

What to expect

Any big change is exciting, but can also be potentially stressful.

Leaving the military often means some big changes, especially if you have been in the military for a long time. When it happens it can be a shock and things might not always go to plan. Knowing what to expect can help you with the process.

Stages of change

Most people pass through a similar progression of stages when confronted with change. Knowing these stages may help you cope and provide reassurance if you feel 'stuck'.

There are three stages:

- Stage 1: Facing up to the inevitability of change.
- Stage 2: Breaking with the old life — mental and emotional adjustment.
- Stage 3: Building and committing to a new life — finding your place in civilian society.

Making the transition may take some time

For many, the transition is not just about leaving a job but leaving a way of life. The strong sense of purpose and belonging from serving in the military can be greatly missed when beginning a new chapter in life.

When you transition there is typically a sense of losing some part of you, or of no longer belonging. Some people liken it to grieving — where you can go through a period of shock and denial before acceptance and adaptation.

Family dynamics and relationships

It is important to remember that your family is a big part of the transition. They:

- may have to adapt to a new home, new responsibilities, and changes to schools, jobs, and friends
- may feel that there is new opportunities and a new beginning now that you are leaving the military
- will be able to spend more time with you
- may need to renegotiate shared responsibilities now that your schedule has changed.

Communication during this transition is very important. Make sure your family knows what is going on and what the plan is.

Talk to someone

If you are worried about how your transition is going, talk to someone and seek advice.

If you're still serving, you could talk to:

- a NZDF career transition coach
- your boss
- a mate
- a family member
- your local chaplain, psychologist, social worker, recovery coordinator or defence community coordinator/facilitator.

If you have already left, you could talk to:

- a NZDF career transition coach, up to 12 months after leaving
- a mate
- a family member
- your local RSA
- No Duff.

The transition can be made easier by asking for help. Doing so is not a sign of weakness. It is a positive step towards regaining and maintaining a sense of control in life.

Don't:

- Avoid planning change.
- Put things off until tomorrow.
- Stop talking — especially with family and friends.
- Hide or disguise your thoughts or feelings from yourself or your family.
- Drink too much.
- Underestimate the change that you will have to go through.
- Think that the family will cope with the change with no difficulty.
- Assume that everything will go to plan.
- Underestimate how different 'civvy' work and life can be.
- Expect to be settled in your new life quickly.
- Reject taking advice or learning from 'civvies'.
- Judge people by military standards.
- Over-commit financially prior to release

Do:

- Take time to reflect on the change.
- Accept that building a future is hard work. Plan early and keep planning as you go.
- Remain flexible and open to change. You won't be able to control everything.
- Continue to believe in yourself and your abilities, and try to think of change as an opportunity for you and your family.
- Accept that new ways of thinking and behaving may be required, as well as new skills.
- Actively look after the health and well-being of you and your family.
- Recognise when you are 'stuck' and don't be afraid to seek help.
- Be open, and listen and learn from those in your new civilian environment.
- Reflect and consider how you successfully coped with stress before.
- Reflect on your own experiences as a service member and as a family. Recall what coping strategies you have used in the past.
- Do not leave it too long to get assistance or advice if you feel you need support.