



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance

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## NRFC Technical Assistance Webinar



“Helping Fathers Reconnect with their Families:  
Issues faced by fathers returning from military service and other fathers  
seeking to reconnect with their children and families”

**Moderator: Nigel Vann**, NRFC Director of Training and Technical Assistance

**Presenters:**

**Tim Red**, National Fatherhood Initiative

**Bryan Jersky**, Parents as Teachers/Dads on Duty, San Diego, CA

**Donna Hilt**, Parents as Teachers/Dads on Duty, San Diego, CA

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**Webinar Transcription (provided by Global Crossing)**

Operator: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for standing by. Welcome to the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse Technical Assistance Webinar.

As a reminder, this conference is being recorded Tuesday, January 27, 2009.

I would now like to turn the conference over to Nigel Vann, Director of Training and Technical Assistance. Please go ahead, sir.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much and welcome everybody back to the world of Webinars. It's been a while since we did one of these. The last one was in October and we had originally scheduled this Webinar for November in honor of Veterans Day, but then we - due to grantee input, we postponed that because of the holiday period.

But, anyway, we are now here today to talk about helping fathers reconnect with their families and with a specific emphasis on the issues faced by fathers returning from military service, obviously, quite a big issue right now. We certainly expect to see a good number of troops coming home over the next year.

So, the focus is on what kinds of issues you might expect to find fathers in these situations encountering. And, even though most of you are not explicitly targeting

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dads from the military, there's, obviously, a good chance, an increasing chance I would think, that you are going to encounter fathers in these situations.

And it's not just fathers actively serving in the military or the reserves. I think you've also got a lot of non-military defense contractors who are having the same experiences out there in the combat zone, possibly coming home not even having as much support as the military dads.

And also, as time permits, we will sort of take a look at how some of these issues compare to issues that are faced by other dads, non-military, non-defense contractors, but also coming back from lengthy absences. And we will certainly be offering those suggestions as to how to help these fathers and we have a list of resources that each of the presenters will refer to.

And, unfortunately, there is a handout that you haven't received yet, there's lists - some resources - there was a technical problem and we couldn't get that to you this morning. But, Jen will - Jen McHenry, will explain a little bit more about that shortly, but you will receive that after the Webinar presentation.

So, with that, let me pass it to Jen and she can go over some of the logistics and I will come back and introduce our first presenter.

Jennifer McHenry: Thanks, Nigel. The first thing I want to go through is to touch on how to ask a question. For those of you who have done the Webinars before, you should be a little bit familiar with this. You can ask a question throughout any of the presentations. At Slide 3, and you think to yourself what about this? You can send it to us and we will collect those questions for the end. And once those presentations have finished, we'll actually ask those of everyone and get your questions answered hopefully.

If for some reason your question does not get answered or you think of a question after the Webinar is finished, you always can contact your SPO to get an answer or email us.

The way to ask a question is to go to the top of your screen and click on the words "Q&A" and type your question in the box and click on "Ask." It's pretty intuitive,

hopefully, but you will get a response which will say that your question has been submitted to the moderator.

This does two things. It allows you to know that we've gotten your question, but it also will free up your system to ask a second question. If you have multiple questions, you want to send off more than one, please feel free and we will collect all of those at the end.

Also, for the handouts that Nigel mentioned, those will be emailed to you but, if you'd like to try to download them from here, there is a button in the top right, it looks like three pieces of paper, if you click on the scroller of that button, it will say handout. If you click on that, it will give you two options, military family resources, which is that resource list that Nigel mentioned and also the Webinar presentation. If you click on those, the little check box shows up, you should have the option to download.

Again, if the email does not work or the handout does not work and you'd like those resources, you can email us at [info@fatherhood.gov](mailto:info@fatherhood.gov).

And just a couple of quick technical points, if the screen is too small for your viewing, you can hit the F5 button on your computer keyboard and that will take the presentation full screen.

If you'd like to ask a question, you will have to go back down to the smaller screen, all you have to do is hit F5 a second time or the escape button. And if you're having trouble hearing, if someone's too quiet or they've going too fast, please send us that message with the Q&A tool and we'll be able to get the presenters, hopefully, to speak up a little bit or go back to something, if at all possible.

And that should be it. If you have any questions, let us know. Thanks.

Nigel Vann: Okay, thank you, Jen. Yeah, so I would certainly encourage, if you want to try and download that resource, do so. I wouldn't try to download the slides right now though. But, you should be getting all of that after the Webinar in an email that Jen will be sending out.

So, what I'd like to do now is move to our first presenter who is Tim Red. Tim is the Director of Military Programming at the National Fatherhood Initiative and Tim brings a range of views of this issue. He's served in the military for 30 years with the last 20 on active duty status. He also served for four years active for the Texas National Guard.

I'm hearing noise on here I don't know what that is, but it's not me, I don't think.

And Tim is working with a lot of military bases around the country, particularly the family support services on those bases to find ways to really help meet the needs of military fathers and their families. So, I think he's an ideal person to keep this Webinar up for us and so with that, Tim, we'll pass it over to you.

Tim Red: Thank you, Nigel. Well good afternoon or good morning, wherever you are in the United States.

And as Nigel said, I retired from the military after 30 years and the last 20 years active duty and retired, in fact, a year ago this last - this past November. And one of the things before I retired, one of the last things I did before I retired was I worked in family programs and I did that - got hired to do that job in July 2001.

And, in July 2001, family programs was still not a crucial issue in the military but that all changed two months later. And, at one point, while I was serving as the State Family Program Director for the Texas National Guard, we had 6,000 service members deployed literally around the world. And with those 6,000 service members come families.

I left that job after four years because I got mobilized and deployed and then was sent overseas for mobilized and deployed for 17 months and sent overseas and came home from that and started getting ready for my retirement and joined the National Fatherhood Initiative a year ago.

So this is very, you know, I've felt it and lived it and very important to me because in family programs in the military there has not been a lot of emphasis on fathers. So, hopefully, we can start correcting that.

Let's see - here is a - this profile shows the percentages and numbers in both active duty and reserve component forces making up the entire Department of Defense. When we talk about dads, the primary focus really is on their kids and what good fathering provides for them.

The question we need to be asking ourselves as you look at this slide is what are the best things we can do for these 1.8 million military kids, especially the youngest ones, ages five and under that make up a large percentage of all military kids, who are in such an important developmental stage in their lives? And, while many of the programs in place currently help military children, one of the best things we can do is to help fathers be good dads.

Now, what we're going to see here is - here's some other reasons why taking a good look at military dads are important. Some research reports giving a clear definition on why it might be a good idea to support military dads. Military and family compete with each other; service members are looking for a work/family fit, more of a work/family fit than ever before.

And, I'll show you later on statistics about how many times people have been deployed. Service members make reenlistment decisions based on family circumstances, leader support and satisfaction with the services. Service members are more able to focus more on mission when family concerns are addressed.

One of the critical things is that getting families prepared prior to the service member deploying. If that service member had prepared their family and has gotten them ready for that deployment, then they are able to more focus on the mission wherever that might be or doing whatever it is as opposed to, you know, dealing with emails and phone calls about problems back home. And all of these are important reasons.

The military needs to keep their soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines happy to retain focus for their difficult mission. But, the most important reason should be - and the picture's not showing up. Jen, do you know why the picture's not showing up? Oh, there it is. That's why the picture's not showing up, I didn't click on it.

So, military kids need their fathers too. And that's why we do - that's why I do what I do is to help military dads take care of their kids, because I have four kids and they have experienced the trials and tribulations or a dad being deployed and I've experienced those trials and tribulations. And, there's some benefits and some positives, but there's lots of - lots of time where it's challenging and it's difficult.

So, let's talk a little bit about deployed dads. What is a deployment? And deployments come in many shapes, forms and sizes depending upon what service you're in right now. A deployment for the air force could be 30, 60, 90 days but, lately, they have been sending individual service members to support shortfalls in the Army that can take them for a year away.

Same thing's occurring in the Navy, the Navy has deployments where they send their ships out and they can be gone six, seven, eight months at a time, come home for four months and rotate back out again for six, seven, eight months.

The, but the Navy is also having to send in what they call individual augmentees to support Army shortfalls and those are individual sailors that have - maybe have a specialty like a doctor or military intelligence and they will be plugged into an Army unit for a year, typically in Iraq or Afghanistan. The Army's deployments are running 12 to 15 months right now; the Marine's deployments are running eight to nine months at a time.

And that's - and it's not always, you know, we hear about Iraq and Afghanistan or ships at sea. There are deployments to Kosovo, there are deployments to the rest of the Middle East in support of the activities in Afghanistan, there are peacekeeping mission in the Sinai Peninsula and there are many places where somebody can be deployed. It's not just Iraq or Afghanistan.

I was deployed in support of the Kosovo peacekeeping mission and that's, you know, Kosovo's an interesting place. There are approximately 165,000 soldiers currently deployed or on hardship duty and that impacts approximately 333,000 kids that are separated from their dad because of a deployment.

And these times in particular make helping the military families even more important. With the increased deployments of - in support of our current military operations, many are wondering how separation will affect family life.

And, let me read you an email that was sent to our Website. It says, "I just came back from a year in Iraq. When I was home on leave, my son was 18 months old and had a real hard time when I left again. Now that I'm home, he gets real upset whenever I touch the car keys. How can I make it easier when I have to go places? Also, what are some easy ways into the disciplining of him? My wife has been a real champ through all this but I want to help take some of the burden off of her. Any suggestions would be helpful."

And, I read that to you because it made me think about something that was communicated to me a couple of months ago in Washington, DC, when I attended a child and youth summit sponsored by the National Military Family Association.

And a lady approached me, since I was working with military dads, and she approached me and she said, "You know, we've got 20 plus Marine fathers out at a particular Marine installation out West," and she says, they're "struggling with getting these 20 Marine dads to connect with their infant children." All of these Marines were in a situation where they had been deployed, came home to an infant child and knew they were getting ready to go back out within a few months and they were just not connecting.

So, those are some of the struggles and, you know, people say, "Well, why aren't they connecting?" Well, there's, you know, I'm not a clinician, but part of the reason I think why they're not connecting is because they don't want to get attached and have to deal with that attachment while they're facing the struggles that they're going to back in Iraq.

So there's - here's a special report that was done in June 2007. Over 1 million service members, 1 million service members, as of June 2007, had been deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan or Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq, of which, 400 - almost 450,000 had been deployed more than once. You think about that.

I have a young man that's in my church that's a Marine and he has been to Iraq four times, four times, at eight months a time. He has spent three years of his life in Iraq and he's not a support specialist, he's a foot soldier, so he's, you know, you can imagine what he has seen in three years in Iraq. And here's the slide that talks about it.

Some service members have been separated from their families as long as three years in repeated increments of three, six, eight, 12 and 18 months and I can testify to that. I mean, I've got a young man that I know that has seen exactly that slide right there, who lived that slide. And a lot of the services are concerned with how these deployments are affecting relationships with children.

You take, for example, a young Army soldier that is deploying. He is getting on a plane, his wife is eight months pregnant when he gets on that plane. He's going to be gone 12 to 15 months; when he comes home, he has not an infant, he missed infancy; he now has a toddler in the house.

He comes home and he's there for - the Army leaves him alone for three, four months, but then they start processing and start training up to get ready to go again for another year to 15 months, meaning they'll process - they'll leave them home for a year, but they'll go out after that year. But, the last eight months of that year, he's home, he's doing all this train up, getting ready to go again. So, the Army's concerned about, you know, what kind of - how that's affecting the relationship between dad and kids.

So, who are deployed dads and military dads? They're regular people; they're parents; they're providers; they're husbands and partners. But, you know, bottom line, they're regular dads. They have the same challenges that all fathers have, childcare, providing, understanding and relating to their children and partners and so on. You know, but how can we meet those needs?

But, however, I mean, it goes without saying that they - they have unique challenges. They deal with separation; they deal with communication issues; they miss important

events; how to help when they're not there, you know, how to help when they're not there, reunion and reintegration.

My oldest son struggled with me being gone. He was starting his freshman year in high school. We had been talking about this for years. We would drive by the baseball stadium. He was going to play on the baseball team. And, he was finally getting to play on that baseball field and the first year he was going to play on that baseball field that we've been driving by for years and years, dreaming about, I was going to miss it and he knew I was going to miss it.

And, he struggled with me being gone more than any of the other kids. And it had an impact on him, a negative impact on him and we have struggled with the consequences of that over the last two years, but he's finally - finally coming out of that in his senior year in high school.

But the last 18 months have been pretty difficult. But, you know, as he told me, he told me one time, he told me about four months ago, that the reason that he stopped praying the day I deployed, because he said, you know, "Why would God let my father be deployed?" And that was his rationale.

So, you know, I have personal experience in how it affects, you know, how this impacts a family.

So, what is a veteran? People think about veterans, somebody that's served 20 years in the military. That's not necessarily the case. If you go to Iraq and serve in Iraq for 12 months and get out of the military, you've served four years in the military and you get out of the military, you are considered a veteran of a foreign war.

Veterans are not people that necessarily have to serve 20 years. I mean, they could have served four years and then deployed to Iraq, they're considered a veteran. I mean, a deployment classifies them as a veteran. And, veterans, once again, face some challenges.

We have the reserve forces, the National Guard and the Army Reserve, that deploy and they come home and they go back to their civilian jobs. But they are also

veterans at this point. They come back from Iraq and now they go back to the police department or they go back as a teacher, they go back working at the bank or they go working in an office, but they are - they are veterans.

And they're still a member of the National Guard or they're still a member of the Army Reserve or the Air Force Reserve or the Navy Reserve, but they have struggles also. Health issues, both mental and physical, dealing with child custody is a big problem facing a lot of military dads these days.

There's struggles in a families prior to deployment and the soldier goes overseas, the sailor, airman goes overseas and the mom picks up and moves back home or she moves closer to family into another state.

And while she's moved to that new location she files for a divorce and now the father comes home and he has very, you know, a very difficult time gaining access to his kids. And he's behind the power curve. And that is happening more frequently than we know. And the divorce is a big consequence of all the deployments.

Here's a quote by the Veterans and Families Organization, "You know, unless our returning veterans can learn ways to decompress from war and deployment and to lower their extreme symptoms of combat-related stress, the anxiety, depression and self-absorbed isolation they experience can last a lifetime. Consequently, both veterans and their families will continue to suffer greatly and far too many will fall between the cracks of our society or will not survive the trials of homecoming."

Let me tell you a little story about the veteran. As a result of the war, the Veterans Administration started providing services, increasing services throughout their facilities around the country to support post-traumatic stress disorder and provide that kind of assistance. And they started getting inundated with people coming to get treatment as a result of this, you know, this increase and publication and notifying people that they were doing that.

Who do you think were going into their offices and their facilities? They weren't Iraq war veterans or veterans from Afghanistan; they were veterans from the Vietnam War that had been dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder for 20 or 30 years.

And there was all of a sudden all this publication and talk about it and they were starting to realize, oh, that's what's wrong with me. So, you know, a lot of them fell through the cracks; a lot of them fell through the cracks over the years and dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Now, the last slide I've got for you is a quote by General Douglas MacArthur, here he is in the middle of World War II and he says, "By profession I'm a soldier and take great pride in that fact, but I am prouder, infinitely prouder, to be a father."

And, Nigel, that concludes my part.

Nigel Vann:

Thank you very much, Tim. I think you did an excellent job there of laying out issues which really leads into what we're going to hear from (Brian) and (Donna). You know, you particularly touched me there with talking about your having to leave when your son was in high school. I just can't imagine having to step away from my son's life at that time and I'm sure that kind of sentiment brings it home for everybody what the pain is here for fathers and children and mothers and that's why we're doing this Webinar.

So, with that, I'll introduce Donna Hilt and Brian Jersky who are going to share the next presentation. They work with Safe San Diego, the Healthy Start, and the military family cluster there in San Diego. They are part of the Parents and Teachers Grant and the Parents and Teachers Network around the country.

So, (Brian) is heading up the grant program there which is called Dads on Duty. (Donna) has 15 years' experience working with military families. And (Brian) has been doing this for the last three years and I also note, (Brian), on your bio there, that you got your BA in psychology from the University of Arizona. We'll have to talk about that, I spent some time there working on my doctorate.

But, anyway, we have, you now, we have a wealth of hands-on, practical experience here from (Brian) and (Donna) dealing with the very issues that Tim has so ably laid out for us. So, over to you, (Brian) and (Donna).

Brian Jersky: Thank you and good afternoon to everybody.

Donna Hilt: Good morning. This is Donna.

Brian Jersky: We'll have to talk about Arizona some time, our team is sort of struggling, but that's another time, another place.

Okay. So, we're going to kind of talk more about how we can help these fathers. And our presentation today is going to go through the stages of reunion, including reuniting with your children and your spouse, intimacy and financial issues and unrealistic expectations, as well as some other resources we can provide for you.

As we go through the issues, I'm going to talk more about all the issues that can arise and Donna's going to talk about some suggestions that are going to help her issue.

So, military deployment is often described in terms of stages. The last stage, the anticipation of homecoming and reunion can often be a stressful time for families as Tim was just alluding to in his presentation. Military children experience and react to this mixture of joy and anxiety as determined by their social, emotional and physical developmental stages.

So, there's three stages of the reunion process. The terms of this can vary, but the ones we're going to talk about are from a source called an "Educators Guide to Working with Military Kids."

The first stage is anticipation. During the weeks before homecoming, service members, spouses and children, they all experience joy, obviously, because dad's coming home, but there's a lot of anxiety. After months of adjusting to dad being gone, daily life as a military family is really about to change.

The next stage is readjustment. After that initial excitement of the reunion, roles, routines, responsibilities, everything is renegotiated. The military service providers have also identified two time periods within this stage, two steps - stages, really. The honeymoon, which is generally until the first big disagreement arises between the

spouses and then the readjustment, which is a process that lasts approximately six to eight weeks after the family's reunion.

And the third stage is stabilization. This is the time required for adjusting to all the new routines and it varies among families. While some families experience only minor changes, others might require some support and should be encouraged to seek assistance and (unintelligible). That's what we're going to talk about.

So as dads prepare for the reunion with their families, they experience a mixture of happiness, excitement, worry, fear. There are all sorts of questions, will my children remember me? Will they know who I am? How are they going to act towards me? Will they listen to me? How do I become part of the family again? And, have they been harmed?

Military children also have pretty much the same feelings, a mixture of happiness, excitement, worry and fear and age will dictate how they express these feelings and emotions. So, we divided it into four different age groups; infants and toddlers, preschool children, elementary school age children and the pre-teenage years.

So, infants and toddlers, from birth to three. Infants meeting their dads for the first time may experience what a lot of us know as stranger anxiety, when they cry, look for mom and other familiar people. This is all normal. Infants just need time to get to know the person in their life. They need time to develop a sense of trust in dad; they've never met him before.

Donna Hilt: I think some of the - some of the things that are suggested that might help with that, is that even before deployment, even if you are expecting your first child, a lot of the military providers will give you the opportunity to make tapes of you reading to your child, reading a story.

You can also make a tape of you and mom together so that the infant during those first months are exposed to the idea that you and mom are partners. You can make tapes reading some of your children's favorite books. That way, they're going to see and hear dad's voice before he comes home and there's a certain familiarity there.

They also recommend that some of the things that dads - that moms can do while dad's gone is to give the infant or the young child some clothing of their dad so that they become familiar with his scent. That can include things like what kind of shaving cream he uses, what kind of shaving cream dad uses or some of his clothing items. Just things that's more than just sight, there's a familiarity that comes through a sense of smell for very young children.

When dad does come home, one of the things that will help him is to remind him that patience is needed; that children need time to readjust to him. Very young children, I know that Tim was talking about that, may be very clingy or they may react as if dad's a stranger and it takes some time for both the child and the father to readjust and get to know each other.

Brian Jersky:

So, let's ignore this elementary school age slide for just a second. The preschool children slide got left out, so, (unintelligible) that. But, preschool children from three to five, they're - very young children react to stress in their environment, even the excitement of a happy reunion. Oftentimes, they lack the verbal ability to clearly express those feelings so they may cling to familiar adults; they might regress developmentally; they might cry more easily than usual and their sleep patterns could totally change.

Young children, they also don't understand the concept of time. So every separation may seem the same to them. When dad comes home, some children will feel shy and avoid interaction with dad at first; others may be exceptionally clingy and be reluctant to let dad leave, saying he's not going to come back again. But this will subside with time and the reassurance with the routine of dad leaving for work and coming home again.

Young children also use what's termed as magical thinking. They believe they have the power to make things happen. So, they may feel guilty about making dad go away. Because of that, they might blame themselves or maybe the other parent. They may react with anger at dad's homecoming, so they need time to warm up.

And this reaction may lead to the children poking or hitting dad or being demanding. They're testing dad's limits and they're also determining if he's real, so those pokes

and hits, really in their head is not (unintelligible), they're making sure dad is really is dad, that he's the real thing.

Donna Hilt: And, I think some of the things that dads can do to help their children and themselves as they're adjusting is to kind of sit back and accept their young children's feelings, even their anger, and listen to what they tell him. Not so much their words, but through their behaviors. Expressing dad's unconditional love for the children, but do it at their pace, don't try to rush them because they're little and they're just sort of readjusting to someone who may seem very much like a stranger to them and it's going to take some time.

One of the things that I left out when I was talking about the infants and dads is that dads may feel left out and they may feel kind of jealous of the baby's close relation with mom or grandparents or other familiar adults.

And this is a normal reaction. I'm sure that dads, you know, sometimes even if dad isn't employed, there's this feeling of being left out this mother/child relationship. But, a dad that's coming home to a new infant, I think this can be especially painful and, hopefully, the mother will be able to help dad adjust. But, I think, a service provider just being aware that he may be feeling this but may not be able to express or even maybe recognize what it is.

I think another good idea for dads who have toddlers that they're returning to is to understand that toddlers learn about their world through play. And, one of the things that dad can do is to play, just play with their toddler and let their toddler take the lead. You know, you have to take it slow but let them lead the playtime together and just sit down on the floor and play with them. And, most important I suppose for all dads and all parents for that matter, is to be patient.

You know, (Brian) was talking about how they may test you with behavior or poke at you or really act out or be very demanding. And, I think for dads, it's very important for them to know that it's okay to set some limits and have them wait if they're really acting out to get your attention to make sure they get that attention, but do it in a way that's appropriate and comfortable for you as a parent trying to reestablish limits.

**Brian Jersky:** Okay, so back to the slides. Elementary school age children, the six to ten years. School age children are learning about the social rules, conformity and friendship, so they think in concrete terms, black and white terms. They feel angry about things that seem unfair and they can be very, very competitive. The boys may even assume the role of little man during dad's absence, the man of the house. This can result in role confusion or even behavior issues at home and at school also.

Military children often experience worries about safety, their home, their family, the deployed parent, just safety all around their world. There's fears about the possibility of physical injuries and death just being exacerbated by the current wars that we're in.

Children also may dread dad's return if they've had lots of problems at school and lots of problems at home, they may not be looking forward to dad's coming home to lay down the rules.

**Donna Hilt:** Yeah, I think the anxiety that school age children have about dad coming home, a lot of time it surfaces in physical ailments, like stomachaches and the inability to sleep and wanting not to go to school because they're worried about their performance at school. So, I think for dads and moms to be aware that some of the things that the children are experiencing may be manifesting as stomachaches or just, you know, they may be especially sensitive or cry more easily than they normally would during this period of adjustment.

I think that for dads, the kids may be very, very excited when dad first comes home, they may really want to monopolize his time and tell him everything that happened and bringing him up to date. I think especially for dads who've been in a stressful situation, this level of energy and noise, coming home to a houseful of children, can really be overwhelming.

I think spending time with each child individually, even if it's just a short time, that child needs to reconnect with dad on a personal level. Listening to them and acknowledging their concerns and their feelings is really important because they're thinking in very concrete terms.

Brian was mentioning about how much more difficult it's been for children. It pretty much started with the bombing of the USS Cole and, of course, has grown over the past years while we've been involved in the two wars. I know that working with children over these years, I've started to hear a lot more expressions of fear. Like, for example, the kids whose dads were in the Navy, you know, they knew dad went to sea, but they really didn't realize, you know, that things could happen to a ship and people could get killed on a ship.

And that brought it really to the forefront for them. So, the fears and in working with children and school age children in deployment groups, they have a lot of fears that they may not share with their at home parent because they don't want to worry the at home parent, but they're very worried about their fathers.

So, communication while dads are deployed as much as possible, sitting down and talking to the kids even before deployment and making sure they have an idea of what dad's going to be doing. Visiting dad at work so they have an idea what's going to be happening when dad's away can be very helpful.

I think reviewing schoolwork, with a special attention to the successes that children have had because, again, they may be very worried if they've had trouble with a particular subject. They don't want to disappoint dad so for dad to sit down and really focus on the successes they've had and trying not to criticize them and acknowledging what they've accomplished, even if it's just in little steps while you're gone.

It's important for dads to expect that they're children will have changed even over six months. It can make a lot of difference in a young child's life and they will have changed both developmentally and physically and may be very different when you come back from when they left.

Brian Jersky: Pre-teenagers, the 11 to 18 years. Life in the military, even as a family member, depends on conformity, obedience and discipline. The drive for independence and the need to challenge their parents' beliefs and way of life can be especially difficult for military teens and their parents.

They may fear they may not live up to your standards, the military parents' standards, while they were gone. The teens may also be very aware of world politics, the war on terrorism, these all affect how - their attitudes toward you.

In addition to the fears and anger associated with having parents deployed, especially during wartime, teens may experience conflicted feelings about their parents' role in military operations all over the world. Sometimes, they're even exposed to negative comments and opinions, so, maybe at school, maybe in the media.

It might be difficult for the teens to share these experiences or feelings with their parents. And, not wanting to worry mom, they're often reluctant to share such concerns during deployment, like Donna was saying.

Donna Hilt:

I think, I know Brian had mentioned for elementary school age children and, I think it's - it carries over to especially the younger teen years, that idea of, especially the boys assuming the role of the man in the family and taking care of the family while dad's gone.

For a lot of families, this is kind of traditional, but it's actually pretty hard on the kids because they are assuming responsibility for something that they really are not able to handle and it also causes problems when dad does come back because then that child has to step aside and relinquish that role. So, it's really a good idea, most experts agree, to - for dads being encouraged to avoid asking their children to assume that role when they're gone.

And, again, that can move into the teenage years, especially - and teens are difficult in family, but for a military family with all the separations, it can be even more difficult.

While the younger kids may have been really excited about dad coming home and wanting to go down and meet the ship or meet the plane, teens may actually resist participating in reunion activities because they think they're too old or it's not too cool, or they don't want to miss out on activities with their friends. And this can be kind of hurtful for dads if this happens because it may make them feel like their children don't love them, but it's really pretty normal for children this age.

So, for dads to - if this happens, try not to be judgmental and respecting your teen's privacy and friends and going slow when you come back about what they've been doing, have they been dating and things like that, can be really challenging for a dad when they first come back.

Dads can help by trying to spend individual time with each of their teens, not only with their younger children, but with their teens. Sharing your experiences during the deployment, as appropriate of course, depending on what kind of situation you were in, but talking about them on more of an adult level about what it is that you do and also sharing what their experiences have been and talking to each other one to one can be really helpful in helping teens reconnect with you as a parent.

I think probably at all stages of development one of the most important things is to be patient with each other. You know, you are the adult and you're the dad, but being patient with yourself and giving yourself a chance to reconnect with your children is just as important as giving them a chance. And to know that they have changed and so have you and so there's this constant need to sort of get to know each other all over again, which can be challenging, but with patience and time, it can happen successfully.

**Brian Jersky:** Reuniting with your spouse doesn't get any easier. This requires a lot of effort and understanding that each person in the relationship has grown and then changed during this separation. Roles and expectations may have changed requiring another renegotiation this time of responsibilities between you and your spouse.

A few common concerns of returning service members, especially after deployment in a combat environment, things like where and how do I fit in my family. My job, am I still needed? There's feelings of isolation of being left out, of not being wanted wondering if your spouses still love you. And, you're definitely concerned about the sexual relationship.

Questions by the spouse on the other end, do I have to change my way of doing things? I'm so used to kind of being more independent not having you around. What will I have to give up? Will my spouse like what I've done? What will our intimate

relationship be like? She'll have the same question as the returning military spouse, military member. Will he still love me? So, all questions, really similar questions between both partners.

Donna Hilt:

I think for deployed couples, whether of course, it's your first deployment is probably going to be one of the most difficult because you don't know what to expect. But, I think even after many deployments, it's important to realize that both of you have changed during this last deployment especially if you've been in a combat situation or in very stressful situation. You may have changed a lot in ways that you don't even realize yet. So, being aware that it's going to be different when you come back can be helpful.

It's good to realize that things will never be exactly the same as they were before this particular deployment. Your spouse's independence has increased while you were away. It's good if a returning husband and dad can give their spouse time to readjust and realize that she has been doing things all alone out of necessity; she has learned how to get along without you.

And so, give her time to get used to sharing responsibilities and decisions that you can make together while you're at home, but she may have to deal with it while you're gone.

It's not unusual for newly returned fathers and husbands to feel very isolated, maybe even unwanted, kind of out of step with the family's routine. It's going to take time for everyone in the family to readjust, not just the returning dad.

It's important for dads to realize that they're needed but even more importantly, they're wanted by their family at home.

If there's been unresolved marital issues or conflicts that were taking place before deployment, that will not have been resolved while you've been gone and they're likely to surface again once you come back. Maybe not so much right at first because that's that honeymoon period that we discussed earlier, but if there were issues that were going on before, chances are they're going to rise again and they're going to need some attention on both your parts.

Remember that your spouse may feel really disorganized and have a sense of loss of control when you first come home. So, taking time - being open to communication with her. I think that a lot of - a lot of dads have expressed to me that they feel like they, you know, that they're expected to come home and just resume where they left off. And that isn't necessarily the case and so being able to take some time, sit back, kind of watch how things are happening and renegotiate with your spouse and children and take it slow.

Really, it's a situation where both spouses, they've been married, but single and now you're going to have to readjust to not being single/married spouses anymore but you'll actually be together. And that can be really difficult because, as Tim was saying, it may be for a short time and then you're going to have to deploy again. So, it's really challenging for a family these days.

But, I think, if couples can focus on their marriage, share their experiences while they were apart from each other and develop a new sense of a shared sense of purpose, again, as a couple and as parents to your children, all of the those things can help as you try to reintegrate into your family coming back from deployment or just being absent.

And that leads into reestablishing the sense of intimacy which (Brian) is going to talk about.

**Brian Jersky:** So there's a difference between sex and intimacy; intimacy is both physical and emotional and it's going to take some time to become comfortable with each other again.

Sexuality is an important and very personal aspect of a couple's marital relationship. High expectations at the end of a long separation can often - does result in disappointment, awkwardness and anxiety. Intense sexual activity can be intimidating for some women who feel as though their husbands are like strangers when they first come home. Because of this, husbands can feel a sense of rejection.

Also, one or both spouses may have been exposed to rumors and/or the reality of infidelity among close friends or other military couples during deployment.

Donna Hilt: I think that the last point is especially painful. A lot of times when you're working with couples who maybe this is only their first or second deployment and they're very young and it's early in their marriage, they may be especially sensitive about things like that.

Again, recognizing that you've both changed and you're both out of practice, and it's going to take time to reestablish not only the sexual relationship but your sense of intimacy and partnership with each other. And there, again, communicating and reestablishing your roles as partners can be helpful. Allowing yourself time to adjust to different sleep patterns and - sleep patterns and routines, especially if you've been in a combat situation, that's going to be especially important.

If you have children, you expect that your much needed private time is going to be limited and so it's going to take some creativity and flexibility on your part. And be patient, work with yourself and your spouse as you work together to become a couple again.

Brian Jersky: Okay, finances. Coming home after being at sea or in a foreign land for a lot of months, often results in the urge to spend money on big ticket items and gifts for family members. At the same time, the extra income families receive during deployment, abruptly comes to an end so this leaves significant - excuse me - significantly less money to cover everyday expenses. While some families are able to save a good amount of this extra income, others just aren't.

Depression and loneliness may result in an excessive spending by the spouse at home. Car and appliance repairs may claim a significant percentage of that extra income as well as increases in the cost of living.

While most active service members return to a relatively secure employment environment, reserve and National Guard personnel face the additional stress of reintegrating into the civilian workplace and reclaiming a job that has been held by someone else during their absence, results in misunderstandings.

And disagreements about finances both at home and by the service member during deployment can severely impede a couple's effort to rebuild a sense of shared trust and purpose following that deployment.

**Donna Hilt:** One of the things that's highly recommended in preparation for deployment is to reestablish a reasonable budget together before you leave. I think that, you know, for a lot of couples that's hard to do.

Money is always a sensitive issue, but planning for the change in the pay allowance when you come back from deployment is important and keeping that in mind while you're deployed - I know, a lot of times active duty members like to buy presents while they're overseas to bring home to the family. But being realistic about what you can afford and what's reasonable can be helpful when you come to deploy.

Returning home, there's always that urge to go out and spend money, especially on big ticket items, the latest technology, things that have come about while you've been away. It's important to stick to your budget and work with your spouse and family support centers can be very helpful in helping you work out a budget before you even leave for deployment.

**Brian Jersky:** So, unrealistic expectations. Dreams of the perfect reunion often result in disappointment, conflict and confusion among all family members. So understand that you, your spouse and your children have changed during deployment. Your spouse and your children have changed during deployment; your spouse and children have probably established some new routines in your absence. Remember that readjusting to home is a process not an event; you just have to give it time.

Your children's reactions at reunion and at home may not be exactly what you or your spouse expected or even hoped for. Again, give them time to get to know you as you start to grow together. Well meaning family members and friends efforts to welcome you home may seem kind of intrusive and overwhelming. Again, be patient; try to be flexible but show your feelings honestly and respectfully with your spouse.

Getting to the long awaited sexual intimacy with your spouse may seem awkward at first like we said before resulting in that disappointment or anxiety. So, take it slow and patience is the key word, patience.

Donna Hilt: So, here are just some general suggestions for becoming part of the family again and these are taken from various resources of military publications. Number one, go slowly and don't try to take over when you return. Certainly, you have a role within the family, but be slow in how you reestablish that role.

Be strong, don't give into your children's demands, remember they will be testing you and be especially demanding and it's important from day one for you and your spouse to present a united front about parenting issues and discipline.

Observe, examine the family's schedules and rules; again, taking it slow, kind of see what's changed while you've been gone and where you might fit in appropriately upon your return.

Be flexible, don't expect things to be the same. Be realistic, don't expect the impossible. Communicate, discuss your feelings, you may have a mixture of feelings and, if possible, discuss them with your spouse.

And, don't rush; slowly reestablish family relationships. I think we've emphasized this through all of these different areas of adjustment when you come back from deployment. Okay?

Brian Jersky: So, I know we're in a bit of a time crunch so these last three slides are just about community resources.

Military families have access to a broad spectrum of support services within the military system, but they're often reluctant to access those services. They fear negative impact because they might be the problem family so they might be more comfortable seeking assistance from civilian service providers.

Every organization is located near a base; try to contact the director that family support center there and start the collaboration process. Find out what they offer and let them know what you offer and start to work together.

And these are just additional steps to that collaboration process. And then, here's a list of some resources that we've used and compiled for everybody and I know that there's going to be another list that you guys will all be receiving I believe.

**Donna Hilt:** And we sort of emphasized the Navy and Marine services because they are the populations that we work with, but I know that all of the services offer comparable support services for their families.

Military One Source is a really good comprehensive source that can be accessed via the Web and they help with all the services.

**Brian Jersky:** So, that's it for us.

**Nigel Vann:** Okay, thank you very much Donna and Brian. We've got a few questions that came in while the presenters were speaking and I will get to those. I just want to make sort of a general observation, you now, just sort of listening to both presenters, it sort of hit me that, obviously, these are really big issues and, ideally, if you're working with military family services, you know, you'll be helping families prepare for this before deployment and during deployment.

But a majority of the grantees on the call here, you're obviously going to be encountering these situations after deployment when dads have come back unless you're working somewhere somehow with the families before he's deployed.

And, in terms of how you deal with that, I think we've got some good pointers there. It struck me at one point, it's similar to working - I went back to the Webinar that we did on working with dads of special needs kids.

If you do start coming in contacts with dads who are coming back from deployment, they're going to be feeling very much alone and not connected to other dads, so, you know, I think, one of the biggest services we can do for them, as with the dads of

special needs kids is connect them to other dads in the same situation and help share benefits from each others experiences.

And, beyond that, be able to provide some one-on-one counseling, certainly some mental health referrals when we're talking about post-traumatic stress disorder and perhaps some work with the couples and certainly being able to refer to other resources in the community.

So, if I could just ask the presenters just to say a little bit more about ways in which - I think what's needed here, you know, is the staff that comes into these problems, is to, one, be able to bring guys together with other guys, but, if you can't do that, have full knowledge as we've just starting getting here of what the issues are so you can talk to the guys on a level where they really feel they're being related to. And then, beyond that, refer them to other services.

And, Brian did give you some there on that slide and you will get the resource slide as well. But just any thoughts that, you know, either Tim, Donna or Brian, any thoughts for the grantees on ways to go out there in the community, connect to other agencies, the services on a military base for services that can help them learn more about these issues.

Tim Red: Well, one thing I would say is talk to veteran organizations around your communities. The VFW, Am Vets, American Legion, all of those - and if you go to, for instance, VFW, American Legion, Am Vets, they all have state organizations.

I mean, there's the national headquarters and they have state headquarters. And you can contact those individual state headquarters to find out what's going on in your particular state and as to how they, you know, what are ways, you know, information about how to help returning service members.

The VA is another great Website, is to go to [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) and they will talk to you about all the ways they assist family members.

And, another thing I'm talking about is on the resource - the handout that Jen's going to send to you that talk about the family program Websites for the Army, the Navy -



Navy and Marines, and air force and the D of D's military family Website, Military Homefront.

Donna Hilt:

This is Donna and I'd like to add on to what Tim was saying. I think that as community providers, one of our suggestions was that you try to connect with your local military base, if there's one there. They have a lot of information that you can get to give to your families that you're working with. They also, most of them, will provide some level of counseling. Like Tim was saying, the VA is a really good resource.

I think that one of the things to remember is that a lot of times, families always are - can be reluctant to try to get assistance through the military. They're sort of trying to keep their problems private and they worry about confidentiality.

I know that, Nigel, you had mentioned domestic violence earlier and I think it's important for service providers be able to provide civilian resources to address those issues because families may need, especially spouses, may be very reluctant to bring that to the attention of the military.

I think the important thing is that the families get the help they need, whether it's through the military or a civilian provider. The active duty member may be reluctant, as Nigel was saying to access any kind of mental health resources, but there are a lot of them available to them like through the VA, through their military healthcare providers, maybe through the chaplain's office. The family resource centers and family service centers will have a lot of information available for families.

A lot of commands do provide post-deployment briefings. They also will some free deployment - pre-reunion briefings for spouses. I think it's real important for spouses to have an idea of what to look for in terms of post-traumatic stress disorder, what are some of the things that might be happening that they may not have seen before and what - where they can get help if that happens because we know that that's happening a lot.

But, I think developing Tri-West that they can get counseling through private providers. Military One Source can provide up to six sessions of short-term

counseling. The active duty members a lot of times are expected to get their services through the military providers, where the family members may have some different options. So being aware what's available and kind of working with the family to see what they're comfortable in accessing is really important for us as providers.

Brian Jersky:

And, Donna, just to tag on to what you said about Tri-West and Military One Source, it's the - the family members can go for six visits, but it's each family member can go for six visits based upon, for instance, hypothetically, the father comes home and there's a lot of struggling internally with the family about he's got some issues and he's dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder and this is running through the family.

And there's a wife and three kids, well the wife can go for six visits and each kid can go for six visits and it's not like - there's a lot of resources available that many times people just don't understand.

But I do want to reiterate what Donna said about the fact that the military service members still are very, in many cases, very reluctant to try and seek assistance, especially for mental health issues, on the military installation because the concern is about how it's going to affect their career, even though there's a concerted effort in the military community and military leadership to say it's not, there still is that fear. And so, they do try to seek out other resources outside of the military community to solve those problems.

Donna Hilt:

Yes and I think that a lot of that we talked about, you know, just coming home from deployment the readjustment to the children and to the spouse and to being home is already stressful enough but, if you - and then if you add on top of that PTSD and some of the stressed that come from that, then a family is just really at risk for having some real serious problems.

So, I think, as service providers, maybe it's a - the important thing is knowing what questions to ask and what to look for that the family may or may not be willing to talk about upfront but knowing what might be going on and asking some general questions can just lead to perhaps finding out some things they might need some help with by they're really afraid to bring it forward.

Nigel Vann: Yeah, I think that's a great point Donna, because, you know, there is a piece on the resource on the Website that's got a spotlight on fathers in the military that I was having a look at before the Webinar and it makes the point about the impact on children, particularly young boys, while their dad's gone.

Donna Hilt: Right.

Nigel Vann: And it also makes the point that you can expect to see severe social aggression more so in military families than civilian families and particularly after deployment. That the longer the deployment, the more the likelihood that you're going to see some special violence. But I think it speaks to the fact of, as you say, being aware, but also trying to be able to intervene a little bit earlier and help couples.

But, I do need to spend a few minutes just to go over some questions that were asked and let us get to the survey. I wish we could continue to ask - and I had some - I was going to ask Tim to talk a little bit about he really worked with his son when he came back, but I don't think we're going to have time for that.

One person did suggest that we should have pictures of the presenters at the beginning. I know we did that one time, we'll have to work on that.

One person raised a question about child support that I would like to ask if any of you are familiar - how child support works. Can military personnel be subject to any kind of child support measures while they're deployed and if they're non-custodial parents? Do you know?

Donna Hilt: Why I think that's - I think, yes, if - my understanding is it's always been that with the military, if there is a court order in place, the active duty member is required to provide child support. But it's important that that court order be in place, because, without that, it's sort of - it might be up to the command or it might be up to the individual service member. But, if an actual court order is in place, the military will require that the active duty member has an allotment in place to provide that.

Nigel Vann: Okay. There was another question sort along a similar line in a way, asking, "Does the military help to locate missing parents with children for deployed military before or

upon their return?" So, I think what that's asking is if you're in the military and the other parent disappears with the children, is there anyway through the military to help you with that?

Donna Hilt: You know, I'm not - I have to say I'm not sure about that. What they would need to contact their legal officer on base. That could be something that might be done in conjunction with child protective services. That would something that certainly would be a child protective issue, but I haven't encountered that in all those 15 years, I'm glad to say. But, I think it's certainly going to the legal officer on base would be a good place to start there because I really can't answer that.

Nigel Vann: Okay.

((Crosstalk))

Tim Red: What I've, you know, Nigel, what I've learned from that, because it's something that and I tried to prepare a presentation for veterans, I read a lot about this and that seems to be a very frustrating issue for many returning service members about the lack of assistance they get in trying to - this is not something that the military looks at in way that this is - this is not something that their fault.

It's a disagreement between the two parents and, you know, I see that there's a lot of frustration and not, in many cases, not a lot of help in trying to resolve this dilemma.

And, once again, it's a case by case basis because it depends upon the states. You know, it's a state issue and the federal government, I mean the military where the service member lives could be in a different state than where the spouse has moved with the children and so, they're not under what state the military installation is in, might not have the same rules and many times does not have the same rules as the new state that the wife and the children are living in now.

Nigel Vann: Yeah, so it's obviously - it's an issue that certainly for a military - and these family support programs could do a lot to just put parents' minds at ease I guess.

A similar question here is, “Our understanding is that not all family courts are following the Service Members Relief Act.”

Tim Red: The Soldier and Sailor Relief Act.

Nigel Vann: The Sailor Relief Act?

Tim Red: The Soldier and Sailor Civil Relief Act.

Nigel Vann: Okay. The question is, “Is there any movement or other agencies that help a deployed parent have his or her proper day in court?”

Tim Red: Say that again.

Nigel Vann: Is there any movement or other agencies that help a deployed parent have his or her proper day in court?

Tim Red: As far as what aspect of the Solider and Civil - Civil Relief Act, because there are several aspects that that covers. It may, you know, is this about a child’s custody issue or is this about child...

Nigel Vann: I don’t know, Tim, this is just a general question that came in. Perhaps you can just talk a little bit about that act and how it...

Tim Red: The Soldier and Sailor Civil Relief Act and I can’t remember it verbatim, but what it’s designed to do is put protective measures in the event a service member is deployed.

For instance, you can’t - you can’t repossess their home, if something goes wrong with the mortgage payments or the mortgage, you can’t repossess their home while they’re gone. You can’t repossess their - you have to reduce interest rates on the service member on debts that they had incurred prior to - prior to the mobilization and deployment. There’s a provision in there to reduce the interest rate down to 6%.

And, but it's really designed to protect them financially while they're gone and to protect their families. But it's really - it's to protect the service member and his financial rights while he is gone.

((Crosstalk))

Tim Red: I shouldn't say the family because it's not designed to protect the family, it's designed to protect the service member's financial rights while they are - while they're deployed.

And, in the event that something happens, for instance, like the mortgage, they cannot repossess that home and make them move out of that home until they come back. There are some legal workings to try and incorporate a provision into the Soldiers Civil Relief Act to prevent spouses from leaving - putting service members in this dilemma of moving to another state and taking their kids and the service member having to deal with that while they're deployed.

So, there is some legal moving - there is some political moving to try and get some - a provision added to the Soldiers Civil Relief Act to address that issue.

Nigel Vann: So, in theory, family court should be following that act.

Tim Red: Yes.

Nigel Vann: Yes. Well, I'm afraid...

((Crosstalk))

Tim Red: ...depending on what the case is.

Nigel Vann: Okay. I'm afraid we're getting tight on time. There are a couple of questions that we didn't get a chance to get to. What I'd ask actually, is that if you asked a question and we haven't gotten to it, if you would email that question again and I'll make sure we get back to you with a detailed response. And you can just email that to



info@fatherhood.gov, which is, you know, the same address you can use for any request for assistance or any inquiries. So, info@fatherhood.gov.

I did just want to let you know that the Webinar for February has been set now. It will be the last Tuesday, February 24 and the topic will be on working with fathers group, it's a follow on to what we were doing as part of some of the grantee roundtables. And we've got a few presenters lined up for that. So that's what we'll be doing in the next one. I think you'll find that useful for a lot of your staff who want to get more on facilitation skills.

And I do want to encourage you to, if you do need any kind of staff training, that's the kind of thing to send to us at info@fatherhood.gov or go on to the (unintelligible) Website, you know, go the grantee resources, go to technical assistance and there's a TA request form there so any questions, however you want, just let us know.

So, with that, let me pass it to Jen and she's got the brie survey just to get some brief feedback on your responses to the Webinar today.

Jennifer McHenry: Great, thank you, Nigel. I only have four questions will go through very quickly. This is just a little feed back on how we did today.

Here's question number one: I have a better understanding of some of the challenges facing fathers who are returning veterans or the spouse of a returning veteran. Please answer to the left of the colored block. And the choices are: strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, strongly disagree or at the bottom there is a no vote.

The second is: I have a better understanding of some of the challenges facing fathers who are returning veterans or the spouse of a returning veteran. Okay?

We're going to move on to Question No. 2. I have a better understanding of the resources available to my program to address these challenges. And the four choices are strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, or no vote. And again, the question: I have a better understanding of the resources available to my program to address these challenges.



Okay, we're going to move on to Question No. 3. I have a more complete understanding of the unique issues facing military families reconnecting after deployment. And your choices one more time are, strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, strongly disagree, or no vote. I have a more complete understanding of the unique issues facing military families reconnecting after deployment

Great. And we have one last question: The advice and suggestions regarding how to work with military families were helpful to me. Your choices this time are very helpful, helpful, unsure, of little help, no help at all and, again, a no vote at the bottom. The advice and suggestions regarding how to work with military families were helpful to me.

Thank you very much and we'll turn it over to Nigel for some closing comments.

Nigel Vann:

Okay. Well, thank you, Jen and certainly thank you to Tim and Donna and Brian. I certainly trust that was helpful for everybody and I do again encourage you, any follow-up questions, any questions we didn't get to, email us at the address on your screen there and we can certainly put you in touch with Tim or Brian and Donna as well if you wanted to again get in touch with them directly.

I do think this is, as we saw, an important issue that we are going to see more of and even maybe a way for you to reach out and get some more dads in your program because you all should try to do that.

And so, I wish you all a good day and we will talk to you again for the next Webinar and you'll also actually be hearing from OSA and the Fatherhood team soon about ideas for what we're going to do to follow-up with the grant tables from last time, so we certainly hope to be talking to you and seeing you very soon.

Have a good day.

Operator:

Ladies and gentlemen, that does conclude the conference call for today. We thank you for your participation and ask that you please disconnect your line.

END