



Pre & Post deployment exercises

EXERCISE: SUPPORTIVE COMMUNICATION

Good talking in a relationship requires that both partners are also good at listening. Too often partners listen just to react, tell their views or give their advice. Good listening starts with getting out of your own world and understanding your partner's world. Great communication makes both partners feel understood in what they are sharing with each other. The ability to make your partner feel known and understood revolves around the ways that you listen. This exercise gives new and deeper meaning to the saying: "I'm all ears!"

PRE-DEPLOYMENT

During deployment there is a major increase in the need for supportive communication because there are few other ways to support because of the distance. Deployed partners need to learn to be supportive even though they are "helpless" to do anything about the problem!

Talk about the following responses that a deployed partner can give to a problem occurring at home. Discuss one or more of the ideas generated from the group. This gives new and deeper meaning to the saying: "I'm all ears!"

Empathetic: Supportive and sympathetic

Appreciative: Appreciate your spouse and his/her experiences

Reflective Inquire and ask for more

Suggestive: Advice and problem-solving discussions

POST-DEPLOYMENT

After deployment there are major changes in your communication because, contrary to your separation, you are both physically present during your talks and the amount of time for communication is almost always greater. However, the expectations that each of you has about your communication may be very different, leading to misunderstandings, conflicts and distancing. Many changes take place during deployment that can cause conflicts upon reunion unless a couple practices supportive communication!

Talk about the following responses that you can use when talking to your partner, especially when responding to a change that occurred during deployment that has created some need for adjustments. Discuss one or more of the ideas generated from the group. This gives new and deeper meaning to the saying: "I'm all ears!"

Empathetic: Supportive and sympathetic

Appreciative: Appreciate your spouse and his/her experiences

Reflective Inquire and ask for more

Suggestive: Advice and problem-solving discussions

EXERCISE: TALK TIME

Deployments always change communication. This is because of the distance, lack of face-to-face contact, and time restraints. In addition, there is typically a filtering of what you are allowed or think is advisable to talk about. This is true for both the deployed partner and the spouse at home. Use the following exercise to anticipate the changes your deployment will bring.

PRE-DEPLOYMENT

In deployed settings there is often a change in how you talk together. This is due to less time to talk, increased differences between the deployed setting and the civilian setting, and a lack of face-to-face interactions.

Anticipating these changes can help you find new ways to express your love and support while also deepening the feeling of knowing each other. These questions should be revisited periodically throughout the deployment so that you both share similar expectations.

1. Discuss the various ways you want to communicate with each other while separated (email, IM, text messaging, video cam, phone, letters, etc.).

PRE-DEPLOYMENT: TALK TIME cont.

NOTE: Some couples find immediate communication methods (IM, text messaging) a source of unchecked emotion and conflict. Talk about the pros and cons of this, and make an agreement with each other how and when you want to use these methods.

2. Some couples write to each other in a journal or letter and then send it periodically. They find this allows longer and more meaningful sharing. Talk about what you think of this and make a plan for where this will fit into your overall communication.

3. What are some things that you anticipate “filtering” or “censoring” in your talks? How are you going to handle this “selected” communication?

EXERCISE: OPENNESS & COMMUNICATION

Deployments always change communication, and reunions must realign the entire relationship. In most extended deployments, abnormal becomes normal. You get used to doing things without each other so that being together feels more abnormal than normal. The reunion requires that you re-establish “normal togetherness” which creates the opportunity to make areas of your relationship better than they were even before deployment. Use the following exercise to practice open communication and to discuss the adjustments you want to accomplish during your reunion.

POST-DEPLOYMENT

Having open communication with your partner during reunion is incredibly important. In order to have your needs met, you must voice them. It is also important to let your spouse know how you are feeling about reunion. Take some time and sit down together and discuss your feelings regarding your reunion experiences. Because these discussions may be difficult to have, below are some suggestions of sentences you can complete together.

Having you home has been....

Being home with you has been....

The thing I missed most about you is...

The hardest thing about deployment was...

Since you have been home, I wish you would...

Since I have been home, I wish you would...

POST-DEPLOYMENT: OPENNESS & COMMUNICATION cont.

I have really appreciated...

One thing that I wasn't prepared for...

If I could change one thing, it would be...

What I expect from you now that we are reunited...

What I believe you expect from me now that we are reunited...

The biggest adjustments to our reunion...

What I really want for us now that we are back together...

EXERCISE: EXPRESSING WHAT IS IN YOUR HEART

PRE-DEPLOYMENT

It is very important to stay positive and appreciative while separated, especially because of the feelings of wanting to help but not being present to accomplish it. Advice is usually not as important as compliments and appreciation.

List five things you appreciate and admire about your partner. Then face each other and look each other in the eyes and share these five things.

The love you have in your heart for your partner is the essential core of a healthy relationship. However, even though your partner knows that you love him/her, the lack of expression can cause insecurities, a weakened bond, and even doubts and vulnerabilities. It is important to know what your partner needs and likes in this area of love expressions. Write a brief love letter to your partner telling what you love about him/her. It can be difficult to put these feelings into words. So here are some beginning sentences you can finish.

Something you do that I really appreciate is...

One way that you show love to me that means a lot is...

Something I appreciate about what you do for me that I have been meaning to tell you about is...

I think you are beautiful/handsome because of your...

When we were apart, what I missed about you was ...

POST-DEPLOYMENT

It is very important to stay positive and appreciative after your reunion. During your adjustment there are bound to be expectations that are not met that can lead to resentments. However, when you major on the positives with compliments and appreciation then you can usually talk through any unmet expectations.

List five things you appreciate and admire about your partner. Then face each other and look each other in the eyes and share these five things.

The love you have in your heart for your partner is the essential core of a healthy marriage relationship. However, even though your spouse knows that you love him/her, the lack of expression can cause insecurities, a weakened bond, and even doubts and vulnerabilities. It is important to know what your partner needs and likes in this area of love expressions. Write a brief love letter to your partner telling what you love about him/her. It can be difficult to put these feelings into words. So here are some beginning sentences you can finish.

Something you do that I really appreciate is...

One way that you show love to me that means a lot is...

Something I appreciate about what you do for me that I have been meaning to tell you about is...

What you did while we were separated that I really appreciated was...

I think you are beautiful/handsome because of your...

When we were apart, what I missed about you was...

EXERCISE: ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

PRE-DEPLOYMENT

During deployment there is a major increase in the load of responsibility for the at-home partner. Under non-deployed circumstances, the military partner can pitch in and help with routine responsibilities, especially when there is a difficulty or crisis. However, the distance of deployment prevents this kind of hands-on problem solving. Deployed partners need to learn to be supportive even though they are “helpless” to do anything about the problem!

PRE-DEPLOYMENT: ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES cont.

1. Review the “I’m all EARS” Supportive Communication Exercise from session one before proceeding to the task of this exercise.
 - a. Empathetic: Supportive and sympathetic
 - b. Appreciative: Appreciate your spouse and his/her experiences
 - c. Reflective Inquire and ask for more
 - d. Suggestive: Advice and problem-solving discussions

2. List three of the most challenging new responsibilities that the stay-at-home partner will take on during deployment. Brainstorm 3-5 ways that this spouse can manage these new responsibilities with the least amount of stress. Be sure to include which of the four types of supportive communication (EARS) that you would like when you and your spouse talk about these responsibilities during your deployment.

POST-DEPLOYMENT: ADJUSTMENT & REALIGNMENT OF ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Reunions are often as stressful as separations. Because you or your partner has had to pick up the slack at home and has adjusted to life without a partner, it is important to prepare yourselves for how things will change when you are both back in the household. Below are some questions that can be used to help you and your partner prepare for some of the upcoming changes and possible stressors that accompany reunions.

First, think about these questions and discuss them with your partner. Next, create a “game plan” with your partner regarding the best ways to adjust to his/her homecoming.

For example, some deployed partners need time upon return to adjust to being home before resuming their typical roles. Or, sometimes a deployed partner wants to “jump right back in” to the responsibilities that the at-home partner has been covering. Does your partner (or do you) need time for adjustment ; and if so, what is an initial timeframe you can use before rethinking your changes and adjustment?

Also, sometimes couples may have different expectations of what their reunion will be like. Use this exercise to help coordinate your expectations. Be sure to talk about a future time when you can discuss your progress in this process.

POST-DEPLOYMENT: ADJUSTMENT & REALIGNMENT OF ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES cont.

FOR THE PARTNER AT HOME

- How will it feel to have your partner back in the household?
- What are some positive aspects of having your partner back in the household?
- What are some negative aspects to having your partner back in the household?
- How will having your partner home change your day to day routine?
- Have any major changes occurred while your partner was away? If so, how will these changes affect you and your partner's relationship?

FOR THE PARTNER AWAY

- How does it feel to be home?
- What have you looked forward to most when you have thought about returning home?
- Are there any negatives to returning home? If so, what are they?
- Have any major events occurred while you have been away? If so, how will these changes affect you and your partner's relationship?

FOR BOTH PARTNERS

- How will things be different now that you are back together?
- Discuss what you would like from each other now that you are back together again?
- Discuss how you would like your roles to change now that you are back together? For example, do you want to resume your previous routine and activities or revise them?

EXERCISE: ROLES & FINANCES

It can be rewarding—and sometimes challenging—to run the finances when a partner is deployed. There are fewer opportunities to “touch base” about purchases, requiring a greater trust and agreement between partners.

It can also be difficult making completely realistic financial goals because of unforeseen challenges and expenses during deployment. Therefore, you may need to review these goals periodically during deployment.

PRE-DEPLOYMENT

1. List five financial goals that both of you want to accomplish during this deployment.
2. If you were to monthly review your finances, what major areas would you want to discuss (e.g. savings, expenses, bills, anticipated expenditures, goals, etc.)?
3. Write out in 1-2 sentences promises you will make to your partner to stay supportive, understanding, complementary, flexible and thoughtful while also staying diligent in working toward your goals.

POST-DEPLOYMENT

Finances are often run by the at-home partner and the adjustment to working together can sometimes be challenging. It can also be difficult making realistic financial goals and managing a budget because of unforeseen expenses. Therefore, you may need to have clear roles or plans for working together to regularly review your financial goals and make necessary adjustments.

1. Describe how you work together in your relationship to manage your finances. Do you have specific roles or responsibilities? How often do you discuss money and your finances?

POST-DEPLOYMENT: ROLES & FINANCES cont.

2. If you were to monthly review your finances, what major areas would you want to discuss (e.g. savings, expenses, bills, anticipated expenditures, goals, etc.)?

3. Write out in 1-2 sentences promises you will make to your partner to stay supportive, understanding, complementary, flexible and thoughtful while also staying diligent in working toward your goals.

EXERCISE: CONNECTIONS

PRE-DEPLOYMENT: LONG DISTANCE CONNECTIONS

During deployment you may not feel as close to your partner as you did when together. Because of the long separation, it is not unusual to feel distant from your partner and uncertain about how to keep your feelings of connection and closeness. Long distance connections can be strengthened by creative activities and ideas that help you feel together even though you are apart.

With your partner, take some time to define what closeness means to each of you. In other words, how/when do you feel close to one another? Next, what are some deployment challenges to achieving this closeness? Finally, how can you overcome these challenges or compensate for them in order to kindle a feeling of closeness even though you are separated? Take turns completing this sequence.

PRE-DEPLOYMENT: LONG DISTANCE CONNECTIONS cont.

I feel close to you when...	A deployment challenge to achieving this closeness is...	We can overcome this challenge by...

Ideas:

Read a book together

Virtual dates (<http://www.fambooks.com/couples/coverpage.htm>)

Write a romantic poem

Write a book together by taking turns with emailing a paragraph back-and-forth to each other. Each new paragraph should continue the ideas and thoughts from the previous so that over time, the paragraphs develop a story that weaves together your different worlds.

Send a package filled with cards that have to be opened one-each-day.

Plan a vacation that you will take when reunited.

Go shopping together online.

Make a memory book. The following are suggested ideas:

- | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| Favorite vacation | First Car | Best friends of childhood |
| Summer camps | Pets | Pranks done |
| Athletic events | Concerts | Athletic achievements |
| Family stories | Best/worst jobs | Road trips |
| Spring breaks | Natural disasters | Shopping trips |
| Camp outs | Fishing | Sleep overs |
| Amusement parks | Cities visited | Bike rides |
| First apartment | College | Snow storms |
| Holidays | Beaches | Times of getting into trouble |
| First day of school | Ski trips | Best/worst teachers |
| Leaving home | Sibling stories | Historical events in your life |
| Best walk together | Favorite date | First time you noticed him/her |
| Best meal together | Favorite present | Most romantic moment |
| Favorite present | First date | Craziest thing you did together |
| Wedding day | engagement day | Most memorable vacation |
| Best weekend | First kiss | Favorite concert |
| Memorable birthday | Best sunset | Most embarrassing moment |

Used by permission from A & E Publishers. These are a sample of the activity handbooks for strengthening long distance relationships found on www.fambooks.com.

POST-DEPLOYMENT: RECONNECTIONS

After deployment you may not feel as close to your partner as usual. Because of the long separation, it is common to feel distant from your partner shortly after you reunite. Sometimes this awkwardness occurs immediately, and other times it is delayed. Creative activities and ideas can help you regain and even deepen the closeness in your relationship.

With your partner, take some time to define what closeness means to each of you. In other words, how/when do you feel close to one another? Next, what are some challenges to achieving this closeness? Finally, how can you overcome these challenges or compensate for them in order to kindle a feeling of closeness even though you are separated? Take turns completing this sequence.

I feel close to you when...	A challenge to achieving this closeness is...	We can overcome this challenge by...

There are many creative ideas that you can do in each of the 10 areas of intimacy (from session three) while separated. Many times couples find that they engage in intimacy-building activities while deployed that they neglect to do while together. In this way, the adjustment after deployment can be an opportunity to broaden your repertoire of loving and being together.

EXERCISE: CATCHING YOUR SECOND WIND

It is crucial to be able to work through difficult challenges. Commitment is both the source of this perseverance, as well as the bond that is exercised and strengthened as a result of the problems or hardships that you work through. Challenges create opportunities for growth. Anticipate returning after your deployment and work on each of these four steps.

PRE-DEPLOYMENT: LONG DISTANCE CONNECTIONS

1. Clean out your bad habits. First, identify two important priorities in your relationship that have kept you close through difficult times. Then come up with at least one way that you have acted in the relationship that has weakened your bond and commitment. Promise to stop this bad habit and to replace it with something better.
2. Establish some new habits. Deployments disrupt your normal way of getting along. However, when a deployment or crisis ends there is an opportunity to get into some new and better habits. You must be careful that you do not let the rush of life direct your choices. Determine one new way of practicing your commitment to your partner that will strengthen your relationship, especially during your deployment.
3. Form new connections that foster meaningful relationships. No matter where life takes you as a couple, you need to have an umbrella of support and friendships. It is very difficult to stay strong without the encouragement and involvement of others. "Friends sharpen friends like iron sharpens iron." Make a plan for how you are going to improve your friendships and reach out more often to those who benefit your relationship.
4. Find a positive way of looking at the hardships that you have worked through (or are still working through). Identify one or two benefits that can come from this situation or difficult time. Look past the situation itself and find something positive that has come out of it. Discuss ways that you want to look back on the situation that has challenged your relationship and write your story.

EXERCISE: RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN

POST-DEPLOYMENT

1. Help your children adjust to your homecoming. Reunions may be most difficult for children. Children may have a range of reactions regarding reunion, such as anger, shyness, acting out, or even confusion. In order to minimize the difficulty for children, it can be helpful to involve them in preparing for the reunion. But even if you have not done anything to prepare them, this exercise will provide you with suggestions for involving your child(ren) in the reunion process.

Something you can do before the reunion is to sit down with your child(ren) and discuss how they feel about their parent returning home and how they imagine the homecoming. The following can be done both before or after the homecoming. Talk about what types of things or activities they want to do now that their mom/dad is back home. Sometimes discussing these issues may be difficult. Here are some suggested questions:

What do you want to tell mom/dad most now that they are home?

What do you want to do with mom/dad now that they are home?

What do you think will be different now that mom/dad is home?

What have you missed most about mom/dad?

How do you think what we do everyday will be different now that mom/dad is home?

2. Involve the children in the homecoming. One way to help your partner adjust to being home, while not neglecting the children's needs is to have each child write the parent a letter. This letter can talk about what they have been doing while the parent was gone and what they missed about the parent the most. The letter can also contain a description of a "special day" that the child would like to have with the parent now that he/she is back home. This letter can be presented to the parent and can help to ease them back into their everyday routine at home, while keeping them connected with their children's needs.

POST-DEPLOYMENT: RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN *cont.*

3. Take time to reset the sharing of childcare responsibilities and the running of the home. Sometimes it may also be difficult for the parent returning home to be bombarded by all of the commotion and excitement of family life. He/she may need some down time to readjust to being home... or the at-home partner may want the returning parent to not “take over” right away. Discuss a plan for how you want to harmoniously “redistribute” responsibilities for the children.

Talk about the changes that are going to occur in the sharing of responsibilities for taking care of the children, discipline, transportation, and recreation. Discuss the amount of time you think you will need to acclimate to working together as a team.

EXERCISE: SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP & EXPECTATIONS

After a long deployment, it is not unusual to experience mixed feelings in your sexual relationship with your partner. Although most couples jump right back into sex with each other, many have difficulties within the first three months of their reunion. One thing that is important in regards to rekindling your sexual relationship is that you and your partner agree in your expectations about how the sexual relationship will be upon reunion.

This exercise can help you and your spouse to voice these expectations and, hopefully, resolve them before they become a sore spot in the relationship.

POST-DEPLOYMENT

Write your partner a letter (or talk with your partner) about how you imagine your first three months upon return from deployment. Include these three areas.

1. Anticipation: What do you want the mood be like when you are together? Talk with your partner about how much you have missed being together? Tell your partner what you would like and expect from your sexual relationship now that you are back together?

POST-DEPLOYMENT: SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP & EXPECTATIONS cont.

2. Resolution: Do you have any apprehensions about resuming your sexual relationship? Are there any sexual conflicts that preceded deployment that were never addressed or resolved? How would you like your sex life to be different after deployment than what it was before you deployed? What aspects of your sexual relationship before deployment do you want to not change now that you are reunited?
3. Romance & Affection: What nonsexual loving, affectionate and romantic things do you want to do with your partner after your reunion? What do you think would make your partner really feel loved? What are three to five ways you can express how much you love and value your partner.

EXERCISE: MAKING LOVE WITHOUT SEX

PRE-DEPLOYMENT

1. Write three ways you would like to be romanced during deployment, and then pass it to your partner. This reinforces the idea from session three that you need to “do unto your other as your other would like”—not what you think he/she wants.
2. Set dates during the deployment to do each thing on your list (your partner does not have to know the dates you have set). This will help to spark romance in your relationship ONLY if you do what you have promised. Setting a date will hopefully help move you to action!
3. Make up a new loving pet name for each other. Share these with the class and agree to use these new pet names over the next few weeks. Agree to use these new pet names during their time together before deployment so that it becomes a special name to use during their separation.

POST-DEPLOYMENT

1. Write three ways you would like to be romanced now that you are back together, and then pass it to your partner. This reinforces the idea from session three that you need to “do unto your other as your other would like”—not what you think he/she wants.
2. Set dates to do each thing on your list (your partner does not have to know the dates you have set). This will help to spark romance in your relationship ONLY if you do what you have promised. Setting a date will hopefully help move you to action!
3. Make up a new loving pet name for each other. If there is a pet name that relates to your deployment or your reunion then use that. Share these with the class and agree to use these new pet names over the next few weeks.

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER BEFORE AND AFTER DEPLOYMENT

SESSION ONE

PRE-DEPLOYMENT

How will your relationship change during deployment? Move the levels of the RAM to represent the changes that will occur during deployment.

How do you think your deployment will change the communication in your relationship? What effect will the lack of “face-to-face” communication have on your relationship and what are some things that you can do to help with this change?

POST-DEPLOYMENT

How did your relationship change during deployment? Move the levels of the RAM to represent the changes that occurred during deployment. Have you had adjustment challenges with any of the five areas of the RAM?

Discuss any benefits that have resulted from your deployment (use the five areas of the RAM to discuss these benefits)?

What did you do that you liked in your communication during deployment? How can you continue this now? What has been lacking in your communication over the course of your deployment that you want to bring back into your relationship?

SESSION TWO

PRE-DEPLOYMENT

Why is it even more important during deployments to help maintain a strong trust in your relationship?

What are ways that both the deployed and the at-home partner can strengthen the trust, respect and appreciation in the relationship?

POST-DEPLOYMENT

What are some of the “pebbles in the shoe” that result from your adjustment to being back together since the separation of your deployment?

What will help increase the feelings of being respected and appreciated now that you are back together?

SESSION THREE

PRE-DEPLOYMENT

Brainstorm activities in the top ten list that you and your partner can do “together” during deployment.

POST-DEPLOYMENT

What responsibilities still need to be revised and agreed upon (harmonized) in your home and with your children?

What are some of the unique and positive relationship activities that you did during your deployment that you would like to continue now that you are together?

SESSION FOUR

PRE-DEPLOYMENT

What helps you to keep your commitment strong over the course of a deployment?

What are some specific resources that you can draw upon to mobilize and/or cope during your deployment?

POST-DEPLOYMENT

What are some resources (personal, community, professional and relational) that you can draw upon to help you with any of your adjustment struggles?

SESSION FIVE

PRE-DEPLOYMENT

What are some of the important boundaries that both the deployed and the at-home partner need to respect in order to honor each other and insure faithfulness.

POST-DEPLOYMENT

What do you believe would help your partner feel sexually closer and more comfortable with you since your reunion?