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## Introduction

Deployments can be an exciting period of change and development for the service person. You can feel proud of professional success and excited about the role you will have towards International commitments and security. However, The NZDF also recognise that deployments can also create additional strains and stressors for the family members remaining at home.

Firstly, the NZDF thanks all of those who make significant contributions and sacrifices in support of our service people on deployment. We want you to know how incredibly grateful we are that you lend us your loved ones. Without your support, it would be almost impossible to achieve our goals.

This resource for families is in recognition of your contribution and the unique role you play in enabling deployments to happen.

The information in this resource is designed to help you to understand the range of responses that your children might have when someone important to them is deployed and offer some ways to support them. We hope that you find the information helpful. Should you require access to additional family support, please contact your local NZDF agency listed on pages 29-31.

## **The Impact of Deployment on your Child**

Deployment is a big change for children. From an attachment perspective, children make key connections to significant adults and caregivers in their lives, so it's not surprising an extended period of physical absence might affect the way a child may feel and behave.

A key point to remember when navigating this unique situation is physical absence does not mean connection and attachment is lost. Regular contact, affirmation of your love and support from afar is still vital. Both the parent at home, and the departed parent can help facilitate these forms of connection.

Additionally, remember you are the expert on your children. You know them best and how they are likely to react to the extended absence of one of their parents or carers. It is important to remember that different children will experience different reactions at different times and that some children may seem more or less affected than others.

Likewise, some families experience few or no problems during deployments, but grow and deepen their closeness. There is no “right response”. Communication, understanding and support are really crucial for a child to be able to process any big changes in their life so, it's always a good idea to check in, be open to their perspectives and let them know that all feelings are valid. If your child's reactions are not covered in this resource, this does not indicate a potential issue for your child; it just means we need to update our book.

### **What the research says. Possible impacts of deployment on children.**

According to Easterbrooks et al. (2013) “A recent study investigated how 1,500 military-connected youth, ages 11–17, coped with deployment. Two-thirds of them reported no emotional difficulties, although those whose parents were deployed longer were more likely to report problems. Looking at younger children, ages 6–12, whose Army and Marine Corps parents were currently or recently deployed, another study found that levels of depression and behaviour problems among military-connected children were similar to those among civilian children in the same communities.

“Other research has found that families with deployed parents may grow closer together, and that children in these families show more independence and responsibility. These positive findings serve as a counterweight to past research that focused on problems or psychopathology in military families, rather than recognising these families' strengths”.



## Children's Reactions to Deployments

Because age and temperament affect normal development of children, it also stands to reason that the age and nature of your children will impact their responses to deployment.

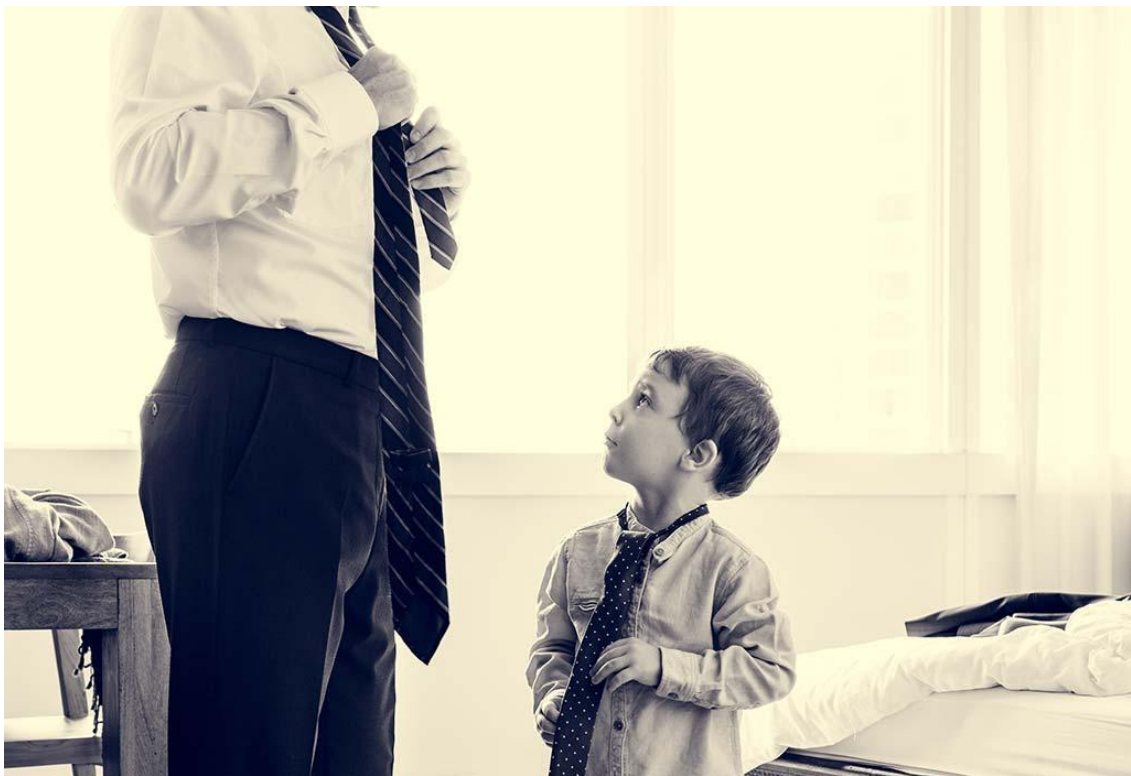
There can be a mixed bag of emotional responses to a deployment for children. Positive emotions could include feeling proud and excited and planning for a change in family life. More negative and upset feelings may also occur and you might see your child:

- Becoming more **angry** at the person being deployed ("it's all your fault")
- Expressing guilt ("it's my fault")
- Feeling **anxious** and worried
- Becoming distant or **withdrawn**
- Displaying **bravado** as a form of protecting themselves from the hurt they feel ("big deal, who cares?", "I don't need you anyway")
- Increased **fighting** among siblings
- Crying and seeming more sensitive and **sad**
- Being more irritable, **aggressive** and argumentative both at home and/or at school or kura
- **Pleading** or making promises ("please don't go"), ("if I behave better will you stay?")
- Intense rage and using big words to express big feelings ("I want to kill you")
- Denial ("I don't want to hear about it")
- Confusion or **disbelief**

If you find that your child is having some of these responses it is important that you know that these are completely normal and could be expected to occur at some stage during the deployment, including when a

deployed parent is about to come home. With the right support and care, many children settle into a new way of daily life fairly quickly.

One of the biggest clues for how they might be feeling comes from watching you. As a parent you will know that children do much more of what they see you do and much less of what you ask them to do! Make sure you look after yourself as much as possible and ask for support during the times when you need additional support (see the list of the NZDF Support Numbers and contacts on pages 29-31. There are some excellent ideas for managing issues related to children and deployments in the booklet “Managing Deployment Related Stress” (provided during the Pre-Deployment Briefing).



## Different Ages and Stages - How your child's development might impact their response.

### Infants & Toddlers



Infants and toddlers are still very reliant on their parents and although they may not be able to say how they are feeling, they will definitely pick up on the changes in your home. Toddlers can often become more in need of physical reassurance from both parents before the deployment and with the parent at home during the deployment. They may seem more unsettled and become distressed when you go out of their sight. Children flourish with attentive connected parents. When one key attachment is no longer physically present they can increase attachment to the caregiver at home to meet their need for security.

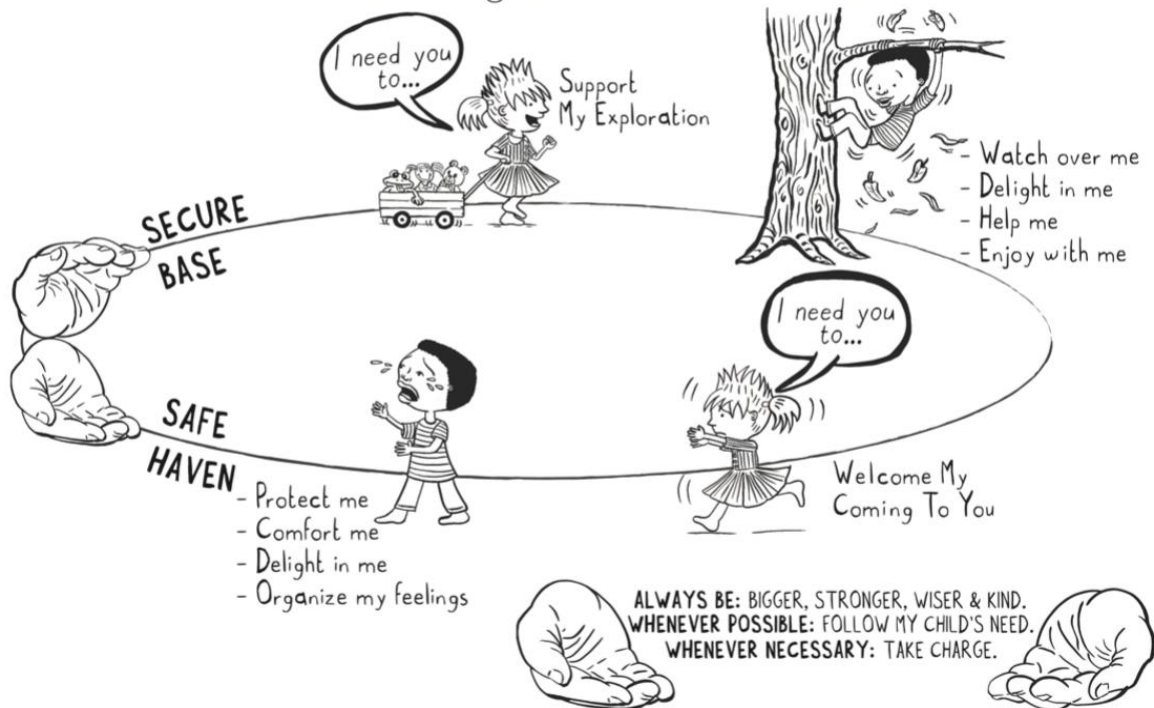
They might seem more withdrawn and shy than usual and can take a few steps backwards in things like toilet training, sleep routines, and feeding. Try to reassure them as much as possible and follow their lead with readiness. They have picked up on a change and need you to assure them they are still safe.

Some toddlers can become more sensitive and they may hit their siblings or behave more aggressively with other children.

There's no doubt this can be exhausting and a significant demand on the parent at home. Providing children of this age with undivided attention and love will increase their sense of safety and security, and enhance their ability to cope with the changes brought on by deployment.

# Circle of Security<sup>®</sup>

Parent Attending To The Child's Needs



## Tips for the parent at home

- Maintain **consistency** in day-to-day caretaking. Whatever that looks like for you, having the same routine is helpful.
- Giving them **reassurance, love, attention** and rituals e.g. holding, hugging, bathing, feeding, and playing.
- Treating any regression as casually as possible; don't encourage it but try not to make a big thing of it.
- Use puppets, drawings or toys to translate information about the deployment into a story that's easy to understand.

## Pre Schoolers



Pre-schoolers can become demanding and set out to get reassurance in their connection with you. This can happen in a number of different ways.

They might be overly sensitive to real or imagined injuries that may be an expression of a need to be looked after and cared for more than usual.

Pre-schoolers may have tantrums more often than usual. Like Toddlers, they may also experience some sort of regression, in an attempt to return themselves to the security of babyhood.

For example, a return to a forgotten security blanket, an increase in thumb-sucking, a return to the bottle, problems with toilet training, or a disruption in sleeping patterns. A child who has just learned to speak may revert to baby language, play patterns may become disrupted, or a child who has shown some independence may need you to be close more often both at day and in the night time. Generally the most recent development or accomplishment becomes impacted if regression occurs amongst children in this age group.

### Tips for the parent at home

- **Give them your time, attention and love**, within the boundaries of your normal routine.
- Spending as much **one-on-one time** as possible with them. This will give them a chance to verbalise their feelings and any fears that they may have, as well as continuing to encourage their development.
- **Play** with them.
- Be **patient** with them - they need a lot of reassurance - and acceptance of their feelings.
- Reinforce your love and assure them that you are not going anywhere.



- Assure them that the deployed parent is coming back, and that the only reason they have gone away is for work, you can have a visual calendar for this.
- Provide them with words to **manage their feelings** – this may be achieved through drawing pictures or acting out emotions using toys.
- Do not be too concerned about regressive behaviour, but be aware that this is a way for the child to express their personal difficulties. **Don't humiliate or blame the child for this regression.** Simply encourage your child to choose another, more appropriate way of expressing their feelings. Time and effective communication with your child will help these symptoms gradually disappear. A security aid (e.g. a blanket or favourite toy) to fall back on may also be helpful.
- To help your pre-schooler, **talk about their feelings** and to uncover any misunderstandings they may have. You could ask them to draw a picture about the deployment, then ask for explanations about what you see in the picture. Keep in mind, also, children do not always have the vocabulary they need to talk about their feelings. You could fill in any blanks with expressions like “feeling empty”, “hurting”.

### Primary School Children



Children in this age group can suffer deeply from a big upheaval like a deployment because they are too old to use fantasy to deny the situation but too young to have the maturity or independence to realise that they are not responsible for the deployed parent's absence.

In particular, the literature and experience of deployed families suggests this age bracket is especially vulnerable to the potential effects of a parental deployment.

They may feel that the deployed parent's absence is somehow their fault. They may try to be overly compliant, or try to take on the role of the absent parent to compensate for the separation.

Children of this age may:

- Experience **increased anxiety** due to the separation from the parent and concern about their own safety.
- Feel intense **anger**.
- Start getting **minor illnesses more often**.
- Complain of things from the **physical stress symptoms** checklist (e.g. sore tummy)
- Experience changes in their relationships with other children.
- Express their loneliness without the deployed parent by refusing to talk about the deployment or their reactions.
- Show **signs of stress** about the deployment at school.
- **Not perform** as well as usual at school.
- Get a hard time at school from other children due to the absence of one parent.

## Tips for the parent at home

- Talk about the important job that the parent is doing overseas and how they are helping children in another country.
- Show your children that you love them constantly; give them plenty of attention.
- Resist the temptation to substitute food and treats for attention. Instead place a emphasis on shared time together.
- Encourage them to talk about their feelings: if you suspect that something is up but your child is very quiet, bring up the subject of the deployment and offer to answer questions at any time.
- Put yourself in the child's place by saying something like: "If I were seven I'd be wondering... are you?"
- Ask them to write a story or draw a picture about the deployment, and talk about this with them. If appropriate, send the story or picture to the deployed parent.

## Informing the School

In terms of potential difficulties at school in relation to the deployment, parents have found it a good idea to visit their children's teachers and explain the situation. It can also help to provide the teachers with a copy of this booklet. Open communication with other significant adults in your child's life - such as a teacher - allows a community of support to understand and nurture your child throughout this period of time.

### Tips for the Teachers

It is important for the teachers to support the parents by continuing with the routine that the child is used to, and treating them the same as they normally do. This assists with applying consistency where possible. However, there may be times during the deployment when the teacher is required to spend additional time with the child.

### Pre-Teens and Teenagers

Pre-teens and teenagers are not necessarily better equipped to deal with the deployment because of their age. However, there is more of a tendency to hide, repress or avoid feelings and emotions in this age group than in any other. Anger and uncertainty are common reactions, as are feeling hurt, left out, isolated, rejected and depressed. These emotions can be common experiences for pre-teens and teens regardless of the circumstances, but may be exacerbated by deployment experiences.

Children in this age group can feel embarrassed about almost anything and a deployment is no different.

If things at home are difficult, teenagers tend to show their responses differently to younger children. They may spend more time in their room, more time online or start to avoid situations that they feel challenged by. This is because trying to make sense of their emotional responses takes up a lot of energy and head space. Ultimately, all of these behaviours indicate a need for greater connection and reassurance.

Your teenager may not have the words to express how they are feeling so your relationship and connection with them is extremely important in making them feel safe and anchored. However some teens find healthy means of escape, by spending more time with a close friend or relative, becoming more involved in sports teams, extra-curricular activities, community groups or part-time work.

### Tips for the parent at home

#### *Pre-Deployment*

It is a good idea to include children of this age in the development of a household plan with both parents before the deployment. This will give the children an additional feeling of contributing to the family.

## Deployment

Learn, practice and employ good communication skills and encourage your pre-teen/

Teen to do the same.

- **Ask for help** with the logistics of extra-curricular activities, so the teen has their usual routine and does not feel resentment for missing out.
- **Encourage them to be active** in activities which bring them joy or a sense of purpose. Support their interests.
- **Encourage them to express their feelings about the deployment**, but also be aware that pre-teens and teens value their privacy and may feel that their emotions are private and not for discussion. The key is to keep this line of communication open and allow them to share if they wish to. If they prefer, you could encourage writing or playing music as a way of expression.
- Let them know that **you are ready to listen any time they want to talk**. Be careful not to judge, mock or tease. You could also encourage them to talk to another relative or close friend.
- Continue to **set reasonable limits on such things as rules and curfews** – teens need more rather than less structure in difficult times. Clearly set boundaries also help provide a sense of security.
- Try not to dump responsibilities (such as babysitting younger children) on them. Instead, **make them part of the discussion and decision-making process**.
- If there are any signs of substance abuse, seek professional help (See NZDF contact list on pages 29-31).

## Informing the School

Ultimately it is up to the family what they share with their children's school. Many families have found it helpful to include teachers and senior management in the planning and support of deployment. But not all young people want the added attention of “everyone knowing” and can find the extra focus on them stigmatising. Be open with your child prior to deployment about what they want and how school can support them in a way that is led by their needs.

## Tips for the Teachers

It is important for the teachers to support the parents by continuing with the routine that the child is used to, and treating them the same as they normally do. Communicate with the parents if there are any changes in the usual behaviour of the child.

## Tips for the deployed parent

### *Pre-Deployment*

Assist with the development of a household plan, where your usual chores and responsibilities are shared amongst the other members of the family. Involve your pre-teen/teen in this process, and ask them for their input and ideas. This will provide them with an additional feeling of contributing to the family during your absence.

### *Deployment*

- Letters are not only for younger children. It is also important that teenagers receive news, photos and messages from their deployed parents.
- Remain in contact with your pre-teen/teen; assist with discipline if required by communicating with your child from your deployment location.
- Reinforce the authority role of the parent at home to your children, and support the at home parent in the decisions they make about parenting during your absence.

### *Post - Deployment*

A teenager can react in different ways to the return of a deployed parent. They are likely to be relieved and happy, but it could also mean that they have to seek out a new role. Acknowledge that they have taken on a difficult role at home during your absence. It is important that the deployed parent talks openly and honestly with the pre-teen/teen and makes time for them.



## Possible Feelings and Behaviours while a parent is absent

### Pre Deployment Phase

Pre-school Children:	
<i>Any combination of these feelings:</i>	<i>Could lead to any of these behaviours:</i>
Confusion Surprise Guilt Sadness Fear	Clinging Irritability Increase of attention seeking behaviour (in both positive and negative ways)
School Age Children:	
<i>Any combination of these feelings:</i>	<i>Could lead to any of these behaviours:</i>
Sadness Anger Separation Anxiety Guilt Feel they are the cause of parent leaving Loneliness	Behaviour changes  Regressive behaviours (forgetting already learnt skills and behaviours, e.g. can return to bed wetting).  Angry outbursts mixed with clinging Changes in relationships with other children Changes in school performance
Adolescent Children:	
<i>Any combination of these feelings:</i>	<i>Could lead to any of these behaviours:</i>
Sadness Fear of remaining parents rejection Denial of feelings Anger	Aloofness, "don't care" attitude, withdrawing  Friends take on increased value Change in school performance Change in usual behaviour

## During Deployment

Pre-school Children:	
<i>Any combination of these feelings:</i>	<i>Could lead to any of these behaviours:</i>
Sadness Feelings of abandonment Separation anxiety Confusion at routine changes around the home Feelings of guilt about remaining parents sadness	Change in appetite or sleep Behaviour changes Evidence of lowered self-esteem Attempt to care for the remaining parent
School Age Children:	
<i>Any combination of these feelings:</i>	<i>Could lead to any of these behaviours:</i>
May feel like remaining parents companion or protector Loneliness (parents are often seen as friends at this stage) Feelings of abandonment Fear that separation may be permanent	School problems Swing from very responsible to very irresponsible Increase in bed wetting or other "accidents" Increased aggressive behaviour
Adolescent Children:	
<i>Any combination of these feelings:</i>	<i>Could lead to any of these behaviours:</i>
Sadness Independence Anger	School problems Behaviour problems Control problems Substance abuse/misuse

## Post Deployment

Pre-school Children:	
<i>Any combination of these feelings:</i>	<i>Could lead to any of these behaviours:</i>
Joy, excitement Wants reassurance Anger causes desire to punish or retaliate against returning parent May be afraid of returning parent	May have something for returning parent Want recognition Clingy Avoid returning parent Attention-seeking behaviour Compete with remaining parent and other siblings for the returning parents attention Rejection of parent at home
School Age Children:	
<i>Any combination of these feelings:</i>	<i>Could lead to any of these behaviours:</i>
Joy, excitement Remaining anger Anxiety over changing roles in family Competition for their place in the family against the returning parent	May have something for returning parent Want recognition Attention-seeking behaviour Aggressive behaviour May attempt to initially split/come between parents
Adolescent Children:	
<i>Any combination of these feelings:</i>	<i>Could lead to any of these behaviours:</i>
Anger Relief Resentment	Defiance, poor attitude Behaviour problems School problems



## Returning Home

Reuniting families can experience both positive and negative emotions associated with homecoming.

Actual family reunions may not match the imagined excitement; especially for the parent returning from deployment. It is understandable the whole family has grown and changed during the NZDF member's absence, and returning home is just as significant a change as departing. It will take time to readjust to being together again.

Key points to remember for returning home are to go at the pace of your child. A child-led approach allows them to feel safe and valued as they reconnect with the parent who has been away.

What this looks like will again depend on the age of the child and the length of absence from the departed parent.

## Conclusion

Deployments are hard. Separations caused by deployments are hard – for adults, for children, for families. The NZDF is aware of the family difficulties caused by separation, and thanks you for your contribution and sacrifice.

Most people cope with the demands and challenges presented by deployments most of the time, but there are periods during every deployment where things seem more difficult than usual and a little extra support is required. During these times, please contact any of the resources listed on the contact sheet on pages 29-31 and appropriate support can be initiated.

Many positive experiences have been reported by families during deployments, and we hope that you, too, experience many of these. Thank you once again for your contribution to NZDF deployments, and best of luck for your own deployment experience.



## Additional Information

### Internet

- NZDF now have a website dedicated to wellbeing support for those involved  
<https://force4families.mil.nz/deployment-resources-2>

There are various US military sources with a wealth of information and research. It is worth having a look at some. Here is an example.

- <https://cfmws.ca/support-services/families/military-family-resource-centres>

### Websites

- [www.skylight.org](http://www.skylight.org)
- [www.brainwave.org.nz](http://www.brainwave.org.nz)

### References

Amen, D.G., Jellen, L., Merves, E., & Lee, R.E., (1988). Minimizing the Impact of Deployment Separation on Military Children: Stages, Current Preventive Efforts, and System Recommendations. *Military Medicine*; Vol 153, pp 441 – 44

Karen, R. (1998). *Becoming Attached: First relationships and how they shape our capacity to love*. Oxford University Press: New York

Times Magazine, The: Separations and Reunions: What Parents Can Do, Feb 1, 1982

# NZDF CONTACT NUMBERS

Appointment	Outside No.	Camp/Base & Ext No.
<b>DEVONPORT</b>		
<b>24/7</b>	<b>0800 NAVYHELP</b>	
24/7 Naval Base Officer of the Day	(09) 445 5080	021 968 076
24/7 Counselling Support	0800 NZDF4U (693 348)	wellbeingsupport@NZDF4U.co.nz
Navy Social Workers	(09) 445 5922	socialworkersdev@nzdf.mil.nz
Navy Chaplains	(09) 445 5325	Navy.Chaplains@nzdf.mil.nz
Navy Family Support Officer	027 454 2512	navyfamilysupport@nzdf.mil.nz
Navy Welfare Liaison Manager	0272 208 284	navywelfareliaison@nzdf.mil.nz
Te Taua Moana Marae	(09) 304 4416	NAVYMARAE@nzdf.mil.nz
Military Police	0800 50 11 22	
<b>WHENUAPAI</b>		
Base Psychologist	(09) 417 7000	Whenuapai 8020
Chaplain	(09) 417 7000	Whenuapai 7009
Defence Health Centre	(09) 417 7019	Whenuapai 7019
Duty Medic	027 490 6074	
Social Worker	021 952 845	
SAPRA 0800 693 324, (04) 527 5799 Overseas +64 4 527 57 99	021 908 424	
Defence Community Facilitator	(09) 417 7000, 027 4450 2001	Whenuapai 7035
Deployment Services Officer	021 649 903, 027 449 756, 0800 683 77 327, 0800 337 567	
Military Police	0800 50 11 22	
Career Transition Coach	021 943 882	
Base Psychologist	(09) 417 7000	Whenuapai 8020
<b>PAPAKURA</b>		
Base Psychologist	396 8624	
Chaplain	396 8760	
Defence Health Centre	(396) 8522	
Duty Medic		
Social Worker	021 952 205	
SAPRA 0800 693 324, (04) 527 5799 Overseas +64 4 527 57 99	021 908 424	
Deployment Services Officer	021 649 903, 027 449 756, 0800 683 77 327, 0800 337 567	
Defence Community Facilitator		Papakura 5744
Military Police	0800 50 11 22	
Career Transition Coach	021 943 882	

## Confidential Helpline

**0800NZDF4U (0800 693348)** is a confidential helpline offering 24/7 telephone sessions and up to 3 face to face confidential sessions with a trained counsellor. It is available to all members of the defence community including all uniformed personnel, defence civilians, veterans and families.

Appointment	Outside No.	Camp/Base & Ext No.
<b>WAIOURU</b>		
Base Psychologist	(06) 387 5599, 021 957 710	Waiouru 7704
Chaplain	(06) 387 5599	Waiouru 7030
Defence Health Centre	021 241 9248	
Duty Medic	021 942 989	
Social Worker	021 913 645	
SAPRA 0800 693 324, (04) 527 5799 Overseas +64 4 527 57 99	(06) 351 5531, 021 226 9065	
Defence Community Facilitator	021 226 9056	
Deployment Services Officer	021 649 903, 027 449 756, 0800 683 77 327, 0800 337 567	
Marae Manager		Waiouru 7185
Military Police	0800 50 11 22	
Career Transition Coach	021 940 854	
<b>OHAKEA</b>		
Base Psychologist	(06) 351 5446	
Chaplain	021 351 542	
Defence Health Centre	(06) 351 5732	Ohakea 7132
Duty Medic	021 716 290	
Social Worker	021 922 427	
SAPRA 0800 693 324, (04) 527 5799 Overseas +64 4 527 57 99	021 913 645	
Defence Community Facilitator	(06) 351 5439, 021 351 542	
Deployment Services Officer	021 649 903, 027 449 756, 0800 683 77 327, 0800 337 567	
Tūrangawaewae Manager		Ohakea 8150
Military Police	0800 50 11 22	
Career Transition Coach	021 940 854	
<b>LINTON</b>		
Base Psychologist	021 949 996	
Chaplain	(06) 351 9635	
Defence Health Centre	(06) 351 9565	Linton 7 565
Duty Medic	027 249 9426	
Social Worker	021 922 159, 021 953 967	
SAPRA 0800 693 324, (04) 527 5799 Overseas +64 4 527 57 99	021 913 645	
Defence Community Facilitator	(06) 351 9970, 021 649 901	
Deployment Services Officer	021 649 903, 0800 683 77 327	
Military Police	0800 50 11 22	
Career Transition Coach	021 940 854	

Appointment	Outside No.	Camp/Base & Ext No.
<b>WELLINGTON/TRENTHAM</b>		
Base Psychologist	(04) 529 6121	
Chaplain	(04) 529 6111	
Defence Health Centre		
Trentham	(04) 527 5064	
Wgtn City – Travel Doctor	(04) 527 5045	
Duty Medic	021 386 094	
Social Worker	021 905 251	
SAPRA 0800 693 324, (04) 527 5799 Overseas +64 4 527 57 99	021 913 673	
Defence Community Facilitator (Air)	(04) 496 0894, 021 243 410 8	
Defence Community Facilitator (Army)	(04) 527 5029, 027 217 1476	
Deployment Services Officer	021 649 903, 027 449 756, 0800 683 77 327, 0800 337 567	
<b>WOODBOURNE</b>		
Base Psychologist	(03) 577 1699	
Chaplain	(03) 577 1175	
Defence Health Centre	(03) 577 1136	Woodbourne 7136
Duty Medic	021 625 984	
Social Worker	021 916 143	
SAPRA 0800 693 324, (04) 527 5799 Overseas +64 4 527 57 99	021 913 691	
Defence Community Facilitator	(03) 577 1177, 027 246 4910	
Deployment Services Officer	021 649 903, 027 449 756, 0800 683 77 327, 0800 337 567	
Military Police	0800 50 11 22	
Career Transition Coach	021 241 0085	
<b>BURNHAM</b>		
Base Psychologist	(03) 363 0005, 337 7005	
Chaplain	(03) 363 0315, 021 246 9336	
Defence Health Centre	(03) 363 0159, 0800 262 342	Burnham 7159
Duty Medic	027 435 388 9	
Social Worker	021 921 762, 021 957 528	
SAPRA 0800 693 324, (04) 527 5799 Overseas +64 4 527 57 99	021 913 691	
Defence Community Facilitator	(03) 363 0322, 021 045 5099	
Deployment Services Officer	021 649 903, 027 449 756, 0800 683 77 327, 0800 337 567	
Military Police	0800 50 11 22	
Career Transition Coach	021 241 0085	

*Reservists: Contact the appropriate support agency at the camp or base nearest to your location, or request assistance through your Unit.*

## References

Amen, D.G., Jellen, L., Merves, E., & Lee, R.E., (1988). Minimizing the Impact of Deployment Separation on Military Children: Stages, Current Preventive Efforts, and System Recommendations. *Military Medicine*; Vol 153, pp 441 – 44

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