



Marines Offer Help To Families Left Behind

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Photo by Kenny Goldberg

Above: Laura Loasching holds a "daddy doll" of her husband Kurt, who isn't due back from deployment until next January.

SAN DIEGO — Marines have been at the forefront of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the stress has taken its toll on their families back home. Marine Corp. officials say they're aware of the burden that repeated deployments place on families. The Corps has a lot of services to help families cope.

Laura Loasching, who is married to a Marine sergeant, said her husband's first deployment to Iraq was in 2006.

"It was hard, because he kept getting extended, and we didn't know when he was going to come home," said Loasching. "It was supposed to be six months, and it turned out to be nine months. And I didn't have a child to take care of, I just had a dog. So me and the dog became best friends."

While her husband was in Iraq, Loasching said she spent a lot of time worrying.

Then when he finally came home, things had changed.

"It was just weird," Loasching said. "It was kind of like, getting reintroduced to someone all over again, you kind of don't know them anymore. They're completely different when they come back," she said.

There are more than 24,000 Marines currently deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. That leaves a lot of family members who are left behind.

Camp Pendleton has a staff of 500 dedicated to supporting families.

Meghan Jones, director of [Marine Corp. Family Readiness](#), one of six departments on base that help Marines and their families, said "Twenty, 30 years ago they didn't have this type of support. It wasn't identified yet. But the commandant of the Marine Corp. has said families are so important, and we need to take care of our own, and that's what we're doing."

Jones said her programs offer classes on things like building communication skills, managing conflict, and anger management.

"There's pre-deployment briefs that educate the family on 'OK, this is what's going to happen during the deployment,' how to prepare yourself for that deployment," Jones said. "There are classes on, in the middle of the deployment, care for the caregiver. A lot of our spouses, they do everything while the Marine is deployed, but they forget to take care of themselves. So we have a class on how to take care of yourself, communication, making sure you're not too stressed out."

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And Jones said all of the programs offer help for kids, too.

"Mom or Dad has left, and how are you feeling, and how to express those feelings, and then return and reunion," she said. "What mom or dad may feel when they come home, and how to tell them how you feel, and they're fun, interactive activities for the children."

Marines and family members can also get eight to ten counseling sessions, or more if they need it.

Some people prefer to see a civilian therapist off-base.

Therapist Jeff Palitz, who practices in Chula Vista and Eastlake, sees a lot of Navy families. He said some tell him they want to talk with someone who's outside of the military culture.

Palitz said military spouses often talk about the burden of having to manage things by themselves. Some Marines and sailors have been deployed half a dozen times. Palitz said repeated deployments are tough on a marriage.

"It's absolutely true that the emotional intimacy that is present in a healthy marriage comes from day in, day out contact, and dealing with things in daily life," Palitz said. "The reality is when you have to deal with things on your own, there's almost a natural disconnect that you have to place between the other person in order to tolerate that. And it takes time to break that back down."

Loasching said she's hanging tough. Her husband is on his second deployment. And this time, she has their seven-month old son, Thomas, to take care of.

She said her husband feels the separation, too.

"He's worried Thomas isn't gonna remember him when he gets home," Loasching said. "So that's been hard on him. And then he doesn't get to see his first steps, and his first word."

To help Thomas remember his dad, Loasching got a doll made with a picture of her husband on it for Thomas to play with.

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