

Reunion

Reunion is a time of celebration and change. It is important to remember that the children have grown emotionally and physically. Children experience a variety of feelings before and after being reunited. Some common reactions from children include:



- # Wonders why you left if you loved him/her;
- # Pretends initially that he or she does not care about you;
- # Attaches themselves firmly to you;
- # Expresses anger or jealousy over the father's interaction with the mother;
- # Becomes anxious and insecure about what to expect;
- # Feels guilty that he or she did not do enough while the parent was away;
- # Dreads the parent's return if they believe they will be disciplined for all the wrongs committed;
- # Angry with the parent's absence and feels guilty over that anger;
- # Needs warm-up time to get used to the parent again;
- # Happy and excited;
- # Talks nonstop to get the parent up to date;
- # Runs to parent or withdraws totally.

Suggestions for the Parent at Home to Help with Reunion

- # Bake cookies or make a special meal that the children can help prepare.
- # Make welcome home signs in preparation.
- # Have a family reunion first; *then* plan special time as a couple.
- # Plan inexpensive but fun things to do as a family.

Suggestions for the Returning Parent

- # Praise the children for what they have accomplished while you were away.
- # Review pictures, schoolwork, and scrapbooks.
- # Start with a clean slate; past wrongs do not count.

- # Accept that it will take time to adjust as a family again.
- # Expect changes—the children may not like to do the same things they did before you left.
- # Take personal time with each child, such as arranging a “date” with each child.
- # Do not criticize.
- # Talk, talk, talk.

Some Great Children’s Books

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| <i>The Giving Tree</i> | by Shel Silverstein |
| <i>You Go Away</i> | by Dorothy Corey |
| <i>A Father Like That</i> | by Charlotte Zolotow |
| <i>Chicken Soup With Rice</i> | by Maurice Sendak |
| <i>Make Way For Ducklings</i> | by Robert McClosky |
| <i>The Runaway Duck</i> | by David Lyon |
| <i>Dear Daddy</i> | by Phillipe Dupasquier |
| <i>The Peppermint Pig</i> | by Nana Bawden |
| <i>If You Listen</i> | by Charlotte Zolotow |
| <i>Amifika</i> | by Lucille Clifton |
| <i>How Many Stars in the Sky?</i> | by Lenny Hart |
| <i>At The Crossroads</i> | by Rachel Isadora |
| <i>Jafta’s Father</i> | by Hugh Lewin |
| <i>Cecil’s Story</i> | by George Ella Lyon |
| <i>Father Bear Comes Home</i> | by Else Holmelund Ninarik |
| <i>The Daddies Boat</i> | by Lucia Nonfried |
| <i>The Goodbye Year</i> | by Carole Bolton |

All kids are different and will adjust to separation in different ways and at different rates. This handout described children’s normal emotional reactions to separation. However, you may want to seek professional advice if these behaviors become too intense, persist, become worse, interfere with routine daily activities, or the child’s health begins to suffer. Some additional resources you may want to turn to for assistance include:

- # Chaplain,
- # Family Readiness Group (FRG),
- # Family physician,
- # Guidance counselors, and/or
- # Army Community Service.