

MODULE 3

Reintegrating with Partners

Module Description

Purpose: *Reintegrating with Partners* helps Service members prepare for the mission of returning home to their spouse or partner by focusing on three areas: re-establishing connections, celebrating change and managing expectations. This module is similar to *Homecoming: Reintegrating with Partners*, a module provided to the non-deployed partner by The Fleet and Family Support Center.

Target Audience: Deployed Service members of all ranks who will return to a spouse or partner, whether newly married or those in a long-term relationship. This workshop is beneficial for first-time and experienced deployed members.

Module Length: 30-45 minutes. The time to facilitate this brief may be modified based on the needs and availability of the command.

Instructor Notes

Scripts: Instructors should become familiar with this curriculum and personalize the scripts to ensure facilitation feels natural without compromising the course content.

Activities: Instructors may modify or adjust the activities used in this curriculum to fit the needs of the command members. Activities are written with two options, allowing instructors to decide which one best fits their need:

- Option 1 – Handouts, paper or other materials are needed to complete this version of the activity.
- Option 2 – Additional materials are not required and this version can be conducted through lecture or discussion only.

PowerPoint Slides: PowerPoint slides are provided but not required. This module is designed so that it can be facilitated with or without the slides. If using slides, cues are provided for when animations occur.

Training Tips: Training tips are used throughout this curriculum to guide the content and recommend alternative methods of interaction.

FFSC Resources: An electronic copy of the *Deployment Support Handbook* is provided on this CD so command leadership may make it accessible to Service members from the command or through shipboard intranet.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this module, Service members should be prepared to re-establish face-to-face connections with their spouse or partner by building on the strengths in their relationship.

- During the *Rubber Band Hand* activity, participants will experiment with attempting to complete a simple two-person task alone.
- During the *Three Doors* activity, participants will practice listening and responding to three questions about their relationship and deployment.
- During the *Quick Change Exchange* activity, participants will share at least three strategies on how to deal with change.
- During the *Intimacy Journal* activity, participants will identify intimacy stressors and offer at least two suggestions to overcome these stressors.

Module Preparation

Materials

- *Module 3: Reintegrating with Partners* PowerPoint file or printed copy
- *Deployment Support Handbook*

Handouts (if available)

- *20 Questions* card deck
- *Intimacy Journals*

Optional Materials (if available)

- Computer
- Projector
- Rubber bands (one for a single volunteer, or, if conducting as a group activity, one for each participant)
- Index cards
- Markers
- Paper and writing instruments
- Timer

Course Outline

1. Welcome and Introductions (5 minutes)
 - a. Activity: *Rubber Band Hand*
 - b. The Power of Two
2. Re-establishing Connections (10 minutes)
 - a. Activity: *Three Doors*
 - b. Open Communication
 - c. Building Trust
 - d. Balancing Time
3. Growth and Change (5 minutes)
 - a. Activity: *Quick Change Exchange*
 - b. Finding Common Ground
 - c. Change is Constant
4. Managing Expectations (5 minutes)
 - a. Communicating Expectations
 - b. Avoiding Assumptions
5. Restoring Intimacy (10 minutes)
 - a. Types of Intimacy
 - b. Activity: *Intimacy Journals*
 - c. Tips from Couples
6. Closing (5 minutes)
 - a. *Deployment Support Handbook*

Content

Welcome and Introductions (5 minutes)

Slide 1: Reintegrating with Partners

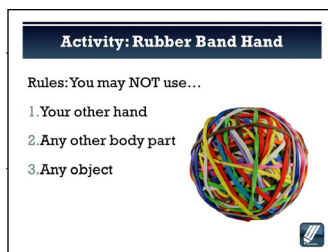


Provide the handouts and rubber bands (if available) as participants enter the training area.

Provide a brief welcome and introduction to *Reintegrating with Partners*.

SAY: Welcome to *Reintegrating with Partners*. The goal for the next 30 minutes is to help you prepare for re-establishing connections with your partner or spouse who is anticipating your return home.

Slide 2: Opening Activity: Rubber Band Hand



Ensure that all participants have a rubber band. If you do not have enough rubber bands for the entire class, you may use one rubber band and ask a volunteer to come to the front and demonstrate this activity.

SAY: Some of you may be wondering why I distributed rubber bands and what rubber bands have to do with return and reunion. We are going to use them to test your relationship resilience and see just how ready you are to return home to your partner.

SAY: Here's the test. Listen closely to my instructions.

[CLICK to animate slide]



Demonstrate how to perform the exercise.

1. Loop the rubber band over your right thumb.
2. Pull the rubber band along the back of your hand and loop it over your little finger. Bring the loop as far down as it will go on your finger.
3. Your goal is to get the rubber band off your little finger so that it is hanging off your right thumb again (just as when we started). But wait! We have three rules. You may not use:
 - a. Your other hand.
 - b. Your teeth or any other part of your body.
 - c. A table or any other object.

SAY: Good luck!

Allow 15 to 20 seconds as participants struggle to complete the exercise.



If a participant is able to complete the test, commend them for being one of the few persons to master the challenge.

ASK: It looks like most of you are struggling to pass the test. Do you need a hint?

SAY: We had three rules, but we did not say you cannot get help from another person.

Watch as participants help one another release the rubber band.

ASK: What would you say is the purpose of this activity?

Solicit feedback. Look for: teamwork.

SAY: Reintegrating to life at home with your spouse or partner is a two-person job. Both you and your loved one must be committed to engaging fully in the homecoming experience. In other words: There is power in two. When the two of you work together, communicate together and solve conflict together, you will strengthen your relationship and be better prepared to tackle deployments together.

Slide 3: Three Things



Add a personal touch by inserting your command's logo and/or ship's crest in the space provided on the slide deck.

SAY: There are three topics we will cover today, all of which require the power of two:

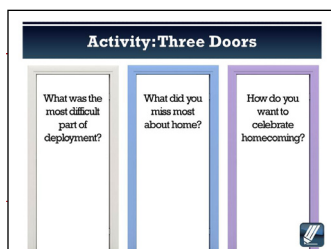
[CLICK to animate slide]

1. Re-establishing connections
2. Celebrating change
3. Managing expectations

SAY: Now let us start with our first topic: re-establishing connections.

Re-establishing Connections (10 minutes)

Slide 4: Activity: Three Doors



If you are not able to present from the slides, conduct this exercise using three imaginary doors. Example: "Let's suppose there are three doors. Behind each door is a question about deployment and returning home for you to answer. Which door would you choose? Door No. 1, 2 or 3?"

SAY: On the slide, there are three doors. Behind each door is a question about deployment and returning home. I want you to choose one.

ASK: Which door do you choose?

Have participants vote on which door to choose.

CLICK the door to reveal the question.

- Door 1: What was the most difficult part of deployment for you?
- Door 2: What did you miss most about home?
- Door 3: How do you want to celebrate homecoming?

SAY: It is time for all of us to get some practice. Pair up with a shipmate and take turns answering the question. If you feel that the question is too personal, it is OK to say so. However, instead of avoiding the questions altogether, let your partner know what you are comfortable discussing.

SAY: Make sure your shipmate has an opportunity to talk. You will have two minutes total; each person should have one minute to share.

Keep track of time. At the halfway mark (60 seconds), announce that it is time to switch.

Slide 5: Open Communication



SAY: This activity was meant to give you practice asking and responding to open-ended questions. I know that seems trivial now. However, face-to-face communication with your partner after a long separation can be awkward at first.

SAY: Open-ended questions will encourage meaningful conversations to strengthen your relationship, instead of closed-ended questions which, at a minimum, only require a “yes” or “no” response.

SAY: To make conversations about deployment, homecoming and reintegrating more engaging and less threatening, you can create a communication game with your partner.

SAY: You and your partner will make a list of questions that you want to know about each other. For example, the questions can be about deployment experiences, homecoming expectations, goals, finances, your relationship, intimacy and faith. Be imaginative and include some fun topics that explore your passions and dreams. Example questions may include:

- What surprised you most about homecoming?
- What did you miss most (or least) about home?
- In what ways has deployment changed you?

[CLICK to animate slide]

SAY: Write all of your questions down on a piece of paper together. When you get home, ask your partner to write a few questions down as well. Cut these questions out and use them as a deck of cards. The questions are a starting point for addressing topics that you and your partner may be thinking about but are hesitant to discuss.

Slide 6: Building Trust



SAY: Speaking of trust ... do you trust your partner? Are *you* trustworthy? Asking and responding to open-ended questions — as you did during the open communication game — is a good beginning. But what do you do with all the information that was shared?

SAY: Once you and your partner open up to each other, it is important to show that you listened by taking action on the things you discussed. Here are four ways to ensure that your actions will speak louder than your words.

[CLICK to advance slide]

1. **Pay attention to your partner's needs.** If your partner tells you that something makes them happy, continue doing it. If they say something makes them sad or angry, do your best to stop that action. If they share a personal goal, be supportive. If they share a fear, reassure them. If you are attentive to your partner's needs, they will be attentive to yours.
2. **Be a person of your word.** If you say you will do something, do it. If you say you will not do something, do not do it. If you say you will call, call. If you commit to being somewhere, be there. Following through tells your partner that you value them and the relationship.
3. **Take responsibility for your actions.** You are not perfect. You are going to make mistakes. Humility is more important than perfection. Acknowledge when you misstep and how it affects your partner. Your gesture of apology should be sincere and meaningful.
4. **Agree to forgive and forgo.** Your partner is not perfect either. Let them know when they have hurt you and forgo the hurt after talking it through together. Learning how to receive a sincere apology is just as important as learning how to give one.

SAY: Sometimes we need the help of a trained, objective party to help us build trust. Do not be shy about seeking professional help when you need it.

Slide 7: Balancing Time



SAY: Other ways to re-establish connections with your partner include balancing time with each other, and having time alone and time with family.

- **Quality time vs. quantity time.** There will be times when you and your partner will need time alone. It is important to honor these moments without feeling guilty or fearing that love is lost. When needing alone time, reassure each other that the relationship is safe and still intact.

[CLICK to advance slide]

- **Couple time vs. family time.** This can be especially challenging when you have children and other relatives who are eager to be a part of your homecoming. Communicate your homecoming expectations to your extended family and ensure that you and your spouse or partner are on the same page when it comes to balancing your time together.

SAY: Now it is time to address our second topic, “change.”

Celebrating Change (10 minutes)

Slide 8: Activity: *The Quick Change Exchange*



Option 1 - Quick Change Exchange

(Use this option if handouts or paper are available for activity. Option 2 follows this section. Go to Option 2 if handouts or paper are not available.)

SAY: The days leading to homecoming and reuniting with your spouse or partner can be thought of as a crossroad to change. You have faced some changes, and your partner has probably experienced change, too. Some of the changes will be an easy adjustment, while others may be difficult.

SAY: We all have dealt successfully with new circumstances. So, we are going to tap into our group’s wisdom. In a moment, I will ask you to write one tip that can help your shipmates deal with change. You will write it on the index card included with your handouts. Then, I will collect the cards, shuffle them and redistribute them.

SAY: First, take a minute to think about the most difficult adjustment you have faced. Perhaps it was moving to a new town, getting married, losing a loved one, joining the military or even going on deployment.

SAY: Once you have that situation in mind, reflect on how you adapted. What did you do to come to terms with the change? Write your words of wisdom on the index card now. Try to keep it to seven words or less. For example, perhaps you learned to “roll with the tide,” “express gratitude” or “not sweat the small stuff.”

Allow no more than one minute for this task. Gather everyone’s cards, shuffle them and redistribute them.

ASK: It is time to share some of the words of wisdom you received from your shipmates.

Ask three participants to read the index card in their possession. Facilitate a brief discussion about how to apply the advice when reintegrating with your partner.

Examples of change and adaptation for discussion, if needed:

- *Moved overseas; “Remaining open to new experiences”*
- *Spouse lost job; “Stay future-focused”*
- *Had a baby; “Be patient”*

Use one of the suggestions as an example to expand upon and apply it to returning to a partner.

Example 1: "Be patient."

ASK: *In what situations might you need to use patience when reintegrating with your partner? Responses may include getting reacclimated, readjusting roles and responsibilities, restoring intimacy, etc.*

ASK: *How will being patient help?*

Responses may include helping them have the ability and composure to hold back and wait for something to happen without feeling anxious, becoming irritated or panicked; having patience will help with regaining self-control; the ability to remain cool in stressful situations.

Example 2: "Remaining open-minded"

ASK: *In what situations might you need to remain open-minded when reintegrating with your partner?*

Responses may include if your spouse has made a change to his or her appearance or a change to their home while the Sailor was deployed or trying out a new restaurant/activity/class that your partner is excited about.

ASK: *How will being open-minded help?*

Responses may include helping to adjust your perspective, discovering a new experience that both you and your spouse can enjoy together or exploring multiple ways to tackle a challenge together.

SAY: As you complete the deployment, keep these cards, and refer to them as a reminder before reuniting with your spouse.

[Advance to next slide/section following Option 2.]



Option 2 - The Quick Change Exchange Lecture/discussion *(Use this option if no handouts or paper are available.)*

SAY: The days leading to homecoming and reuniting with your spouse or partner can be thought of as a crossroad to change. You have faced some changes, and your partner has probably experienced change, too. Some of the changes will be an easy adjustment, while others may be difficult.

SAY: We all have dealt successfully with new circumstances. So, we are going to tap into our group's wisdom. Take a minute to think about the most difficult adjustment you have faced. Perhaps it was moving to a new town, getting married, losing a loved one, joining the military or even going on deployment.

SAY: Once you have that situation in mind, reflect on how you adapted. What did you do to come to terms with the change? For example, perhaps you learned to "roll with the tide," "express gratitude" or "not sweat the small stuff."

ASK: Who has an example of a time they encountered change and what they did?

Solicit responses. Facilitate a brief discussion about how to apply the advice when reintegrating with your partner.

Examples of change and adaptation for discussion, if needed:

- *Moved overseas; "Remaining open to new experiences"*
- *Spouse lost job; "Stay future-focused"*
- *Had a baby; "Be patient"*

Use one of the suggestions as an example to expand upon and apply it to returning to a partner.

Example 1: "Be patient."

ASK: *In what situations might you need to use patience when reintegrating with your partner?*

Responses may include getting reacclimated, readjusting roles and responsibilities, restoring intimacy, etc.

ASK: *How will being patient help?*

Responses may include helping them have the ability and composure to hold back and wait for something to happen without feeling anxious, becoming irritated or panicked; having patience will help with regaining self-control; the ability to remain cool in stressful situations.

Example 2: "Remaining open-minded"

ASK: *In what situations might you need to remain open-minded when reintegrating with your partner?*

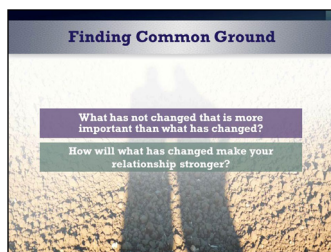
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ASK: *How will being open-minded help?*

Responses may include helping to adjust your perspective, discovering a new experience that both you and your spouse can enjoy together or exploring multiple ways to tackle a challenge together.

SAY: Keep the things we've just discussed in mind. They are good pieces of wisdom from your shipmates about what to expect and how to handle change when it comes to reintegrating into your life back home.

Slide 9: Finding Common Ground



SAY: Now that you have shared advice with one another, I would like to share two pieces of wisdom.

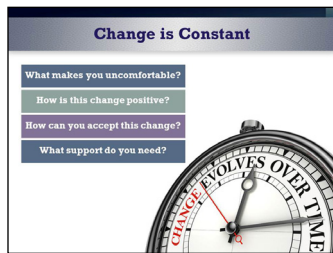
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SAY: There is a saying: "How can two walk together unless they meet on common ground?" One of the most productive ways to adjust to change is acknowledging the staples in your relationship that remain. Ask yourself, "What has not changed that is more important than what has changed?"

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SAY: Our second piece of wisdom is to “celebrate the growth that change brings.” Change is not always easy, but it usually helps us grow as individuals and as a unit. Ask yourself, “How will this change make our relationship stronger?”

Slide 10: Change is Constant



SAY: Change is constant, but it is seldom sudden or drastic. Change evolves gradually. It only appears drastic to you because you have not been home to experience the progression. If you or your partner feels uncomfortable with change, be patient with each other and discuss these questions:

[CLICK to animate each item below]

1. What makes you uncomfortable about this change? What is causing the resistance?
2. What is positive about this change? In what ways is this change good?
3. What can you do to make it easier to accept this change?
4. What kind of support is necessary to honor the changes that have taken place?

SAY: If you or your partner feels so strongly about change that you reach an impasse in your discussion, you might consider counseling. If you do not feel comfortable seeking counseling, you can find support through professional organizations and networking groups such as the Fleet and Family Support Center, that offer tools and resources to aid your situation.

Managing Expectations (5 minutes)

Slide 11: Communicating Expectations

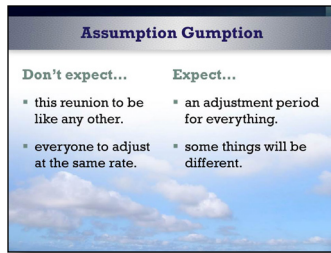


SAY: We have come to the last of our three topics: managing expectations.

SAY: One of the biggest problems with expectations is presuming people know what we want or need when we have never expressed it. This is common sense, yet we often hold others accountable to our unspoken expectations.

SAY: If you and your partner do not invest time discussing each other's desires and concerns, you both will be left making a lot of assumptions. Save yourselves time and hardship by having a conversation about realistic expectations, instead of hoping you will hit the mark. Have the gumption to avoid assumptions.

Slide 12: Assumption Gumption



SAY: When it comes to homecoming expectations, here are some points to consider:

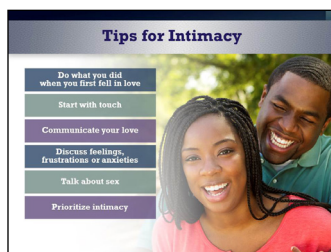
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- Don't expect this reunion to be just like others you have experienced. Service members and their families who have gone through multiple deployments say their experience depends on what is going on in their lives at the time of deployment.
- Don't expect everyone will reacclimate at the same rate. Although you and your partner are a couple, you are also individuals. Communicate openly with each other and respect the time you both need to readjust.
- Expect there to be an adjustment period for just about everything. You and your partner will have many adjustments to make. For example, you must transition from long-distance communication to face-to-face communication, the reassignment of roles and responsibilities, and, of course, intimacy. The adjustment period for these aspects of your relationship will vary. It does not matter what adjustment happens first; progress in any area is progress.
- Expect that some things about your partner (and home life, in general) will be different. Just as you have changed during the deployment, your partner has, too. They may have changed physically, gained new friends or acquired a new hobby. Your house or apartment may look different. You may feel like a stranger in your own home at first — even this is normal.

SAY: With predictable deployment cycles, most couples indicated they discovered a new “normal” within four to six weeks after homecoming. However, sometimes we need the power of three to help our relationships. Please seek professional help if you and your partner need additional support.

Restoring Intimacy (10-15 minutes)

Slide 13: Tips for Intimacy



SAY: Many of you have probably started to think, or even fantasized about, your first encounter with your partner.

SAY: Everything we have discussed today — open communication, balancing time, and celebrating change, contributes to restoring intimacy in your relationship.

SAY: There are many forms of intimacy: intellectual, emotional, physical and, of course, sexual intimacy.

SAY: Deployment created the opportunity to enhance intellectual and emotional closeness with our partners (e.g., through letters, email, phone calls, photos, videos and care packages). Homecoming gives us an opportunity to rediscover physical touch and sexual intimacy.

SAY: This can be a source of anxiety and stress for couples. It is normal to have concerns about intimacy, especially when you have been separated from your partner for an extended time.

SAY: Couples who have experienced deployment and homecoming express anxiety about ...

- Sexual performance
- Dealing with children and relatives
- Being naked in front of each other

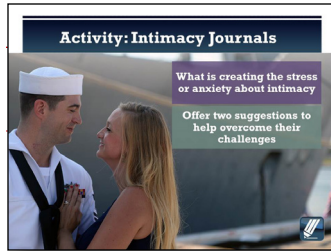
SAY: Spouses who are pregnant or who have recently given birth expressed feeling self-conscious about their appearance. Partners who have gained weight or lost considerable weight have expressed similar fears.

SAY: Understand that anxiety is a normal part of the reunion process. Sex may seem awkward at first. Expect some tension. Allow each other time and space by not rushing. Here are some tips to enhance your relationship and make sexual intimacy more comfortable:

[CLICK to animate slide]

- **Do what you did when you first fell in love.** You probably came together because you enjoyed each other's company, so use this time as an opportunity to date again. Both of you have changed, so take the time to get to know each other. Go out to dinner, walk in the park or on the beach, put on some music and dance, leave notes around the house, buy flowers, etc.
- **Start with touch.** Physical intimacy is not the same as sexual intimacy (although it can lead to it). Start with small acts of touching, like holding hands, sitting close to each other, stroking your partner's hair, giving a shoulder or foot massage, soft kisses on the cheek, hand or forehead. Sometimes less is more.
- **Communicate your love.** Communication can bring you closer. Partners may experience high or low sexual interest, and for the other partner, that may cause disappointment, disagreement or a sense of rejection. This may pass, but it is important to reassure your partner that you still love them.
- **Discuss feelings, frustrations or anxieties.** It is easy to let our imagination get the best of us and create anxieties. For example, a spouse who just had a baby may feel self-conscious about her appearance, while their spouse finds them sexy. By sharing these feelings with a partner, the partner can help ease that concern.
- **Talk about sex.** This can be fun in itself. Talking about your sex life is the single best method for improving it! Remind your partner of what you like (or dislike) and talk about what you feel comfortable doing (or not doing). It is important to have a light heart when having these discussions. If your conversation is too serious, you may end up becoming frustrated or offending each other.
- **Prioritize intimacy.** Do not put so much emphasis on the sex aspect of intimacy (whether good or bad) that it overshadows the joys of being a couple. Allow the emotional, intellectual and physical (touching) aspects of affection to be building blocks to sexual intimacy.

Slide 14: Activity: *Intimacy Journals*



Select two or three scenarios to discuss with the group. If the Intimacy Journals handout is not available, instructor may read the scenario aloud.

SAY: Now that we have had an introduction to restoring intimacy, it is time to read the journal entries of couples who are expressing intimacy issues after deployment. The journals are based on fictional characters. However, their situation describes issues that many couples face when it comes to restoring intimacy.

SAY: Our job is to help these couples by ...

[CLICK to animate slide]

1. Identifying what is creating the stress or anxiety about intimacy.
2. Offering at least two suggestions to help them overcome their challenges.

SAY: As we help these couples, think about everything we discussed about re-establishing connections through open communication, balancing time, celebrating growth, and honoring change.



If not using the handout, do not include the following sentence.

SAY: You will need the *Intimacy Journals* handout.

All scenarios are written from the Service member and the spouse/partner perspective.

Scenario 1

Service member: During deployment, I had these incredible fantasies about being intimate with my partner. I don't know if I set myself up for failure or what, because sex has been nothing like I imagined it to be. Every time I try to be intimate with my partner, something gets in the way. Our parents came for back-to-back visits and, of course, our three children. I wish my partner would just relax.

Spouse/Partner: My partner returned home from deployment with sex on the brain! That would be great if our parents weren't visiting and we didn't have three children. I told my partner that I do not feel comfortable having sex in a house full of people. On top of that, I am exhausted from taking care of everyone. He thinks I am just coming up with excuses. He says our parents expect us to have sex and that the kids can't hear us. Why doesn't he get it?

ASK: What might be creating stress or anxiety for this couple?

Possible responses include different views on when sex is appropriate is causing frustration. Spouse/partner may feel stressed and overwhelmed tending to family and children.

ASK: What suggestions might help this couple overcome their challenges?

Possible responses include respect each other's feelings and compromise. Ask the parents to watch the kids and get a hotel room. Space out future visits from extended family so the couple can have quality time alone.

SAY: This couple needs help balancing couple time with family time. They may need to be reminded that a loving marriage is one of the greatest gifts they can give to their children and extended families. They may also need to sit down and renegotiate their roles and responsibilities.

Scenario 2

Service member: Since coming home, sex has been incredible! Unfortunately, that is the only thing worth bragging about. Nothing else is as I expected it to be. I don't agree with some of the changes my partner made while I was away, but I don't want to be offensive changing everything back to the way it was before. Having sex is far better than having an argument.

Spouse/Partner: Since my partner returned home, sex has been fantastic! But I have noticed that when we are not being intimate, we don't talk at all. I still don't know what my partner's deployment experience has been like. And my partner doesn't seem interested in hearing what life was like for me at home juggling things while they were away. We both have changed so much. Outside of the bedroom, I feel like we don't know each other anymore. I just want us to hold each other and have a meaningful conversation.

ASK: What might be creating stress or anxiety for this couple?

Possible responses include not spending enough time communicating. Service member is avoiding dealing with the changes. Sex is defining the relationship.

ASK: What suggestions might help this couple overcome their challenges?

Possible responses include agree to talk before or after making love, spend time together in a public setting (e.g., dinner, walk in the park, etc.) where they do not have the opportunity to have sex.

SAY: Although sex is good, this couple needs help sharing their experiences and addressing the changes that have taken place in their household. Spending time in a public place where they can talk without the distraction of sex is a good idea. Initiating conversation can be difficult. Here are a few examples to get the conversation going:

Scenario 3

Service member: Deployment was tough. I'm happy to be home, but I am physically and mentally tired and, quite frankly, sex is the last thing on my mind. My partner has gained some weight and thinks that is the reason why. I tried to explain that this is not true. I just need some down time. I want to relax in my comfortable bed, soak in the tub and catch up on doing nothing. I want to talk about my experience, but no one understands what I've been through.

Spouse/Partner: My partner has returned from deployment and doesn't seem interested in sex at all. Our love life was great before the deployment began, so it must be because of the weight I gained while we were apart. My partner says I look fine, but I don't believe it. If I were attractive, we would make love more often. I am trying to lose weight, but it's hard.

ASK: What might be creating stress or anxiety for this couple?

Possible responses include partner is insecure and rejected; service member just wants to relax, possible operational stress.

ASK: What suggestions might help this couple overcome their challenges?

Possible responses include sharing their experiences, discussing change, dealing with insecurity by exercising or improving diet, give service member space and focusing on other aspects of intimacy.

SAY: The partner is obviously feeling insecure and the service member may be dealing with some operational stress. They may also need to balance time with each other and time alone.

SAY: To help, this couple may benefit from communicating their love by prioritizing intimacy. Sharing their experiences, lessons learned and goals will build emotional and intellectual intimacy. Communicating their love and engaging in physical touch (holding hands, sitting close to each other, etc.) takes the pressure off sex and builds security in the relationship.

SAY: Exercising together and making other lifestyle changes to improve health can be a source of bonding. These changes are good for the partner's body image and help the service member deal with operational stress.

SAY: If the service member continues to struggle with operational stress, they should seek professional help.

Scenario 4

Service member: I was deployed to a combat zone and returned home two weeks ago. My partner and I had sex once and it was bad ... OK, it was really bad! I can't blame her for not wanting to try again, but on top of all the other stress in my life, I am sexually frustrated. I am starting to believe my partner had an affair while I was risking my life! When I confronted her about being unfaithful, she broke out crying. What in the world does that mean? Was she unfaithful or not?

Spouse/Partner: My partner returned home from deployment two weeks ago. So far, we have only been intimate once and it was extremely awkward. I know my partner wants more sex, but I'm just not in the mood. I thought by now we would have readjusted roles in the family, but I am still managing the entire household. Sex feels like another chore. My partner is getting impatient and has even accused me of having an affair. I wish I wanted to have sex, but I am just not interested.

ASK: What might be creating stress or anxiety for this couple?

Possible responses include issues with all forms of intimacy (intellectual, emotional, physical and sexual). Partner is tired and overwhelmed; service member may have operational stress.

ASK: What suggestions might help this couple overcome their challenges?

Possible responses include sharing their experiences, discussing the renegotiation of roles and responsibilities, self-care, and focusing on other aspects of intimacy.

SAY: Let's address the partner first. The partner may be tired and overwhelmed and is ready to renegotiate roles and responsibilities. The service member returned two weeks ago. Most families feel "normal" within four to six weeks after homecoming. Some families can take up to six months to stabilize their relationship. The partner's expectations are probably unrealistic.

SAY: The service member may also have unrealistic expectations regarding intimacy.

SAY: To help, this couple may benefit from communicating, managing expectations and implementing a self-care plan that allows them to spend quality time together and alone. Focusing on intellectual, emotional and physical intimacy will help build trust and sexual intimacy.

Slide 15: Tips from Couples



SAY: Here are some additional tips from couples who have experienced deployment:

[CLICK to animate slide]

- Court your spouse even before homecoming day through letters, emails and phone calls.
- Make "love" every day, to include doing things with and for each other — smiles, kisses, gentle touches, cleaning the car, cooking meals, etc.
- Expect intimacy to be awkward at first. Start with tried-and-true techniques.
- Tell your partner how much you love and appreciate him/her.
- Respect and trust each other.

Solicit additional suggestions from participants.

SAY: The *Hints for a Happy Homecoming* handout, found in the *Deployment Support Handbook*, offers additional tips to enhance your relationship.

Closing (5 minutes)



If you have made the Deployment Support Handbook available on the Intranet, refer participants to it. If it is not available, let them know that their friends and family at home may have received it at a deployment briefing or they can check the FFSP website or go to their local FFSC.

SAY: The *Handbook* has pre-, mid- and post-deployment tips that may have been helpful for your family and friends back home. It also includes installation, community and national resources to help you experience a positive homecoming.

Slide 16: Closing



SAY: Thank you for your attention during training today. I hope you use these tips when re-establishing connections with your spouse or partner.

REINTEGRATING WITH PARTNERS

20 Questions

20 Questions is a communication game that builds intimacy, honesty, openness and trust. The questions are a starting point for addressing two topics that you and your partner may be thinking but are hesitant to discuss:

- Deployment and Homecoming
- Relationship and Intimacy

Play *20 Questions* whenever you want to feel closer to each other, when you believe communication is becoming an issue or even when you just want to have fun!

Rules of Engagement

1. Pick a topic and play in a private and intimate setting when you and your partner will have uninterrupted time together. Be comfortable, face each other and do not be shy. Give eye-to-eye and hand-to-hand contact!
2. Decide how long the game will last. For example, you can agree up front how many questions each of you will ask. Another option is to set a time limit on the game. Only play longer if you both agree you want to continue.
3. Take turns answering each question, using as much time as you need to respond. In spite of your discomfort in answering some of the questions, try your best to answer them, even if you have to “pass” until the end of the game.
4. Respect your partner’s feelings. When it is your turn to listen, do so without judgment, opinion or interrupting.
5. The blank cards are for you to customize with your own questions. Be imaginative and include other topics such as finances, faith or fun topics that explore your passions and dreams.



20 Questions: Deployment and Homecoming

Tip: Print or copy the cards front to back. Laminate and cut the cards and store them in a safe place.

How would you describe your overall deployment experience?

What surprised you most about homecoming?

What was the best (or most difficult) part of deployment?

What did you miss most (or least) about home?

In what ways has deployment changed you?

How did you spend your downtime during deployment?

What was your greatest fear about homecoming?

How will you let me know when you need time alone?

20 Questions

Deployment and Homecoming

20 Questions

Deployment and Homecoming

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20 Questions

Deployment and Homecoming

What changes make you uncomfortable? What changes are you pleased to see?

What has been your biggest adjustment?

How will we know when/if we need help adjusting?

What do you wish I would do more (or less)?

What new things did you learn during deployment?

What are your expectations for reintegrating?

What makes you feel most relaxed?

What would constitute a perfect day for you?

20 Questions

Deployment and Homecoming

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Deployment and Homecoming

20 Questions

Deployment and Homecoming

What are your expectations for
how we maintain our home?

What would make our
home more comfortable?

For what do you feel
most grateful?

How do you like to
spend quality time?

20 Questions

Deployment and Homecoming

20 Questions

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Deployment and Homecoming

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Deployment and Homecoming

20 Questions: Relationship and Intimacy

Tip: Print or copy the cards front to back. Laminate and cut the cards and store them in a safe place.

What three things do we
have in common?

What do you think is
our greatest strength
(or weakness) as a couple?

What do you believe it takes
to have a good relationship?

What do we do really
well together?

What concerns you most
about our relationship?

What do you need
most from me?

Have I ever hurt you in a way
you have never told me about?

What song best describes our
relationship and why?

20 Questions

Relationship and Intimacy

20 Questions

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20 Questions

Relationship and Intimacy

How do you prefer to
handle differences?

What is the most important
expression of love?

What past experience (good or
bad) can affect our future? How?

What would you like us to spend
more (or less) time doing?

What are we doing when
you feel closest to me?

What does intimacy
mean to you?

What do you want me to
know about you?

In what ways do you wish I would
express my love for you?

20 Questions

Relationship and Intimacy

20 Questions

Relationship and Intimacy

20 Questions

Relationship and Intimacy

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20 Questions

Relationship and Intimacy

20 Questions

Relationship and Intimacy

20 Questions

Relationship and Intimacy

20 Questions

Relationship and Intimacy

What are you feeling in
this very moment?

How would you define a
good sexual relationship?

How often would you
like to have sex?

What do you believe is
your purpose in life?

20 Questions

Relationship and Intimacy

20 Questions

Relationship and Intimacy

20 Questions

Relationship and Intimacy

20 Questions

Relationship and Intimacy

20 Questions

Relationship and Intimacy

20 Questions

Relationship and Intimacy

20 Questions

Relationship and Intimacy

20 Questions

Relationship and Intimacy

REINTEGRATING WITH PARTNERS

Scenarios: Intimacy Journals

Scenario 1

Spouse/Partner: My partner returned home from deployment with sex on the brain! That would be great if our parents weren't visiting and we didn't have three children. I told my partner that I do not feel comfortable having sex in a house full of people. On top of that, I am exhausted from taking care of everyone. He thinks I am just coming up with excuses. He says our parents expect us to have sex and that the kids can't hear us. Why doesn't he get it?

Service member: During deployment, I had these incredible fantasies about being intimate with my partner. I don't know if I set myself up for failure or what, because sex has been nothing like I imagined it to be. Every time I try to be intimate with my partner, something gets in the way. Our parents came for back-to-back visits, and of course, our three children. I wish my partner would just relax.

Scenario 2

Spouse/Partner: Since my partner returned home, sex has been fantastic! But I have noticed that when we are not being intimate, we don't talk at all. I still don't know what my partner's deployment experience has been like. And my partner doesn't seem interested in hearing what life was like for me at home juggling things while they were away. We both have changed so much. Outside of the bedroom, I feel like we don't know each other anymore. I just want us to hold each other and have a meaningful conversation.

Service member: Since coming home, sex has been incredible! Unfortunately, that is the only thing worth bragging about. Nothing else is as I expected it to be. I don't agree with some of the changes my partner made while I was away, but I don't want to be offensive changing everything back to the way it was before. Having sex is far better than having an argument.

Scenario 3

Spouse/Partner: My partner has returned from deployment and doesn't seem interested in sex at all. Our love life was great before the deployment began, so it must be because of the weight I gained while we were apart. My partner says I look fine, but I don't believe it. If I were attractive, we would make love more often. I am trying to lose weight, but it's hard.

Service member: Deployment was tough. I'm happy to be home, but I am physically and mentally tired and, quite frankly, sex is the last thing on my mind. My partner has gained some weight and thinks that is the reason why. I tried to explain that this is not true. I just need some down time. I want to relax in my comfortable bed, soak in the tub and catch up on doing nothing. I want to talk about my experience, but no one understands what I've been through.

Scenario 4

Spouse/Partner: My partner returned home from deployment two weeks ago. So far, we have only been intimate once and it was extremely awkward. I know my partner wants more sex, but I'm just not in the mood. I thought by now we would have readjusted roles in the family but I am still managing the entire household. Sex feels like another chore. My partner is getting impatient and has even accused me of having an affair. I wish I wanted to have sex, but I am just not interested.

Service member: I was deployed to a combat zone and returned home two weeks ago. My partner and I had sex once and it was bad ... OK, it was really bad! I can't blame her for not wanting to try again, but on top of all the other stress in my life, I am sexually frustrated. I am starting to believe my partner had an affair while I was risking my life! When I confronted her about being unfaithful, she broke out crying. What in the world does that mean? Was she unfaithful or not?