

The Amazing Race of a National Guard Couple

Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. Pass out the 6 different cards to each couple. (For larger groups, you may want to adjust accordingly by only passing out 3 Challenge Cards of topics 1-3 to some couples and 3 Challenge Cards of Topics 4-6 to other couples).
2. Instruct the couples to read the cards and answer the questions on the back. Suggest they spend 2-3 minutes working on each Challenge Card.
3. Invite the couples to share with the group, or get together with another couple to share. They may want to take notes on other couples' ideas.

The six topics are:

1. Separations: Riding the Deployment Cycle
2. Finances: Cha-hanges In Your Cha-ching
3. Communication: Talking On the Move
4. Coping with Stress: Won't Let It Get Me Down
5. Independence and Togetherness: Keeping it Together, Together and Apart
6. Resiliency: We'll Come Back Stronger

Process:

Use this opportunity to discuss the ideas. You can highlight the really creative ideas, and encourage less involved couples to consider different ideas. It is helpful for couples to hear what others have to say.

Conclude:

Praise couples for their efforts. Encourage them to revisit the cards.

Group Size: All

Time Needed: 45 minutes

Goal: To give seriously dating and engaged National Guard couples the opportunity to anticipate and discuss some of the challenges inherent to one or both partners being in the Guard

Audience: Engaged or dating couples where one is a member of the National Guard

Special Considerations: This activity can be used along with information on communication and problem solving, understanding expectations or other MRE activities. It talks about the Emotional Cycle of Deployment so you will want to complete this after your lesson on the emotional cycle or take out Challenge Card #1.

Resources Needed:

- ✓ 6 Challenge Cards (one of each topic), printed on card stock or heavy paper, folded in half to make two-sided cards for each couple

Challenge Cards:

<p>Separations: Riding the Deployment Cycle Life for a soldier in today's Guard is a life in the Deployment Cycle. Getting ready to separate, living apart, and coming back together, are all part of the deployment cycle, along with the emotional stages of Anticipation of Separation, Detachment, Disorganization, Stabilization, Anticipation of Return, and Reintegration. The Deployment Cycle puts a lot of challenges on the Guard member and his/her relationships. It takes a special kind of strength and internal and external resources to thrive in the Guard.</p>	<p>Challenge Question: What strengths do you have as people and as a couple to deal with the challenges of the Deployment Cycle? List three strengths or supports you have under each: His _____ Hers _____ Ours _____ _____ _____ _____</p>
<p>Finances: Cha-Changes in your Cha-Ching Finances can ebb and flow during the course of a career in the Guard. Sometimes a soldier makes more money downrange than in his/her regular job, and sometimes a job isn't there after a yearlong deployment. Money is the number one thing couples fight about, even under the best of circumstances. The stresses of deployment, and of changing employment situations, pose a real challenge to many National Guard couples. Can you rise to this challenge and deploy your teamwork and good decision making? .</p>	<p>Challenge Question: Many couples don't have in-depth conversations about finances before they get married. As a National Guard couple you will be called on to be creative and smart about money. What kinds of things do you need to discuss in order to manage your money well together as a couple? List three things here to talk more about later to help you be a strong team when it comes to money: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____</p>
<p>Communication: Talking on the Move Communication is a skill. Some of us are really good at it, and sometimes it comes easily. Under stress, when we are not at our best, or when life is really hard, some couples fall into patterns of conflict and poor communication. Conflict is normal, but how we deal with it makes all the difference. Communication during the stresses of getting ready to deploy, during the separation of deployment, and getting back together after deployment all pose different kinds of challenges. Strong couples anticipate challenging times and come up with a plan for how to keep the lines of communication open through all kinds of situations.</p>	<p>Challenge Question: On a scale of 1 to 10, how do you each rate your ability to communicate about hard stuff? Him _____ Her _____ What's one thing you can do to improve your communication? Him _____ Her _____ How will you do this? What kind of help do you need? How will you learn or develop the skills you need? _____ _____ _____</p>

Challenge Cards:

<p>Coping with Stress: Won't Let It Get Me Down</p> <p>Life gets stressful sometimes. Most of us are not at our best in relationships when we are stressed out. For National Guard couples, deployment, finances, being married to the Army for stretches of time, are all stressors on top of the normal stresses of everyday life. Many people cope with stress fairly well. Others turn to behaviors that aren't so helpful, like alcohol abuse, anger, withdrawal, or food, just to name a few. We can't erase or eliminate a lot of stressors from our lives, so the challenge is to develop really strong ways to deal with stress so that stress doesn't dictate how we relate to our partner or spouse.</p>	<p>Challenge Question: What are four signs that stress is impacting how you relate to each other? _____</p> <p>What's one thing you do to deal with stress individually and one thing you do well to deal with stress together?</p> <p>What new thing could you learn or try to add to your toolbox of skills for dealing with stress?</p>
<p>Independence and Togetherness: Keeping Together, Together and Apart</p> <p>Most couples expect that they'll do most things together in life. In the National Guard, couples shift back and forth between times of being together in civilian life and deployment. During deployments, each spouse learns new kinds of independence, develops abilities to deal with things on their own, and each grows in sometimes unexpected ways. Most couples will say that army life makes them stronger in many respects. Here's your challenge: What will you do to keep your bonds strong during a deployment when you both deal with life apart?</p>	<p>Challenge Question: What do you most respect and admire about each other? List two qualities each: His _____ Hers _____</p> <p>How will you keep your bonds strong during times of separation?</p> <p>What do you want to learn about yourself and your relationship as a result of deployment and separation?</p>
<p>Resiliency: We'll Come Back Stronger</p> <p>With all the talk about the risks and hard stuff, we sometimes forget that National Guard life makes many couples stronger. We bend, but we don't break, and what we learn about ourselves while undergoing challenges makes us better people. That's the challenge of resiliency. Resiliency is made up of a variety of factors, including internal factors (like optimism and faith), relationship factors (like commitment and trust), and social factors (having a supportive community or family around us). Humor helps a lot, too!</p>	<p>Challenge Question: What resources do you have to draw on, like family, friends, faith, yourself, to keep you strong and focused on your family during a deployment?</p> <p>What are two things you can do to support each other in staying healthy, and even growing stronger, during deployment?</p>