

# Intro to Short Guides

**Dear Parents, Bishops, Ward Members, Stake Presidents, and Mission Presidents,**

After reading and listening to the challenges and lessons learned of over 1,000 early RMs, I have come to realize more than ever that **you are CRITICAL to an early RMs success.**

While it is ultimately their decision to stay active, I must be bold in saying that you can either make or break a missionary. Your impact on how they view their mission will be felt for the rest of their lives. [I am not just saying that. I have read multiple stories about the impact a mission president or a family member had on their son or daughter's return decades ago.]

For better or for worse, your initial reaction does make a difference.

That being said, if you are reading this letter, chances are you are handling it better than you think.

I have purposefully chosen to write SHORT guides for each of you. Ideally, a parent would be able to glance through this guide on their way to the airport. A bishop would be able to read through this guide to support parents and missionaries immediately after receiving the call that a missionary is coming home. A ward council would be able to read through this guide before a missionary's first Sunday back. Perhaps even a mission president would be able to glance through this guide before telling a missionary they are going home.

These are not check-off lists or one-size-fits-all guides, but simply suggestions gathered from many, many conversations with early RMs.

When missionaries learn that he or she will be coming home earlier than anticipated, most will feel the stigma and pressure immediately. You have the opportunity to be their support system.

Help them heal and turn to the Lord

Everything else can stay on hold for a while.

Sincerely,  
Destiny Yarbro

P.S. Here are some comments from early return missionaries about their return. Positive comments are in green. Negative comments are in red. While not every missionary has these experiences, these quotes are to help you better understand what your missionary may face.

## Bishops

“He congratulated me and told me I should hold my head high and that I served an honorable mission. He said I should always remain faithful, remember the work I did out in the field and that now I should start planning my future.”

“He continued to meet with me weekly, gave me a temporary calling in the priests quorum and as a ward missionary. I appreciated feeling like I was useful to some degree.”

“Hasn't approached, called or even really asked how I'm doing, I'm struggling and having a hard time. Depressed.”

“I wish [the bishop] would not have treated me like coming home was a bad thing. I wish he wouldn't have hidden me from the young men and members of the ward. I would have loved to report on my mission. I had a lot of great experiences.”  
(Depression)

“No counsel from my bishop. He viewed my returning home early as a weakness and he didn't want the ‘young men in the ward to think that it was okay to return home early from their missions.’”

## General Stigma

"I wish I wouldn't have felt so alone on my return. Coming home is hard enough, but coming home early was awful, awkward, and misunderstood."

"While being home I wish that members would think more broadly and with more understanding. Too many assume that nothing can go wrong or harm a missionary unless they are doing something wrong."

"I wish we'd had a mission culture that encouraged asking for help... Asking for help felt like failure to me."

"I had never heard of a missionary getting sick while in the mission field. It would have been very helpful to have someone pick up the phone and tell me I was not the first person to leave the mission field early to illness."

"To this day I'm still left wondering if my offering was acceptable to the Lord."

"When I was on my mission I felt like I let the Lord down. I couldn't understand why I did not get healed from the health blessing which promised I would [be healed] if I had enough faith. I really felt like I had a lot of faith and more than anything, I wanted to be cured and stay on my mission. I wish I could have talk[ed] to someone about the feelings I was having."

"Missionaries are volunteers and should be assumed to have good motivations and intentions as a default, not [that they're] trying to get out of something."

"Those who have served missions with no medical problems don't understand how the missionary feels."

"It was an awful experience that is hard to re want to get on with my cover from. I just life and forget it ever happened."

"When I was sent home the second time, I made all of my problem internal. I thought, if I can't even handle a mission, how am I going to handle having a job and kids and a future?"

"It was hard to feel like I was one of those missionaries who couldn't finish. Still today, nearly 3 years later, I struggle with thoughts of inadequacy and guilt."

"Just compassion, no judgements. It was hard enough to go home as it was."

# Short Guide for Bishops and Stake Presidents

## If I could tell you one thing:

Your ward will often follow your example in how you welcome an early RM.

### 1. Meet with missionary's parents before the missionary returns.

Short of the quick phone call from the mission president (and sometimes not even that), parents will know very little about how to support an early RM. Even if you are not sure about what to do either, meeting with them prior to the return shows your support and a willingness to work directly with them during this time. While the parents will meet many of the needs of their missionary, they may need the ward to help meet their needs. Consider bringing the [Short Guide for Parents](#) with you to your first visit.

### 2. Meet with the missionary as soon as possible.

It is absolutely vital that you meet with the missionary immediately upon their return and regularly over the next few months (at least). Similar to a convert, this missionary needs a friend, a responsibility and 'nurturing with the good word of God'. Do not make assumptions regarding the missionary based on their reason for coming home. Misunderstandings can be devastating. If a missionary came home for transgression, prayerfully consider treating their return as their first step to repentance. Consider discussing some of the following questions in your first meeting:

- When will you be able to meet regularly over the next few months? (I recommend *at least* weekly during the first month. Trust grows with experience.)
- Should you announce that he/she is home and formally welcome him/her back to the ward? (This may be easier for the missionary than individual conversations with every member in the ward over the next few months.)
- If appropriate, would he like to pass the sacrament or would he/she like to give the closing prayer? (This can help members accept an early RM back into the ward more quickly.)
- When would be a good time to give a talk in church? (Most return missionaries are asked to give a talk. This invitation is often neglected in the case of early RMs. Be aware that some might not feel emotionally ready, but giving them the opportunity can help them feel accepted.)
- How can the ward council best support him/her during this time? (Does he/she need a friend, home teachers and/or visiting teachers, meals delivered, Priesthood blessings, etc?)
- If appropriate, would he/she like a calling or a responsibility?

**4. It may or may not be the Lord's will for a missionary to return to the field.**

While you may have to ask whether a missionary is considering returning to the mission or not, do not add pressure. This is an extremely personal decision between the missionary and the Lord. Allow the missionary to receive his/her own revelation on the matter.

**5. In the case of transgression:**

There is no one reason why a missionary came home early, especially for transgression reasons. Prayerfully seek to know whether your particular missionary returned for an addiction he/she could not overcome, confession of a sin committed prior to the mission, or willful rebellion. While you'll approach each reason differently, proceed with love for all.

Bishops now have access to a Ministering Resource on helping early return missionaries at [www.providentliving.org](http://www.providentliving.org).