United States Department of State
Bureau of Human Resources

SEPARATED BY SERVICE

HELPING YOUR FAMILY THROUGH AN UNACCOMPANIED TOUR

GUIDE FOR THE PARENT OR GUARDIAN STAYING WITH CHILD(REN)

FLO
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Advancing Programs Services

UNACCOMPANIED TOURS SUPPORT

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SEPARATED BY SERVICE: HELPING YOUR FAMILY THROUGH AN UNACCOMPANIED TOUR

Parent's guide

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FLO: Unaccompanied Tours Support Officer
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Information: Overseas Briefing Center; Foreign Service Transition Center
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SEPARATED BY SERVICE: HELPING YOUR FAMILY THROUGH AN UNACCOMPANIED TOUR

PARENT'S GUIDE

The majority of families assigned to unaccompanied tours (UT) have both a resolve that they can make it through, and a dread of what the separation will do to the family relationships. Planning, having realistic expectations, and maintaining a consistent effort at on-going communication are all key factors to coping with the separation. This manual is designed to address these factors by giving information about how the different phases of separation affects marriage and children, and then providing suggestions to help the "left behind" or "at-home" spouse or guardian cope with that stage of separation.

FLO is pleased to provide (thanks to a generous grant from the Una Chapman Cox Foundation) this and a corresponding manual for the employee, as well as age-appropriate manuals for children. Each family member should have his/her own manual; please contact FLO (see Appendix A) should you require more. To economize on space and weight, both parent manuals are on CDs. Younger children will, of course, require your assistance to complete the activities. A variety of activities are included for your children to try; you may need to supplement the materials for the ones they prefer.

As the at-home parent, the bulk of the responsibilities for home and hearth will inevitably fall on your shoulders, whether you like it or not. Raising a family can be a thankless job that can seem even more daunting if you are faced with doing it all by yourself. However, the effort you put towards facilitating distance bonding exercises *will* make a large difference in helping you and your child(ren) remain connected with your spouse.

To Other Caregivers: Relatives and Friends

For the purposes of this manual, FLO recognizes that "family" is broadly defined and that UT Families (UTF) often rely on relatives and friends who are, for all intents and purposes, "family." The contribution of the many grandparents, aunts, uncles, significant others, and good friends who have stepped up to the plate to help cannot be underestimated. However, the government's official response does not extend this appreciation to include funding and services for persons not on the employee's orders. Such issues, though important, are beyond the scope of this manual. Interested parties may contact FLO with questions related to the specific circumstances of your family (also see Appendix E).

Coping with Separation: The Emotional Cycle of Unaccompanied Tours

Stages of Separation:

In general, any one facing separation progresses through four stages, spending varying amounts of time at each phase.

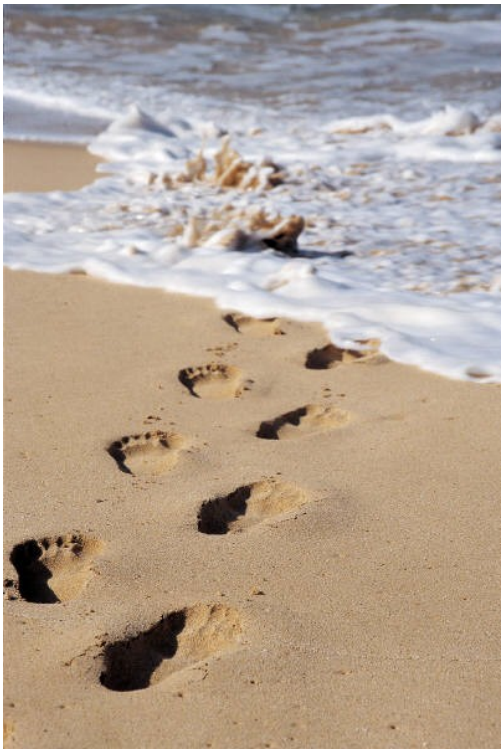
1. **Protest:** About 1-2 weeks before departure spouses report feeling tense, selfish about wanting their partner to stay, and disbelief that they're actually going. In addition, there is frustration over the long hours the employee is spending at work rather than with the family, preparing for all the changes, and tending to work that needs to be finished before he/she leaves. Both spouses may feel mentally and physically fatigued, and children react to their parents' emotional unavailability.

2. **Despair**: Immediately before and after departure, spouses/partners often feel overwhelmed, vulnerable, and tearful at being left alone. Thoughts of "How will I live through this?" are common. They may have difficulty sleeping alone and a need to hold the children closer than usual for comfort and company. Children often feel the same way and may find their way into the parental bed.

3. **Detachment:** During most of the separation, there is a sense of relative calm because the spouse is in survival mode, handling daily demands, and staying positive for the family's sake. However, strong emotions, especially anxiety and sadness, are not too far from the surface and may emerge when the spouse feels stressed, sometimes in seemingly petty situations, e.g., while sitting in traffic, or when trying to deal with tasks that the employee used to handle.

4. **Reunion adjustment:** One to two weeks before homecoming there is incredible excitement and activity with a heightened awareness of things that need to be cleaned or done before the employee arrives. Four to six weeks after the initial honeymoon period, the family begins to readjust, sometimes awkwardly, to new realities and establishes new rules and structures. Emotional readjustment can continue for three to six months after return.

Family Separation and Readiness



Tips:

- Talk as a family before separation: Before she/he leaves, the employee is usually preoccupied with many preparatory activities for both the releasing and receiving jobs, often requiring extended hours and increased workload. Consequently, employees may come home tired and reluctant to address painful concerns related to the separation. Family members often join in this resistance in order to keep things peaceful for their remaining time. However, planning and coordination are essential for coping well with the separation. The Family Meeting sheets provided in each of the UT Family manuals are designed to help all members make plans as far ahead as possible.

- Delegate rather than "dump" responsibilities on family members: Although everyone is called to take up the slack after the employee leaves, children in particular balk at having to do "everything." Positive reframing of the re-distribution of household chores and duties will help them see the mutual benefits of helping out. That is, while acknowledging their complaints about increased work and doubts in their ability to carry it out, also point out how valuable their contributions are to the family as well as your confidence in them. The more they help the at-home parent, the more energy that parent has to spend on them.

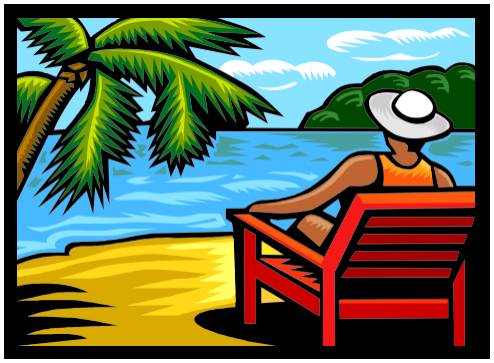
- Commit to consistent and active contact: This involves both the at-home parent's committing to the mechanics of the distance bonding activities as well as the employee's committing to making the activities a priority in the midst of a stressful work situation at post. Some parents (especially of young children) might complain that the tasks suggested in the manuals are tedious, made more laborious by overseas technological pitfalls. However, keep in mind that you would be having the same kinds of interactions with your children if you were all at home, and if you want to stay connected, the extra time and work you put in to making the interactions happen will definitely be rewarded.

- Maintain family routine and discipline: A steady family structure with respect to routines and discipline provides children with order and predictability in life. It is particularly important to maintain structure (e.g., meal and bedtimes, etc.) so children have a sense of normalcy rather than chaos in the midst of the changes brought on by the separation. Expect children to test your limits as the family adjusts. Be firm about expectations related to bedtime, morning routines, cleaning up, chores, homework, and accountability. Follow through with clear and predictable consequences, both rewards and discipline to keep the structure intact.

- Listen to children's worries; answer questions as truthfully as possible: Do not assume you know what your child is asking or feeling. Explore their thoughts with open–ended questions until you reach their real concern. Using age appropriate language, give as truthful and encouraging an answer as possible without giving false assurances as to the employee's safety or return. When your child appears "done" or is satisfied, do not pursue the issue further.

- Talk to your children: Because they are with you at home and they rely on you, children are prone to show more immediate worry over you than the away parent. Not only will they pick up on your signals if you are troubled, inaccessible, preoccupied, tired, irritable, or depressed, they will likely interpret it to mean something negative about themselves. Often a child's fantasies about what's wrong are much worse than reality. Even though you may not be able to lift yourself out of a mood, simply acknowledging the mood and "owning" (i.e., that it's about you, not them) it will help your children a great deal. It tells them that although you're down, you're still in control and you can function. Be relatively open in explaining things to your children, but use your judgment in sharing just enough to ease their worries.

- Take care of yourself: To avoid becoming haggard and harried, or creating "parentified" children during the separation, the remaining parent must make taking care of oneself a priority. This is easier said than done as remaining parents are frequently working single parents with little support. However, the choice is between taking time to do things that keep you sane and loving your children, versus spending that same time sagging under the weight of the "have to's" of single parenting and feeling yourself slipping under. Make a plan with your children to include your own time-out's (for exercise, sleep, to be alone, creative outlet, coffee with a friend, etc.); explain how time away actually makes you happier to be around them. Time-out's will necessarily be short but frequent. Use your judgment in finding a balance in the guilt-to-benefit ratio. Praise your children for supporting you in time-out's, and let them know how much better you feel.



- Maintain a close relationship with teachers and/or daycare personnel: Be proactive and take the lead. Most teachers and caregivers will welcome information and direction on how to understand or better care for your child. Let them know about the family separation and increased stress at home. Ask for their cooperation in coordinating large projects and scheduling conferences and discuss methods of discipline and what they should do if your child appears teary, irritable, or troubled. Involve the school counselor in a proactive manner, and make sure the school understands that you need extra lead time to make arrangements for any additional school related services or activities.

- Stay active and engaged. If you are relocating to a new place in advance of the separation, make an effort to make friends and find activities, social groups, and/or religious centers around you. Talk with other UT families; volunteer; take up hobbies. Building a support system and using it will be vital in maintaining a positive outlook during the separation.

A Word to Tandem Couples

In taking a tandem UT assignment, you have decided, consciously or otherwise, to accept the difficult trade-off's with respect to career versus family needs. Having done so, expect to feel ambivalence and nagging guilt about "leaving" your children, despite the more than adequate plans you've likely made for their on-going care. Some common behavioral expressions of such feelings include "sniping" at your spouse for not offering to stay behind with the children or take another non-UT assignment, competitiveness and self-justification of your own needs, or lavishing gifts on the children to assuage guilt. Try to put aside defensiveness, guilt, and hackneyed clichés as these suck up emotional energy better spent tending to distance bonding with the children and supporting each other. Remember, you're on the same side.

Marital matters

Common marital concerns for UT spouses:

"I'm being left behind. He's going to have a life of adventure without me." Some spouses privately think that home life is boring compared to the exciting challenges and people of the employee's life. Unable to share in the adventure, many UT spouses feel they have all the drudgery of Foreign Service life without any of the benefits. They worry that they are becoming dull and unattractive to their spouses; they may worry that their spouses might have affairs. If left unchecked such worries might grow into self-fulfilling prophesies.

"I didn't get married to live alone" is a frequent lament of many Foreign Service spouses who find themselves unexpectedly "abandoned." Although they support the employee's choice, there is a great deal of pain over disappointed expectations and continued sacrifices. Many are afraid of the possibility of losing their mate.

"I have no choice." There is significant frustration that someone else has control of life changing factors and one has little say in what happens. Because the spouse wants to stay married, he/she often feels as if there is no choice but to go along with the employee's decisions. This can lead to resentment and a "you owe me" attitude that adds to a sense of being apart rather than working as a team.

Worries about sexual needs. Knowing about their spouse's sexual appetites leads some to worry that their partner will turn to other methods of sexual fulfillment during the separation. Extramarital affairs may occur, as well as increased use of pornography, masturbation and prostitutes. Frank discussion about these concerns before departure can help to clarify expectations and allay some of these fears.

"What if we grow apart?" Without the benefit of dailyinteraction, reunited couples often find their lives have become vastly different with little common ground. Neglect and complacency will damage a marriage whether the couple lives together or not. For this reason, it is vitally important that both parties commit to consistent and active communication, not only around the children but with each other as well.

Tips

Nip in the bud the temptation to sit around and brood about how bad your situation is. Yes, it is not fair and no, you can't do much about it. You can either make the most of the situation by taking control of what you can control, or continue to wish for another outcome that's not going to happen. Making the employee feel guilty or otherwise beating yourself up with super parent expectations does not contribute to positive solutions.

- Accept reality and move on: "Moving on" means coming to grips with what you can and cannot control. You cannot change the UT, but you can make plans that will definitely affect the way you cope with the separation. Asking for help and support isn't the same as being helpless. Often capable spouses act dependent and helpless as a means of communicating a wish to not be alone. By being proactive in making plans, you can manage the anxiety associated with looming uncertainties; you'll see that *feeling* helpless doesn't mean you *are* helpless.

- Communicate openly and often: Make virtual dates with your partner, and take pains to keep them.
  - Use the time to build up your spouse; he/she may be just as worn down and discouraged as you are. Talk on all levels, not just to exchange information, but also to build intimacy. Show genuine interest by asking about what they're reading, how their minds or spiritual lives are developing, and tell them the same kids of things.

  - Rather than avoiding potentially charged topics like child rearing practices, money, and sex, use written as well as verbal communication methods to dispel defensive language and unnecessary comments.

  - Remember feelings do not define reality. Differentiate between feelings and thoughts, and recognize that both are needed for effective communication and problem solving. To dismiss one or the other is to cut out important information.

  - Be respectful in your tone of voice. When the other does not have the benefit of line of sight to catch nuances of body language, it is easy to misconstrue words and tones. Manners count.

  - Say what's in your heart. Sometimes saying a truthful "sorry," or "you're right," or "I love you" can diffuse a tense moment and get right to the core of the matter.

- Develop yourself. Remember that you are more than a spouse and parent. There is so much more to you than what is, by necessity, in the forefront of your attention. Stay engaged with your own interests and develop new ones that help you grow.

- Make it OK to get help. Prior to departure, agree that either one of you can ask for marital and/or individual counseling if needed, without fear of reprisal. If possible, agree on a counselor.

DEVELOPMENTAL Implications for Separation

AGE	POSSIBLE FEELINGS	POSSIBLE BEHAVIORS
Birth to 1 year	Reaction to parents' reactions; senses that something is different (or wrong) but doesn't know what or why Stranger anxiety as new caregivers/support are introduced	Crying and fussing; clinginess Irritability Sleep and eating disturbance Difficulty eliminating
1-3 yrs	Confusion Surprise and disbelief when Dad/Mom leaves Magical thinking: worry and guilt that they did something wrong to make Dad/Mom go away Distress at saying goodbye Worry about danger and death	Clinging behavior; tearfulness Acting up in reaction to parental conflict Searching behaviors after departure Temper tantrums Demand for attention and reassurance Regression: loss of toilet training; sleep disturbance Play reflects control, power and relationship themes.
3-6 yrs	Fear of losing Dad/Mom Sadness, anger at abandonment and employee's choice to leave Separation anxiety Ego-centric thinking: may blame self for making Dad/Mom leave (even if it's explained otherwise) Weepiness before departure When in good mood, everything seems good; reverse is true when in bad mood	Inability to concentrate as well on school work Acting up behaviors at home and/or school Excessive silliness, regressive behaviors Angry outbursts and "meltdown's" mixed with frustrated clinginess Experiences the world (including self) as either all good or all bad, even if discussed

AGE	POSSIBLE FEELINGS	POSSIBLE BEHAVIORS
7-12 yrs	Sadness and anger at employee for messing up their lives; things feel unfair Anxiety over Dad/Mom's safety Guilt over seemingly selfish feelings Resentment over changes and increased responsibilities Worry about what will happen and who will take care of them	Behavior problems at home or school: acting up, bullying, impulsiveness Regressive attention-seeking behaviors mixed with defiance Withdrawing from friends and activities to stay closer to home Drop in school grades and motivation Angry outbursts
13-18 yrs	Sadness and anxiety; fear of loss Worry for remaining parent and what will happen to self Denial of feelings Anger and resentment at changes that impinge on their freedoms and choices Feeling misunderstood; tendency to hide feelings Unable to admit fault or shortcoming to parents without feeling loss of self esteem	May show open disrespect and rebellion in speech and/or manner Aloofness, "I don't care" attitude "Closing off" or arguing as a defense against closeness Spending more time out of the house with friends Loss of interest in school and activities Increased concern with privacy and personal freedoms

Pre-Posting Phase

What to expect in the Pre-Posting Phase

Your family will be in "doing" mode before your spouse leaves. There will be a lot of discussion and planning in preparation for the separation. During this time, the older members of your family may be "living in their heads," focusing on getting things ready and staying positive in the midst of anxiety over uncertainties. Younger children, however, will tend to react to parental preoccupation and relative inaccessibility.

Common spousal reactions to upcoming separation:

"*Will you come back in one piece? What's going to happen to us?"* Fear is a common initial reaction when UT spouses hear of where the employee is going. The many uncertainties of a UT plus the possibility of danger are anxiety provoking.

"Why did you choose to go now?" Some spouses question the employee's motives for leaving when the family's needs are so demanding. They wonder whether there's an ulterior motive that usually pegs staying at home as an undesirable option, e.g., to escape responsibilities, to avoid being with the spouse.

"Why didn't you tell me? You should have discussed it with me first." In the rare cases where the employee made a unilateral decision to take the UT, the "left behind" spouse is understandably angry and resentful.

"What the ?@! am I supposed to do? Everything is dumped on me."* Most spouses initially feel overwhelmed with the mechanics of having to take care of everything. There is a discouraging sense of aloneness, of not having enough support, of being left with the full weight of responsibility for kids and "never getting a break."

"I'm tired just thinking about it." Raising children and running a household in some sort of orderly fashion involves a lot of thinking of disparate details, planning ahead, and coordinating. Many parents often wish that "someone else would just do it without my having to tell them first."

"Oh, you're going? It doesn't make a difference; I do everything anyway." When employees travel frequently, many spouses have been largely raising the family on their own. Still, planning and positive feedback about parenting is much appreciated.

A Pre-Posting Guide to Practical Needs

This section deals with practical issues related to running a household, including financial arrangements, household maintenance, child care, and contingency plans in the event of emergencies. Although most people do not like facing the issues because of the emotional implications, these necessary details are better discussed before the employee's departure. Making such arrangements is as much an exercise in anxiety management as it is in administrative planning, and will help you cope in the long run.

Pre-posting preparations: check lists and activities in this section

./ Communication equipment and supplies
./ Family Discussion(s) format
./ Your Go-To list of support people
./ Emergency Contacts (local services)
./ School needs guide and list
./ Financial needs checklist
./ Legal needs checklist
./ Household matters
./ Suggestions for the Officer
./ Suggestions for the Family Members

In addition, FLO's article on *Planning for Family Contingencies* provides a list of documents and information to put together prior to departure. Contact FLO for a copy.

Staying in Touch

Use all communication avenues open between you and post. These days we rely on electronic mail and telephones to provide speedy connections; with added equipment one can easily add photos, videos, and even real-time communication via web cameras. If your family does not already own a digital camera, computer, or web cam, this would be a very good time to get one, or better yet, two. However, good old "snail mail" is still a very viable option and most people appreciate a hand-written note or drawing, especially from children.

- Buy greetings cards and presents ahead of departure (or subscribe to e-Cards and gift services, see Appendix B)
- Stock up on 'Forever' stamps if post has U.S. mail capabilities
- Make sure the computer, phones, cameras are in functioning order
- Set family ground rules for communications: e.g., length of calls; cheaper-rate times; sharing air-time when Dad/Mom is on the line with one person. Agree to not draw negative conclusions if one party misses a phone date.
- Decide together which dates are the most important not to miss: e.g., birthdays, anniversary
- Set up a family calendar showing schedule of calls, R&Rs, etc.

FAMILY MEETING

Task: Discuss SEPARATION, Make a Plan Together

[Have each person in the family fill out this form before you sit down together.]

Questions about the Unaccompanied Tour:

? Where are you going? When? For how long?

? When will you be back?

? Why can't I go with you?

? Why did you choose to go there? Can't you tell them you don't want to go?

? Will you be in danger?

? How will I find you?
Your address:_____

_____

e-mail and numbers: _____

? Ground rules for internet/-email use: Use the Internet Safety Pledge sheet for kids
? Ground rules for communications: Cheaper calling times are _____
Time differences: Post is + or - _____hrs. from me
Best times to call spouse: Best _____
times to call me: _____

What if I forget to call or aren't home when you call sometimes? _____

What kinds of things interest you that we can talk about over whole the separation (e.g., sports teams, favorite TV show, etc.)?_____

_____

Things that I'm interested in talking about on the phone:

_____

_____

? When will we see you again? Discuss:

- Your expectations around family time, R&R, and holidays
- Which holiday visits will you spend at in-law's: _____

_____

- It's most important for me that you're here for the following holiday or event: _____

_____

Questions about what will happen to us:

? Will we have to move too? If so, when and to where?

? Who will take care of us?

? What do I do in case of an emergency?

1_____

2_____

3_____

? What do I do in non-emergency trouble? If they're not available, whom do I go to?

? What will happen to me if something happens to you?

? What happens when you come back?

? Will you be mad at me if I notice something is wrong when you come back and I tell someone about it?

Here's my list of people that I want to have as support contacts.

- Fill the blank Go-To list (next page) when you've decided who will be on your Go-To Team. They should be people you trust who know you and who will be able to help you easily if ever you need them.
- Code word: decide on a single word that, when used, will signal your Go-To people that you need immediate attention.

Picking "safe" Go-To people

When you're feeling low, you need people to turn to who can help in a way that you find useful. Let's face it, some of your friends and relatives may mean well, but their brand of "help" can be more trouble than it's worth. Pick "safe" people for your Go-To lists.

A safe person is someone who

- Keeps your confidences
- Listens without judging you
- Is able to understand your point of view
- Can hear "no" or handle disagreement without getting their feelings hurt
- Handles anger without slinging it back or retaliating
- Doesn't "should" all over you

My Go-To Team

NAME	NUMBER	E-MAIL	Notes
1			
2			
3			

- Code Word: _____

- Call them individually every once in a while just to check in.

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

Personal contacts: name, number

1. _____

_____

2._____

_____

3. _____

_____

Family Doctor _____

Pediatrician _____

Local hospital _____

address/phone _____

Fire: _____

Poison Centre _____

Police: _____

McGruff's Internet Safety Pledge

Check each promise and sign your name at the bottom. Then put it by your computer so you'll always remember how to stay cyber-safe!

I PROMISE

./ Never to give out my name, address, phone number, school name, any adult's credit card number to anyone online.

./ Never to arrange a face-to-face meeting with anyone I meet online.

./ Never to go into chat rooms unless my parents say it's okay.

./ Never to open emails from someone I don't know and never to go to links I don't recognize.

./ Always to tell an adult if I see anything online that makes me feel uncomfortable.

X_____ _____

Name Date

Keep taking a bite out of crime online at **McGruff.org**!

National Crime Prevention Council

1000 Connecticut Ave. 13th Floor, Washington, DC 20036, www.ncpc.org

Legal Matters

No body wants to think about the possibility that your spouse may not return. During the separation, you will inevitably worry about his/her safety, particularly since he/she is going to a dangerous post. Taking care of legal and financial matters before departure will help to minimize the sense of vulnerability commonly felt by spouses in the employee's absence. So, as much as it gives you a lump in the throat, address the following with your spouse:

./ Update both your Will and Testaments
./ Make a Living Will (instructions to deny medical care if incapacitated; see Appendix D, Five Wishes)
./ Funeral wishes
./ Wishes for your children
./ Immigration and visa matters if you're not a U.S. citizen
./ Powers of Attorney (general or specific, notarized. Check with your bank, credit union, or other financial institution to make sure they will accept your POA – many have proprietary forms they insist you use instead)
./ Leave a notarized POA listing each child by name for medical, educational, and physical custody issues, including permission to travel abroad (may be needed to renew or replace passports)
./ Make sure both names appear on deeds and titles to property and assets
./ Any liens or binding contracts that your spouse has not told you about

When these arrangements are finished, it is a good idea to copy the documents to CD and give a copy to key extended family members or executors.

FINANCES

About ISMA: why is it so low?

ISMA stands for Involuntary Separate Maintenance Allowance, a tax free sum of money to which an employee is entitled to offset costs of maintaining his/her family who are not permitted to come to post. You will find that ISMA does not cover the rent or mortgage in most U.S. cities. Theoretically, since the employee's housing is "free" while he/she's overseas, his/her salary can still go towards paying rent or mortgage for the family back home, as though the employee were living there. By design, ISMA is meant to cover extra expenses for things that make the UT family's life a little less stressful during the employee's absence (e.g., maid, lawn service, baby sitting).

Use the following Family Budget Worksheet to guide discussion about finances. Determine your expenses and budget, and make arrangements accordingly. You can also consult a Financial Manager through IQ: Information Quest (see Appendix A).

FAMILY BUDGET CHECKLIST

MANAGING HOUSEHOLD FINANCES:
Make sure both spouses have access to money, i.e., that both will be able to make inquiries and transactions without the other being present. Be familiar with passwords, procedures and PINs needed to access accounts. Discuss who will file taxes.

Bank:

./ Joint account and remaining spouse's own checking account
./ Emergency funds: how much to set aside
./ Set up internet banking; link joint account with other account(s), if any
./ ATM cards in hand, PINs secured
./ Personal checks (for both employee and at-home spouse)
./ Safety deposit box: find the key

Credit cards: Make sure credit line is sufficient to cover emergencies. Each spouse should use cards from separate accounts to simplify purchasing and bill paying during separation.

Insurance:

./ Life insurance, including amount to cover funeral or living will wishes
./ Health, dental and vision
./ Car insurance
./ Property insurance

Investments and Property:

./ Make sure assets are also in remaining spouse's name
./ Consider trust funds and investments for children

BUDGET

A. Gross Income			B. Deductions	
Income: Employee	Base pay:	$_____	Federal tax:	$_____
	COLA	$_____	FICA	$_____
	Differential	$_____	FEGLI	$_____
	Danger pay	$_____	Other	$_____
				$_____
Income: Spouse		$_____		$_____
Income: Other		$_____		
TOTAL A		$_____	TOTAL B	$_____

C. NET income = A – B

Total Gross Income (A):	$_____
Total Deductions (B):	- $_____
Other deductions:	- $_____
TOTAL NET income	**= $_____**

MONTHLY LIVING EXPENSES:

1. Housing

Rent/ mortgage (including taxes, insurance)	$ _____	
Utilities (gas, electricity, water, garbage)	$ ____	
Home owners' association fees	$ _____	
Telephone (land and cell)	$ _____	
Cable TV/ internet	$_____	TOTAL: $ _____

2. Food:

Groceries and household supplies	$ _____	
Eating out	$ _____	
School lunches	$_____	TOTAL: $ _____

3.Car and Transportation

Gas and oil	$ _____	
Car payments	$ _____	
Parking	$ _____	
Other (maintenance, car wash etc)	$ _____	
Public transportation (metro, bus, train)	$_____	TOTAL: $ _____

4. Clothing

Family clothes and shoes	$ _____	
Laundry and dry cleaning	$_____	TOTAL: $ _____

5. Personal

Hair (barber, beauty salon)	$ _____	
Toiletries and cosmetics	$ _____	
Cigarettes/ tobacco	$ _____	
Medication	$_____	TOTAL: $ _____

6. Entertainment

Media (newspaper, magazines, books)	$ _____	
Baby sitters	$ _____	
Outings: Movies, bowling, games, clubs	$_____	TOTAL: $ _____

7. Medical, Dental and Vision

Doctors (pediatrician, ob/gyn, GP)	$ _____	
Dentist and Orthodontist	$ _____	
Eyeglasses, contacts etc	$_____	TOTAL: $ _____

8. Other expenses	$ _____	
Allowances	$ _____	
Child support/ alimony	$_____	TOTAL: $ _____

9. Annual expenses (divide by 12 for monthly expense)

Auto insurance	$ _____	
Car: License plates, taxes	$ _____	
Property Taxes	$ _____	
School fees	$ _____	TOTAL: $ _____

GRAND TOTAL MONTHLY EXPENSES (Add 1 - 9) **TOTAL: $ _____**

Household matters

In most families, in the interest of time and equity of workload, one spouse typically handles one group of household matters while the other attends to another subset. Whether you rent or own your residence, you will need to be at least aware of how you might attend to *all* household concerns.

Address the following with your spouse:

./ Be familiar with where household records are kept, including operating manuals, car records, bills, policies, and leases.

./ Monthly maintenance: know about your utility companies; when the trash goes out etc., and home owners association's or landlord's imperatives.

./ Survey large ticket items or maintenance needs; decide which projects need to be done and when, e.g., roof repairs, new fridge, heater, etc.

./ Preferred services and vendors: Secure emergency contact details for

- Plumber
- Electrician
- Car mechanic
- Internet service
- Doctors (including pediatrician, dentist)
- Environment services if applicable (lawn service, snow removal, etc.)

./ Mail: identify items that need to be suspended or have change-of-address filed for during separation, e.g., spouse's magazine subscriptions.

./ Identify which licenses, memberships,and items will expire during the separation; make plans to request renewal papers as necessary, e.g., drivers license, professional licenses, club memberships, library cards, etc.

./ Other household services: the remaining spouse should be bold in asking for extra help during separation (after all, this is what ISMA is for), e.g., agree on expenditure and frequency of lawn care, babysitting, maid service, au pair, tax filing service, property manager's fees, etc.

./ If you are in transition from last post, discuss HHE plus storage from other government facilities, and how you will receive it if employee is not present.

./ Voter registration: spouse may request absentee ballot.

./ Discuss what things belonging to your spouse should and should not be moved during his/her absence. Can you move his tools? Put away her cosmetics?

School Needs

One of the assets as well as the liabilities of an international lifestyle is the education that your child has received while growing up all over the world. It is not uncommon for a Foreign Service child to experience multiple school changes before graduation, often involving different international curricula and second, third, and fourth languages. When they enter U.S. schools, internationally mobile families can find the transition to local public schools rather bumpy, depending on how savvy school staff is about the needs of Foreign Service and military families.

If your children are transferring to U.S. schools, contact FSI/Transition Center as well FLO for school information (see Appendix A).

You will need on hand:

- Original school records and reports
- Work samples from the last year
- Explanations of curricula, if not standard American type
- Standardized test scores, if any
- Letter from old school regarding special needs (whether gifted or learning needs), if any, even if services to meet these needs did not exist at last school
- Current immunization record
- English as a Second Language documents, if applicable.

Whether your child is "new" or not, teachers should be aware of:

- The affect of prolonged family separation: expect some initial anxiety and drop off in grades after departure; refer for help if decline lasts more than a few months
- Signs of distress following widespread news on TV about danger in the parent's assigned country
- Close and open contact with the remaining parent; contact with school counselor at parent's discretion
- Child's experiences from different cultures and languages
- Affects of multiple international moves and sensitivity to change
- Child may be less familiar with imperial measurements
- Academic lags owing to different school calendars in southern vs. northern hemisphere may not reflect actual ability
- Maturity level may differ from U.S. peers (may be more or less mature in certain subject areas and social contexts)

- Cultural biases of standard tests used to assess a child who has not grown up in America
- Encourage "buddy" system of pairing up like-minded youth when faced with new experiences and transitions.

Pre-Departure activities

To do for the Employee:

- Consider giving a digital photo frame, preloaded with family photos. (Buy an extra memory stick to send more in future.)

- Ask each family member to make wish lists on favorite websites: Select items in various price ranges and categories. The lists will be useful later for the employee who needs last minute gift ideas – make sure he/she has the necessary access passwords to the various websites and lists. Ask the employee to make wish lists on his/her favorite websites, again, picking items with a wide price range to fit family budgets.

- Ask the employee to make a video or cassette recording of him/herself, perhaps reading a favorite book or poem.

- Begin to pick up memorabilia for a UT scrapbook that the family can put together over the period of separation. Start with a copy of his/her travel orders and the official visa to the destination country. Add photos of farewell parties. Collect news articles or particular items pertaining to the UT; gradually compile the album and give it to Dad/Mom after homecoming.

- Plan a farewell party with closest friends, family and Go-To support people. It is uplifting and important to give people an opportunity to express their respect for both the family's sacrifices and the employee's service to the country before departure.

- Assist children with selecting small special "remember me" items or photos: wrap and give to Dad/Mom to open on the flight out. (See Appendix B for personalized photo-imprinted items.)

To do as a Family:

- Commit to completing the short list of fun family outings or activities before departure. (See lists generated from Family Meetings.) Shopping for necessities and running errands don't count.

- Make a time capsule: each member contributes one or two items to a weather-resistant, air-tight container. Bury it together as a family and dig it up again at the end of the UT.

- Spend extra time together without electronic entertainment: e.g., everyone reading on Mom and Dad's bed, doing jigsaw puzzles, playing board games, going to the beach, or for a hike.

- Plan for early nights and simple dinners a few days before departure.

During Separation

Making it work for your family

Practical choices: managing work and home work

At this stage of separation, you are implementing your plans and making your way as a family with some trial and error. Reality dictates that when the rubber hits the road, in spite of the best laid plans and intentions, the limiting factors in day to day life will be time, energy, money, and support. Just when you think you've got it down, something will happen to throw the system off and you find yourself constantly re-adjusting. External stressors mount when you add in to the equation multiple children, family separation, and a remaining spouse who has to work outside of the home to augment the income. Many parents feel "stuck" with few choices and find themselves becoming frustrated nags whose daily behaviors do not reflect their true values.

Tips for balancing your life:

- Opt for quality of life over having everything done just so. In other words, know what you need to maintain a loving attitude towards yourself and your children and make those rejuvenating needs a priority.

- Consider the cost-benefit ratio of all the activities you do. With a realistic look at your limitations, decide on what level of energy you need to experience "quality of life." (This can differ as you age and as stress levels rise and fall.) Ask yourself, is this how I want to spend my time? Is this the kind of person or family I want to be or have?

- Decide on what you need as a core structure to function and stay sane. Routines related to meal times, homework, bedtime, personal hygiene, getting up, and school or work readiness are typically basic to most families. These are the real "have-to's" to maintain some kind of consistent order so that things do not descend into chaos.

- Recognize that besides the core structure, all other activities and duties are secondary, and possibly dispensable. Although it may be hard to accept and to say "no," the reality is that you can only do so much; you might be able to multi-task and do more, but it comes at a cost.

- Keep things simple and easy. Lower your expectations. Your kids may initially feel sad that they can't go to every activity, but they will soon realize that you're less stressed and that's good for everyone.

- Delegate tasks to others when possible, accepting that their way of doing the tasks may not be the way you would have done it.

Managing Transitions

Expect and plan for disruptions during transitions from one routine to another. For example, R&Rs, though joyful times, can be very stressful due to a mixture of logistics and expectations. Some children (and pets) react as soon as they see the suitcases come out. Make these transitions as smooth as possible by maintaining sleeping and eating patterns and keeping plans simple and appropriate for your children's developmental ages. Having a favored comfort item (e.g., teddy bear, blanket, pacifier, or Dad/Mom photo shirt) close at hand and giving a special gift from Dad/Mom can take the sting out of difficult transitions such as saying goodbye.

Ask for help

Strong values influence social interactions. For example, the American credos of "do it yourself," "help others in need," and "don't impose on others" make it awkward for some parents to ask for help, as though doing so would be to reveal less than stellar parenting skills. It can also be equally difficult to accept help when it's offered because of the social "strings" involved. Nonetheless, you will need help and you will likely have people willing to support you. Pick "safe" people as supports; you will not have enough energy to expend on "high maintenance" people. Politely decline help from those who detract from you; this may ruffle feathers, but they are grown-up's and you have to take care of your children.

Safe people:

- Will listen to you, not judge you;
- Don't run a mental tab of how you "owe" them;
- Are reliable;
- Are trustworthy and won't spread your business about town; and
- Can both say and accept "no" for an answer without crumbling emotionally.

Be specific in asking for help, as people's idea of what constitutes "help" differs and their capacity to help differs, particularly with babies. (For example, if the task is "get groceries," your helper might be expecting to go shopping for you, while you're thinking they'll watch the baby while you go for groceries.) To avoid misunderstandings, be clear about what you are requesting and invite the support person to be equally clear with their "yes" or "no."

Helping your family with distance bonding

As the remaining parent, you are undoubtedly the mainstay for the family as well as the bridge between your children and your spouse. Unfortunately, their initiative towards that relationship will wax and wane, and they will rely on your gentle reminders to translate intentions to maintain contact into actions. A family calendar kept in an accessible spot will help keep track of important "dates" or tasks with/for Dad/Mom and reduce the perception of nagging.

The children's UT manuals include various distance bonding activities. Younger children will require assistance. In addition to phone calls to Dad/Mom, encourage your children to do one activity a week and to try variations on the themes suggested. Keep sessions short and enjoyable, and make sure things are actually sent to Dad/Mom. Collecting items sent to/from post in the children's manuals and treasure keepers (boxes, jars, etc.) will help to minimize the clutter.

Suggested activities:

- Phone conversations with Dad/Mom: The younger the child, the more tongue-tied they become on the phone when they cannot see the speaker. Make their calls to Dad/Mom frequent and short. Each child's manual has a list of suggested conversations to try with your spouse; school-aged manuals also have brief pointers for talking on the phone. These lists might be kept nearby their usual phone outlet for quick reference.

- Letters and e-mail: Encourage your children to write to Dad/Mom as much as possible, even if it's a doodle, or one poorly penned word. Facilitate e-mail for elementary school-aged and older children; consider personal e-mail accounts for children, if feasible.

- Recordings: Make recordings of your voice and the daily buzz at home for your spouse. In addition to giving description about the day, give your impressions and thoughts. Familiar noises, like starting the car, are very welcome details to a homesick spouse.

- Care packages: When asked what they really want from home, the vast majority of employees reply "A note from my kids." Consider the employee's restricted space and storage situation at post when deciding on gifts, and always include a note.

- Photos: Send photos frequently and ask for return pictures of post. (Also see Appendix B for a list of personalized photo-imprinted items).

- **K**eep your spouse up to date with the children's changes and interests: The children's manuals have a range of ten-minute tasks designed to be periodic updates to send to Dad/Mom. By encouraging your child to fill out and send one page at least once a month, the sending and receiving ritual can develop into a fun part of the UT experience.

- Themes shared with Dad/Mom: Find common interests between child and the employee, and encourage them to develop their mutual interests over the separation. For example, both may enjoy sports, space, dogs, music, history, cooking or the movies. They can explore what exactly appeals to the other, how the interest exists at post, and send each other intriguing news or items. As these interests will likely be carried through after homecoming, this type of activity can be especially rewarding and has long–lasting effects with respect to bonding.

- Seasonal markers: Help your spouse celebrate holidays and seasons that he/she'll be missing by sending themed care packages (e.g., a kit for decorating your desk for Thanksgiving), and scrapbook pages. Besides hard-copy pages, e-scrapbook pages can also be sent to post and can be collected on CD.

- Albums: Start a UT album, document the year in photos and memorabilia, e.g., news articles and best e-mails, copies of orders, visas, and R&R brochures.

- Keep special dates: Birthdays, anniversaries and important occasions take more planning to celebrate from afar but should not be neglected. Facilitate your spouse's gift giving to the children by buying ahead and "delivering" on the employee's behalf, or by reminding him/her in a timely manner to order of internet wish lists (established in pre-departure phase).

- Virtual dates: It sounds corny and feels awkward, but it is possible to have a romantic time in cyberspace. If you have contact details for another employee at post, ask them to help orchestrate a surprise, e.g., deliver or place a special item for your spouse. Send a CD of music that reminds you of when you met. Be creative!

- Maintain family traditions: Carry through with the traditions that are most important to your family. Engage your Go-To support people to pull off surprise parties,

Easter Bunny or Christmas Elf visits. Involve your spouse by sharing recordings, stories and photos, e.g., the tooth fairy's visit; or a recorded note of thanks at family Thanksgiving dinner.

- Make new traditions: Designate one or two days over the UT (in between R&Rs and public holidays) as new holidays to be named by your family. Arrange for days off from school and/or work. Enjoy the family's suggestions for special food, activities and rituals! Suggestions include Family Heritage Day; UT Half-Time Day.

- Play themes:
  1. Ask the employee to send home traditional clothes and sandals from post that the children can use for "dress-up."
  2. Unusual items from post also make intriguing fodder for treasure hunts.
  3. Ask for a map of the general area where your spouse lives; this can be enlarged and used by young children to represent Daddy/Mommy's place when they play "Paper World" (see elementary school-aged children's manuals).

- Story telling: Take turns with your children building a story a few sentences at a time. You begin the sentences, they fill in the blanks. Separation and traveling themes can easily be woven in. The employee can do this with school-aged children and you can also with younger children at home.

- Dates with Go-To people: Occasional social visits with the family's various Go-To people will help maintain accessibility and contact. It is especially important for younger children to feel comfortable with their support persons so they will be more likely to lean on them if an emergency arises.

- RSR: Before the rendezvous, remind your spouse of your child(ren)'s current realities so he/she knows what to expect. The younger the child during the separation phase, the more time and space needed to be reacquainted. Plan on simple R&Rs that allow for a lot of down time, i.e., opt for a beach vacation over Disneyland.

- Homecoming: Before *and* after Dad/Mom returns, encourage your children to collect all the items sent and received from post. Go over the various albums and treasures together, and praise them for all the effort they put into maintaining their relationship with Dad/Mom over the separation. Remind them that readjusting to being a whole family again will take time.

Homecoming

Reality Check

This section discusses what you can expect in the final stage of separation. A few week's prior to the employee's return, you may notice the up's and down's of anticipation, excitement and anxiety mixed in with fatigue over homecoming preparations. After return, the family takes at least six to eight weeks to readjust, possibly longer. It is common for employees to find reunions more stressful than the separation, regardless of marital and family status.

Stages of Reunion:

1. **Pre-arrival Stage**: The week or two before leaving post, the employee is working long hours in trying to make sure she/he leaves things at post in order. You will be similarly engaged in homecoming plans and getting things ship shape. Expect:

- fantasizing about reunion
- excitement
- fatigue and keeping long hours to make everything ready
- preoccupation with details of leaving and receiving plans
- irritation at interferences, including children

2. **Reunion Stage**: The immediate meeting and first few days after return. Honeymoon, bliss, a time for being happy and not bringing up painful things. This is a time for understanding, not to address problems or make major changes. Expect:

- physical changes in each other
- immediate excitement and relief, mixed with anti-climatic experience of daily demands
- pride in each other
- a wish to make everything easy and happy for your spouse
- initial insecurity and anticipation about intimacy and sex
- courting again
- social events as friends and family call or drop by
- small homecoming celebration
- deep tiredness with a readiness for relaxation
- spouse's jetlag
- special attention to include the children
- giving and receiving gifts, especially for the children
- intense curiosity; lots of questions about post, and longing to get caught up
- allowing your spouse time and space to "unwind"
- spouse marveling at advancements in U.S. culture, services and products
- urge to spend money (either budget for it or try to resist this)

3. **After the Honeymoon Stage**: Within the first month of return. Problems surface as normal family life and expectations march on, and members have to readjust to having another authority figure around who isn't yet up to speed. If the family has healthy communication, these problems will naturally and diplomatically resolve with time. Expect:

- Assertion of independence, especially from older children. Employee may feel slightly hurt or displaced at not being needed as you're able to do more.
- Employee's deep fatigue and need for space; spouse's resistance to being told what to do and keeping the family regimen in the same way you do.
- "Who had it worse" and hard time stories.
- Focusing on differences – ways of doing things; a tendency to hear comments as criticisms and replying defensively.
- Competitiveness and bracing against changes – who's right, whose way is better, who should change.
- Awkwardness over readjusting routines (transportation, chain of command, managing schedules and duties).
- Financial concerns; disagreement over how money is spent.
- Explaining specific children's issues (school performance, chores, etc.).
- Control issues: your awkwardness over relinquishing or spouse's taking control of things again.
- Negative thoughts about the other's motives and ability to fully appreciate you.
- Hesitant decision making with an urge to make changes and "get on with it."
- Petty jealousy and trust issues as employee sees children preferring you, and hears about how you and children have spent time getting close to other people.
- Children taking advantage of parental confusion over authority and rules.

4. **Communication Stage**: About four to six weeks after return. This is the time to renegotiate new routines, define new roles and expectations, and to make arrangements that fit new realities. Ideally communication will be open, frank and inclusive of all family members in order to build mutual acceptance of new controls, decisions and rules.

Expect:

- Renegotiation
- Forging trust through discussion and compromise
- Reconnection with deeper understanding of needs, motives and expectations
- Acceptance
- Explanation of new rules as they pertain to present realities
- Children to test limits of new rules
- Employee works through UT related affects more deeply

5. **Achieving Normalcy Stage**: About two to six months after return. The family reaches a new equilibrium with new routines of sharing, growing, and experiencing all the joys and trials of being a family.

Expect:

- establishment of new routines
- a new family rhythm
- acceptance of change
- clearer expectations and view of problems, if any
- personal growth
- frustration if the employee is not adjusting well or not taking up family responsibilities.

One final note: The returning employee may well want to spend time with 'buddies' from the unaccompanied post. This is to be expected and accommodated as much as possible – just think of how VFW halls are filled with reminiscing veterans many decades after their time together.

CHILDREN'S REACTIONS TO HOMECOMING

AGE	REACTION	RESPONSE (Employee)
Birth to 1 year	Crying and fussing Does not recognize returnee Clings to primary caregiver, wary of strangers Problems with "pooping and peeing" Changes in sleeping and eating habits	Hold baby; give lots of hugs Relax, be patient; be around with baby and spouse. Baby will warm up to you after a while and will come to you when spouse is out of sight Bathe, feed, change and play with baby, making soothing sounds Carry baby
1 -3 yrs	Clinging to primary caretaker; shyness; wants reassurance Does not recognize returnee; pulls back, looks afraid of returnee Crying; temper tantrums; desire to punish or retaliate against returnee Regression: temporary loss of new skills, e.g., toilet training, sleeping through the night Wanting to be in parents' bed	Give child space and time approach you; don't force holding, kissing or hugging Be gentle and approachable Sit at their eye level Do not take their pulling back as a personal rejection; in time, they will warm up Take turns with spouse putting toddler to bed; be involved in bedtime rituals
3 -5 yrs	Initially very excited about return; may have odd ideas about why Dad/Mom went away Talking a lot and showing off to update the returnee Angry outbursts and defiance Demanding attention Acting out behaviors to get your attention Feels bad if told off	Listen and pay attention; dispel odd ideas about why you went away Play with them at their level Be patient with all their "updates;" set a clear time limit beforehand if needed Set firm limits; be consistent with established consequences and structure Reassure that you love them Learn about their interests

AGE	REACTION	RESPONSE (Employee)
5 – 12 yrs	Excitement about homecoming; makes big plans that are sometimes unrealistic. Relief at arrival Eager to please and be seen as good Worried about not being good enough Dreads discipline for things left undone or being in trouble Pride in parents; boasts to others; feels important Abiding anger for separation Surprise in changes in returnee's appearance; initial awkwardness Vacillation between regressive and pre-teen behavior and language Competition with same-sex parent; initial attempts to split parents	Spouse: Involve child in homecoming plans; talk about realistic expectations without dampening enthusiasm. Employee: Praise them and tell them how proud you are of all their efforts Learn about their interests, school friends, teachers, etc. Look together at scrapbook, school work, photos Try not to criticize Give lots of hugs Praise them for new skills and achievements since separation Recognize their efforts; reaffirm that you're the parent, and reassure you're back to take care of things
13-18 yrs	Excited about homecoming; want things to be perfect. Relief at arrival Anxiety over not living up to standards Worry about how things will change, new rules, responsibilities Hopes for greater freedom and independence Braces against being told what to do. May be rebellious or defiant; unwilling to change plans to accommodate parents. May hide things or keep secrets if they think parents will disapprove	Spouse: Discuss their expectations prior to return; involve in homecoming plans. Acknowledge upcoming changes will affect everyone; encourage them to keep talking to you Employee: Be open about what has happened with you Listen with undivided attention; do not judge or tell them what to do Respect their privacy Learn - don't tease - about their friends, music, fashion, driving, job

* Adapted from Fort Bragg MWR ACS Return, and Hooah4Health Reunion

Pre-Homecoming preparations

3-4 weeks before arrival:

./ Confirm employee's ETA. Make arrangements for childcare and time off work and/or kids to all be home on arrival day.

./ Plan a small homecoming celebration: nothing fancy, just family and a tasty meal.

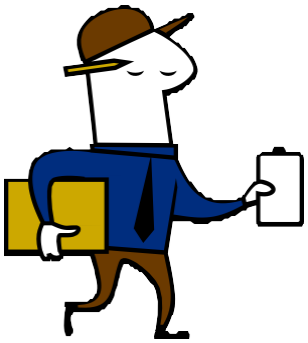
./ Plan a larger party for 2-3 weeks after return. Send invitations.

./ Have kids make Welcome Home banners. (Send Can't Wait Till You're Home banner to employee at post a month prior to arrival.)

./ Award "UT survivor" badges to your kids, or write them thank you card recognizing their contributions to the family during separation.

./ Write a thank you note for each Go-To Team member and anyone else who helped or encouraged you during the separation (to send after arrival).

./ Help kids collect the items sent from post and made over the UT for Dad/Mom (memory jars, treasure box, photos, etc.).



1-2 weeks before arrival:

./ Slowly clean the house a room at a time; get rid of junk (throw or give away - don't just hide them).

./ Buy non-perishable items for family celebration, if needed.

./ Delegate tasks to children and helpers: cleaning the car, pets, things outside the house, etc.

./ Attend to your personal appearance; arrange kids' haircuts, if needed.

3 Days before arrival:

./ Get lots of rest; go to bed early even if you don't feel like it.

./ Help hang up Welcome Home banners and any decorations.

./ Plan on quiet for the first few days and evenings as a whole family again at home; minimum noise, few or no errands, no "outside" friends or calls.

./ Purchase food for arrival celebration. Keep it simple.

Minimizing Homecoming Stress

Remember:

- Expect physical changes in both you and your spouse.
- You have both grown and changed, and are now different than when he/she left.
- Expect anger and insecurity as well as love and happiness; all these feelings are valid and need to be aired.
- Allow plenty of time and space for your spouse to readjust: hold back on pre-planned events and involvement in activities; do not overwhelm him/her with questions, schedules or new things all at once.
- Your spouse may want pampering for a while, but he/she is not another child, let him/her do things their own way. Do not be so controlled in your routines that you strangle spontaneity and flexibility.
- Expect your spouse to be very tired: follow his/her lead with respect to sexual intimacy and perhaps save the lingerie for later.
- Expect your spouse to be run down and susceptible to illness; supply a healthy diet; encourage rest; give a massage; hold off on the “honey do” list.
- Do not make major changes within the first month. Until the employee is ready, plan to continue your roles as the primary driver, house and bill manager, decision maker, and liaison with important relationships and contacts.

After homecoming
Ending Separation: Time to Readjust

Timing and Communication are two main keys that help families adjust to being together again.

Timing

Be patient. Give family members, including you, time to get used to each other again. Initially there may be awkwardness, frustration or misunderstandings. This is normal for the situation and will get better in time as your family finds a new rhythm.

<u>1-2weeks after reunion:</u>

./ Family time: pick something easy and casual to do together that would be fun for all
- Look over the Dad/Mom Treasure Keeper
- View Family Video or listen to Family Cassette all together
- Home movie night, or hot chocolate and games night; jigsaws

./ Allow for one-on-one time between the employee and each child for the child to show Dad/Mom something new, e.g., their work, interests, or tell of new friends.

./ To avoid overwhelming your spouse with too much information at once, write down things that he/she can refer to later, e.g., family schedules, calendar of appointments, and current chore cycle.

./ Take time off from work and school; sleep in.

./ Send thank you notes to your Go-To Team and other helpers.

<u>3-4 weeks after reunion:</u>

./ Have a Welcome Home party for larger family, Go-To Team members and friends.

./ Continue with routines as they were during separation.

<u>1 month after reunion:</u>

./ Family Reunion Discussion (see Discussion format at end of this section).

./ Unbury the family time capsule.

./ Slowly adjust schedules and routines as agreed in the discussion.

Communication

Besides talking, communication involves active listening to what is *not* said as much as what *is* said. Pay attention to tone of voice, and feelings conveyed in stylized communication patterns (e.g., sarcasm; defensiveness, etc.).

Problem solving tips:

- Identify and define the conflict: what exactly is the problem and who is experiencing it as a problem? Listen to the needs and feelings involved without assigning blame or being defensive.

- Look at possible solutions creatively. Brainstorm; write solutions down so as not to dismiss off hand ideas offered by those less mature than you (i.e., children).

- Evaluate the options, looking at costs and benefits of each. Talk until you find a compromise acceptable to all.

- Chose the best solutions given the *current* situation, and accept the trade-off's. Mutual agreement and commitment are vital to making a solution work.

- Act on the solution. Determine how and when to evaluate progress. Agree to revisit the topic and make changes as needed after the solution has been tried for a while.

- Re-evaluate the results: does the solution address the problem? Or have other underlying needs surfaced that redefine the problem? Brainstorm further and be persistent in the problem until it's solved.

Fighting Fair:

Disagreements, tension and stress are part of human life and relationships. Healthy open communication can minimize arguments but for the times when you do fight, fight "fair." The key to fair fighting is the ability to see and validate another's point of view without losing your own, and to consider their interests above one's own.

- Know your own threshold of tolerance and anger: if you're reaching a boiling point, take a time-out as confrontation will escalate the problem.

- Do an attitude check before you engage: do you want to solve the problem for mutual benefit, or do you want a pound of flesh? If your intention is to hurt the other, to defend your point of view at all costs or to gather emotional ammunition, it's better not to talk. Wait until your spiteful or defensive mood passes. Remember, you're on the same side.

- *Listen* when your spouse is talking. Try not to fidget or merely think about your next retort.

- Ask questions for clarification rather than assume you know what is meant.

- Take turns in talking out a conflict: try not to either take over the conversation or to be tight-lipped.

- Stick to the issue at hand. Big issues cannot be solved in one sitting; take on little bits at a time, over multiple sessions.

- Remember that people of all kinds, including you, are not "all bad" or "all good;" we're a bit of both. Accept the bad with the good.

- Control yourself, not someone else, it works better. You control your own "bad" by reining in the urge to attack your partner. In this way you choose to be good, even if provoked by someone whom you feel might deserve more severe responses.

- Don't "hit below the belt," meaning stay away from attacking your spouse's sensitive spots, e.g., appearance, or intelligence level. Attacks in these areas are designed to hurt and will shut down, if not destroy, communication.

- If possible, wait for a good time to bring up emotionally charged points of contention; make an appointment if need be. For instance, it is not fair to bring up a hard topic when your spouse needs to sleep or is rushing out the door, and then say "never mind."

Homecoming FAQ's

What is Post-Traumatic Stress and how do I know if it's a problem?

It is normal, that is expected, that anyone exposed to prolonged stress will experience some kind of stress reaction. Stressors may include exposure to trauma directly or indirectly (including natural disasters, abuse, neglect, prolonged lack of food, violent events, and injury), whether one-time or over time. People typically react with immediate shock, disbelief, temporary disorientation, heightened arousal, hypersensitivity, and anxiety; sometimes flashbacks and nightmares may occur. Reactions vary depending on the person's functioning capacity prior to the trauma, prior experience, and on the nature and intensity of the trauma and subsequent events. As the immediate shock wears off, these reactions typically subside by themselves, given time and "space." If, one to three months after his/her return home, you notice that your spouse seems hyper-aroused (continually on edge, easily startled, reactive, can't sleep or "turn off"), or she/he seems to be withdrawing from support systems, contact any of the relevant support services listed in Appendix A. Your spouse may be having difficulty readjusting even if he/she does not feel there's a problem.

He's seems really moody since he came back. Why isn't he happy to be home? Should I be worried?

Depressive reactions are not uncommon for people exposed to prolonged stress and separation from loved ones. These moods might appear as the "blues," irritability, general despondency, or physical complaints, to mention a few. After the initial euphoria of finally leaving post and coming home, the psychological effects of the UT begin to surface as the employee lets down his/her defenses and comes out of survival mode. You and your spouse might wonder why s/he's feeling down now that s/he's home. Try your best not to take it personally, and to give the returnee as much space and time as he/she needs. This can be tricky when you also have pressing needs and are tired of being "on hold." Although it doesn't look like it, the fact that your partner is now beginning to show all the emotions that were pent up for so long indicates that she/he is feeling safer to do so. That's a good thing, but it's a matter of getting worse before

getting better. Pointing him/her in a better venting direction would be also a good idea so that negative interactions with the family brought on by the moodiness do not add insult to injury.

Most employees who choose to work overseas have a healthy dose of denial which, at post, serves to help the employee live with the hardships and get the job done. At home, however, this same asset can be a liability if the employee views the intrusion of unpleasant emotions as a weakness. Most employees find it cathartic to talk about their experiences with others who have "been there," but find it hard to talk with others who cannot relate. For this reason, the State Department's ECS and FSI/Transition Center run a debriefing program for personnel returning from high stress posts, (see Appendix A). This also explains why they want to spend time with others who were posted with them.

Typically, it takes a few months for the effects of UT to surface and for the employee to fully realize the strain he/she has been living under. Seek professional help if you notice the following in your partner lasting more than a few months:

- Feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, sadness, tearfulness
- Change in weight (gain or loss)
- Can't get to sleep or stay asleep
- Excessive irritability
- Emotions appear to be "flat"
- Lack of pleasure in things that used to bring pleasure
- Withdrawing from family and social network
- Not functioning well at work; can't get out of bed
- Increasing indecisiveness
- Memory problems
- Suicidal thoughts**

**Seek help immediately if your partner voices suicidal or homicidal thoughts, especially if you know she/he has access to a weapon.

We're having problems since he returned; is this "normal?"

Unaccompanied tours will magnify the substance of your marriage: whatever is there before separation, good or bad, will be amplified after reunion. Some families not only survive the separation but are greatly strengthened, while others do not recover. In most cases, the employee's choice to take an unaccompanied tour is made considering the input of the partner and family. However, a few officers do not tell their spouses and some even choose back-to-back UT's in order to escape family responsibilities, citing "better pay" as an ostensible reason for going.

A large number of returning employees require "down time" to recuperate and reorder their insides. During this time, spouses often report a loss of intimacy and an emotional distance as communication is reduced to exchange of information and meaningful connection is lacking. These are not necessarily problems and may not indicate a festering marital problem. Given time, the issues resolves themselves in most cases within about three to six months, and the employee is more able to talk about his/her experiences and needs.

A few of the more common conflicts that UT families report when they are reunited include:

- Extra-marital affairs
- Loss of religion or faith
- Increased drinking
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Money problems
- Conflict related to living with in-law's or temporary housing
- Conflict arising from childrearing disagreements and parenting shortfalls

Less common but needing immediate attention:

- Domestic violence
- Drug use
- Finding out secrets, e.g., HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases
- Intention to divorce

To avoid these pitfalls, frank discussion with your partner is necessary. If your spouse refuses to talk, it's time to ask for help; if he/she does not want to go to counseling with you, go yourself.

I've noticed he's drinking a lot more than before he went overseas. He says it's not a problem, that all the officers drink. Is this true?

It is true that a culture exists within both military and foreign affairs services where the inability to deal with stress and personal problems are seen as a weaknesses. Many employees turn to alcohol and tobacco products to numb out the internal noise and to help cope with stress. While the use of substances is not officially condoned, they are often the only relief available in these high stress situations, and may even be seen a means of improving morale and community cohesion.

If you, your partner, or child is using alcohol, drugs or nicotine products in a manner that is interfering with the ability to function at school, work, or home, it's time to seek help. The actual quantity used is not the issue – a person of smaller stature does not need as much substance to get high as a larger person. Nor is the perceived control one has a deciding factor in seeking help. In fact, most addicts would tell you that they are in control and can stop whenever they want to. Counseling can address both the substance using behavior as well as the forces that drive their use. If your partner refuses to go, you can go alone as dealing with the behaviors and conflict around substance use will become a problem for you.

What else can one expect in my partner's typical readjustment cycle?

At about three months: with time-zone, energy, and routine adjustments more or less complete, your spouse may go through a reverse "culture shock" as she/he confronts the stark contrast between the present life and the dangers of the UT post. She/he would benefit from talking with other personnel who have been in similar posts, to process further the experiences of both post and returning home.

Anniversaries: e.g., the one-year date since leaving post, or marking a traumatic event that might have occurred at post. Expect a subdued mood; allow time and "space" for somber reflection and grieving. Encourage your spouse to take appropriate actions to recognize those he/she wishes to honor. Again, it may be easier and less isolating for him/her to speak with others who shared similar experiences.

FAMILY REUNION DISCUSSION

About one month after homecoming, it is helpful for the whole family to do a post-mortem of the separation and to decide together what routines make the most sense now. Encourage each family member to complete their own list (in their respective manuals) and bring to the discussion.

Suggestions for discussion:

These two things worked well for the family while you were gone:

_____

_____

Two things that aren't working well since you returned:

_____

_____

Schedule: Dates and times of activities I do now:

Mondays: _____

Tuesdays:_____

Wednesdays:_____

Thursdays:_____

Fridays:_____

Saturdays:_____

Sundays:_____

Chores: changes I'd like to make:

_____

_____

_____

Discuss the following:

./ Shall you or I be the primary family authority over matters like money, rules, special requests? Are you ready to take some of these tasks over?

./ Access and control of common use items, e.g., TV, bathroom, computer, phone, car, bank accounts.

./ Children's current curfews, methods of discipline, limits, and consequences

./ Expectations around having friends over; what do we as parents find acceptable?

./ Expectations around going out
- What should happen if the kids go out
- What should happen if we go out, separately and/or together
- Babysitting options and instructions

./ Hopes for future
- What's your next posting: how long?
- Any R&R or vacation plans
- Housing considerations
- Negotiating our parents / in-law's wishes

./ Money and allowance: Revisit the family budget, including family income(s), college costs, financial aid; car insurance and gas/transportation money; fees for childcare, school, and activities. Estimate upcoming needs as children grow.

./ If there is a young adult moving out from home, discuss expectations for moving help, things they need to take, visiting and circumstances under which they can return home.

./ Mention any important dates or events to note: e.g., graduation, prom, exams.

Other points I want to bring up:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX A: SUPPORT SERVICES and IMPORTANT NUMBERS

EMERGENCY:
Department of State Operations Center (for emergencies only):
(202) 647-1512
e-mail: SES-O@state.gov
Department of State Main Operator:
(202) 647-4000

FIRST-LINE SUPPORT:

Unaccompanied Tours Support Officer, Family Liaison Office (FLO/UT)
U.S. Department of State, Harry S. Truman Building, Rm 1239,
Washington, DC 20520
Telephone (202) 647-1076, 1-800-440-0397; fax (202) 647-1670
internet: www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo
intranet:
https://intranet.hr.state.sbu/Benefits_Compensation/Family_Services/Pages/UnaccompaniedTours.aspx
E-mail: FLOAskUT@state.gov

Contact UT Support Officer with any UT family questions and for information on meetings and social gatherings for the UT community in Washington DC as well as 'virtual' meetings (i.e. conference calls, simultaneous web casts, etc.) available worldwide. The UT Support Officer is a particularly important resource for those not in Washington as well. Besides covering UT issues, FLO has a wealth of information on re-entry into Washington, spousal employment, education options, adoptions, naturalization, and evacuations. FLO also operates the Job Seekers Network and publishes a number of articles on all aspects of Foreign Service family matters.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES:

Deployment Stress Management Program (MED/DSMP)
Main Office, 1800 N. Kent Street, Rosslyn, VA 22209
Telephone: (703) 875-4828
Email: MEDDSMP@state.gov
Managed by the Bureau of Medical Services, the DSMP offers prevention, intervention, assessment, treatment, counseling, education and referral services covering the spectrum of the pre-deployment cycle through after reintegration. DSMP can also help you increase your resilience or manage any concerns during deployment and reintegration. These services are available to employees and families who are experiencing the effects of being assigned to a high stress/high threat post.

Employee Consultation Services (MED/ECS)
Main Office, Columbia Plaza, Room H246, Washington, DC 20520-2256
Telephone: (703) 812-2257
Email: MEDECS@state.gov

Managed by the Bureau of Medical Services, ECS's licensed clinical social workers offer limited free confidential counseling and evaluations for employees and family members.

FOR RETURNING EMPLOYEES:

High Stress Assignment Out-Briefing Program (run by ECS and FSI/TC)
Telephone (703) 302-7272 or (202) 663-1903
E-mail: FSITCTraining@state.gov
Intranet: http://reg.fsi.state.sbu/CourseCatalog.aspx?EventId=MQ950

INFORMATION and REFERRALS:

Overseas Briefing Center: Foreign Service Institute
National Foreign Affairs Training Center, Rm. E2105
4400 Arlington Blvd, Arlington VA. 22204-1500
Telephone: (703) 302-7267; fax (703) 302-7452
e-mail: FSIOBCInfoCenter@state.gov
Information on posts including cultural data, schools, spousal employment, medical facilities, housing and post reports. Post To Go and Post Personal Insights give a bird's eye view of life at various posts.

Transition Center at the Foreign Service Institute (same address as above) Website: http://www.state.gov/m/fsi/tc/c1932.htm
Information on returning to Washington including schools, adult education, housing options, child care, employment, and pet services. Courses for family members on various aspects of Foreign Service life, including maintaining long-distance relationships.

Foreign Service Youth Foundation: (FSYF)
P.O. Box 39185, Washington, D.C. 20016
Telephone: (301) 404-6655
Email: fsyf@fsyf.org
Website: http://www.fsyf.org

APPENDIX A Continued

A non-profit organization that advocates and develops programs for internationally mobile youth in all U.S. Foreign Service agencies. Publications on Foreign Service life for youth may be ordered.

WorkLife4You
(800) 222-0364 (24/7)
(888) 262-7848 TTY
www.worklife4you.com
Free resource referral service focusing on a wide range of life issues, including child and eldercare, contracted by the State Dept for Foreign Service and Civil Service employees. Free sessions with a financial manager and an attorney can be arranged through IQ. Specialists are available to assist you 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. New users must register.

OTHER GOVERNMENT OFFICES:

Office of Allowances: (ALS)
Telephone: (202) 261-1121
Website: https://aoprals.state.gov
ALS develops and coordinates policies, regulations, standards, and procedures to administer the government-wide allowances and benefits program abroad. Relevant UT articles may be downloaded.

Office of Casualty Assistance (OCA)
Department of State, Room 1241
Washington, DC 20520-7512
(202) 736-4302; (877) 887-5996
e-mail: oca@state.gov
In the event of a critical incident including death of a loved one, kidnapping or carjacking, OCA provides on-going support to US government employees and families serving under Chief of Mission and to DOS employees in the U.S. The OCA is your number one resource for information on insurance (including which ones honor claims from a war zone), wills, benefits, and various Powers of Attorneys.

Office of Retirement (RET)
(202) 261-8160 or 261-8180
e-mail: Retirement@state.gov
Administers Foreign Service (FS) Retirement and Disability System, and the FS Pension System.

Payroll Customer Support Center
Call toll free 1(800) 521-2553 or 1(877) 865-0760
If you are in Charleston call (746-0538 (X60538)
E-mail: PayHelp@state.gov
The Payroll Customer Support Center provides a single point of contact for DOS domestic and overseas American employees with questions regarding salary payments, withholdings, or time and attendance. Your source for W-2 reports.

APPENDIX B: USEFUL WEBSITES

This list is for your convenience only; it does not represent an endorsement by the U.S. State Department.

Expatriate living:
Families In Global Transition: www.figt.org for their homepage. Or go directly to http://www.incengine.org/incEngine/ for lots of information and web links to other sites on expatriate life: education, shipping, third culture children, careers, travel etc.

Dads At a Distance: www.daads.com
Moms Over Miles: www.momsovermiles.com
Activities that long-distance parents can do with or for children.

Long Distance Couples: www.longdistancecouples.com
Activities for long-distance relationships, including "distance dating."

College scholarships, financial aid, internships:

Education and Youth website: www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c21958.htm
Lists information and web links for scholarships, college finance programs and internships.

APPENDIX C: REGULATIONS, READING, DVDs, LINKS

Regulations:

Travel of Children of Separated Families, 3 FAM 3750
http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c23130.htm

Separate Maintenance Allowance Regulations, DSSR 260
http://aoprals.state.gov/content.asp?content_id=215&menu_id=81

Separate Maintenance Allowance: Questions and Answers
http://aoprals.state.gov/content.asp?content_id=162&menu_id=81
www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c23131.htm

DVD's, Books and Articles:

Managing your Unaccompanied Tour Successfully – a DVD/CD set from FLO covering aspects of a UT from the initial decision process to re-unification of the family. Available through FLOAskUT@state.gov.

APPENDIX D: SAMPLES, TEMPLATES AND CHECK LISTS:

Templates for checklists:

Family Pre-Posting Discussion Checklist
My Go-To people
Emergency Contacts
Chores
Calendar
Financial check sheet: Budget and Monthly Expenses
Family Reunion discussion: suggested topics

Templates for activities: used in the Children's manuals

Family Tree
Paper Me, Paper Mom/Dad
Tracking Baby's Growth

Five Wishes: Living Will:

U.S. Department of State, HR/ER/WLP
(202) 261-8176
Free copy of this advance health care directive and living will document is available to permanent DOS employees upon request. The format is user-friendly and the document is legal in 35 states.

FAMILY MEETING

Task: Discuss the UT with your Family, Make a Plan Together:

Questions about the Unaccompanied Tour:

- **?** Where are you going? When? For how long?
- **?** When will you be back?
- **?** Why can't I go with you?
- **?** Why did you choose to go there?
  Can't you tell them you don't want to go?
- **?** Will you be in danger?

? How will I find you? Your e-mail address:_____
Your address:_____
_____

Ground rules for communications: Cheaper calling times are _____
Time differences: Post is + or -_____hrs. from me
Best times to call Dad/Mom:_____
Best times to call me: _____

What if I forget to call or aren't home when you call sometimes? _____

What kinds of things interest you that we can talk about over whole the separation (e.g., sports teams, favorite TV show, etc.)?_____
_____

Things that I'm interested in talking about on the phone:
_____
_____

? When will we see you again? Discuss:

- Your expectations around family time, R&R and holidays _____
_____
- For married children: which holiday visits will you be spend at in-law's: _____
_____
- It's most important for me to be with Dad/Mom at the following holiday or event: _____
_____

Questions about what will happen to us:

? Will we have to move too? If so, when and to where?

? Who will take care of us?

? What do I do in case of an emergency?

1_____

2_____

3_____

? What do I do in non-emergency trouble? If they're not available, whom do I go to?

? What will happen to me if something happens to you?

? What happens when you come back?

? Will you be mad at me if I notice something is wrong when you come back and I tell someone about it?

Here's my list of people that I want to have as support contacts.

- Fill the blank Go-To list (next page) when you've decided who will be on your Go-To Team. They should be people you trust who know you and who will be able to help you easily if ever you need them.

Picking "safe" Go-To people

When you're bummed out, you need people to turn to who can help in a way that you find useful. Let's face it, some of your friends and relatives may mean well, but their brand of "help" can be more trouble than it's worth. Pick "safe" people for your Go-To lists.

A safe person is someone who:

- Keeps your confidences (doesn't blab your business about)
- Listens without judging you
- Is able to understand your point of view
- Can hear "no" or handle disagreement without getting their feelings hurt
- Handles anger without slinging it back or retaliating
- Doesn't "should" all over you

My Go-To Team:

NAME	NUMBER	E-MAIL	Notes
1			
2			
3			

- Code Word: _____
- Call them individually every once in a while just to check in.

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

Personal contacts: name, number

1. _____
_____

2._____
_____

3. _____
_____

Family Doctor _____

Pediatrician _____

Local hospital _____
address/tel _____

Fire: _____

Poison Centre _____

Police: _____

FAMILY BUDGET CHECKLIST

MANAGING HOUSEHOLD FINANCES:

Make sure both spouses have access to money, i.e. that both will be able to make inquiries and transactions without the other present.

Bank:

- ./ Joint account
- ./ Internet banking set up
- ./ Link joint account with other account(s), if any
- ./ ATM cards in hand, PINs secured
- ./ Personal checks (for both employee and at-home spouse)

Credit cards: Make sure credit line is sufficient to cover emergencies; separate cards and accounts for each spouse.

Insurance:

- ./ Life insurance
- ./ Health, dental and vision
- ./ Car insurance
- ./ Property insurance

BUDGET

A. Gross Income			B. Deductions	
Income: Employee	Base pay:	$_____	Federal tax:	$_____
	COLA	$_____	FICA	$_____
	Differential	$_____	FEGLI	$_____
	Danger pay	$_____	Other	$_____
	Other	$_____		$_____
Income: Spouse		$_____		$_____
Income: Other		$_____		
TOTAL A		$_____	TOTAL B	$_____

C. NET income = A – B

Total Gross Income (A):	$_____
Total Deductions (B):	- $_____
Other deductions:	- $_____
TOTAL NET income	**= $_____**

MONTHLY LIVING EXPENSES:

1. Housing

Rent/mortgage (including taxes, insurance)	$ _____	
Utilities (gas, electricity, water, garbage)	$ _____	
Home owners' association fees	$ _____	
Telephone (land and cell)	$ _____	
Cable TV/ internet	$_____	TOTAL: $ _____

2. Food:

Groceries and household supplies	$ _____	
Eating out	$ _____	
School lunches	$_____	TOTAL: $ _____

3. Car and Transportation

Gas and oil	$ _____	
Car payments	$ _____	
Parking	$ _____	
Other (maintenance, car wash etc)	$ _____	
Public transportation (metro, bus, train)	$_____	TOTAL: $ _____

4. Clothing

Family clothes and shoes	$ _____	
Laundry and dry cleaning	$_____	TOTAL: $ _____

5. Personal

Hair (barber, beauty salon)	$ _____	
Toiletries and cosmetics	$ _____	
Cigarettes/ tobacco	$ _____	
Medication	$_____	TOTAL: $ _____

6. Entertainment

Media (newspaper, magazines, books)	$ _____	
Baby sitters	$ _____	
Outings: Movies, bowling, games, clubs	$_____	TOTAL: $ _____

7. Medical, Dental and Vision

Doctors (pediatrician, ob/gyn, GP)	$ _____	
Dentist and Orthodontist	$ _____	
Glasses, contacts, etc.	$_____	TOTAL: $ _____

8. Other expenses	$ _____	
Allowances	$ _____	
Child support/ alimony	$_____	TOTAL: $ _____

9. Annual expenses (divide by 12 for monthly expense)

Auto insurance	$ _____	
Car: License plates, taxes	$ _____	
Property Taxes	$ _____	
School fees	$ _____	TOTAL: $ _____

GRAND TOTAL MONTHLY EXPENSES (Add 1 - 9) **TOTAL: $ _____**

CHORE CHART FOR _____

CHORE	WHEN	NOTE	DONE

CALENDAR MONTH:

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY

SPECIAL DATES and DEADLINES TO REMEMBER:

FAMILY REUNION DISCUSSION

Suggestions for discussion: around 1 month after reunion

These two things worked well for the family while Dad/Mom was gone; explain why:

_____

_____

Two things that aren't working well since Dad/Mom returned:

_____

_____

Schedule: Dates and time for activities I do now:

Mondays: _____

Tuesdays:_____

Wednesdays:_____

Thursdays:_____

Fridays:_____

Saturdays:_____

Sundays:_____

Chores: changes I'd like to make:

_____

_____

_____

Discuss the following:

./ Who do we go to first for permission and decisions about money, rules, requests?

./ Access and control of common use items, e.g., TV, bathroom, computer, phone, car

./ Current curfews, methods of discipline, limits, and consequences

./ Expectations around having friends over; what do parents find acceptable?

./ Expectations around going out
- What should happen if kids go out
- What should happen if parents going out
- Baby sitting options and instructions

./ Hopes for future
- What's Dad/ Mom's current posting: how long?
- Any R&R or vacation plans
- Housing

./ Money and allowance: Revisit the family budget, including family income(s), college costs, financial aid; car insurance and gas/transportation money; fees for childcare, school and activities. Estimate upcoming needs as children grow.

./ If there is a young adult moving out from home, discuss expectations for moving help, things they need to take, visiting and circumstances under which they can return home.

./ Mention any important dates or events to note: e.g., graduation, prom, exams.

Other points I want to bring up:

_____

_____

_____

_____

At _____ months: _____
date

[attach photo]

Height: _____ Weight:_____

What I can do today: _____

_____

I can reach_____

I eat_____

_____

I like _____

_____

_____

I don't like_____

_____

_____

List some recent "firsts":

_____

_____

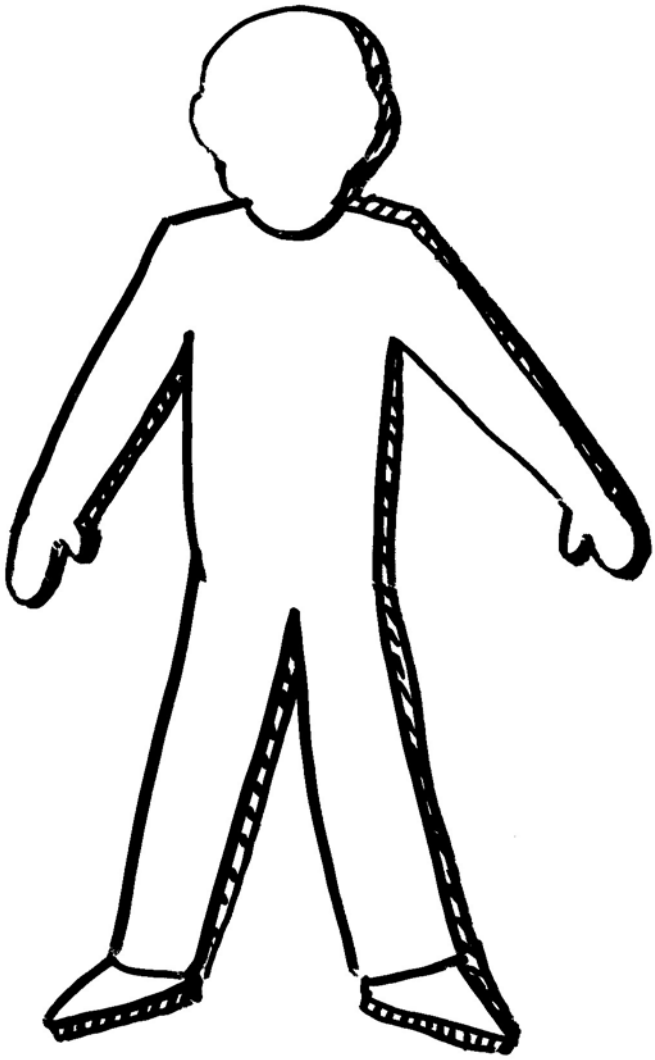
_____

_____

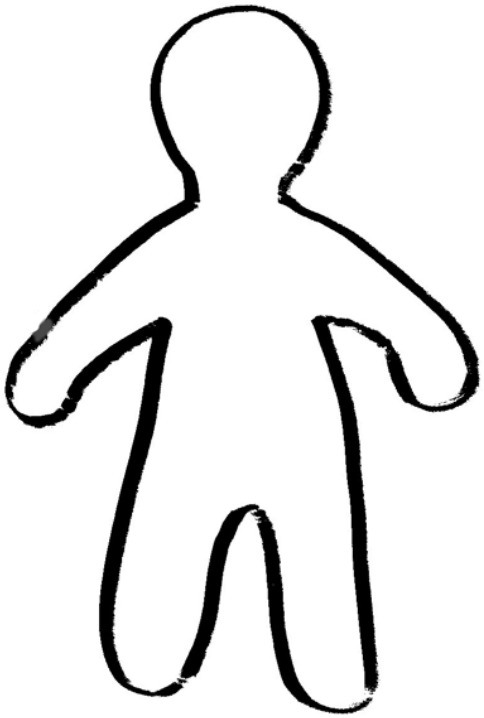
_____

Hand print:

Flat Me template
(for ages 5-11)



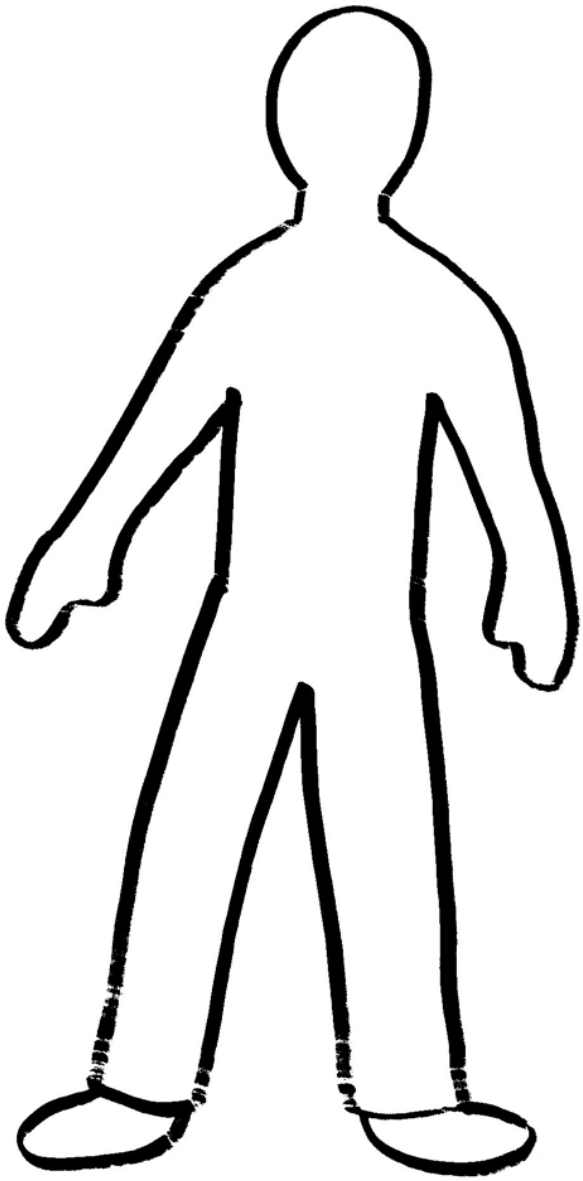
Paper Me Template
(for preschoolers – K)



Paper Mom

Paper Dad Templates

(for preschoolers – K)



APPENDIX E: FAQs SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES – WHAT TO DO

Seek additional help from the relevant support services listed in Appendix A if you are worried about any of the following concerns:

What if my spouse comes back with a physical injury?

If your partner returns home injured, the course of readjusting to home life will be more complicated for the whole family. Depending on the nature of the injury, physical limitations and treatments demand longer term logistical changes, financial and emotional worries. A good counselor can help your family develop new strategies for working with the impairments, first attending to physical security and pain management, and next to emotional needs of the officer as well as the family. During this time of adaptation, children are particularly vulnerable to being overlooked as spouses are overwhelmed with the magnitude of changes. This is a good time to engage people on your go-to list, and the wider community.

What if the officer doesn't come back?

No one wants to think about it, but the possibility exists even if the probability is low. As with any negative potentiality, preparing for loss of a loved one is as much an exercise in containing anxiety as it is in contingency planning. Preparations to set your house in order before the officer leaves will help to mitigate the full impact of their loss.

Preparations include:

- completing a will
- completing a living will (see Appendix D Five Wishes)
- having meaningful conversations about dying and death, including wishes for funeral
- making mutual decision about continuing care for your children, such as setting up a trust and naming a guardian
- making mutual decisions about the disposition of your most important assets: house, car, valuables and items of sentimental value
- some employees have written letters to their children to be opened at future milestones (e.g. graduation, marriage, birth of child); these can still be saved and opened at the appropriate time together if all goes well

If your partner is killed at post, you will likely find out about it via telephone from post personnel – since unaccompanied posts usually make for tight communities and you can be sure the staff there will be feeling the loss deeply. They will want to talk directly to you and will make efforts to not leave messages with children or others. They would have contacted the Office of Casualty Assistance which will be your single point of contact for all administrative and supportive needs. They will contact FLO as well and other government offices to begin follow-on procedures. Alternately, you can call FLO for support. A number of resources are available for helping your children cope with their grief. There is no question that anyone in this situation will need extra support to deal with the loss plus the added concerns. Appendix A lists government offices that can

assist with fiscal aspects; OCA provides excellent and active help with guiding you through the maze of details from the return of the body to referrals for counseling.

I've been told I'm not an "eligible family member". What does this means and why can't I get the same help if I'm going through the same things as official "EFMs"?

U.S. governmental regulations spell out who is considered a family member for legal and funding purposes, and in turn, who qualifies for services that must be paid for by the government. Unfortunately the legal requirement used to determine access to benefits creates an artificial differentiation between those who are deemed "eligible" and "ineligible." In practice on the field and at home, FLO uses a much broader definition of what constitutes "family."

The list of "eligible family members" (EFMs) includes:

- legally married spouse of the officer
- children aged 0-18 (or 21 or 23 depending on the context) years, including legally adopted children and step-children (unborn children are added to amended orders after birth)
- some other adults including children unable to care for themselves or elder parents who depend on the officer for more than 51% of their support, including parents-in-law. The requirements are quite strict.

Not included:

- Non-married partners, whether same or opposite sex
- Children other than those covered by the EFM definition above.
- Relatives taking care of officer's children in USA while he/she is away, including ex-spouses, siblings, grandparents.
- Parents or grandparents whom the officer is supporting 50% or less.

EFMs must normally be listed on the officer's travel orders to receive benefits which include:

- Travel expenses for R&R
- Access to information about the officer via governmental offices
- Funds from various allowances to cover costs incurred by UT (e.g., Separate Maintenance Allowance, Away from Post Education Allowance if child is in boarding school)
- USG Direct Support services (ECS etc.)

FLO makes very effort to assist those in need with information and referrals. Many grandparents, significant others, and relatives have stepped in to care for disengaged family members and are no less deserving of recognition or assistance. For information on the services available to you, please contact FLOaskUT@state.gov.