



Maintaining a Strong Marriage During Military Deployment

Keeping Love, Trust, and Partnership Alive Across the Miles

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When Separation Tests a Marriage

Prolonged separation during military deployment can strain even the strongest marriage. Sometimes the anticipation of that dreaded departure date creates stress long before the ship sails or the aircraft takes off. The spouse who will remain behind may become anxious, withdrawn, or resentful of the demands military service places upon the family.

Such feelings are understandable. Military families surrender considerable control over their lives, and deployment can interrupt carefully established routines, family relationships, and plans for the future. Maintaining a happy marriage under those circumstances requires more than exchanging affectionate letters or looking forward to the homecoming.

It requires recognizing that deployment temporarily changes the very structure of the marriage.

A successful marriage is generally a partnership in which two people have developed an understanding of their respective responsibilities. They share household duties, financial decisions, child-rearing, and countless other obligations. Over time, they establish arrangements that may be spoken or unspoken but nevertheless become part of their everyday lives.

Deployment disrupts those arrangements. The challenge is to preserve the partnership even when the partners cannot physically share its responsibilities.

Plan Together Before Deployment

Long before the emotional goodbyes at the hangar or pier, couples should discuss how the household will operate during separation. Practical planning can eliminate many avoidable sources of marital tension.

Consider the family finances, insurance policies, emergency savings, automobile maintenance, household repairs, and childcare arrangements. Make sure the spouse remaining at home has access to necessary accounts, documents, and emergency contacts. Identify reliable repair services and trusted friends or neighbors who can provide assistance when Murphy's Law inevitably strikes.

Couples should also discuss how major decisions will be handled. What purchases can the spouse at home make independently? Which financial matters should be discussed together whenever communication permits? What arrangements will apply if an emergency requires immediate action?

The objective is not to preserve every peacetime arrangement but to establish mutual confidence. Both partners should understand that the person managing the household must have sufficient authority to do the job.

Good preparation will not prevent every difficulty, but it can keep an unexpected problem from becoming an unnecessary marital argument.

Recognize the Shift in Responsibilities

Every marriage develops its own division of labor and authority. One partner may ordinarily manage finances while the other handles household maintenance. Decisions involving children, major purchases, or family activities may be shared.

When one spouse deploys, much of that arrangement changes overnight.

The spouse remaining at home becomes the principal decision-maker, problem-solver, and disciplinarian. Children quickly recognize the new authority structure, and maintaining order can be exhausting without another parent available to provide support.

The deployed spouse, meanwhile, must concentrate on military duties that may involve long working hours, demanding conditions, or genuine danger. That person may be unable to participate in decisions as frequently as either partner would prefer.

Both spouses need to recognize these limitations without treating them as evidence of indifference.

The person at home should not feel obligated to seek permission for every routine decision, while the deployed partner should remain involved in important family matters whenever circumstances allow.

Most importantly, neither should regard the other's responsibilities as easier or less important.

Maintain the Emotional Connection

Modern technology has made communication during deployment considerably easier than it was during my years aboard Navy aircraft carriers. Letters once traveled slowly across oceans; today, many military couples can exchange messages, photographs, emails, and occasional video calls.

Nevertheless, operational requirements, security restrictions, and limited communications can interrupt contact unexpectedly. Couples should establish realistic expectations before deployment rather than assuming they will be able to communicate whenever they wish.

When contact is possible, share ordinary experiences as well as important developments. A deployed sailor may appreciate hearing about a child's school activities or a neighborhood event just as much as receiving news about household finances.

Likewise, the spouse at home deserves to hear about the deployed partner's experiences, within the limits of what can appropriately be shared.

Try to keep conversations affectionate and constructive, but don't feel compelled to pretend that everything is wonderful. A marriage cannot remain emotionally healthy if either partner believes that loneliness, frustration, or disappointment must be concealed.

There is a difference between sharing a problem and blaming your spouse for circumstances neither of you can control. Sometimes the most reassuring message is simply, "I miss you, and we're doing all right."

Protect Trust and Fidelity

Extended separation also places demands upon the physical and emotional intimacy of marriage. Months without companionship, affection, and sexual intimacy can create loneliness and temptation for either partner.

Fidelity requires more than avoiding an obvious romantic encounter. It also means respecting boundaries, recognizing potentially compromising relationships, and remaining mindful of commitments made to one's spouse.

The old admonition, "Lead us not into temptation," has practical value here. Both partners should avoid situations they know could threaten their marriage. At the same time, trust should not become an excuse for constant suspicion or interrogation. A healthy relationship depends upon confidence in each other's judgment and integrity.

Couples can strengthen that confidence by discussing expectations openly before deployment, maintaining appropriate friendships, and making a deliberate effort to preserve emotional intimacy despite the distance.

The objective is not merely to endure months of separation without breaking a promise. It is to return to a relationship in which both partners still feel valued, respected, and loved.

Watch for Resentment and Emotional Strain

Deployment can create resentment on both sides of a marriage.

The spouse at home may feel abandoned with an overwhelming workload, while the deployed partner may feel excluded from important family developments. One may resent having to make every decision; the other may resent being unable to participate.

These emotions can become especially troublesome when they remain unspoken.

Rather than allowing grievances to accumulate, discuss them calmly when circumstances permit. Recognize that both partners are making sacrifices, although those sacrifices take different forms.

If loneliness, depression, anxiety, or persistent conflict begins interfering with daily life, consider seeking assistance through military family support services, a chaplain, or a qualified counselor. [Military OneSource](#) offers support resources for eligible service members and their families.

Asking for help does not mean the marriage is failing. It means the partners recognize that some challenges are easier to overcome with assistance.

Prepare for the Marriage to Change Again

The long-awaited homecoming is usually imagined as a joyful reunion followed by an immediate return to normal family life. Unfortunately, normal may have changed.

For six months or longer, the spouse at home has made decisions, solved problems, managed finances, and exercised authority over the children. Suddenly, the returning husband or wife expects to resume the responsibilities that existed before deployment.

The previously independent spouse may experience an unexpected stab of resentment. After successfully managing the household alone, surrendering part of that authority can feel like an intrusion.

The returning service member may be equally frustrated, discovering that family routines have changed and that his or her opinions no longer carry their former weight. Children can become confused when a parent who has been absent for months suddenly attempts to resume a disciplinary role.

These difficulties do not necessarily indicate a troubled marriage. They are often predictable consequences of prolonged separation. Couples should discuss the adjustment openly, gradually redistribute responsibilities, and allow time for everyone to become comfortable with the renewed partnership.

Let the Marriage Grow With the Change

Marriages, like people, must grow and adapt. Military deployment is an unusually demanding form of change because the partners experience it separately, often under dramatically different circumstances.

The spouse at home develops greater independence, while the deployed partner encounters experiences that may be difficult to explain or share. Neither person returns to the relationship exactly as he or she was before. The secret is not to resist those changes but to accommodate them within the marriage.

Recognizing the increased responsibilities at home, respecting the demands of military duty, remaining faithful, and maintaining honest communication can help preserve a strong relationship through prolonged separation.

A successful homecoming should not require either partner to surrender the independence or maturity gained during deployment. Instead, both can bring those experiences back into a stronger partnership.

After all, a good marriage is not one in which nothing ever changes. It is one in which two people learn to change together—even when military duty temporarily requires them to live apart.