feelings associated with:

- Relocating
- Changing schools and leaving friends behind
- Moving to a new home
- Separation when their parents are deployed

Support our Troops Grants and Services

Support our Troops meets the needs and special challenges faced by members of the CAF community as a result of military service. This includes providing financial assistance to promote family resiliency and supporting members who may have an illness or injury through various grants and programs. For more information, visit www.SupportOurTroops.ca

Canadian Forces Member Assistance Program

The Canadian Forces Member Assistance Program (CFMAP) is a 24/7 toll-free telephone advisory and referral service for all CAF personnel and their families. The program provides short-term, confidential, external counselling for those in need. CFMAP can assist with a wide range of individual or family issues, including:

- Marital and family
- Interpersonal relations
- Personal and emotional
- Stress and burn-out
- Work-related
- Harassment and sexual assault
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Finance
- Parenting

Contact the CFMAP by calling 1-800-268-7708 or by visiting the website <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/programs/member-assistance.html>

Military Chaplain & Padre

Military chaplains provide non-denominational pastoral care and counselling and contribute significantly to the spiritual and mental health of military members and their families. Chaplains are available to support members in need 24/7 and provide free guidance and advice. Please contact the MFRC or call 1-866-502-2203 to learn how to speak with a chaplain.

Operational Stress Injury Social Support (OSISS)

Unfortunately, military members who are deployed may develop an occupational stress injury. Being with someone who has an operational stress injury can be difficult. Family members may feel guilt or frustration because they cannot help with physical or mental health concerns or their use of alcohol or drugs. They may end up neglecting their own needs and feel very alone.

An OSISS Group can offer support, hope and acceptance from someone with first-hand experience in such a situation. Call 1-800-883-6094 to learn more about OSISS or visit their website www.osiss.ca

SISIP Financial Services

With SISIP Financial Services, military members and their families are assured that from posting to posting, their files will follow them in a seamless process, with no new registrations and minimal paperwork required. SISIP offices at major bases/wings/units across Canada ensure a standardized process and optimal service delivery of the following programs, products and services:

- Financial Counselling
- Term Life Insurance Plans
- Financial Planning
- Canadian Forces Group Retirement Savings Plan



To learn more about SISIP Financial or find a representative in your area, please visit their website at <https://www.sisip.com/en/>

Military Family Doctor Network

In partnership with Calian Health. This program aims to improve access to quality health care for dependents of serving CAF members by expediting the process of obtaining a physician and reducing the number of military spouses and children without a family physician. A representative from Calian's team will contact you to review your requirements and work with you to help you find a family physician. Physician availability will vary by location, and it may take 2–3 weeks for a representative to contact you.

You can access the program in one of the following ways:

- Fill out the online form and email it to MFDN@Calian.com.
- Print out the online form and fax it to 1-888-511-0219.
- Call Calian's team at 1-877-633-7722 Ext. 550.

Military Spousal Employment Network

The MSEN is free to join for military spouses. You'll get access to a list of dedicated national employers who are ready to provide you with equal employment opportunities and be able connect with these employers directly. You'll also be able to search the national employers' job openings through the MSEN job bank. The MSEN also offers virtual and in-person career fairs in multiple locations across Canada. Visit www.https://msen.vfairs.com



Community Services

Below you will find a list of community and government resources and supports located in Charlottetown and Summerside.

Mental Health and Addictions

Mental Health and Addictions 24/7 Line: Calls answered by a mental health professional. 1-833-553-6983

24/7 Crisis Intervention Island Helpline: 1-800-218-2885

Mobile Mental Health Response Service: 1-833-553-6983 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily. Provides in-person care when situations require more than phone-based support.

Mental Health and Addictions Patient Navigator:
MHAPatientNavigator@ihis.org

PEI Gambling Support Line: 1-855-255-4255

Smoker's Helpline: 1-877-513-5333

Community Mental Health Intake: Referrals to mental health programs for all ages.

- Charlottetown – McGill Community Mental Health, 55 McGill Ave. 902-368-4911
- Summerside – Prince County Hospital, 65 Roy Boates Ave. 902-888-8180

Other Supports

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Richmond Centre Metal Health Walk-In Clinic:

(Tuesday & Thursday 10am–6pm & Friday 12pm–4pm)

1 Rochford St. Charlottetown 902–368–4430

McGill Centre Mental Health Walk-In Clinic:

(16+, Saturdays & Sundays 1pm–5pm) 55 McGill Ave.

Charlottetown 902–368–4911

Prince County Hospital Mental Health Walk-In Clinic:

(Monday & Wednesday 9am–5pm) Summerside 902–888–8180

Student Well-Being Teams for Youth: 902–368–5868 or

SWT@gov.pe.ca

PEI Health Addiction Services: (Withdrawal management, opioid treatment program, and referrals to other addictions programs)

- Charlottetown – Provincial Addictions Treatment Facility, 2814 Rte. 215, Mount Herbert 902–368–4120 or 1–888–299–8399
- Summerside – Prince County Hospital 902–888–8380

Addiction and Substance Use Walk-in/Call-in Clinics:

Immediate 45 to 60 minute session with a counsellor without requiring an appointment.

- **Charlottetown Provincial Addiction Treatment Facility:** 902–368–4120, Wednesday 9am–12pm & Thursday 1pm–4pm.
- **Summerside:** 902–888–8180, Tuesday 1 pm–4pm & Thursday 9am–12pm.

Other Supports

Alcoholics Anonymous Charlottetown: 902-892-210

Al-Anon: 1-888-425-2666

Narcotics Anonymous: For meeting information visit www.Carna.ca or call 1-800-205-8402

Sexaholics Anonymous: 902-812-5563

Smart Recovery PEI: 902-330-4357

Open Door Outreach for Women: 2-30 Brackley Point Rd
Charlottetown 902-628-6826 or Office@OpenDoorPei.ca

Native Council of PEI: 6 F J McAulay Court, Charlottetown
902-892-5314 or Admin@NcPei.com

Canadian Mental Health Association Charlottetown: 178
Fitzroy St. 902-566-3034 or Division@CMHA.pe.ca

Family Service PEI Community Counselling:

- Charlottetown: 155 Belvedere Ave. Suite 6, 902-892-2441
- Summerside: 902-436-9171

Bridge the GAPP: An online resource designed to support mental wellness. <https://pei.bridgethegapp.ca/>

Wellness Together: www.WellnessTogether.ca Free, virtual mental health and substance use support available 24/7 for all people in Canada.

Medical Services

811 Telehealth: Non-emergency health information 24/7 from a registered nurse. Dial 711 (TTY) if you have a hearing impairment.

Virtual Health Care Information:

<https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/service/virtual-health-care-for-islanders-without-a-primary-care-provider>
1-833-710-1456 or HealthPEIMaple@ihis.org

PEI Patient Registry List: For residents seeking a family physician. 1-855-563-2101 or
<https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/health-pei/patient-registry-program>

PEI Health Card Information: 902-838-0900 or
<https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/health-pei/pei-health-card>

Patient Navigator: Assistance with navigating PEI's health services. 1-844-882-3141 or PatientNavigator@gov.pe.ca

Public Health Nursing:

- Charlottetown – Sherwood Business Centre, 161 St. Peters Rd. 902-368-4530
- Summerside – 205 Linden Ave. 902-888-8160

Pap Screening Appointments: 1-888-561-2233

Breast Cancer Screening Appointments: 1-888-592-9888

Downtown Walk-in Clinic: Boardwalk Professional Centre, 220 Water St. Charlottetown 902-367-4444

Sherwood Walk-in Clinic: Sherwood Medical Centre, 15 Brackley Point Rd. Charlottetown 902-628-8900

Stratford Walk-in Clinic: Stratford Medical Centre, 13 Stratford Rd. Charlottetown 902-892-2111

Central Street Walk-in Clinic: 434 Central St. Summerside 902-724-3210

Sexual Health Clinic: Prince County Hospital, Summerside 1-844-365-8258 or WomensWellnessProgram@ihis.org

Child Care, Youth, and Family Services

PEI Child Care Registry: <https://peichildcareregistry.com/>

Boys and Girls Club:

- Charlottetown: 35 St. Peters Rd. 902-892-2223
- Summerside: 364 Notre Dame St. 902-436-9403 or BGCsummerside@gmail.com

CHANCES (Caring, Helping, And Nurturing Children Every Step): 77 Upper Prince St. Charlottetown 902-892-8744 or Chances@ChancesFamily.ca

Mi'kmaq Family Resource Centre: 158 St Peters Rd.
Charlottetown 902-892-0928 or Mfrc.Pei.Aibn.com

Family Place: 75 Central St. Summerside: 902-436-1348 or
FamilyPlace@Eastlink.ca

Violence Prevention & Support

PEI Family Violence Prevention Services:

- Charlottetown Office – 902-894-3354, ext. 221 or Admin@FVPS.ca
- Summerside Outreach Coordinator – LeeAnne@FVPS.ca or 902-888-3310
- Men's Services – Charlottetown & Summerside: Tim@FVPS.ca or 902-626-5585

Anderson House Shelter – Charlottetown: 902-892-0960
(Emergencies)

PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre: Offices in Charlottetown and Summerside: 902-566-1864 or Admin@Peirsac.org

National Sexual Assault Support Line (24/7): 1-877-392-7583

Victim Services:

- Charlottetown: 902-368-4582
- Summerside: 902-888-8218

This handbook was written and compiled using information from other MFRCs in Canada, including Halifax, London, and Bagotville. Please check out other MFRCs for additional resources that will be helpful during your military journey! The complete list of sources that were consulted is as follows:

- https://www.halifaxmfrfc.ca/assets/docs/CAN_preparing_for_deployment_stress.pdf
- <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/fullscreen/58546131/how-to-better-cope-with-a-prolonged-absence-a-guide-for-families>
- <https://www.cafconnection.ca/getmedia/266fc799-dcc1-4efd-b6fa-763dd385c546/Family-Information-Booklet.pdf.aspx>
- https://www.cafconnection.ca/getmedia/20b2f162-0828-4a8aaf68-968fe386993a/CF_Deployment_Guide_e.pdf.aspx
- https://www.cafconnection.ca/getmedia/5e1e582e-117d-4748-9476-c0720f17aa94/Homecoming-Handbook_v4.aspx
- <https://www.cafconnection.ca/getmedia/5d8caf66-d97f-4f59-b444-e0aa98404501/A-Family-Guide-E.aspx>

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