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When deployed family member returns

MIDWEST CITY, Okla. (AP) -- While Maj. Mark Rasnake was deployed, he missed his son's birthday for the second year in a row and his daughter's first tooth. Meanwhile, his wife, Melissa, had to be both Mom and Dad, as well as run the household on her own.

So when Rasnake returned home April 28, some adjustments had to be made.

"It's a big change because you're shifting gears so fast," he said.



■ Air Force Maj. Mark Rasnake helps his son Joshua, 3, down a ladder on a playground on Tinker Air Force Base Thursda in Midwest City. Rasnake recently returned from a deployment that took him to Afghanistan and Iraq. ■

Tech. Sgt. Jolanta Sousa at the Tinker Air Force Base Family Support Center said families often go through problems when a member returns from a deployment. Some families can be disappointed by unrealistic expectations for a happy reunion. Other pitfalls can include trouble returning to work, conflicts over how to discipline children, lack of communication and financial problems, she said.

Plus, children can have a hard time coping with a parent returning.

Small children have a tendency to be shy or scared of the returning parent. Older children may act out and push boundaries when a parent returns, while teens tend to adjust easier, Sousa said.



But the Rasnakes said they had a relatively easy transition. Rasnake was gone almost five months as part of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. He is a mission crew commander with the 960th Airborne Air Control Squadron, which is part of the 552nd Air Control Wing.

■ ■ He said he got used to overseeing missions, getting up at 5 a.m., sleeping on a cot and being busy most of the time. And when he did have some free time, he watched movies with the guys and ate junk food, he said.

Meanwhile, Melissa Rasnake was taking care of 9-month-old Sara and 3-year old Joshua. She ran the household and cared for her children her own way.

"When they're gone you can do what you want to do," Melissa Rasnake said with a smile. "When they're back, you have to take them into consideration. There's an adjustment period where you have to get used to each other again."



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There are many things to get used to again, such as sharing the television and the bed, she said.

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"There's a time where you're very careful about what you say and what you do until you kind of test the waters," she said.

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Mark Rasnake said he had to get used to having a bathroom nearby and food on hand, as well as helping out around the house.



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He said his wife did a great job while he was gone, but he felt bad about missing his children's milestones. Plus, Joshua broke his collarbone and started to act out.

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Melissa Rasnake said she thinks Joshua's behavior problems stem from missing his father and trying to get attention.

"I think he suffered more than anyone in the family in the separation," Melissa said.

"You try to make up for it," Mark said.

Joshua said he missed his dad and looks forward to climbing on him now that he's back.

Sousa said it's common for returning soldiers to feel guilty about missing important moments in their children's lives.

Both Melissa and Mark Rasnake worried that Sara was so young when her father left, she might not remember who he is.

"But she went right to him," Melissa Rasnake said.

Mark is trying to spend a lot of time with her. He has until the last week in May to spend with his family.

"I like that," he said. "I can focus all my attention on them."

Sousa also said sometimes the returning spouse's feelings can be hurt when he or she sees the spouse at home has gotten along fine.

But in his case, Mark Rasnake said he is thrilled his wife coped so well.

"There could be heated, hateful thoughts or communications that come out of that," Sousa said.

"I can honestly say I can deploy anywhere and don't have to worry about anything," he said. "I can focus on my job."

Plus, Mark and Melissa Rasnake are "old pros." They have been through at least 35 deployments in the last 10 years. Most were between 45 and 60 days. They will celebrate their 18th anniversary this weekend and plan to have a night out just the two of them.