

## Tips for Married Couples Dealing With Deployment

**Maintaining a healthy marriage through long-term deployments is a challenge that many couples face.**

With over 100,000 military members currently deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan, many military couples continue to face the prospect of additional deployments. Keeping your marriage strong while you are apart takes dedication, patience, trust and commitment. The following tips can help you work towards building and strengthening your own healthy marriage.

### 1. Be Realistic

Communication may be very difficult during deployment. Have realistic expectations that the demands of deployment for the service member may make communication inconsistent and at times impossible. A good way to stay connected is to write down daily events and share them with each other via mail or email. Keep the information as positive as possible and reassure your deployed spouse that you are coping well with his or her absence. In order to focus on their mission, which during war may be very dangerous, the deployed spouse needs to have a sense that things at home are stable.

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### 2. Get Connected

For the spouse staying at home, accessing military resources is extremely important. Most military bases offer pre and post deployment marriage enrichment courses. Surround yourself with friends that support your marriage and are aware of the hardships related to deployments. Spending time with others who are coping with deployments in a healthy way is an invaluable experience and helps make the time apart easier.



### 3. Remember How it Started

In letters to your partner, be sure to talk about the unique history that you share together. Recall key events in your love story like when you first met, buying your first home together, and other marital milestones. These memories will help you stay connected while apart from each other. Positive shared memories can strengthen your marriage.

## 4. Educate Yourself

Read relationship strengthening books and complete workbooks while apart. Mail them to each other if possible and discuss them. The chaplain offices or family support centers on military bases often have free copies of books and workbooks available for couples. Read books and novels, especially about the places and cultures the service member is experiencing. Plan to discuss them during phone calls or while writing emails or letters.

## 5. Send Your Love

Send care packages filled with practical and fun things to your deployed spouse. Enclose a small calendar to begin a reunion countdown. Make and send a small photo album or scrapbook. Care packages are not just for the one who is gone, prior to leaving the service member can make packages for the neighbors to deliver while he or she is gone. Also, create a scavenger hunt that will lead to a gift for the spouse to find. In addition to sending letters and emails, regularly send postcards and photos from home and from the duty station if available. Also, create "coupons" to be redeemed after the deployment. The coupon can be for a wide array of different "services" reflecting practical things like cleaning the house or washing the car, or more creative things like entitling the recipient to massages and other intimate moments.

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## 6. Focus on the Future

Write down and discuss your future plans and dreams together. Planning for the future implies that you will be reunited and stay together. This process can forge a feeling of mutual long term security and reduce stress brought on by the

distance. Make long term and short-term goals for yourselves and for your family. Having something that you are working towards is a great way to make time seem to pass faster. Goals can be practical like what kind of home you want to live in. They can also be value and principle-driven involving setting goals for the lives of your children.

## 7. Write it Down

Keep a personal journal while apart and exchange journals a few weeks after reuniting. Take the time to read the journal and discuss the contents. Knowing that you are both doing this while apart will help strengthen the marriage. This is also a great habit to remain in once you have reunited. Journaling is a great way to chart growth in your marriage and also as an individual. Having a record of this growth and progress is a great resource particularly during challenging times.

## 8. Mix it Up

Music seems to play an important part in the lives of most people. In the realm of a relationship, it is a key ingredient in any romantic night. Music is powerful in that it can take you back in time to specific moments. For

that reason, you can create special music mix collections to share. You and your partner may have a song which you both consider to be “your song.” Burn or download that song and others and send them to each other on disc or by email.

## 9. Study the Stages

Understand the stages of deployment and reuniting and be aware of the emotional cycles of deployment. Understanding them will be a key step in developing a smoother transition to life with both of you home. This emotional cycle may include periods of sadness, detachment and sometimes resentment towards the military. For the non-service member they may feel resentment towards their partner for separating the family. Negative emotions are normal and are all part of the cycle of deployment. Anticipating them and knowing how to work through them will help to normalize your interactions.

## 10. Respect the Transition

Understand that each of you will be changed as a result of the deployment. Some spouses may become more independent and self-confident. Others however may experience the onset of anxiety and dependency when their partner returns. Both spouses need to understand that the experience of war is an extraordinary life event for the service member. Leaving a war zone and returning home can be a very difficult transition but it can be managed well with proper preparation and mutual support.

A great way to prepare for an upcoming deployment is to take a marriage education class previous to the separation. Remember that you want to be in this marriage for life and that the deployment will eventually end. Staying connected through deployment can cement your bond as a couple.

*Special thanks to Katherine Robredo, a marriage and family therapist with extensive experience working with couples on military bases both in the U.S. and abroad, for her contributions to this tip sheet.*

## Additional Resources:

[www.militaryonesource.com](http://www.militaryonesource.com)

[www.tricare.com](http://www.tricare.com)

[www.militaryfamily.org](http://www.militaryfamily.org)

[www.milspouse.org](http://www.milspouse.org)

[www.fambooks.com/couples](http://www.fambooks.com/couples)

*The Five Love Languages; How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate*, Gary Chapman, Ph.D.

*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families*, Dr. Stephen R. Covey

*Self-Matters: Creating Your Life From the Inside Out*, Dr. Phillip C. McGraw

*Relationship Rescue: A Seven-Step Strategy for Reconnecting With Your Partner*, Dr. Phillip C. McGraw

*The Relationship Rescue Workbook*, Dr. Phillip C. McGraw