



# Staying Connected Near and Far

## Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. Before the session starts, post four flip chart sheets in one area of the room. Label the top of each flip chart with one of the following categories:
  - a. Couple Connections – While Home
  - b. Family Connections – While Home
  - c. Couple Connections – While Apart
  - d. Family Connections – While Apart

Do the exact same thing with the other four flip chart sheets, but post them on an opposite wall or in a different area of the room. Leave at least four markers near the flip chart sheets on each side of the room.

2. When the session starts, tell the groups that they will create a list of ideas or activities for couples and families to complete to continue to bond while they are home and/or while they are separated due to a deployment. Explain that this is not as simple as brainstorming a list, but that it involves two teams competing for some amazing prizes (even if the prizes are only candy, try to get the participants excited about the competition).
3. Split the group into two smaller teams. (It is not necessary to keep the teams as couples or families — in fact assigning them to different teams might help to generate more ideas.) Instruct each team to go to an area of the room with flip chart sheets.
4. Tell the teams that they will be given 10 minutes to list 10 ideas per category of activities that couples/families can do to stay connected. That means that each team will have a total of 40 ideas or activities. Before starting the time, talk about what each category refers to.
  - a. **Couple Connections – While Home:** Activities that the couples can do when the Guard member is home, such as date nights or taking a class together

**Group Size:** All

**Time Needed:** 30 minutes

**Goal:** To develop several ideas for couples and families to stay connected whether the National Guard member is at home or deployed

**Audience:** National Guard couples, service members (without the family member) or family members (without the Service member) during any phase of the deployment cycle

**Special Considerations:** None

## Materials Needed:

- ✓ Eight flip chart sheets to tape/post on the walls
- ✓ Markers
- ✓ Enough small prizes to provide to the winning group
- ✓ Four 3x5 index cards for each couple/family in attendance.

- b. **Family Connections – While Home:** Activities that families (both parents and children) can do while the Guard member is home, such as family game night, attending a religious institution, or going to a park
- c. **Couple Connections – While Apart:** Activities that couples can do “together” even when the Guard member is away, such as Internet chatting, writing a short story together, or reading the same book
- d. **Family Connections – While Apart:** Activities that families can do “together” even when the Guard member is away, such as playing a recording of the guard member reading a favorite book to the children or using a Web-cam to connect

Explain that the first team to come up with ten items in each category wins a prize. The groups can pick a scribe or team members can simply individually walk up to the flip chart sheets.

5. When the teams are ready, give them an “On your mark, get set, GO!” and encourage everyone along as they make their lists. (Consider providing playful banter and updates on how the teams are doing to incite the feeling of competition between the teams.)
6. When one team has created a list with at least ten items on each flip chart sheet, stop the game.
7. Starting with the winning team, have a member of each team read off the items that they came up with in each category. Note the similarities and differences of the activities that the teams came up with.
8. When both teams have read their lists, give the members of the winning team their prize, and invite all to return to their seats.
9. Distribute four index cards to each couple or family. Tell them to title each card with a category from the flip chart sheets on the wall (**Couple Connections – While Home; Family Connections – While Home, etc.**).
10. Instruct the couples/families to look at all the items on the flip chart sheets around the room and discuss what activities they would like to try to help their family develop stronger relationships and stay connected. Tell them to pick three ideas from each category based on their personalities and interests. Encourage them to write the activities on the corresponding index cards.
11. When the couples and families have completed their cards, ask for some examples of what activities were chosen and why those particular ideas would be a good fit.

### Process:

Ask the participants what insights they gained from making these lists. If it is not discussed by the group, point out that even while the Guard member is deployed, there are many things that can be done to create and keep strong connections as a couple or family. Specify that things do not have to cost much money but are of great value.

### Conclude:

Encourage the group members to take seriously the ideas they wrote on their index cards. Suggest they post the cards in a place where they will be noticed (such as the refrigerator) and check in often to see if they are working on the activities they chose. Also suggest they continue to add more ideas to the list. Express your confidence that they can stay connected whether or not they are deployed.