

Speaker Notes

Title of Presentation: Challenges Faced by Dual Military Couples

Page 1 – none.

Page 2 – none.

Page 3 – none.

Page 4 – Ask participants if they can think of other positive aspects.

Page 5 – Ask participants to talk about other challenges they have faced.

- **Frequent separations:** As a dual military couple, you may be spending more time apart than in a typical military family. You may return from deployment just as your spouse is preparing to deploy.

Finding childcare when both parents are deployed: this issue will be addressed in later slides.

Differences in:

- **Rank:** especially with officer/enlisted marriages. They may not be able to relate as well to each other's career experiences and expectations.
- **Career fields:** can make it difficult to get assigned together if they have different specialties that are not needed at the same location.
- **Branches of service:** This can also make it difficult to be assigned together. Example: their branches may not operate in the same areas, or there may not be assignments available within both branches of service in the same area and at the same time.
- **Difficult career decisions may be necessary:** There may have to be trade-offs between career and family. One spouse may feel it necessary to pass up a career enhancing opportunity in order to stay together or so the other spouse can advance.

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- **Communication is key** – Make a commitment to communicate with each other often. It's important to talk to each other to coordinate family responsibilities, but you should also set aside time to connect with each other emotionally.
- **Connect with other dual military couples:** Seek out people who understand and support the dual couple lifestyle. If possible, find a mentor who can advise you on managing your career while married to another military member.
- **Focus on the positive aspects of your lives together:** Acknowledge the bond you have and the support and caring you have for each other. Acknowledge the challenges you have successfully managed together.
- **Recognize and support each other's career goals:** In order for a dual military couple to be successful they must have consideration for each other's career goals – taking the other's goals seriously. Take time to learn about your spouse's career field and offer support.

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- **Be flexible, and be prepared to switch roles:** when one person in the couple is deployed and the other is at home, the at home spouse takes on duties such as childcare and household duties, maintenance of vehicles and home. The roles can and do change, so it's important to be flexible and ready to make the shift.
- **Practice self-care and find balance in your life:** Take down time when possible. Try to eat well and get plenty of rest when you can. Participate in recreational activities. Do something fun. Connect with others who have similar interests. Get involved in hobbies.

- **Develop a support network:** This is one of the most important things you can do for yourself. Friends and family can help out at home when you are deployed or when you are the spouse at home and provide emotional support.
- **Take action in trying to find joint assignments:** Each branch of service has a program for assigning married couples to the same duty location or within 100 miles of each other. These programs also try to coordinate assignments of service members married to spouses of another branch of service.

Page 8 – Have a primary plan for childcare as well as a back up plan: Identifying a caregiver is the first step. Frequently children will stay with a grandparent, aunt or uncle. In some cases the relative is able to come to the family’s home and stay, so there is less disruption in the children’s routine. When family members are not available, children sometimes stay with friends of the family. In either case, it’s important to have a concrete plan in place well in advance of the deployment. **A back up plan:** Have another person or persons in mind in case the primary caregiver is unable to fulfill their commitment (this could be due to an accident or illness).

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- **Notify doctors, schools, daycare, dentists, teachers, etc.:** Let them know that you will be away and give them the name of the guardian and the guardianship papers. If teachers and daycare staff know about the deployment ahead of time, they can begin talking to your child and assist in helping them make the transition.
- **Spend extra time with your children:** Engage in fun activities with them – sports, movies, outings, etc.
- **If possible, allow the person who will be guardian to spend time at your house with your children and learn routines:** Even if your children will be staying at the guardian’s home, it’s important for the guardian to understand their routines. The more routine the children have, the easier it will be for them to make the transition.
- **Decide ahead of time how you will communicate:** Utilize email, phone, Skype if possible, and consider sending cards and letters.
- **Once deployed, communicate with your children and their caregiver regularly:** Both your children and you will benefit from frequent communication. It’s also important to communicate frequently with the guardian to discuss any issues that may come up.
- **Encourage the caregiver to talk with your children about you and their feelings about the deployment:** Having the children talk with the caregiver can help them deal with any fears and sadness they may have.

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- **Talk to your children as soon as possible once you are notified of your deployment:** Children need as much notice and information prior to your deployment as possible. Some children have difficulty with transitions and the sooner they find out and start preparing and adjusting to the idea, the better.
- **Let them know who will be taking care of them while you are deployed:** It’s best to have this decided **before** you talk to them. Telling them you aren’t sure who will be taking care of them yet, can create feelings of insecurity and fear.
- **Talk to your children in age appropriate language and give as much information as you can:** It can help with the anxious feelings they may have if they know where you’ll be and what you’ll be doing. We all feel a little more in control when we know what to expect. For young children, speak in simple language and stoop down to their level.

- **Allow your children to express their feelings:** Deployment can be scary for some children especially when both parents are deployed. Encourage your children to talk to you about their feelings and let them know all feelings are ok including anger and sadness.
- **Let them know you are both trained to do your jobs:** Since children worry about the safety of the deployed parent it is helpful for them to know the deployed parent is trained to do their job.
- **Discuss changes in lifestyle that may occur:** If deployment includes any changes like moving, new childcare/school changes - your child needs to hear about them. Knowing about changes in advance helps the child adjust to them.
- **Reinforce the emotional bond:** Give lots of hugs and kisses. A display of affection is powerful communication.

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Page 12 - none.

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Page 15 – none.

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