

# **Guidelines for Assisting Latter-day Saints Returning from War Zones**

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Some members returning from war zones struggle with readjustment following prolonged periods of family separation and after witnessing traumatic events during combat operations. These members may require assistance to successfully reintegrate into their families and communities. Sensitivity to and awareness of readjustment issues is critically important, particularly with Reserve and National Guard service members who do not have access to the support structure available at active duty military installations.

The following guidelines can assist priesthood and auxiliary leaders working with Church members returning from war zones, and the returning members' families.

## **1. Counsel together.**

In priesthood executive committee meetings and stake/ward council meetings, discuss how to support members returning from war zones as they re-adjust back into family relationships, parental roles, the ward or branch, civilian employment, or as they face other spiritual and emotional challenges. Give special attention to children and how family separation and reintegration affects them (see *Handbook 2: Administering the Church*, 3.2.2; 3.2.3; 4.4; 4.51).

## **2. Interview the returning member and the family.**

Interview returning military service members or civilian contract workers, along with their family members. At a minimum, another interview should also be held three to six months after their return. Most reintegration issues do not surface immediately and are frequently misdiagnosed as marital or parenting problems. More serious problems may surface later.

### Before the Interview

- Become familiar with government, military, or Veterans Affairs resources in your country that are available for service members and their families.
- In addition, the Church's Military Relations website ([www.lds.org/callings/military-relations](http://www.lds.org/callings/military-relations)) includes the following resources:
  - *Supporting Military Families* (online pamphlet, English only). Addresses family concerns before, during, and after deployments.
  - *Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled* (DVD and online, English only). Presents combat experiences in a gospel perspective. Encourage service members and families to view it.

### During the Interview

- Discuss their feelings and concerns about their combat experiences and returning home.
- Some service members are reluctant to seek help within the military for fear that it may impact their future military careers. Reassure them that early intervention is critical to their long-term health and the emotional well-being of their families. Encourage them to seek help through appropriate government, military, or Veterans Affairs channels.
- As directed by the Spirit, consider discussing the following with them:
  - *The Atonement*. Some members feel unworthy because of their participation in war. Some may have killed enemy soldiers and are unsure of their status with God. Remind them that the Savior knows them and will heal them as they exercise faith in Him (see Alma 7:11–12).

- *The Temple*. Encourage them to prepare for and attend the temple, where they can put the care of the world aside and be reminded of our endowment from God.
- *Book of Mormon*. Encourage them to immerse themselves in the scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon. Point out that Mormon witnessed bloodshed and carnage almost beyond comprehension, yet his abridgment of the Nephite records reflects a person who knew the Savior and had experienced the redeeming power of the Atonement in his life.
- *Service to others*. Discuss their readiness to accept a calling. Experience has shown that remaining active in church, rendering service to others, and serving in Church callings help returning veterans transition back to normal life more quickly and effectively.
- *Employment*. Members may need assistance in finding employment. This is an essential part in helping them to reintegrate into civilian life.

#### Following the Interview

- Watch for reintegration challenges. These might surface in the form of marital discord, parenting issues, personal trauma, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Members may also experience abnormal behavior, such as withdrawal from social or recreational activities, uncharacteristic rage or panic, nightmares, sleep problems, difficulty controlling emotions, drug or alcohol abuse, or loss of moral values.
- Enlist the help of LDS Family Services. If the challenges experienced by members returning from war don't go away or get worse over time, prompt assistance is essential. LDS Family Services can provide information concerning counseling resources. They can be contacted at 1-801-240-1711 or 1-800-453-3860, ext. 2-1711.

### **3. Assign Responsibility.**

- Delegate responsibility for long-term support to the appropriate priesthood and auxiliary leaders (such as, elders quorum president, high priests group leader, Relief Society president).
- Assign dedicated home teachers. If there are other combat veterans in the ward or stake, it is helpful for returning veterans to talk about their experiences with someone who has had similar experiences, even if the combat experience was from another war.

### **U.S. Military and Veterans Affairs Resources**

- Military OneSource ([www.militaryonesource.com](http://www.militaryonesource.com)) provides a variety of assistance to service members and their families.
- Each state has a Transition Assistance Advisor (TAA) who can help coordinate various types of assistance, from employment services to professional counseling.
- Reserve and National Guard members who had civilian employment before deployment have re-employment rights protected by federal law ([www.dol.gov/compliance/laws/comp-userra.htm](http://www.dol.gov/compliance/laws/comp-userra.htm)).
- The Department of Veterans Affairs ([www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)) offers resources about PTSD, traumatic brain injury (TBI), and other combat related conditions.
- The Army Chief of Chaplains' website provides resources for clergy titled *Ministering to Families Affected by Military Deployments* ([www.usachcs.army.mil](http://www.usachcs.army.mil)).

### **Additional Information**

Additional information can be found on LDS.org (under Resources > All Callings > Military Relations) or by contacting the Military Relations Division at Church headquarters: 1-801-240-2286 or 1-800-453-3860, ext. 2-2286, or at [PST-Military@ldschurch.org](mailto:PST-Military@ldschurch.org).