

## Returning to Work

While many remain on duty in Iraq, some reservists or members of the National Guard have begun to return home to their pre-deployment jobs. These soldiers may have been on active duty for six months or longer, so a return to work can sometimes be a tough transition for the individual and workplace.

- **Tips for Service Members**

If you are a reservist or in the National Guard, here are some tips to ease your readjustment to your regular place of employment:

- **Contact your supervisor:** Before returning to work, ask for a briefing on the current situation, including issues such as how your responsibilities were handled during your absence, changes in personnel, and new policies and projects.
- **Ease into your return to work:** Focus on communicating, being patient, anticipating and accepting changes, and using this time as an opportunity to start fresh all over again.
- **Avoid “taking charge”:** Recognize that your absence may have forced co-workers to take on some of your responsibilities, and they may resent it if they feel you’ve come back to take control or criticize them. Be supportive of decisions that were made, and ease back into your previous role gently and with open communication.
- **Consult with your commanding officer:** He or she may have experience advising others with similar transitions, or may be willing to speak to your employer on your behalf to address any concerns or to ensure a supportive environment for you when you return to work. Also, make contact with a transitional assistance program. Many branches of the service offer transitional assistance programs, although they vary in scope and quality.
- **Talk about it:** By talking with others, particularly other reservists going through the same process, you will relieve stress and realize that other people share your feelings. Reach out to trusted relatives, friends, or faith leaders. If your employer provides an employee assistance program (EAP), take advantage of it. Such programs often provide excellent resources for making the transition back to work—as well as home and family—a healthy one.
- **Take care of your physical health:** Getting plenty of rest and exercise, eating healthfully, as well as avoiding drugs and excessive drinking will help you manage the stress more effectively.
- **Know your rights:** You are protected by the federal Uniformed Services Employment and Re-employment Rights Act (USERRA), which applies to all employers regardless of their size, and protects those in the reserve forces of the Army, Marines, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, National Guard, and Public Health Service Commissioned Corp. Your rights include the following:

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# What You Need to Know...



- **If you are a permanent employee, you must be reinstated to a comparable position** (e.g. similar seniority, pay and status), and if you can no longer perform the job, your employer must use reasonable efforts to help you upgrade or update your skills.
- **Unfortunately, employers do not have to continue paying for health insurance while you are on active duty, although many large companies do so.** When you are returning to work, and transitioning back from TriCare or COBRA, make sure your health coverage is reinstated promptly.

If you feel overwhelmed by the return or are unable to function at work or home, seek professional help from a mental health professional. Talking with others about your experiences and what you're feeling can help. It's not a sign of weakness.

## Tips for Employers

If you are a supervisor or employer of an individual returning from active duty, here are some tips you can use to ease his or her transition back into the workplace.

- **Create a welcoming environment:** Prior to the employee's return, meet with his or her colleagues to discuss any concerns they have about the impact on their responsibilities, as well as to promote the importance of being supportive as their colleague readjusts. If appropriate, consider organizing a welcoming event, such as a breakfast or cake break.
- **Update the employee:** As soon as possible, meet with the employee to update him or her about the status of the workload, policy and personnel changes, and any other changes that occurred during the absence.
- **Give the employee time to readjust:** Be aware that some people may need a little time to get back into the swing of their former routine. Encourage them to ask for the guidance or support they need.
- **Support employee if transition proves difficult:** If an employee is having significant trouble readjusting to the workplace, you can note and discuss changes and expectations in work performance, as well as listen to the employee's response and concerns. If you think there are personal issues, including anxiety or depression, related to the transition back to work, do not diagnose a suspected mental health problem—refer. Suggest that the employee seek consultation from your organization's EAP or a mental health professional. Reminding the employee of available benefits provided by your organization at this time can be helpful as well.

For more information, contact Mental Health America of Wisconsin at (414) 276-3122 or visit [www.mhawisconsin.org](http://www.mhawisconsin.org).

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