

Making sense of the Emotional Cycle of Deployment



Deployment can be an emotional experience. Understanding the stages and the feelings involved can help.

The Emotional Cycle of Deployment is a model that was developed for Naval families by Kathleen Vestal Logan in 1987 and published in Proceedings Magazine. While times have moved on and operating patterns have changed, it is still a helpful tool in understanding and explaining changes in feelings and behaviour resulting from deployment. There will be individual differences in how people feel, and each deployment will be different.

Here is a summary of the feelings and behaviours that are common for couples during different stages of the deployment cycle. You might want to show this to your partner, to others in your support network, or to someone you know who is experiencing these changes.

Stage	Name	When does it happen?	How you and/or your loved ones may be feeling:	Common behaviours:
1	Anticipation of loss	4-6 weeks before deployment	Increased tension Pressure to get stuff done/time slipping away Worry Unexpressed anger Restlessness Irritability Guilt (partner who is leaving) Resentment (partner who is staying)	Being busy Cramming in projects Increased arguments Bickering Organising family visits & social events Unexpected tears over small things Thinking about ways to help children manage the separation
2	Detachment & withdrawal	Final days before departure	Sadness Fatigue Emotional detachment Withdrawal Ambivalence about sexual intimacy (feeling like you should, but also wanting to keep at a distance) Guilt Impatience to 'get on with it' Frustration (particularly if departure is delayed)	Partners may stop sharing thoughts & feelings with each other Difficulties in communicating Focusing on individual tasks Having sex because it's your last chance/avoiding sex altogether
3	Emotional disorganisation	Early days after departure	Shock Relief (may be followed with guilt at feeling relieved) Numbness Pain Loneliness Sense of disruption Confusion Sense of being overwhelmed	Difficulty sleeping (responsible for 'security') or excessive sleeping Withdrawal from friends and neighbours Self-medicating with alcohol or food Doing tasks outside your comfort zone that your partner would normally do

4	Recovery & stabilisation	Second month after departure onwards	Increased confidence and independence Isolation can still cause sense of vulnerability Pride in ability to manage alone Feeling a bit asexual – lack of contact with sexual partner	Settling into a routine Establishment of new family patterns Being more outwardly independent Cultivating new friends and sources of support Stretching self and abilities Finding new skills
5	Anticipation of homecoming	One to two months before return	Joy and excitement Apprehension Nervousness Worries about effect that return will have Worries about how you will feel about each other Worries about what the other partner will think about decisions and actions that have been taken Sense of running out of time to get the 'deployment list' completed	Questioning and re-evaluating the relationship Preparing by doing household jobs and personal care (uncharacteristically 1950s-style cleaning, waxing!)
6	Renegotiation of the relationship contract	Early days after homecoming	Adjustment from being 'single' to behaving like partners Sense of a loss of freedom and independence – having to be answerable to another person Resentment 'Home-based' partner feeling out of control 'Home-based' partner feeling protective of children Returning partner feeling out of place in their own home Sex may initially feel weird – there can be a sense of 'entitlement' not matched by feelings of intimacy Can be both joyful and difficult	Adjusting priorities and loyalties in relationships – from 'oppos' on board/friends/support network to partner/spouse Changes to family routines and activities Too much togetherness causing friction Roles and responsibilities being renegotiated and changing Clash of parenting styles, renegotiation of joint approaches Talking about issues as they come up, having the first 'Big Argument'
7	Reintegration & stabilisation	4-6 weeks after homecoming (sometimes longer depending on type of deployment/ separation)	Beginning of sense of being back together as a family Enjoying more warmth and closeness Sense of normality Being more relaxed and comfortable with each other Back on track emotionally	New routines being established Partners talking about 'we', 'us' and 'our' instead of 'I', 'me' and 'my' Planning ahead Returning to a more balanced social life including extended family, mutual friends and individual activities



It is important to say that deployment is not always necessarily a negative experience for either partner. There can be complex feelings involved, but feelings themselves are neither good nor bad, they just are. It is okay to feel whatever you feel – it doesn't mean that your relationship is doomed or that it is your partner's fault. There is nothing inherently bad about feeling angry, for example. It is what we do with our anger that can be positive or negative. Sometimes it can galvanise us to talk with our partner and sort out an issue. RN and RM families may be living with challenging situations at times, but this does not mean that they cannot have healthy and positive relationships.

The unique nature of Service life can actually drive some couples to be more consciously aware of their feelings and reactions, and to put greater emphasis on cultivating and nurturing their relationships. Knowing that what you are experiencing is normal and natural can be reassuring and help you to accept and work through challenges. Not every conflict is a sign of a deteriorating relationship – some conflict is inevitable and healthy. Having to negotiate challenges and change can actually strengthen and enhance the bond between partners and family units.

If you are feeling 'stuck' or you want to learn more about keeping your relationship strong, you can get free relationship support, funded by RNRMC, from Relate. This can be face-to-face, by telephone, webcam or live chat, even if you are deployed overseas. Contact Relate's dedicated helpline for the RN and RM community on 01302 380 279 or visit www.relate.org.uk.