

ANNEX IV

## **MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY**

**Information to Help United Nations Uniformed  
Personnel, their Families and T/PCCs to Understand  
and Manage Issues around Deployment**



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## Glossary

<b>Caregiver</b>	An individual who provides support and care, which may include physical, medical, psychological, or emotional assistance, to children or people in need, often within challenging environments.
<b>Family</b>	A family is a fundamental social unit consisting of individuals connected by law, marriage, adoption, blood, or intense emotional bonds. Families provide a framework for support, nurturing, and mutual care, serving as a central structure for the upbringing of children, the sharing of resources, and the cultivation of emotional relationships.
<b>Family compositions</b>	These can vary widely and include nuclear families (parents and their children), extended families (including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins), single-parent families, blended families (formed through re-marriage), and more. The concept of family extends beyond biological relationships, encompassing chosen families and close-knit communities built on shared values, emotional connections, and support systems.
<b>Reintegration</b>	Refers to the process that Uniformed Personnel undergo as they transition to parent unit lives following a deployment period. It involves the physical, emotional, and psychological adjustments that service members and their families need to successfully return to their pre-deployment routines and roles.
<b>Spouse</b>	<p>Refers to the legally recognized partner (of a Uniformed Personnel) who is married according to the laws and regulations of the applicable jurisdiction. This relationship grants certain rights and benefits to the spouse, often including access to medical care, housing allowances, and other forms of support provided by the Uniformed Personnel to ensure the well-being of the service member's family. Uniformed Personnel spouses play a crucial role in supporting their service member partners. They often face unique challenges and opportunities due to the nature of Uniformed Personnel life, including deployments, relocations, and potential separations.</p> <p>NOTE: The definition and benefits associated with Uniformed Personnel spouses can vary between different armed forces and countries.</p>
<b>T/PCCs</b>	Troops/Police-Contributing Countries

# 1 Introduction

Being selected for a United Nations deployment is a moment of pride for Uniformed Personnel and their families due to its esteemed status and financial rewards. However, as the preparation for the deployment unfolds, they might experience a spectrum of emotional responses, including excitement, joy, pride, sadness, anger, tension, frustration, resentment, and depression. Deployment periods can also be times of growth and of finding inner strength for some families. Recognizing and understanding these challenges is crucial for effectively coping with the separation during deployment.

The United Nations recognizes the importance of the well-being of Uniformed Personnel's families and understands that effectively managing the impact of deployment on them requires careful attention.

This guide, therefore, aims to help Uniformed Personnel and their family members understand and become aware of stressors and provide tips on preventive and mitigatory actions for dealing with them throughout the deployment cycle. By doing so, it seeks to enable Uniformed Personnel to embark on a United Nations Mission with confidence, focus on their primary tasks during deployment, and reintegrate with their families with pride and joy post-deployment.

This guide is primarily aimed at Uniformed Personnel and their families. However, it is recommended that Troops/Police-Contributing Countries (T/PCC) leadership and their medical officers also get acquainted with these issues and assist Uniformed Personnel and their families in navigating them successfully.

A few suggestions on how Uniformed Personnel and their families can be assisted by the T/PCCs have been listed towards the end of this document.

## 2 Pre-deployment period

Recognizing and addressing pre-deployment stressors while developing effective coping strategies is very important for the well-being of both Uniformed Professionals and their families.

Several issues may arise between the Uniformed Personnel and their families, including arguments around deployment, childcare and financial expectations, and differing opinions on the spouse's location in their absence. Although thorough planning can alleviate some stress and apprehension, it is essential to acknowledge that not all stressors can be eliminated. As such, it is necessary to be aware of how this stress may manifest and how to deal with it.

### Symptoms of pre-deployment stress among family members

- **Anger:** A primary emotional reaction
- **Denial:** Why us? Why you?
- **Anxiety:** What will I do while you are away? What will the future hold?
- **Other feelings:** Fear, resentment, sadness, clinging, distancing

## Ways to help reduce and cope with pre-deployment stress

- **Communicate with** family and have one-to-one discussions
- **Develop** plans together for staying in touch
- **Prepare** family members for their departure

Open and honest communication between both parties is essential for understanding each other's feelings and concerns. By addressing these issues proactively, Uniformed Personnel and their families can better manage the stress associated with deployment, fostering a more robust support system and enhancing overall well-being.

Before deployment, Uniformed Personnel should familiarize their family with ways to contact them during their absence. In case of emergency or inability to contact them, they should tell their family who to approach in their parent unit and introduce them to each other before the Uniformed Personnel's departure.

## 3 Deployment period

Family members may react differently during this period as they are often subject to different worries, fears, and anxieties during this separation.

### Factors influencing the stress of families of deployed personnel

- Fear for the deployed family member's safety
- Disruption of established patterns and routines
- Negative reactions from children to sudden changes in the family environment
- Need to develop new resilience skills, renew family relationships, make new friends, and join support groups
- Being overburdened by new roles and responsibilities

### Symptoms of deployment stress

The families may experience a range of symptoms, the most common ones being:

- Emptiness
- Loneliness
- Fear
- Anger
- Grief

### Ways to reduce and cope with deployment stress

Accept your feelings as normal reactions to challenging circumstances, not signs of rejection.

Some tips for spouses or partners to help themselves and other family members cope with the separation are provided below.

### *Family and friends*

- Accept help from friends and relatives. This is essential during the spouse or partner's absence and is not a sign or admission of weakness or inability to cope.
- Increase contact with your family and friends since they could provide much-needed support.
- Build rituals into a personal routine to keep the deployed family member present.

### *Neighbours*

- Aim to build a relationship with at least three neighbours. They can be invaluable in times of emergency and provide day-to-day support.

### *Work*

- If you work full-time, decide in advance what plans need to be implemented for school holidays.
- Open communication with your employer can help ensure a smoother work-life balance during challenging periods.

### *Self-care*

- Develop a routine that includes dedicated time for you to relax and unwind.
- Take care of yourself to prevent exhaustion.
- Pursue hobbies and interests that you already enjoy or explore new ones.

## 4 Post-deployment period

Uniformed Personnel and their families are encouraged to acknowledge that homecoming can be stressful and that this stress can be eased by fostering mutual understanding and support.

To facilitate a smoother reintegration process, T/PCC may want to implement a process to educate personnel and their families about the challenges and issues they may encounter post-deployment. By fostering understanding and providing appropriate resources, they can better support Uniformed Personnel and their families as they navigate this significant phase in their lives.

### Post-deployment stress factors for Uniformed Personnel

- Conditions during deployment were dangerous or tense, with the expectation of dangerous events occurring
- Death or severe injury of their colleagues while on mission
- Length of time spent overseas
- Exposure to dead and wounded (including hostile combatants and civilians)
- Past trauma that the stress of deployment may have heightened
- Changes in family dynamics during their absence, such as a child's or spouse's increased dependency on Uniformed Personnel or increased independence

### Post-deployment stress factors for families

- Being questioned on decisions they made during a partner or spouse's deployment
- Experiencing shifts in decision-making and responsibilities

- The fact that family dynamics might never return to what they were before deployment

These stressors can lead to several changes in the Uniformed Personnel and their families. They may manifest as emotional and social changes, as described below.

#### Harmful consequences of post-deployment stress in Uniformed Personnel

- Guilt about actions or shame over some failure
- Excessive drinking of alcohol or drug use, or sadness, anxiety and anger
- Uncontrolled or frequent crying and other extreme reactions to events that would usually be handled more calmly
- Sleep problems (too little or too much)
- Difficulty in concentrating
- Verbal or physical violence
- Repeated complaints of headache, backache, gastrointestinal problems, diminished stamina, without obvious physical cause
- Recurrent recall of horror scenes from the deployment
- Negative thoughts about self /others/environment

#### Harmful consequences of post-deployment stress in families

- Inability to resolve family conflicts
- Becoming overdependent or more distant from others at home. Constantly blaming others.
- Disciplinary or academic problems of children

By understanding and implementing these suggestions, Uniformed Personnel and their families can navigate the homecoming process smoothly and happily. It is helpful to remember that resilience is a journey, and that applying these tips makes it possible to build a strong foundation for a positive and thriving future.

## 5 Children and the deployment cycle

Within family systems, children are particularly vulnerable and can experience increased risks to their mental health due to persistent stress. Specific factors that can impact children during the different phases of the deployment cycle and suggested actions to be taken to reduce the impact are provided below.

### Pre-deployment phase

Children may be affected by the following:

- Anxiety and uncertainty. Children may feel anxious about the impending separation from their deployed parent. Conversations about the deployment, its purpose, and potential risks can be unsettling for them.
- Changes in routine. Preparing for deployment can lead to changes in daily routines. Children might need to adapt to new schedules or responsibilities, which can be challenging.

- Difficulties in emotional expression. Children might struggle to express their emotions about the impending separation. Providing a safe space for them to share their feelings is essential.

#### Actions to be taken pre-deployment

Both parents should:

- talk to other parents who have experience of deployment to get a sense of questions children ask, how to respond, and how much information to share;
- think about the best ways to explain deployment to their children, considering their ages, personalities, and how they respond to surprises;
- consider reaching out to the Contingent Family Support Centre if available
- alert children's schools, teachers, and coaches about the upcoming deployment.

The deployed parent should:

- talk to children individually in a way they will understand about what deployment is, why the parent needs to go, for how long, and where they will go, showing them the location on a map;
- let children ask questions, and answer questions as simply and honestly as possible;
- reassure children that their routines will stay the same and that the deployed parent will be in touch as often as possible, and advise them that it is essential to listen to the parent at home;
- ask school-age children to help with packing;
- make sure to say goodbye, but keep the goodbyes brief;
- Highlighting the humanitarian nature of the Mission and the service provided to the local population, using age-appropriate words, will help reduce the impact of the separation.

#### Deployment phase

Children may be affected by the following:

- Absence and separation. Children will experience the absence of one of their parents, which can lead to feelings of sadness, loneliness, and even behavioural changes.
- Communication challenges. Depending on the deployment location, communication between the deployed parent and the child can be limited, irregular, or disrupted, further intensifying feelings of separation.
- Adjustments to new routines. Children and the remaining parent or caregiver might have established new routines to compensate for the absence. These routines could impact school, extracurricular activities, and social interactions.

#### Actions to be taken during deployment

The deployed parent should:

- stay in regular contact as much as possible, making the transition easier;
- back their partner who is maintaining order at home.

The parent at home should:

- stick to the usual schedule as much as possible while creating new routines for interaction with deployed parents;



- set aside time to help children discuss what they hear on the news or from other children;
- not let children get away with behaviour that would not usually be tolerated.

## Post-deployment phase

Children may be affected by or need the following:

- Reunion and reintegration. While the deployed parent's return is a joyous occasion, it can also be challenging. Children might need time to adjust to having their parents back.
- Time for reconnection. Spending quality time together as a family is vital for rebuilding bonds and making new memories.

### Actions to be taken post-deployment

The returning parent can help make re-entry smoother for the family by staying close to home in the days and weeks upon return. They should implement small changes in their family life and appreciate any differences instead of being critical.

The parent at home can help make re-entry smoother for the family by not immediately burdening the returning parent with lots of daily chores and responsibilities, especially around the children. If household routines or rules have changed considerably during the deployed parent's absence, children should be prepared for possible shifts in their daily schedules now that their mom or dad is back at home.

## 6 Reintegrating with friends

The role of friends in the reintegration process after deployment is a cornerstone of successful readjustment. Friends provide a distinct type of support that complements family members and colleagues. Their presence offers a sense of normalcy, familiarity, and camaraderie that can be immensely reassuring during the challenging phase of transitioning back to routine life. Sharing laughs, stories, and experiences with friends can help create a sense of continuity amidst change.

In the face of potential feelings of isolation or struggles with the complexities of reintegration, friends can be a vital source of understanding and acceptance. The camaraderie of friends, built on shared memories and mutual support fostered during deployment, can bolster the confidence of returning Uniformed Personnel, reminding them that they are part of a steadfast community. These bonds help create a safe space for Uniformed Personnel to freely discuss their thoughts, feelings, and challenges, knowing their friends can relate on a deeply personal level. In this way, friends are indispensable in helping Uniformed Personnel rekindle a sense of belonging and purpose as they transition back home.

## 7 Reintegration with parents and extended family

Reintegration with parents and extended family is pivotal for Uniformed Personnel returning from deployment. The intricate dynamics of this process can significantly influence their well-being and the cohesion of the entire family unit. The points below elaborate on this important aspect.

- Extended family dynamics. Reintegration with extended family members can be both heartening and complex. Parents or relatives might have stepped in to support the family during the deployment, forming unique relationships with the children. Uniformed Personnel and their spouse or partner need to acknowledge their support.
- Balancing autonomy and collaboration. Reintegration involves balancing the autonomy gained during deployment and the collaborative nature of family life. Acknowledging each other's strengths and finding ways to integrate them into the family unit contributes to a harmonious transition.

In summary, reintegration with parents and extended family is a multi-faceted process that requires open communication, empathy, and adaptability. It is a chance to celebrate growth, navigate changes, and reaffirm the bonds that make the family unit resilient and supportive.

## 8 The role of T/PCCs

It is important to note that the responsibility of assisting the families of Uniformed Personnel in all stages of deployment rests with the T/PCCs and deployed personnel.

Areas where T/PCC can assist include:

- Communication It is vital to keep families informed about the Mission, the roles of their loved ones, and any changes in the situation as they arise. It is helpful to establish efficient communication channels for families to contact their deployed loved ones. Though this is primarily the responsibility of Uniformed Personnel, the T/PCCs should provide the means to discharge that responsibility. T/PCCs may use videos of the places/culture/people of the host nation duty station to educate Uniformed Personnel and their families.
- Social support networks. Facilitating connections among families of deployed personnel can create a sense of community and enable them to share experiences and support each other.
- Post-deployment reintegration support may include guidance on readjustment, managing potential challenges and providing families enough reintegration time with Uniformed Personnel.
- Counselling and psychological support. Offering access to mental health services or counselling for family members can help them cope with the stress and challenges of having a loved one deployed in a distant and challenging environment.
- Pre-deployment interview of families. T/PCCs, where feasible, may interview the Uniformed Personnel and their spouse or partner at the pre-deployment stage to ascertain if any significant family issues, such as severe sickness of a family member, strained relationships or other hardships are likely to impair the

preparedness of the deployed member. T/PCCs can take appropriate actions based on their findings.

## 9 Conclusion

Starting from the moment of selection and continuing throughout the deployment, the journey of Uniformed Personnel and their families is a remarkable and transformative process. Reconnecting with children, parents, extended family, and friends on return takes on a profound significance. In the face of uncertainty, anticipation, and the need to adapt to new environments, the journey is marked by mutual understanding, personal growth, and strong resilience for both the Uniformed Personnel and their families.

A collaborative effort between T/PCCs, Uniformed Personnel and their families ensures a motivated Uniformed Personnel and strong partner or spouse and family members.

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