

Relationship Survival Guide

Laying groundwork for a healthy relationship *By Stephanie Weichert*

WHEN MY HUSBAND WAS deployed the day after we were married six years ago, I was devastated. He had been given three days official notice. Hours after our wedding, I stood there wondering how would I handle it. I didn't even have any relatives nearby.

Back then, there weren't many options for support for military spouses. Today, couples facing deployment have many.

I have recently found two programs that address the emotional aspects of life during deployment. These are programs I would have used during and after deployment. From conferences to live counseling sessions, they have a lot to offer, all at no cost to you.

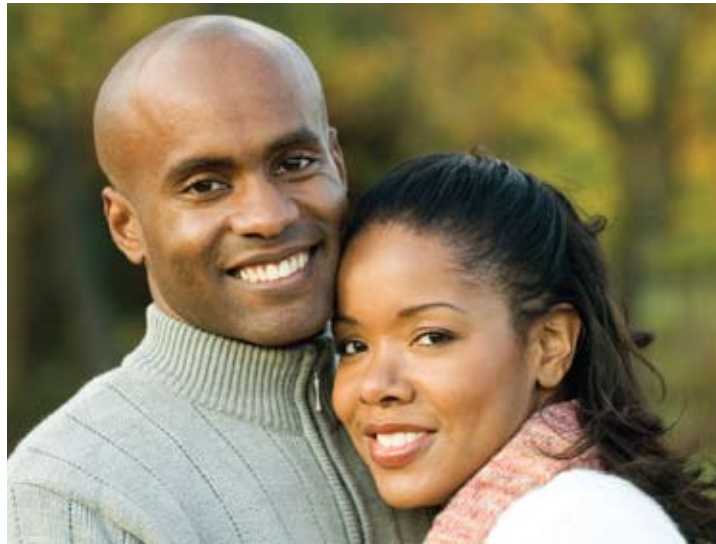
MILITARY AND FAMILY LIFE CONSULTANT

SIX FREE COUNSELING SESSIONS

Military and Family Life Consultant (MFLC) is an Army program run by a subsidiary of Health Net, designed to provide anonymous, confidential support to Soldiers and their families. This program uses licensed clinicians with a master's degree or Ph.D. and at least five years experience in social work, counseling or a related clinical discipline.

According to Health Net's Web site, Hnfs.net, the mission of the MFLC program is to provide education and information on family dynamics, parent education, and available support services, and to help the individual, family, or other groups to develop positive coping mechanisms.

"Military Family Life consultants address issues that occur across the military lifestyle spectrum and help service members and their families



cope with stressors related to deployment, war and reintegration," says Steve Read, State Family Program Director for California.

Soldiers and families are entitled to six prepaid, face-to-face counseling sessions. This means the Soldier and his or her spouse may attend counseling together or separately. They are both entitled to the benefits. MFLC counselors help with problems including:

- + Marriage and relationship issues
- + Family issues
- + Stress and anxiety
- + Depression
- + Grief and loss
- + Anger management

To sign up, call (888) 755-9355, anytime, 24/7. You will speak to a live agent who will assign you a case number. To protect your privacy, the agent won't ask for any personal details. You can select a therapist in your area either during the call or online at Mhn.com/member/start. To find a local therapist once on this page, click on the employee

assistance program and then enter your state, therapist preferences and ZIP code. Once you make an appointment, call the toll-free number and provide your case number, your therapist's name and your appointment date.

STRONG BONDS

FREE MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT CONFERENCES

Run by chaplains, Strong Bonds is a preventative program committed to the restoration and preservation of Army families, according to the Strong Bonds Web site, StrongBonds.org.

WHERE STRONG BONDS STARTED

The Strong Bonds program originated from the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), created by Scott Stanley, Ph.D., Howard Markman, Ph.D., and Susan Blumberg, Ph.D.

Research for the program included teaching PREP skills to select couples. These couples were then compared to couples who did

not receive the PREP education. After observing, testing and tracking couples over a period of years, researchers determined steps couples can take to avoid marital distress, and used the information to create a relationship enhancement program steeped in empirical research.

THE STRONG BONDS PROGRAM

Purchased by the Army in 1996, Strong Bonds features options for single and married Soldiers.

The Army National Guard offers free weekend marriage seminars, commonly called Marriage Enrichment Seminars. The seminars give practical advice on how to make and keep your marriage strong by addressing:

- + Root causes of marital problems
- + How to speak to one another
- + Event, issues and hidden issues
- + Listening techniques
- + Problem solving techniques
- + Supporting each other

DEPLOYMENT AND REINTEGRATION

In addition to the two-day seminar, food and hotel accommodations are also free to participants.

After being approved by their supervisor, Soldiers can use the weekend as a drill. Spouses of Soldiers driving more than 50 miles to the conference can be put on orders so that they can receive mileage reimbursement. Parents cannot bring children to the seminar, but the program does help pay childcare costs.

Couples interested in signing up can find an event online at StrongBonds.org. Click on "Find a Strong Bonds Event" and select Army National Guard. You can also call your local Army National Guard chaplain for more information. **CX**