

Section A-1 Commander's Focus

The contents of this Toolkit have been developed to assist you in your efforts to support family readiness. Every effort has been made to ensure that the information provided is current and accurate. However, because statutory and regulatory changes may have occurred since the publication of this Toolkit, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs cannot assume responsibility for its continued accuracy. Before taking any significant action based on the contents of this Toolkit, you should contact a subject matter expert in your chain of command to secure the most current information.

Deployment

Commander's Focus

Deployment

The terms deployment and separation bring up strong feelings for service members and family members. For service members it can bring on apprehension, excitement, and a sense of fulfillment as they put the training they have had to use. For family members, it can bring fear, anxiety, apprehension, and also a sense of accomplishment once the deployment is over. It may be very helpful to define deployment in your welcome and pre-deployment briefings. Open up the discussion to brainstorm those feelings and definitions. It's a good time to provide factual information about an upcoming deployment and to squelch any rumors or misconceptions.

Deployment means separation and military duty away from home. Separation can result from shorter periods of military duty as well, whether it is for weekend training assemblies, formal school training or active duty for special work. It may be as short as overnight or as long as an unaccompanied overseas tour. The purpose of deployments and training is to keep our military forces at the highest state of readiness to meet our global military commitments. Many deployments are scheduled ahead of time so that specific training and planning can take place. The nature of the military makes it extremely important for service and family members to have their personnel and personal affairs in order. By setting policies, enforcing military regulations, and providing assistance the commander can help to ensure that his or her service members have their affairs in order.

Rear Detachment (Stay Behind Personnel)

The designation of competent, dedicated, stay behind personnel (also referred to as rear detachment) is essential for military organizations that deploy as a unit or as detachments from units. Regardless of the number of members that deploy from the unit, families must see that the commander has placed special emphasis on the issue of family readiness. Normally, the rear detachment or other stay behind unit personnel has responsibility for all of the personnel and equipment remaining at home station during the deployment and shoulders the family readiness duties. A positive and supportive relationship between rear detachment personnel, the deployed unit, and family readiness leaders is crucial to the overall success of the family readiness effort. The mutual coordination and support between these elements is a mission multiplier and significantly enhances the capabilities and morale of the organization.

The organization of the rear detachment requires careful consideration. These individuals have a difficult task of keeping abreast of the unit's mission status, responding to family members, and maintaining close coordination with family readiness program staff and volunteers. The rear detachment is clearly the link and facilitator between the deployed unit and the family members dispersed throughout the community and often spread over several states. It is helpful to have someone who will work well with spouses and family members, and is also competent and knowledgeable about community resources. It is wise to select a rear detachment commander who is knowledgeable about finances, legal affairs, personnel services systems, and medical services. Training the rear detachment personnel is essential.

Commander's Deployment Checklist

The checklist below cites some specific areas to consider during deployments.

1.	Visible, competent, caring rear detachment personnel	
2.	Operational security	
3.	Family Care Plans	
4.	Command information program	
5.	Service member finances	
6.	Clear communication structure between deployed unit and rear detachment personnel	
7.	Telephone rosters	
8.	Family Readiness Group	
	a. Guidelines or Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)	
	b. Designated office space for Family Readiness Program, often referred to as Family Readiness Centers (FRCs) resourced with equipment, Internet access, supplies and room for volunteers, copy machines, and meeting areas	
9.	Planned social activities before and during deployment	
10.	Specific programs and activities for single service members and their significant others	

Operational Security

Operational security consists of measures taken to ensure that sensitive information is not compromised. It often considers deployment areas and times, location of spouses and families after deployment, the planned re-deployment date, and any special pre-deployment training. This information is not for public knowledge. As part of your pre-deployment briefing, and throughout the deployment, the need for operational security should be emphasized. Family members often do not realize that a simple statement they make in passing may jeopardize the conduct of operations and the safety of those involved. It is wise to address these issues forthrightly and candidly. The family readiness program personnel should emphasize to families the importance of practicing operational security.

Provide the following guidance to the unit and family members:

- Avoid discussing operational information over the telephone or cellular phone.
- Avoid discussing operational information in public areas.
- Avoid discussing knowledge of military events with members of the media.

A separate section will address working with the media.

Family Care Plans

Family Care Plans are discussed in depth in the Service Member TAB, Section B-3. Command emphasis on the development of feasible and effective Family Care Plans (FCPs) impacts the family support aspect of deployments. FCPs should be reviewed, verified, and updated as needed.

Command Information Program

A very important aspect of family readiness is the dissemination of information during a deployment or mobilization. Rumors can be a detriment to morale, and they can start when information does not come from the command. People may tend to fill an information void from an unreliable source. Every commander has the responsibility to disseminate accurate and relevant information via the most efficient means available. The use of the Internet (a unit web page and e-mail) and a telephone tree are efficient methods. If possible, a message should be sent from the deployed unit to the home station upon the unit's arrival at its deployment destination. The message should be disseminated quickly to family members to eliminate unnecessary anxiety. Deploying commanders should caution family members in their pre-deployment briefings that delays may occur. Families should understand that a service member's first responsibility is to the mission and accomplishment of his or her operational duties. Consequently, there may not be sufficient time for the service member to call home as quickly as the family would like. That is why a message needs to be sent from the command to the rear detachment to let them know that the unit members arrived safely.

Family members want to access news about their spouse and the unit. Other techniques to provide up-to-date unit information and access to loved ones are through teleconferencing (VTC), a command information newsletter, and through a toll-free family readiness telephone number located within the unit. A toll-free telephone number is well worth the cost and effort. Guard and Reserve families are geographically dispersed and having access to a toll-free number can alleviate anxiety and facilitate calls for assistance. The toll-free line can be placed in the family readiness center or family readiness program office manned by family program staff and volunteers. A VTC allows families to see and feel close to the service member even though they are miles away. Unit web sites need to be frequently updated to keep information current. The web site can provide valuable information about available resources, family counseling, communications with family members, and unit Points of Contact (POC).

Documentation of telephone calls during a deployment or training exercise and their disposition are quite important. This provides a tracking mechanism for problems that occur, how they are resolved, and what resources are employed. As a commander, the information obtained from the telephone calls can be a strong indicator of how prepared families were prior to deployment, the type of concerns (was there a spouse without an ID card or DEERS enrollment?), and how helpful and efficient unit FRG personnel and community resources were in responding. You can demonstrate your commitment to family readiness by tracking family readiness indicators and employing a systematic method of documentation. A sample form that can help track family readiness and provide valuable historical data for the unit is provided on the next page.

Emergency Tracking Form

Date _____ Unit _____

Unit Point of Contact (POC) _____ Unit telephone # _____

Military and or Family Readiness POC _____

Commander _____ Telephone # _____

Name of Individual Calling _____

Address _____

Telephone # _____ e-mail address _____

Service Member's Name _____

Current location (training, deployment, other) _____

Relationship of Caller to Service Member _____

Nature of Problem or Telephone Call _____

Resources offered _____

Was problem solved? Explain _____

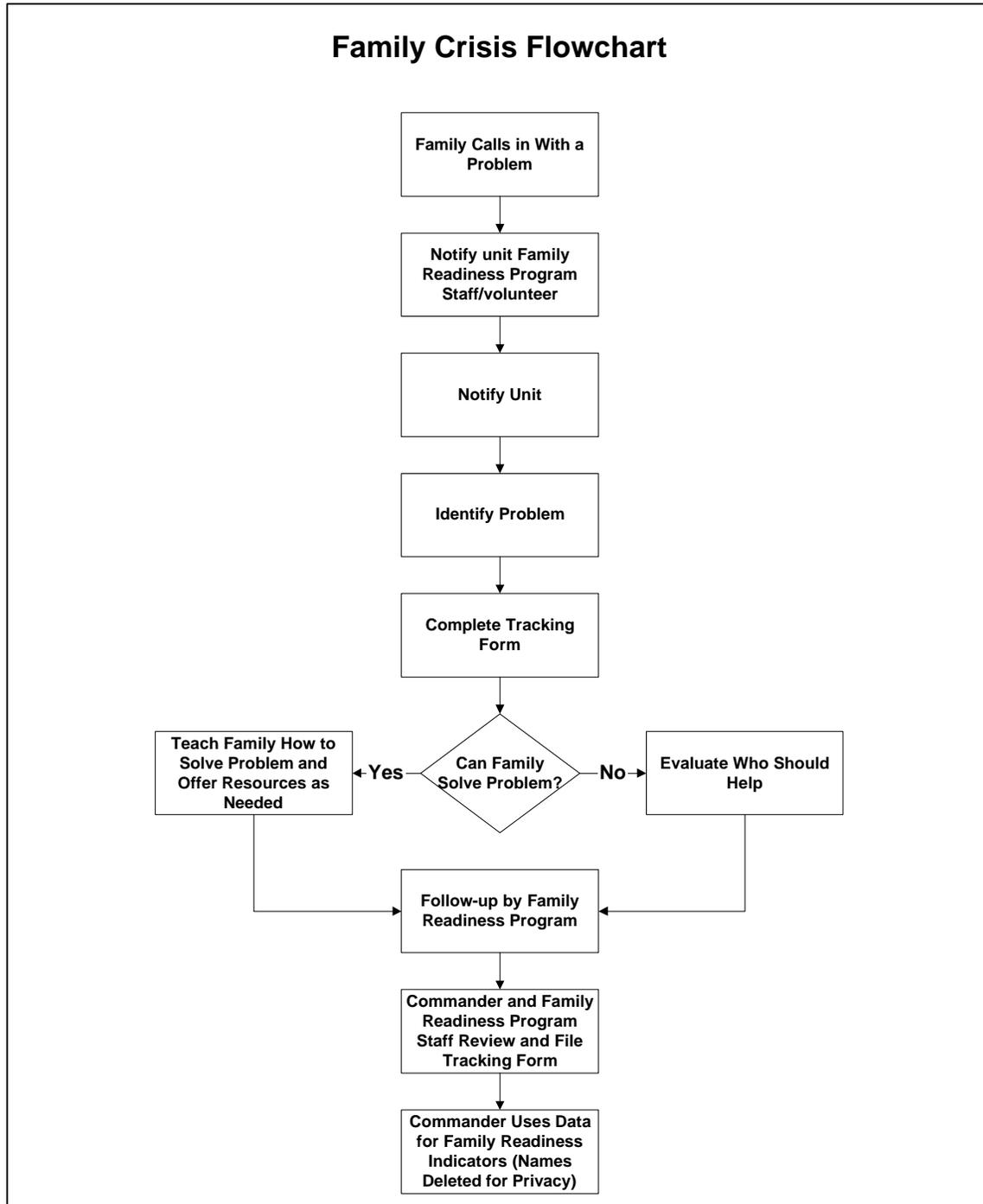
Date Taken Care of _____

Date Follow up _____

Notes/Comments _____

GUARD & RESERVE FAMILY READINESS PROGRAMS TOOLKIT

Often by speaking with family readiness program staff, family members are able to work through their own concerns. Just knowing where to turn and who to call for questions and emergencies makes a significant difference in attitude and morale. Family readiness program volunteers are typically family members or retirees who can relate to other family members. It's a mutually beneficial relationship when a trained, caring volunteer helps another family member.



Telephone calls to the family readiness program and unit vary greatly. A family member could call for information (i.e. has the redeployment date been confirmed?); they may need specific services (i.e. how does TRICARE work? Where can I go?); they may need immediate assistance for a crisis, or they may need advocacy, (a spouse may be dissatisfied with services from various resources and family or command policy). Whatever the reason for the call, the Family Crisis Flowchart provides a strategy for how the telephone call is handled. Coupled with the Emergency Tracking Form, it can provide the commander with concrete data concerning family readiness issues.

Service Member Finances

Financial problems are usually the most prevalent type of problem when service members deploy or are separated from their families for long periods. Some units have developed a Command Financial Specialist Program to work with service members and families on financial issues. The program provides financial training on consumer and financial management skills. This training can be provided through multiple venues. Financial specialists can present programs at unit functions and a financial management column can be added to the unit web site and newsletter. Solving recurring financial problems improves mission readiness and quality of life for the service members and their family. Financial issues will be the initial and last concerns to appear during longer deployments. Educating spouses can also help alleviate potential problems.

A basic command briefing with the following points is recommended:

- Ensure families' financial responsibilities are taken care of before deployment.
- Ensure families have access to money.
- Advise that spouses may need a Special Power of Attorney to make financial transactions on the service member's behalf.
- Advise that there are normally no ATMs in deployment areas of operation.
- Ensure members bring a checkbook with sufficient checks.
- Advise that entitlements during this deployment are: (list appropriate ones such as BAH, Family Separation Allowance (FSA), Hazardous Duty Pay...).

Telephone Rosters

Each unit maintains a roster of its members and their telephone numbers. This roster is used to notify service members about training, mission cycles, deployments and normal mission requirements. It is a requirement for service members to provide specific personnel information including address, telephone number, and family information. In compliance with Privacy Act requirements, personal information (name, address, and phone number) can be released only to authorized personnel. Typically, that includes members of the family readiness group. Unit rosters are often referred to as a Chain of Concern and they are in order of rank, position, and section with the unit commander at the top.

Telephone rosters, or telephone trees for spouses, differ significantly from unit rosters. Spouses are not required to provide their name or telephone number. Many units provide a form to be completed by a spouse that given permission for release of their telephone number. Each family member should be informed as to how this information will be used.

Telephone rosters are effective tools providing information to family members during times of deployment and separation. All families do not have access to e-mail or the Internet, and a telephone call also provides a personal touch of relating to another individual. It is extremely important to update the rosters regularly. Disconnected telephone numbers and changes in personnel affect the roster, especially when an emergent need to contact a family arises.

In many units, family readiness program staff and volunteers are recruited to be “callers.” Callers should be assigned to contact no more than ten family members. Otherwise, the time required to make those calls becomes problematic. It is a two-way relationship between the callers and the family members. The caller becomes another resource and a familiar person to call when questions or emergencies arise.

Callers need guidance from the Family Readiness Program staff and unit commander regarding their job limits and responsibilities. The caller’s mission is to provide information to all family members, thus enhancing family and unit readiness. Information sharing reduces the feeling of isolation and builds a cohesive network. This network is used to disseminate information to the families. Most importantly, callers need to respect privacy and confidentiality when handling family members’ personal information.

As a commander, work with the Family Readiness Program staff to carefully select callers. Not everyone who volunteers is suited to be a caller. Recognize their time and efforts.

Family Readiness Group (FRG)

Family readiness is a commander and service member’s responsibility. In many units FRGs are the centerpieces of the family readiness effort. FRGs are directly linked to unit family readiness programs and both operate under the commander’s guidance. The main goals of the FRG include:

- To serve as a link between the deployed unit and families.
- To be a conduit for command information on deployment and re-deployment dates, changes in the unit’s status or mission, and other resource information for family members.
- To facilitate deployment and re-deployment briefings and activities in conjunction with the family readiness program, the unit commander, and the rear detachment command.
- To serve as a mutual support group for family members, providing personal advice, a listening ear, counseling, and referral to community organizations and resources.

The most effective FRGs are those established as part of the unit’s ongoing and routine mission readiness training. If the family readiness organization is in place before a deployment, and

systems have been tested and used, then family members know who to call and where to go for assistance.

Commanders should establish organizational guidelines or a standard operating procedure (SOP) for the FRG. This should be published and available for unit members and family members.

Designated Office Space for Family Readiness Program

Designating specific office space and equipment for the FRG may enhance a unit's family readiness program. Ideally this space (often referred to as the family readiness center- FRC) would include Internet capable computers, telephones, a copier, a scanner, administrative supplies, and bulletin boards with the latest deployment information. A space for FRG meetings and an area for children may enhance the program. The family program staff should be available to meet and assist family members or refer them to the appropriate service agencies. If the space is available, computers should be accessible for family members to send e-mails. The toll-free telephone number could be located in the same office.

Social Activities

Planned social activities before and during deployments and long separations are beneficial ways to share important unit information with service members and family members. These activities provide an opportunity for family members to meet unit staff and other family members. Combining social and information meetings facilitates this connection. Family members are more likely to attend if events are associated with a major deployment, are free or low cost, are held locally, and some form of child care is offered. Providing food or sponsoring a potluck with guest speakers on specific topics often works as an enticement for attendance. For Guard and Reserve members, deployment briefings, "Family Days," and FRG meetings require even more advance planning. Their families are dispersed throughout the community, state, and may even be several states away.

Programs for Single Service Members

Commanders should maintain a careful balance between pre-deployment and deployment programs directed towards service members with families and single service members. Single service members may feel that most of the support is planned for families. Single members may have significant others and immediate family who will benefit from knowing the same unit leaders, toll-free telephone numbers, unit web site address, and resources during a deployment.