YELLOW RIBBON REINTEGRATION PROGRAM®

Family Communication Around Household Roles and Responsibilities

Facilitator Guide

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Family Communication Around Household Roles and Responsibilities

Facilitator Note:

The following two symbols are used as indicators:
💻 *(computer) indicates it is time to advance the slide on the associated PowerPoint;*
✋ *(hand) indicates there is an exercise associated with the content.*

Essential class content is noted in ***bold****.*

All class handouts are available for download on the YRRP website at www.yellowribbon.mil/cms/event-handout. Unless otherwise specified in the Materials section below, all handouts should be printed for distribution to class participants.

Class Description:

This class covers the challenges of reintegration from the perspective of Service members and family members and discusses communication strategies for overcoming roadblocks during renegotiation of household roles and responsibilities.

Stage:

During deployment, Post-deployment

DoDI:

1342.28 DoD Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP)

The content of this class has been developed for the Department of Defense Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program. The Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State has reviewed the class and is responsible for content management.

If you have additional information or updated research to be considered for inclusion in this class, please send your suggestions to yrrp@psu.edu.

Audience:

YRRP attendees

Time:

45 minutes

Equipment:

- Projector
- Laptop
- Flip Chart
- Pens

Materials:

- Facilitator Guide
- Core Material Checklist
- PowerPoint Presentation
  1. Family Communication Around Household Roles and Responsibilities
  2. Objectives
  3. Household Reintegration Challenges
  4. Service Member
  5. Family Members
  6. The New Normal
  7. Tips for Managing Household Chores
  8. The Duncan Family
  9. Household Roles and Responsibilities
  10. Strategy for Overcoming Roadblocks
  11. Finances
  12. The Duncan Family: Job Options
  13. Review of Objectives
  14. Family Communication Around Household Roles and Responsibilities
- Handouts
  1. Household Roles and Responsibilities Worksheet

Exercises:

1. What Are the Reintegration Challenges with Household Roles and Responsibilities?
2. Household Roles and Responsibilities Worksheet

Objectives:

After completing this class, participants will be able to do the following:

1. Identify the challenges of reintegration according to the perspectives of the Service member and individual family members.
2. Identify tips for renegotiating household roles and responsibilities.
3. Identify communication strategies for overcoming roadblocks during renegotiation of household roles and responsibilities.
4. Develop a plan for renegotiating household roles and responsibilities.

Introduction

SHOW Slide 1: Family Communication Around Household Roles and Responsibilities

Facilitator Note:

Introduce yourself as the facilitator. State your name, military experience or affiliation, and perhaps one additional brief bit of relevant personal information that establishes your credibility (i.e., your professional training or experience).

Please limit your personal introduction to no more than 2 minutes to maximize the time attendees are able to engage with course content, practice skills, and participate in self-reflection activities.

Welcome! Today we will discuss the challenges associated with renegotiating household roles and responsibilities after Service members return home from deployment. Before deployment, your family might have had one system for managing family responsibilities. During deployment, many of the deployed family member's responsibilities may have been distributed to other family members. So, when the family is reunited, conflict or friction may occur. **The post deployment challenge is to find a new balance that acknowledges everyone's preferences and to recognize that achieving balance among conflicting preferences may require negotiation.**

***Family* is used to describe situations in which a Service member is living with one or more individuals and not necessarily with a romantic partner or biologically related group of individuals** (e.g., roommates could be part of your family when it comes to communicating about household roles and responsibilities)**. You do not have to be living with a romantic partner and/or biologically related individuals to benefit from this class.** Throughout this class, the term ***family* will be used to describe all individuals with whom you share household responsibilities.**

SHOW Slide 2: Objectives

Let's go over our objectives. At the end of this class, you should be able to do the following:

1. **Identify the challenges of reintegration according to the perspectives of the Service member and individual family members.**
2. **Identify tips for renegotiating household roles and responsibilities.**
3. **Identify communication strategies for overcoming roadblocks during renegotiation of household roles and responsibilities.**
4. **Develop a plan for renegotiating household roles and responsibilities.**

Understanding the Challenges of Reintegration

SHOW Slide 3: Household Reintegration Challenges

EXERCISE 1: What Are the Reintegration Challenges with Household Roles and Responsibilities?

Facilitator Note:

The purpose of this exercise is to help participants reflect on the challenges of reintegration related to household roles and responsibilities. This should take approximately 3 minutes.

One of the challenges of reintegration after deployment is renegotiating household roles and responsibilities. Now that your Service member is home, **what kinds of challenges do you anticipate or are you dealing with presently as you look at the household roles and responsibilities?** What concerns do you think other family members may have? Take a moment to think about and write down concerns you have. I will capture some of your responses on a flip chart.

STOP the participants after about 3 minutes.

PAUSE for responses after each of the following questions and CAPTURE responses on a flip chart:

What were some common challenges regarding reintegration and your household roles and responsibilities?

Were there common concerns among family members?

What was different?

Everyone is facing something different after a deployment. Coming home can be a joyful time, but it can also be stressful. Different family members may have different concerns. To ease the challenges of reintegration, it may be helpful to recognize the perspectives of each family member (Long & Andrews, 1990). We are going to discuss possible concerns from the point of view of the Service members and individual family members.

What are some concerns a Service member may have when returning home from deployment?

PAUSE for responses.

SHOW Slide 4: Service Member

Service members returning from deployment may experience a number of worries and concerns. Service members may face major life decisions following deployment, such as changes in career or education plans. Returning Service members may have difficulty adjusting to the tasks of life at home, including feeling they are no longer needed as their family members may have managed home life well during their absence. Service members may also miss the structure and camaraderie of military service (Bowling & Sherman, 2008; Wood, Scarville, & Gravino, 1995).

The Service member may want to reengage in family life and family chores; however, he or she may feel overwhelmed if given too much responsibility shortly after returning from deployment (Bowling & Sherman, 2008; Chandra et al., 2011). He or she may need time to adjust to being at home and taking on household responsibilities.

What about family members? How are they feeling about the Service member coming home?

PAUSE for responses.

SHOW Slide 5: Family Members

Family members faced their own challenges during deployment and may have different concerns about the Service member's return. While the Service member was away, the other adult family member at home may have assumed sole responsibility for the management of the household and child care. Other family members may have taken on extra responsibilities. The other adult family member at home also had to make important decisions without the help of the Service member. Family members may be feeling independent and self-sufficient and proud of their abilities to manage the household successfully (Bowling & Sherman, 2008; Wood et al., 1995). On the other

hand, family members may be upset with the burden placed on them during deployment. They may be expecting immediate help and support from the returning Service member; however, the Service member may be unable or not ready to provide the wanted assistance, and this can cause disruption in the household (Bowling & Sherman, 2008; Wood et al., 1995).

SHOW Slide 6: The New Normal

When a Service member is deployed, everyone in the family adapts in some way to his or her absence. Over the course of deployment, family members create new routines and new methods for managing household chores. During reintegration, **discussing changes or renegotiating the division of tasks and responsibilities may help weave the Service member back into the household routine**. Take this opportunity to renegotiate tasks to each family member's satisfaction. Discuss and decide how to divide responsibilities, such as who will mow the lawn, who will pay the bills, and who will do the dishes.

A key to navigating these challenges is anticipating and communicating them and making plans for dealing with them throughout deployment (Wood et al., 1995). **Plans should be flexible, if needed, but provide enough guidance to help all family members.**

Renegotiating Household Roles and Responsibilities

SHOW Slide 7: Tips for Managing Household Chores

Empathizing and communicating with each family member's experience may help to improve adjustment after deployment (Chandra et al., 2011). As you negotiate household roles and responsibilities, it is important that all family members communicate what they like and dislike about their current roles. If possible, **roles and responsibilities should be revamped in a way that maximizes everyone's positive feelings, such as fairness, competence, independence, and importance. While this list of considerations may seem simple, it may be difficult to reach an agreement as individuals may place greater emphasis on certain considerations (e.g., taking care of dependents) than others (e.g., leisure time).**

SHOW Slide 8: The Duncan Family

Let's follow a military family, the Duncan family, and examine their strategies around renegotiating household roles and responsibilities. Let me give you some background information about the Duncan family.

Ted Duncan and his wife Clara have three children: Erica, who is 11; Josh, who is 7; and Michelle, who is 2. Ted's unit is just returning from a deployment to Afghanistan, and he and Clara are both concerned about changes in their family and how they will manage the household again upon Ted's return.

Let's look at how the Duncan family handles a potential problem renegotiating household chores. As I read the vignette, think about different points of view and possible solutions.

Before he was deployed, mowing the lawn was Ted's job. When he left, Erica (age 11) started mowing. She loves it and makes $10 extra allowance per week. However, she is not as good at it as Ted. Ted plans to take this job back when he gets home. However, Erica likes the extra money and feels proud having such a grown-up job, and she does not want to give it up.

Everyone in the family agrees that this could be a problem and may cause trouble between Ted and Erica. What are some possible solutions?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: Erica keeps the job; Ted gets the job back; Ted and Erica share the job by alternating weeks)

After some discussion, Erica and Ted agreed that they would split the job. In order to prevent Erica from losing the extra allowance she had come to enjoy, Ted agreed to think of other jobs for her to do on the off weeks. Erica and Ted were both okay with this and agreed to try this plan for a month and then meet as a family to see how it is actually working.

SHOW Slide 9: Household Roles and Responsibilities

EXERCISE 2: Household Roles and Responsibilities Worksheet

Facilitator Note:

Handout 1 will be used. The purpose of this exercise is to get participants to consider productive ways to approach household responsibilities within their family. This should take approximately 8 minutes.

Now that you have heard the Duncan's plan, please think about your own household roles and responsibilities. Using **Handout 1: Household Roles and Responsibilities Worksheet**, I would like you to consider some of the tasks and responsibilities associated with running your household. Family members should work together to

complete this exercise.

As you think of chores or tasks, list them on the worksheet in the first column. Then, for each task you list, answer each of the follow-up questions:

- Before Deployment: Who did it?
- During Deployment: Who does it now?
- After Deployment: What would be ideal?

For each task or chore also indicate with a plus sign (+) if having that person do this task is positive (i.e., the person is okay with doing it, he or she does it well, and the household runs well when he or she does it). If for some reason the task is negative (i.e., the person does not want to do it, he or she does not do it well, and/or it causes stress for the household when he or she does it), indicate this with a minus sign (-).

Does anyone have any questions before we get started?

PAUSE for questions.

Please begin.

ALLOW 8 minutes for participants to complete the worksheet.

Now, let's take a few minutes and see how you are assigning or changing household tasks.

PAUSE for responses after each question.

How did you manage filling in the different columns on the worksheet?

Was it easy or hard to identify tasks?

What were the challenges?

Do you feel that everyone would agree that tasks were fairly divided among family members?

Did you have more *pluses* or *minuses* about any one person continuing to do the job?

How did you resolve the *minuses*?

Are there some changes that you will make?

How does your family feel about those changes?

It is likely that each of you had many tasks listed on your page. Families are busy, and a

lot needs to get done every day. Also, I hope you noticed how roles and responsibilities have changed from before deployment to during deployment. In some families, the changes are considerable, and, in other families, the changes are more minimal. In some families, the children step up and take a lot of responsibility. In other families, friends or extended family may have become involved in helping the family cope with the household responsibilities (Bowling & Sherman, 2008; Chandra et al., 2011). The point is, **everyone's experience is different, but there may be common elements**.

SHOW Slide 10: Strategy for Overcoming Roadblocks

Do you have some **renegotiation** to do concerning roles and responsibilities? **When you start renegotiating changes, you may encounter some roadblocks in getting agreement from everyone**. Work through this as a family. Here is a communication strategy for dealing with roadblocks that may come up as you are negotiating household chores and responsibilities.

First, **get input from other family members** – do they see the problem the same way? Next, **discuss alternatives** – what could be done differently? Then, **decide on a plan** – what is the best option for dealing with the problem? Also, **decide how long you will try this option**. **At the end of the time, check in with everyone – did this work?** If not, could we try something else? What?

Let's go back to the Duncan family for an example. How did the Duncan family apply this strategy when there was a potential conflict over who would mow the lawn?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: got input from other family members; decided on a plan; checked in a month to see if it was working)

SHOW Slide 11: Finances

PAUSE for responses after each question.

Did anyone have finances on his or her list of household tasks on the worksheet?

What changes to finances might occur during deployment?

Money and family finances are topics that can be touchy for some families. During deployment, the family member at home may take care of all of the finances, or the deployed family member and family member at home may keep separate budgets during deployment. In some cases, handling the finances may not have changed much during deployment, but, in other cases, this may have changed a lot.

In order to determine if routines should be maintained or altered, changes that occurred during deployment should be discussed once the deployed family member comes

home. **Write down a list of changes; list the pros and cons of each change**; and, if possible, **discuss this list before the deployed family member returns**.

Some things to think about: How are decisions about money made - on a daily basis and in the big picture? Who manages the budget? Who earns the money? Where are potential points of conflict, and what are constructive ways to address these issues? If there is conflict as you discuss this issue, work through it as a family and try to resolve it.

SHOW Slide 12: The Duncan Family: Job Options

One other area where you may need to renegotiate is employment. Was this on anyone's worksheet?

PAUSE for responses.

Service members and family members may find this transition period to be a good time to reflect on future career goals. Maybe the Service member is considering a career change, or the family member at home left his or her job to take care of household responsibilities during deployment. Alternatively, the family member may have taken a job outside the home. If the non-deployed family member took a job during the deployment, what are the pros and cons of keeping that job? Who should be involved in those decisions and to what degree? What are the potential points of conflict and what are constructive ways to address these?

Let's go back to the Duncan family and see how Ted and Clara address this challenge in their family.

Before her husband was deployed, Clara worked about 20 hours per week at a nearby store while the older children were in school and Michelle was in day care. When Ted was deployed, he and Clara agreed that she would quit her job because of the increase in her responsibilities at home. Also, Ted made more money with his hazardous duty pay, which made Clara's job less necessary. As Ted is preparing to return home, the question of whether Clara should return to work is on both of their minds.

What factors should Ted and Clara consider as they make this decision?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: whether or not Clara wants to go back to work; if Ted and the kids want her to go back to work; the pros and cons of Clara returning vs. not returning to work from everyone's perspective; if Clara goes back to work, whether or not she should wait awhile or go back to work right away)

Ted and Clara consider their options. Clara misses her old job but also enjoys the extra time to complete tasks at home. Ted thinks the extra income would be helpful in

managing the household budget. The kids did not really notice her absence since she mainly worked while they were in school and day care. The family decides that Clara will go back to work, but she will wait a month or two, so everyone can adjust to having Ted back home before she makes the transition back to work.

As you navigate toward a new normal, there are many issues to consider as you discuss household roles and responsibilities, including finances and employment. Remember the communication strategies for overcoming roadblocks if you run into difficulty negotiating certain roles and responsibilities. **Keep in mind that sometimes issues with household roles and responsibilities can be exacerbated by other, more serious problems. If you or a family member is having trouble coping with adjustment (i.e., acting in ways that are concerning to you), you should seek help.**

Summary

SHOW Slide 13: Review of Objectives

Let's see if we met our objectives:

1. **What are some of the challenges of reintegration according to the Service member and individual family members' perspectives?** *PAUSE for responses.*
   (Possible answers: Service member – may face major life decisions following deployment; may feel left out or not needed; may have difficulty adjusting to responsibilities at home; may miss structure and camaraderie of military service)
   (Possible answers: family members – may have a newfound independence; may feel unwilling to relinquish their new responsibilities or control; may be upset about burden placed on them during deployment)

2. **What are some tips for negotiating household roles and responsibilities?** *PAUSE for responses.*
   (Possible answers: consider the perspectives of everyone involved; all family members should share what they like and dislike about their current roles; try to decide on a solution that all feel is "fair"; talk out the pros and cons of each perspective change)

3. **What is the communication strategy for overcoming roadblocks?** *PAUSE for responses.*
   (Possible answers: get input from other family members; discuss alternatives; select a strategy; set time limit for new responsibility; check in with everyone; make changes as appropriate)

SHOW Slide 14: Family Communication Around Household Roles and Responsibilities

Thank you, and please complete your evaluation for this class.

References

Bowling, U. B., & Sherman, M. D. (2008). Welcoming them home: Supporting service members and their families in navigating the tasks of reintegration. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice 39*(4), 451-458. doi:10.1037/0735-7028.39.4.451

Chandra, A., Lara-Cinisomo, S., Jaycox, L. H., Tanielian, T., Han, B., & Burns, R. M. (2011). *Views from the homefront: The experiences of youth and spouses from military families*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

Long, E. C. J., & Andrews, D. W. (1990). Perspective taking as a predictor of marital adjustment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 59*(1), 126-131. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.59.1.126

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