



Family Readiness

Family Readiness is a critical issue for the Department of Defense. Quality of life and family matters are priority issues for the Secretary and the services. The Department's ability to assist service members and their families to prepare for separations during short and long term deployments is paramount to sustaining mission capabilities and mission readiness. The Reserve components have worked closely with their parent services to develop seamless, integrated family readiness and support programs that provide information and services to all members, regardless of the parent service or component of the member-Active, Guard or Reserve.

To enhance support for Guard families and maintain a Total Force approach to family readiness, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs and the DoD Office of Family Policy formed a strategic partnership. The results of this partnership cemented the Department's commitment to eliminate all barriers to providing quality family support program across the force. This partnership will continue to nurture the philosophy and reinforce the practices of working together to share information and resources to better prepare and support military families.

This has proven to be a very productive partnership, which has resulted in publications that will assist RC families, a strategic plan for the future and integrated efforts to support all families.

Family Readiness is a force multiplier for successful deployments.

Service Member/Family Readiness is a key factor in unit, service member, and family morale.

Family Readiness helps to increase retention of service members, encourages family participation and ultimately contributes to successful achievement of the mission.

Family readiness programs are a command responsibility. The command's leadership (which includes senior unit enlisted personnel as its most vital element) and demonstrated concern for families before, during, and after a deployment/mobilization can directly impact the success of many of your unit's efforts. Commanders must clearly articulate their goals and vision for family readiness. Senior non-commissioned officers' full support of this command vision is also critical. Empowering families to be self-sufficient, especially during times of mobilization and training, pays immeasurable dividends to unit commands and personnel.

Family readiness cannot be achieved through "catch-up" activities conducted just before or during training or a unit deployment. Instead, family readiness must be continuously promoted through a well-planned and thoughtfully executed program. Family readiness has a direct impact on:

- Overall unit morale
- Unit retention
- Participation in family related unit activities
- Common understanding and access to available government benefits/entitlement programs (e.g., SGLI, TRICARE, and Exchange/Commissary benefits)

All too often, family readiness programs mistakenly over-focus on the immediate family (spouse and children) to the exclusion of others. Every individual has personal concerns outside of your command, whether it is with parents, siblings, significant others or even a pet. While it is not specifically your command's task to yield to all of the details in your member's lives, it is extremely important to be all-inclusive in the efforts you make to ensure everyone in your unit is ready to deploy whenever and wherever required.

What is an FRG:

Family Readiness Groups (formerly known as Family Support Groups) were renamed such by the Department of the Army to emphasize the need for readiness and self-sufficiency among Army families in the modern Army. According to the official Web site, "The Family Readiness Group (FRG) is an officially command-sponsored organization of family members, volunteers, and soldiers belonging to a unit, who together provide an avenue of mutual support and assistance and a network of communications among the family members, the chain of command, and community resources. An FRG helps create a climate of mutual support within the unit and community." That explains what the Army defines an FRG as, but what does that mean for you?

Educating unit members about their benefits and entitlements is the most fundamental and yet most challenging aspect of any Family Readiness Program. It is fundamental because every member must understand their basic benefits and entitlements and be aware of the vast network of support agencies and organizations created to support them and their families. It is also complex because the regulations and laws that govern them change often so it is critical that your unit members have the most current and relevant information. There are literally tens of thousands of people in many organizations who make it their duty to support Military Families. Connecting them to members of your unit is a continual task and no command staff can do it well without the assistance of volunteers and organizations that can fill the gaps.

An FRG is a group that usually meets at specific times in order to distribute information discuss support issues, raise funds, foster friendships and a sense of community. It is a network that is formed because of its members' affiliation with the unit it represents. Your role in an FRG depends on your relationship to the Army. If you are the family member or dependent, the unit FRG is where you will gain information about the unit and military community. This is one of your "links" or connections to the leaders, soldiers, and spouses in your unit. If you are a soldier, an FRG is there to provide and foster support, integrity of care, and open and honest communication for your dependents.

FRGs are a great way to build cohesiveness in your unit and meet the other families. Meetings are not mandatory for the family member but definitely encouraged. As we hope we have demonstrated, participation will be the best way of knowing "what's going on."

If you would like to become involved with your units FRG or to volunteer please give us a call.

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