

Section D-2 Outreach to Family Members

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

Outreach to Family Members

Family readiness is not a passive initiative. It is achieved through the proactive interaction of commanders, service members, and, most importantly, family members. Effective family member outreach is essential to family readiness and therefore mission readiness. Family members should be aware of the family readiness program as well as the wealth of information and resources available through the program long before a deployment or training exercise. Once the unit departs, family members outreach should increase its tempo to ensure that family members remain informed and supported.

Like most military activities, family member outreach requires careful planning and robust execution. Outreach planning must be detailed and realistic. Resource requirements should be clearly identified and prioritized to those who must allocate limited resources. Planning should be conducted on a lifecycle basis. The outreach plan should be comprehensive and address all essential elements of family readiness.

Be creative in establishing a step-by-step outreach plan for your unit. Seek guidance and coordinate an outreach program with the commander, personnel specialist, and family readiness group (FRG) coordinator. Design a procedure or plan for outreach that is individualized to your unit's mission and the geographic dispersion of its members. Tap into whatever community and local military resources that are available. Essential parts of an outreach plan should include:

- Sponsorship
- Signing into the unit; adding the service member and family to the official unit database
- Welcome letter or telephone call to newly assigned families
- Telephone rosters
- Newsletters
- Unit web page
- Ongoing family readiness program meetings and events
- Deployment support and assistance

Effective outreach programs utilize a wide variety of media and are always built on a solid foundation of interpersonal communication. Ideally, service members will be assigned a sponsor when they are assigned to a Guard or Reserve unit. The sponsor becomes their main point of contact to answer questions about the unit. Sponsors often forward an installation or unit welcome packet, a copy of a recent unit newsletter, and basic information pertaining to the unit and its mission to the incoming service member. Most importantly, the sponsor demonstrates a warm welcome to the unit and facilitates the new service member's transition into the unit. Many units and family readiness groups also assign family sponsors.

An initial step of outreach should begin when the spouse/sponsor signs into a Guard or Reserve unit. The service member completes a family readiness data card/personnel form, which asks for home address, telephone number and personal family information. The service member may be handed a welcome letter from the command, and resource contact information. His or her personal and family information will be added to a database, a unit telephone roster, and filed. It is critical to have a direct link between the unit personnel administrator and family readiness program coordinator to share information about new families so that families are welcomed as soon as possible after the service member signs into the unit.

Take the time to call the newly assigned family or have the family sponsor make a home visit. Explain the telephone roster system and provide the name and telephone number of their key caller. Mail a copy of the telephone roster to them or send it electronically. Explain the privacy act and “need to know” policy so that they do not feel like anyone can have access to their telephone number and address. If the family has e-mail and Internet access, provide the unit web site (if applicable) and the e-mail addresses of key contacts within the family readiness program. That simple gesture of making a call to a new family can make all the difference in their impression of the unit, and how involved they may become in the future in the unit FRG. First impressions are important.

Unit newsletters are an excellent tool for reaching family members and promoting family readiness. Take the time to have at least one article regarding family readiness in every issue. Plan ahead and develop newsletter articles about key topics such as reunion, strategies to cope with separation, and financial management. Share resources. There is no need to reinvent the wheel. Find out what other units and the services include about family readiness in their newsletters and print their articles, if they are applicable to your unit (giving them credit in the by-line). The topics pertinent to family readiness are common for most units. Keep track of the annual training calendar and capitalize on the regularity and standardization of newsletters. Include articles on topics such as family care plans and powers of attorney several months prior to a deployment. Budget for mailing the newsletters. Newsletters handed to service members often never make it home to the family member. Putting your unit newsletter on the Internet will improve its accessibility and potentially reduce costs.

As stated earlier, the importance of Internet-based resources to the National Guard and Reserve cannot be over emphasized. Unit web pages and Internet sites can be kept current and up-to-date much easier than printed pamphlets. Users can download and browse through the links that pique their interest. A unit Internet site can be linked to the major commands, the service headquarters, the Office of Reserve Affairs, and the Department of Defense. The wealth of information is boundless. Examples of links include command information, Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, community outreach, event calendar, family information (i.e. teen issues), public affairs and news releases, TRICARE Website, and volunteer updates. The military Services are also using the Internet to provide educational information and programs such as Family Team Building, Crossroads, and LIFELines to address spouses and are a valuable tool for learning about military life. Internet-based resources are also an effective recruitment and retention tool and an excellent way to keep family members informed. The Office of Reserve Affairs, <http://www.defenselink.mil/ra/> is establishing a specific readiness support web site as one of the many initiatives in support of family readiness.

A family readiness program should not be considered important only in times of deployments, mobilizations, and periods of separations. Family readiness program events, activities, and meetings should be ongoing throughout the year. Add family readiness program events to the unit training calendar so that both service members and family members can plan ahead. Holidays such as Halloween, Thanksgiving, Veteran's Day, and Christmas present an excellent theme-based opportunity to plan a family event that can include the entire family. Family days and organization days are also events that family members may attend if they know in advance. Combine fun events with educational presentations and deployment briefings.

If possible, incorporate the interests and ideas of family members in the planning of events. Organize committees and solicit volunteers. Family members are more inclined to be involved if their input, ideas, and time are included in the planning process. To learn more about family member interests, send out an interest-survey similar to the sample found at the end of this section to find out what topics interest individual family members.

Deployment support and assistance ensures personal family readiness during periods of separation. When service members deploy to world trouble spots or are separated for an extended training exercise, it is difficult on the spouses and children they leave behind. Fostering resiliency of families while emphasizing a customer service philosophy, the family readiness program encourages families to seek help early before problems arise. Crisis assistance is available when those emergencies do occur during family separation. Pre-deployment and deployment briefings are an essential component of family readiness programs. Provide service members and families as much information as possible. Use the Toolkit sections with deployment checklists and personal property inventory as class lesson plans. Emphasize deployment support in unit newsletters, telephone calls to individual family members, and the unit web site in specific presentations and briefings. The family readiness program serves as a conduit for command information on deployment, re-deployment, changes in the unit's status, and other items of interest to family members. As a family readiness program manager/director, you are on the front line in developing and implementing an effective family readiness program.

Family Readiness Program Interest Inventory

1. Tell us about yourself. Please check all of the below categories that apply to you.

- Male Female
- Married Single
- Spouse Child

2. As a family member of a Reservist, what is your biggest concern? Please check one.

- Finances
- Health care
- Child care
- Separation from my spouse
- Other

3. When do you prefer to have family readiness program events/classes? Please check only your first choice.

- Afternoons
- Evenings
- Saturday
- Sunday

4. Listed below are programs that are currently being offered, or could be offered if there was sufficient interest. Please check all programs you would be interested in attending.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marriage Enrichment | <input type="checkbox"/> Couples Communication |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Single Parenting | <input type="checkbox"/> New Parenting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Effective Parenting | <input type="checkbox"/> Parenting Teens |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strategies for Coping with Separations | <input type="checkbox"/> Kids and Moving |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Introduction to the military (for spouses) | <input type="checkbox"/> Stress Management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Handling Depression | <input type="checkbox"/> Anger Management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Budgeting and Financial Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Using Credit Wisely |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Time Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Resumes/Cover Letters |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Successful Interviewing | <input type="checkbox"/> Career Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Travel & Tourism Tips in your Area | |

5. What other programs, classes, and events would you be interested in?