

Erin's Rules of Thumb for Successful Deployment Reunions for the Partner deployed

Rule #1: Beware the fairytale!

As much as you want life to be perfect when you get home—the house to function, the kids to behave, the in-laws to get along, your partner to be in a good mood—it never happens exactly right. Don't set yourself up for disappointment.

Rule #2: Make realistic expectations and be patient.

Instead of expecting the fairytale, *plan* for a good reunion. They don't just happen. Plan for activities, conversations, and social gatherings that both parties can agree on. Give yourselves *time* to adjust to being back together. You both have changed. Don't expect that he/she will know what you want him/her to say or do when you get off the bus if you don't him/her first!

Rule #3: Avoid “pissing contests!”

Both parties had it bad. No one wins when partners fight over who did more work and who suffered the most. It only takes one person to stop this contest.

Rule #4: Use good timing!

A basic rule of communication is: if you want someone to hear what you are saying, say it when they are listening. A man or woman who has just finished a 36 hour trip home from a combat zone is not listening. Nor is a man or woman who has anxiously been awaiting the return of his/her most significant other for 7-12 months and sees him/her for the first time. Wait.

Rule #5: Prepare for the “stupid questions” and the silence.

Some people will want to know about your deployment and some won't. Some will know the questions to ask, and some won't know what to say. Some will ask the “stupid questions” out of curiosity, and some won't ask anything at all. Plan for the questions to be asked and plan your response in advance. Consider telling your friends and family in advance the questions that you do *not* want to hear and have them spread the word. Some common “stupid questions” are:

- a. *How was it?*—too general
- b. *Did you kill or shoot anyone?*—no right answer and brings back bad memories
- c. *Are you glad to be home?*—you may not give the answer that is expected or desired
- d. Any variation of: *Was it hot?, Did you see any camels?, Did you talk to any Iraqis/Afghanis?*—of course, but is this relevant?

Also consider what stories you *do* want to share and what you want people to know. That way you won't be caught off guard when your deployment comes up, and you can help friends and family know your

experience even if they don't know how to ask about it. *Don't assume* a significant other who doesn't ask questions isn't interested.

Rule #6: Thank each other!

Each party plays a role in the deployment experience. Don't forget who kept the house standing while the other was fighting for the freedom to have it.