

Stronger Than Separation

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The hardships of being married to the military have become a feeding ground for mainstream media these days. It's disheartening that the media only covers the hardships, deaths, and destruction of the Iraqi War. While it is a *war* to the American public, it is *life* to a military family, and life must go on. Admittedly there are hardships, but there are many strong marriages out there amongst military families. With all things in life there must be both positive and negative or things just won't work. It's hard though with all of the vultures flying around, to not wonder if your military marriage might end up as just another statistic. It doesn't have to be.

Surprisingly, in a survey conducted amongst military spouses on the topic of deployment affecting their marriage, many said that deployment actually made their marriage stronger. Let's explore what they are doing that is having this effect.

First and foremost, they're communicating. In this day and age it doesn't take four weeks for a handwritten letter to arrive stateside to know what your soldier is thinking. It's a simple instant message or email. Many of these successful couples are using technology to their advantage. Sandy Jones, a military spouse on her third separation says, "Every night before I head off to bed I write him a daily account of what went on for the day. I make sure to tell him how I feel, what we did, and any event that happened that day." Sandy says this keeps her connected to her spouse. She tells us this helps her keep a journal about the passing year, and they read these notes together when her soldier returns.

Military spouse Jennifer Hayden shares a tradition with her soldier. When he left on his second deployment she sent him with a stuffed animal. Her soldier then took pictures with the stuffed animal while he was away and sent them via email to her and her children. "The children thought of it as an adventure," Jennifer says, "we were always wondering where the animal would turn up next."

Many military spouses turn to online communities for ideas on staying connected. Others turn to books like Elaine Dumler's *I'm Already Home Again*, Gary Chapman's *Five Love Languages*, or Shellie Vandevoorde's *Separated By Duty, United In Love*.

All agree that you cannot replace those intimate moments of snuggling up close in bed, a backrub or a hug. You can be stronger than the separation though. It takes two, but you can bridge the gap of the distance by creating emotional intimacy with your spouse. Military spouse Heather Gorgonza, says "By my fourth separation I consider myself somewhat of an expert. I promise you there is no other time my husband would pour feelings into actual words like he does when he is deployed."

No matter how you put it, staying connected means staying in touch and making an effort to make your communication meaningful and purposeful. Creative ways to staying happy and connected are being found by military spouses everywhere, even if they aren't making the nightly news. Melinda Shaha, a new military spouse and contributor to www.LovingASoldier.com sums it up best. "Military wives live lives full of passion. The goodbyes with teary, long kisses; homecomings that make your heart skip a beat just like you were dating again; the first kiss after a deployment; having your heart ache with loneliness; getting really angry when something breaks and your man isn't around to fix it. While I obviously haven't lived through all of this yet - I am banking on the fact that strong emotions make you feel more alive than most people ever feel when they get into a marriage rut."