



**national
healthy marriage
resource center**

NHMRC September 2008 Webinar Frequently Asked Questions

Reaching Out to Military Couples

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The National Healthy Marriage Resource Center broadcasted a webinar entitled “Reaching Out To Military Couples” on September 24, 2008. During the course of the webinar, we received more questions than we were able to answer. This Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document is a follow-up to many of the questions posted during the webinar.

1. We heard a lot about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). How can we help couples that might be suffering from PTSD?

Although your natural inclination may be to start addressing PTSD concerns, it is paramount to recognize that you are providing marriage education, not counseling or therapy. It is not appropriate for you to suggest to a couple that one or both of them may be suffering from PTSD, nor are marriage educators equipped to help couples diagnose or address PTSD. You should, however, develop a referral list of providers that can diagnose and treat PTSD and therapists trained to help couples work through issues presented by PTSD. This information can be offered to all participants as part of a resource package during the intake session, or during the first class.

2. Is there any evidence that deployment increases the divorce rate? Is the divorce rate negatively affected by multiple deployments?

According to the 2007 RAND study “Families Under Stress: An Assessment of Data, Theory, and Research on Marriage and Divorce in the Military,” married service members who had been deployed were generally less likely to end their marriages than those who had not been deployed. The study, conducted by Benjamin Karney and John Crown, also found that longer deployments were associated with greater reductions in the risk of divorce. One possible reason

for these surprising results is that the military is a cohesive organization that provides job security, health care, and other benefits to service men and women and their families. As a result, military families are well-functioning and not especially prone to divorce. Additionally, longer deployments may benefit families by offering increased income from combat pay and providing opportunities for career advancement. Also, families that spend more time in the military may be better suited to military life than families that exit earlier. Thus, soldiers who experience more and longer deployments are those who that fit military life well, such that deployment is a marker for liking the military lifestyle, rather than a true cause of family stability.

Below is a link to the Rand study press release:
<http://www.rand.org/news/press.07/04.12d.html>

Below is a link to the Rand study:
http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2007/RAND_MG599.pdf

3. How can communication skills and decision-making skills help military families?

Preparing for deployment, being deployed and reintegrating back into the family following deployment are all very sensitive and emotional activities. Couples can ameliorate some of their concerns and worries through healthy, safe communication. Couples also need to decide when, if at all, they should have serious conversations while one or both spouses are deployed. Spouses at home need to be cognizant of the incredible level of stress soldiers are under. In addition to the distractions and dangers of combat, some soldiers feel frustrated when told of issues at home that they are unable to address from afar. Prior to deployment, spouses and soldiers need to decide which issues the soldier should be brought into and which the spouse should deal with alone or with the

help of other supports, like extended family members or friends.

4. Is there evidence that the military ranking system affects which service members experience marital dissatisfaction?

Marital dissatisfaction is higher at lower pay grades and lower ranks. However, service members at these ranks are younger and do not have as much experience maintaining a healthy relationship while serving in the military. Marital dissatisfaction is therefore probably linked more to youth and inexperience than the ranking system. Additionally, marital dissatisfaction may occur at any rank.

5. What is the optimal setting for marriage educators serving military families?

It is necessary to have a variety of settings available, since families differ in the way they would like to approach marriage education. While one couple prefers a group setting where they can interact with other military couples, others prefer a private session. Families should also have options for the length of the program, and when and where it meets. Some active duty military members work non-traditional hours and programs need to be able to accommodate their schedules.

6. What is the best way for Healthy Marriage programs to reach out to military couples?

Active duty service men and women can be served through their installation chaplain's office on the base. In most cases, it is possible to Google the Post or Base website and search for the chaplain's phone number. They can also call the main post/base number and ask to be connected with the Installation Chaplain's office.

Reservists may be served by contacting Chaplain

Mac Griffith, who may be reached at mack.griffith@usar.army.mil or via phone at (404) 464-8475.

National Guard members may be served by contacting the Joint Forces Chaplain office in an individual state. They can Google the National Guard in their state for this website. The sites typically list the Joint Forces Chaplain's contact information and/or the State Family Program Director's information.

For general information about serving members of the military, marriage educators may also contact CH (LTC) Ronald Martin Minnich at ron.martinminnich@us.army.mil or via phone at (703) 607-5481. Marriage educators may also use the Strong Bonds information on the web. (www.strongbonds.org) They can log on as a user.