

## Post-deployment



# Returning home

When returning home from deployment or separation to friends and family we often have high expectations of what life will be like on our return. There is nothing wrong with harbouring such expectations as they will often form the comfort blanket that sustains us during the more demanding times while in theatre or on task.

Equally, for spouses and families awaiting your arrival, they are by and large confident that their love and affection will overcome any difficulties that they and you might encounter as you re-establish yourself in the home environment.

Whilst some may make the transition without difficulty, a significant proportion of returning diggers are likely to encounter issues that cause them and others at least some degree of difficulty. Life does not always easily fall back into place and there will inevitably be occasions when you have to make real efforts to ensure your lives stay on track – homecoming has the potential to be one of those occasions. The key to dealing with issues that may arise lies primarily in:

- processing and addressing the areas of difficulty
- cherishing hope in life and the future
- sustaining contact with family, friends and colleagues

It is far more likely than not that you will be eagerly looking forward to your return. However, over the preceding months whilst you have been away your mind and body will have become attuned to reacting to a wide range of psychological cues and stimuli.

Your 'fight or flight' responses will have become highly tuned to respond to dangerous situations. Having taught your body to react to these danger signals it will take some time for it to return to a more usual state of being.

Some responses may include:

- **hyper vigilance** – finding it difficult to relax when surrounded by large groups of people
- **heightened startle response** – responding to loud bangs or noise
- **experiencing flashbacks** – reliving events and episodes
- **panic attacks** – you feel threatened and your body feels it has to go into survival mode
- **extreme anger** – heightened arousal coupled to negative thoughts and emotions

None of these experiences are unusual for diggers returning from operational duties. Initially you could feel that you are:

- 'loosing your grip'
- you are isolated from your family and friends
- you alone are feeling these disturbing reactions whilst your colleagues remain robust and untouched by their experiences

The short answer is that you are neither going mad or are you unique in experiencing these potentially corrosive and unwanted feelings.

The reactions you are trying to deal with are quite normal reactions to an abnormal set of circumstances. It is worthy of mention that you are not the first combat veterans to experience this phenomenon. The emotions you may be feeling were first journaled by soldiers of the Roman Legions and have been experienced by 'returning warriors' to the present day.

So having identified some potential problems what are you going to do about them?

Remember, you are now back home and safe. Given sufficient time most people find their operational experience to be enriching, professionally rewarding and something to be proud of. The period of time required to get fully back to normal will vary from person to person, however try to remain positive and optimistic even if at times your homecoming experience has not been all you might have wished for.

Like many who have gone before you, the most likely outcome is you will be stronger, more resilient person as a result of your experiences. You may need to work hard on relationships to ensure they are re-established on your return, but as with all the best things in life they need constant attention. Most of you will find talking to spouses, partners and friends when it feels right to do so will be a positive and rewarding experience for both you and them.

**If you are troubled by your experiences, remember you are not alone. There is no stigma whatsoever attached to making an approach for advice and support**



[www.youngdiggers.com.au](http://www.youngdiggers.com.au)

Your non-military, non-government, confidential volunteer help and support service



Australia

Veterans & Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCSS)

Phone: 1800 011 046 – 24 hrs, 7 days



New Zealand

Veterans' Affairs New Zealand (VANZ)

NZ Freephone: 0800 4 838372

International: +0011 64 7 859 7676

8am-5pm Monday to Friday (NZ time)