

Short Guide for Ward Councils

This guide is from the book *Home Early... Now What?*

This guide is for ward councils but also a reference for all ward members. Like a convert, early RMs may struggle to find their place in the ward and need, as President Gordon B. Hinckley suggested, “a friend, a responsibility, and nurturing with ‘the good word of God’ (Moro. 6:4).” You have the wonderful opportunity to help these missionaries feel welcomed, needed, and loved.

If I could tell you one thing:

You do not need to know why a missionary came home. Simply welcome them home and express your love for them. Find ways to get them engaged in the ward again.

1. Make sure they have “a friend.”

Every early RM needs a friend: someone who will not judge or ask personal questions but quietly give support and love during this time, especially as many of the missionary’s peers may still be in the mission field. This friend may be someone their own age, someone who came home early from a mission in the past, or a person with lots of time to give (such as an elderly member of the ward). Consider the possibility of assigning a separate set of visiting teachers or home teachers (from the parents) to the missionary for more individual support.

2. Give them “a responsibility.”

Transitioning home from 24/7 service on the mission is very difficult for most. Ward councils can discuss ways for an early RM to have a calling or a responsibility. A responsibility gives the missionary a sense of purpose and meaning and a hint of their mission life. A responsibility gives a missionary another reason to come to church. A responsibility often helps other members welcome them more. If health or unworthiness is an issue, think of creative ways to give this missionary an opportunity to serve.

3. Nurture them with “the good word of God.”

Although not all early RMs will struggle with their testimonies when they return, many feel shaken and unsure of how to proceed. More than anything, these missionaries need “nurturing” with the gospel. They need faith-building environments to ask the questions they may be struggling with. They need opportunities to feel the Spirit. They need to be able to teach the doctrine. Pray to know how to

carefully provide these opportunities to them. If you want an early RM to give a talk or share a mission story in a lesson or teach in mission prep, gently ask them *beforehand* if they would be comfortable doing so. Support them if they feel they are not ready or need more time to prepare.

4. Support the family of the early RM.

While most expect the early RM to struggle, sometimes the needs of the family around them are forgotten. Parents may be grieving for the loss of the mission too and may struggle just as much as (or more than) their child. They may struggle to know how to parent an adult child during this time when a missionary may be extremely dependent on their emotional support, finances, and testimony. Siblings may not know why a missionary is home and may feel confused as to why everything is so different from the last time they saw their sibling at the airport. Supporting the family as you would through any trial and ensuring that the family has steady home teachers and visiting teachers is vital.