



## **Mental Health America of Franklin County**

2323 W. Fifth Ave. Suite 160, Columbus, OH 43204

Telephone: (614) 221-1441 Fax: (614) 221-1491

info@mhafc.org

www.mhafc.org

# **Returning to Work**

## **Information for Reservists and Members of the National Guard And Their Employers**

---

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:
  - 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. If you are experiencing any of these, you should seek help. With professional help and support you can overcome these problems. Everyone needs help from time to time in dealing with the stresses of life. It's also best to act on these problems as early as possible. You have many options to choose from: support groups, anger management classes, your faith leader, a service chaplain, a family services counselor or mental health professional. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness.

Nearly every military installation has a Family Service Center, Family Support Center or Army Community Service Center where you can access information, referral, counseling, and crisis intervention services. In addition, all military families, including those of National Guard and Reserve members who are activated for more than 30 days, are eligible for medical and mental health care either at a Military Medical Treatment Facility or at a civilian facility through the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Uniformed Services (CHAMPUS). **Columbus area military personnel or their families can access the Family Advocacy Program, DLA -Columbus at 614-692-7217.**

*Mental Health America of Franklin County (MHAFC) has several resources available to help you and your family deal with the homecoming. For more information, contact us at 614-221-1441 or visit us online at [www.mhafc.org](http://www.mhafc.org).*

**Mental Health America of Franklin County** is a private, not-for-profit organization, established in 1956. We help people navigate the mental health system. We are dedicated to promoting mental health in Franklin County through advocacy, education, and support services. Our programs include: information and referral to community mental health and alcohol/drug services; free support groups for people with mental illness and their families; an Ombudsman program that assists clients in navigating the mental health and alcohol/drug system; mental health screenings in English and Spanish; Pro Bono Counseling Program where underinsured and uninsured individuals can receive free counseling; community and professional mental health education including Get Connected; maternal mental health support and advocacy (POEM); and a quarterly newsletter featuring legislative updates and new happenings at MHAFC. We receive funding from the Franklin County ADAMH Board, United Way of Central Ohio, individuals, foundations, and corporations. To become a member or find out more information, please visit us online at [www.mhafc.org](http://www.mhafc.org).