



Helping Military Couples Stay Connected Across the Miles

All couples have their share of stressors, but with deployments and long-distance duty assignments, military couples face additional strain. As a provider, you can help military couples build stronger bonds, in spite of frequent separations.

Remind military couples in your practice that it takes commitment to make things work. Encourage them to try these suggestions.

Stay connected

Certain assignments might be trickier than others for frequent contact. If possible:

- Stay in touch with texting, FaceTime, phone calls, email, photos, videos, and letters.
- Consider using the Love Every Day app to connect in new ways and rekindle the romance.
- Schedule online dates. Play internet games or tour a museum website together.
- Schedule intimate phone or email chats with lit candles and background music.
- Memorize the time difference so they can relate to each other—is the other working, sleeping, relaxing?
- Keep up-to-date on the other's location. Know the current weather and news.

Remain open

Not only is frequent communication important, but so are openness and honesty. Encourage them to:

- Ask each other what they need or want. Don't try to mind-read or guess.
- Acknowledge their feelings. One partner may feel angry and the other sad about the separation. Accept each other's feelings, as well as their own.
- Work through worry together. Either partner may envision a catastrophe every time the service member leaves for a military assignment. They can team up to overcome the worry habit.
- Avoid reading between the lines. Everyone has different communication styles and expectations. For example, will they both welcome frequent calls, texts, and emails, or will that seem like a subtle form of pressure? Tone and attitude are especially hard to convey via email or text.
- Let the partner explain why a call, text, or email hasn't been returned promptly; don't jump to conclusions.
- Communicate their expectations regarding fidelity and then let trust rule.

Reconnect after separation

No matter how eagerly they awaited a reunion, most couples find that living together after a long absence requires a readjustment. These tips may help:

- Allow time to adjust when they reunite. It may be awkward at first. If they've been apart a long time, they may think their partner seems different.
- Both of them probably will have developed routines on their own and will need time to transition to a new or restored flow as a couple.
- Don't misread jet lag or combat fatigue in the returning partner as a relationship problem.
- It's easy to romanticize each other across the miles, wiping out memories of annoying habits. Allow each other lots of space to be human.

If you are interested in providing non-medical counseling to military service members and their families through Military OneSource, please email us at mosproviderrelations@militaryonesource.com.