

**Personnel—General
Family Reunion Guide**



**Headquarters
United States Army Europe
and Seventh Army
United States Army Installation
Management Command
Europe Region
Heidelberg, Germany**

24 July 2009

24 July 2009

Personnel—General
Family Reunion Guide

For the Commander:

BYRON S. BAGBY
Major General, US Army
Chief of Staff

Official:



DWAYNE J. VIERGUTZ
Chief, Army in Europe
Document Management

Summary. This pamphlet provides useful information for Family members of redeploying Soldiers and civilian employees.

Applicability. This pamphlet applies to Family members of active U.S. Army, Reserve, and National Guard Soldiers and civilian employees who are redeploying.

Forms. AE and higher level forms are available through the Army in Europe Publishing System (AEPUBS) at <https://aepubs.army.mil>.

Records Management. Records created as a result of processes prescribed by this pamphlet must be identified, maintained, and disposed according to AR 25-400-2. Record titles and descriptions are available on the Army Records Information Management System website at <https://www.arims.army.mil>.

Suggested Improvements. The proponent of this pamphlet is the USAREUR G1 (AEAGA-M, DSN 370-6373/3540). Users may suggest improvements to this pamphlet by sending DA Form 2028 to the USAREUR G1 (AEAGA-M), Unit 29351, APO AE 09014-9351.

Distribution. B (AEPUBS).

CONTENTS

Chaplain	2
Family Activities	
Session One - “Getting Reacquainted”	3
Session Two - “Oh, How We Missed You”	4
Session Three - “Precious Memories”	5
Session Four - “Nobody Knows the Troubles I’ve Seen”	6
Session Five - “Somebody Broke All the Rules”	8
Session Six - “Let Me Tell You How Much I Love You”	10
Session Seven “Let’s Refresh Our Loyalty”	13
Session Eight - “Kids Are People, Too!”	15
Session Nine - “Creating a New Way to Be Together”	17
Session Ten - “Jump-Starting Our Reunited Family”	19

CHAPLAIN

Reuniting with your loved ones after a lengthy deployment can be as stressful as it is exciting. If life were easy, we could say that your experience will be the same as everyone else’s and that you could simply follow a formula. However, we all know life is never that simple. While you share some things in common with other Families reuniting after a lengthy deployment, there will be issues and events that make your situation almost unique. As you read this pamphlet, many of you will find information that fits while other information is irrelevant to your challenges. For many of you, redeployment and reintegration will be fine if you take it slowly, give yourselves time to become friends, lovers, and partners again, and reestablish a routine as a couple and perhaps as parents.

Some of you, however, have experienced things during the separation that will not go away. These obstacles are huge hurdles rather than inconvenient speed bumps. Unfortunately, some of you are not going to reconnect with your spouse until you both agree that you are committed to the relationship, are able to forgive things that have happened, and envision a future that includes you both.

The U.S. Army has decided that all Soldiers and Family members must have someone with whom they may speak who is forbidden to discuss their issues with anyone else without written permission. Chaplains and chaplains assistants acting as spiritual advisers must keep sensitive personal information and information disclosed as a formal act of religion or as a matter of conscience in the strictest of confidence. If you want to speak about a crime, a serious Family matter (for example, adultery, abuse), or anything else that you want to keep secret, chaplains may not report it unless you consent to the disclosure in writing or a military judge orders them to. You can safely discuss all your troubles with a chaplain without fear of the information being passed on to someone else.

If you read this pamphlet and have questions, you may call your chaplain and arrange for a meeting, during which you can share your struggles. There may be things your spouse has done, or things you have done, that will make your reunion difficult. The chaplain will listen to your concerns and offer resources or information that may help. It is up to you to choose what to do next. Whether you accept the information or offer for further services or not, you may be assured that nothing will be reported. All chaplains are trained to offer grief counseling, teach marital communication, offer tools on parenting, and coach couples in problem-solving. Family Life chaplains have additional tools to help couples recover from the trauma of adultery and post-traumatic stress, and have many other techniques for improving the marital bond. Additionally, chaplains are primarily religious leaders and are selected by their faith communities to address issues such as forgiveness, shame, marriage covenants, divorce, grief, and other challenges.

Reuniting with loved ones can be tremendously rewarding for some and frightening for others. Reconnecting with someone you want to be loved by and knowing that person will always be there for you is perhaps the most wonderful part of the human experience. The disappointment of being rejected by that person or discovering that you are in a relationship in which you can no longer commit yourself is the greatest cause of human anxiety, shame, and depression. Please do not feel you need to carry these burdens alone. Chaplains are available for challenges such as these.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

SESSION ONE

“Getting Reacquainted”

Read this first:

There are moments after a long separation when Family members seem almost like strangers. We do not know how to respond or react to one another. That is to be expected. Once everyone settles into a new routine, you will feel much better.

This session is designed to help folks get reacquainted. If parents “lighten up” a bit, this can even be fun.

There are worksheets for everyone for part two of this session. Part one requires only that the Family sit around the dining room table or in the living room or Family room. Try not to have any distractions. Make it simple and you can keep it short. However, if you discover that some of your Family members want to talk about the things this session highlights, try not to discourage them. If you begin with this session by discouraging participation, the following sessions will be less successful. Your support and leadership in these experiences will pave the way to less stress and much stronger Family relationships.

Family Reunion Experience

Purpose: To encourage conversation about how individual Family members feel about the separation.

Concept: Conversation among Family members is an essential element of reunion. Children are especially sensitive about this issue. If children do not talk about their feelings, they may bury them. When this happens, those feelings may later erupt in ways parents do not desire. Let the conversation continue.

1. Get the Family together either at a table or sitting closely in the Family room or living room.
2. Give everyone enough time to think about his or her answers.
3. Each person in turn introduces him- or herself to the rest of the Family. Each person will tell things about him- or herself that have happened during the separation.

NOTE: It is a good idea to allow the discussion to go beyond short answers, such as when describing a situation or event.

4. When the returned parent introduces him- or herself, be sure to provide information about the absence that will make this experience enjoyable.

SESSION TWO

“Oh, How We Missed You”

Read this first:

Yes, you wrote lots of letters and cards. Yes, you have said over and over that you missed one another. However, this group exercise concerning how people have been missed in your Family helps Family members know that you take the absence seriously. It helps children know that they were missed.

Most often we “miss” the person who is away. But the person who is away also misses the Family members back home. There were many more events that the absent person missed than what the Family members missed by staying home. The absent parent read letters that made the absence more difficult because he or she was missing important personal events. However, Family members did not want to be experiencing what their military Family member experienced.



A hug and an “I missed you” just do not go far enough in ensuring that the pain of being away is healed. This is a healing exercise. Use it like medicine. And try to laugh a lot. Stories about being apart do not have to be only the sad ones. There are things to laugh about. Families should laugh together.

Family Reunion Experience

Purpose: To encourage Family members to say how much they missed one other during the separation.

Concept: Passing information about “being missed” is important information for people to have. Children especially come to believe that they are not missed. It is a funny thing about being missed; people never get tired of hearing that someone missed them. This is your Family’s chance to fill in the empty spaces about being missed.



1. Get the Family together around a table or in the living room or Family room. Be sure everyone has a pen or pencil and paper.
2. Give everyone enough time to think and write things about one another that they missed during this separation.
3. The returning parent will have more work than the others since he or she “missed” everyone. Perhaps the others really missed only the absent parent!

SESSION THREE

“Precious Memories”

Read this first:

Life is really made up of memories. Social scientists tell us that even the experiences of very young children get written into their memories. Life's circumstances teach us to either remember the good things about life or the bad things that happen to us. It is likely in your Family that each person sees life a little differently. One of you is likely to be hopeful and energetic, while another of you is low energy and cannot see the good in the future. One of you has seen the value of your recent separation while another of you cannot see any value in it.

What we remember molds our feelings and our attitudes. Those who collect good things to remember are most often happy, hopeful people. Those who collect painful things to remember are most often disappointed, fearful, and sometimes angry.

So what are we to do with a separation? Allow it to be a painful experience that will bother us for years ahead? Will we tell our children that it was painful so that they, too, will despise the idea of separations?

This reunion experience is designed to help you make good memories of your painful experiences.

Family Reunion Experience

Purpose: To encourage Family members to create happy memories and to encourage Families to celebrate their strength and power to endure even very difficult circumstances.

Concept: Helping one another recall things that can make us laugh instead of the things that will make us cry is one characteristic of strong, happy, and healthy Families. Use this time well. Perhaps one Family member can record on tape, video, or in writing the memories that you collect in this Family reunion experience.

1. Get the Family together to share another Family reunion experience. Get around a table or sit in the living room or Family room.
2. Give everyone enough time to think about what they will write about. Be sure that each person has a pen or pencil and paper on which to write his or her story.
3. Each person is to write about an experience that he or she had during this separation. Then, in turn, each person reads or tells his or her story. Remember, the purpose is to get the Family to laugh. Laughter heals hearts.
4. Very young children who cannot write must be offered the opportunity to “tell” their story if they have one. If not, do not ignore them. The youngest children can share in the happiness of a Family together, even when they are not able to participate in this experience.

SESSION FOUR

“Nobody Knows the Troubles I’ve Seen”

Read this first:

Well, how long can we go on feeling as if we are denying that there have been some difficult times? Actually, these exercises were designed because we have had difficult times. The trick is to learn the ways we can “turn our frowns upside down!” At least that is what Mom used to say!

There are some sad and painful experiences that can never have a happy face. However, if your Family is together now, then what is in the past is in the past. But we need a little practice in leaving the past in its place.

What we do not do in this experience is make an argument of our past troubles. That is, we do not talk about marital difficulties, or children’s school performance, or the time someone broke something. The experiences we are talking about are those that were difficult for one or more Family members and may have helped draw us together. Families also grow stronger as they suffer through difficult times together.

Obviously, there is great benefit to all of us if we can “turn our frowns upside down!” We are happier people. We have a more positive attitude. We “work friendly.” And people enjoy being with us. Hey! That does sound like a Family!

Family Reunion Experience

Purpose: For Family members to learn the skill of turning bad experiences into learning experiences; to learn ways of making something useful out of a bad experience.

Concept: Artwork and people work go hand in hand. That is, as we “visualize” a way of making our situations better, we can actually begin thinking about them in a different, healthier way. Your Family can do this!

1. Get the Family together to share another Family reunion experience. Get around a table this time. Be sure you have pencils and crayons (if possible) and paper (colorful “construction” paper would be best).
2. Everyone is to draw a “happy face” (☺) on the front of the paper, and a “sad face” (☹) on the back of the paper.
3. While doing your drawings, begin telling stories about a difficult time that one member or the entire Family experienced while separated. It could be about attempts to make a telephone call or about being hurt by friends in school. Or about a missed birthday or mail that took so long to arrive.
4. After telling the sad or painful story, see if you can find what good may have come from it. It could be we learned that being a Family is the most important thing in the world.

**“Nobody Knows the Troubles I’ve Seen”
Worksheet**

“Leaving Troubles in the Past”

One problem or trouble I cannot seem to forget:

What I could have done differently to prevent this problem or trouble:

What others could have done to help me prevent this problem or trouble:

Some ways to leave problems and troubles behind: Forgive one another; talk out our feelings; apologize; forget about it; or create a ceremony to bury the problem in the past.

SESSION FIVE

“Somebody Broke All the Rules”

Read this first:

Rules are not for the breaking, we know that! But somehow they keep getting broken. Family rules are important parts of how Families stay organized. If there were no rules or if everyone made his or her own rules, we would be living in chaos. Maybe sometimes you feel as if your home is in chaos!

So, who broke the rules and which rules did he or she break? Usually we think only of children when we think of rules. But parents and couples have rules, too. When someone does not follow them, we have hurt feelings, even anger. Not that breaking the rules may cause serious problems, but the rules matter to the Family.

The rules of your household changed when only one parent was there to guard them. One parent may be a strict rule-keeper and the other may be more flexible. We think that is important because if both parents were strict, the home would be a very depressing place. If both were flexible, there might as well be no rules at all!

How did your rules change during the separation? Do you have permission to talk about them? Do you have permission to get them under control? Can you map out a new direction with the Family involved? We think you can!

Family Reunion Exercise

Purpose: Children may have a problem recognizing that they broke rules that the absent parent would have enforced. Maybe it was staying up past the usual bedtime. Maybe it was not having to eat their vegetables! Maybe it was shortening of a curfew or staying out later than usually allowed. Maybe the parent who stayed home also took advantage of not having to discuss a decision he or she wanted to make. The purpose here is to put that behind us. There is no earth-shattering reason that rules must always be kept or kept the same way. But it is time now to know the rules that will be kept now that the Family is back together.

Concept: Telling about broken rules makes them less fearful. It is likely that no one is going to confess to anything very great. But remember that younger children will take you at your word when you say that there will be no penalty to telling about a rule they broke. Keep it light.

1. Get the Family together to share Family reunion experience number five. Have pencils and paper handy, too.
2. Have the Family members write on the paper a rule that they had permission of a parent to break, a rule they want to keep, and a rule they want eliminated.
3. Each Family member, in turn, tells the story of his or her rules and why they were selected.

NOTE TO PARENTS: Just because a child wants a rule to be eliminated all the time since it was broken already with someone's permission, is not reason enough to take the rule away. Sometimes parents have to make rules that are good for the Family and children that the children do not like.

4. After everyone has had his or her turn, make a new list of rules that the Family will live by in the coming months. Post them publicly, such as on the refrigerator door. See how they work. Review them again soon.

**“Somebody Broke All the Rules”
Family Reunion Exercise**

The rule I want to keep:

The rule I had permission to break:

The rule I wish did not exist:

SESSION SIX

“Let Me Tell You How Much I Love You”

Read this first:

Hearing that you are loved by the person you love is vitally important. Parents sometimes believe that telling their children “too often” that they are loved will give the children permission to get away with things that “unloved” children would not. That is really sad. The most vital factor in growing up is knowing that your parents love you. Not guessing that your parents love you. Knowing that you are loved. People who grow up without knowing may spend a lifetime trying to find out. Do not let that be the story of your children or anyone in your Family for that matter!

You have all been separated for a long time this time. It could be worse. But it means that Family members did not hear that love message often enough. It means that it is time to begin again.

Let us get on the love bandwagon! That is real music!

Family Reunion Exercise

Purpose: Children thrive on the messages that they are loved. If you have been working through these experiences and you are now on number six, you already know that importance. Missing all those days of love messages during a deployment or other separation can actually make us “love starved.” No, not like in the movies! But children who do not know they are loved may act out negatively in some way to get the attention they need.

Concept: The idea here is that children will accept negative attention before they accept no attention at all. Children need to confirm in their minds that they are loved. Parents can help to make that happen.

1. Again, gather the Family in the living room or Family room, or around the kitchen table. It might be a good idea to meet in a different room this time, just for change’s sake. Paper and pencils need to be handy.
2. Each person has a message about loving and being loved that he or she would like to give to another and receive. These “love messages” must be reaffirmed after a long separation or must be adjusted because of the separation. Knowing what messages each person needs will tell you how much love needs to be given!
3. Using worksheet 1, each Family member records his or her statements about love, and then shares these messages with the Family.
4. Finally, using worksheet 2, each person makes a valentine to give to another person in the Family. Parents must protect children who might not get a valentine. For this reason, parents should make a valentine for each child.

**“Let Me Tell You How Much I Love You”
Worksheet 1**

The message about love I would like to hear from others:

The message about love I need to give to others:

The person or persons I most need to talk with about love messages:

**“Let Me Tell You How Much I Love You”
Worksheet 2**

My Special Valentine for You!



SESSION SEVEN

“Let’s Refresh Our Loyalty”

Read this first:

There are two kinds of glue holding Families together. The first and finest is love. Love goes the extra mile. Love cares when no one else will. Love is stronger than circumstances and behavior.

The second glue holding Families together is loyalty. This means that no matter what, each Family member can count on the others to be “true blue.” Family members must know that the rest of the Family is on their side. Without this loyalty, Families are not “stuck” together strong enough to continue to withstand the challenges of military living. So far, your Family has been strong enough.

However, long absences have a tendency to weaken this “loyalty” glue. Younger children are not certain that the absent parent really and truly is dedicated to the Family. They may, in fact, feel betrayed. The rebonding mission in this exercise is to ensure that the “glue of loyalty” is reinforced so that there is no doubt in any Family member’s mind that this Family is here to stay!

Family Reunion Experience

Purpose: To encourage Family members to reinforce the bonds of loyalty that have kept them together throughout the challenges of military living.

Concept: Security is a vital force in the “glue” that holds Families together. And not just for children. We all thrive in life when we have the knowledge that our Family is going to be together forever.

Adults know that Families do break up. This is not the ideal, nor is it what adults or children want. Therefore, for this exercise it is not necessary to address the reality that Families do not always stay together forever. It is what everyone in a Family hopes for. Let it be the hallmark of your Family, too.

1. Gather the Family into the living room or Family room, or around the kitchen table. Paper and pencils need to be handy, as usual.
2. Each person has both a hope and a fear about his or her own Family’s ability to “stay together through thick or thin!” Children fear it the most. This exercise gives each member the opportunity to reinforce the loyalty that exists in every Family.
3. Using the worksheet, identify where each Family member feels weakest when it comes to loyalty. This is an exercise designed to find out how people feel, not to argue that they should not feel that way. It is important to know where Family weaknesses are. A separation is stressful to the loyalty feelings in a Family. Here is a chance to strengthen them!

**“Let’s Refresh Our Loyalty”
Worksheet**

I worry about loyalty in my Family because of the following:

The loyalty message I wish I would give:

The loyalty message I want to hear:

SESSION EIGHT

“Kids Are People, Too!”

Read this first:

People who cannot vote, cannot drive, cannot make the rules, and cannot make adult decisions are kids! But this does not mean that they are not “people.” Being a person means that one has feelings, wishes, dreams, and hopes. Being a person means that we get lonely, get our feelings hurt, get angry, and love others.

Too often in military Families, things are moving so quickly that the children are forgotten. You know, “Yes, that is a good idea, but we have kids!” The children are often forgotten during going-away and welcome-home parties.

Your deployed military Family member is home. We cannot afford to forget about the children during the reunion-adjustment process. They are people with feelings and ideas. They must be included in your plans for rebonding and rebuilding your Family.

This Family reunion experience is primarily for them. Parents will need to “bite their tongues” if necessary to let the children have a night in which they are not told how or what to feel. This is their night for self-expression.

Family Reunion Exercise

Purpose: To encourage children to talk with other Family members about who they are and how they feel.

Concept: Everybody has feelings and has an idea about who he or she is. However, in the adult “kingdom of the giant people,” children have a hard time getting a word in edgewise. Parents are so often trying to “teach” their teenagers about the world that the teenagers do not get the chance to tell parents what it is like just to be a teen. This is that chance.

1. Yes! Get your handy paper and pencils for this Family reunion exercise.
2. While the Family is talking about whatever comes to mind, a parent can read the questions one at a time to the children. Children can take those handy pencils and write the answers. If you have spirited children who would rather just answer out loud, go ahead and let them. But going slowly is important to make all these exercises work.
3. Using the worksheet provided, respond by talking or by writing to the questions or statements on the worksheet. If you choose to write your answers, be sure that there is a time afterwards in which the Family listens to the children tell what and why they wrote their particular answers.

**“Kids Are People, Too!”
Worksheet**

Some things I do well that no one notices much:

The funniest thing I ever did:

What it feels like to be my age:

SESSION NINE

“Creating a New Way to Be Together”

Read this first:

This is session nine, the next to the last. Now that we know so much about one another, we can get on with mapping out the direction that we want our Family to go from now on. It is not a perfect direction. There are bumps and curves. However, if we know where we are going, we will get there with a plan designed to do just that!

Everyone has a good idea of what they want out of a Family. A young child may want more playtime with parents. A teenager may want more freedom. Parents may want it quieter in the house. After a long separation or deployment, Families need to “get on course” in the direction they want to go as a Family.

Here is a part of that process. This exercise gives Family members the chance to put on paper what they think are important things their Family needs to do and be.

Let us get that map on paper and hit the road for a new future with our reunited Family!

Family Reunion Exercise

Purpose: To enable Families to share together in planning about what will be important in their Family. This is a vital final part in the readjustment necessary after a deployment or long separation.

Concept: Charting the course after a long separation enables Family members to join together in love and loyalty in a direction they have chosen together. Children often ask other children what it is like in their Family. When they are part of the planning, they tell the wonderful story of health and happiness.

1. Get the paper and pencils once again and gather the Family in the regular meeting place.
2. Using the worksheet, each Family member tells the ideas he or she has about what the Family could be like.

Parents: Do not worry that you may not like or be able to do what children want in your Family. This exercise gives you a good idea of what is important to them. Even though these things may not be what you will incorporate into your Family plan, it is good to know what is important to all Family members. And just maybe you can do some of these things some of the time.

3. Combine everyone’s written comments and the verbal comments of children who cannot write yet. Make a list and hang it on the refrigerator door for a few days or so. Leave room on the list to add to it as the days go by. You will all learn what is important to your Family.

**“Creating a New Way to Be Together”
Worksheet**

Here is a partial list of things that you may want in your Family plan:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Spending time together | Taking time to talk together |
| Sharing a religious faith together | Volunteering somewhere together |
| Doing things together | Having special Family traditions |
| Celebrating special days | Eating meals together more often |
| Everyone helping everyone | Tell more jokes |
| Exercising together | Going to movies more often together |

Important parts of our Family plan I want to include:

Some things in our plan I know are special to other Family members:

SESSION TEN

“Jump-Starting Our Reunited Family”

Read this first:

It is time to do just a few more things to be sure that your Family has finished the reunion process. Just a couple of ideas left. They seem to be harmless enough, but they are as important as everything else. Do them, and you will never regret it.

“Quick and easy to do” is the motto for good Family-reunion adjustment. Although what you have experienced during the last nine sessions does not guarantee that your Family will not have problems in the future, it does help you know that you have done some of the things that it takes to ensure that your Family is going down the right road.

If there are serious problems resulting from the separation or deployment, please be sure to seek the help of a marriage or Family counselor.

Well, get on with it, and may your future together be everything you planned it to be.

Worksheet

Write in this space the Family strengths that you have developed by using this pamphlet:

Write in this space one Family strength that needs building:

Write in this space one or two steps you can take to build the Family strength:

Write a positive event that you remember since your Family was reunited:

What I pledge to do to be sure that our Family gets stronger and stays strong:

Something special I will do to help keep my Family happy: