

How to Strengthen Your Relationship: 14 Ways

Whether your marriage is strong, rocky or somewhere in between, the fact is many could stand to strengthen their relationship. A loving, resilient marriage is a source of personal happiness and family joy. A solid relationship also lets service members focus on their mission and daily duty requirements.

But good relationships take effort and attention, especially military relationships. Contact Military OneSource for free, confidential, non-medical counseling services, if you and your partner need extra help to connect or communicate. Whether it's reconnecting and rediscovering one another in daily life or dealing with deployment separation, here are 14 ways you can supercharge your relationship.

Nine everyday ways to better connect

You maintain your vehicle to get better performance and keep it running in good condition, right? Apply that same care to your marriage. A bit of regular attention goes a long way.

1. **Talk:** Take 15 minutes a day to talk with one another. Share your day's highlight. Hard to find time at first? Put it on the calendar until it becomes a natural part of your day. Talking is key to connecting.
2. **Listen:** When your partner is talking, give your full attention. Turn off the TV. Put down your cell phone. To show you're listening, repeat back the gist of what was said, starting with "What I hear you saying is..." Remember: Everyone wants to be listened to.
3. **Share:** Make an extra effort to share your thoughts and feelings with your partner. This can be tough for some of us. But stepping up to share boosts your connection to one another.
4. **Think:** Simply think of your partner. Send an email or text during the day, telling your partner "I love you," "Thinking of you," or something else. If your partner has a presentation or otherwise has to do something important, write a note or text "Good luck!" Check out Love Every Day to help you get started.
5. **Work:** Split the workload in a way where you both feel it's even and one partner isn't bearing the brunt of everyday chores, for example, too much of the laundry, dishes, cooking, grocery shopping, etc. Splitting the workload lets you both set aside time to connect with one another over fun stuff.
6. **Have fun:** Set a regular date night. Go dancing — or learn to dance. Take up a sport or activity together, whether it's tennis, playing cards or walking. Check out your local Morale, Welfare and Recreation program.
7. **Create rituals:** Those special things you do together — whether it's a regular date night, an evening stroll after dinner or a goodbye kiss before work — help to root relationships.
8. **Give space:** Give space to your partner to connect to his or her friends, or pursue an interest or hobby. You're a couple, but you're each an individual. Part of strengthening your relationship means keeping up with friends and interests.

9. **Appreciate and support:** Studies show that couples who stay together have far more positive interactions and make fewer negative comments to one another.

Relationship strengthening takes effort. But the results are worth it. Consider military couples counseling. You can access free, confidential, non-medical counseling services through Military OneSource by calling 800-342-9647 or via the Military and Family Life Counseling Program — contact the program through your installation’s Military and Family Support Center.

Five steps to fortify your relationship during deployment

While deployment can add a strain to a relationship, you and your partner can take steps to prevent or minimize that — and even nurture your relationship through deployment. Remember: continue to give your relationship attention throughout the deployment cycle. Here are five steps:

1. **Talk about your feelings.** Discuss your upcoming separation. Make time to talk about your feelings, listen to your partner and plan how each of you will manage during your time apart. Make this time special. If you have children, get a sitter and spend a few hours alone with your spouse in honest conversation.
2. **Plan how you will stay in touch.** Discuss how you’ll communicate: email, phone, video chat or snail mail. Which ones are the best to connect the two of you? What’s realistic? Your relationship is the connection between the home front and the mission. Plan how to stay connected.
3. **Share daily happenings.** First, keep busy and stay active. If you have children, keep them occupied and on track. When you communicate, fill each other in on your daily routines, updates on children, work, activities and friends and family. Think about creating an online journal with pictures your spouse can access over the internet. This builds the connection, while keeping your spouse updated on home front activities. Share songs that remind you of each other.
4. **Send care packages.** Everybody enjoys receiving care packages. Sending them can be fun too! Deliver a little piece of home to your deployed spouse. Be creative. Include treats, funny notes and items of special meaning for both of you. Include homemade coupons, reminding your spouse of the special things you’ll do when your partner returns.
5. **Communicate when you can.** Be realistic about communication. Your deployed spouse may be in an area with limited mail or email service or cannot respond right away. Remember, sporadic communication doesn’t mean your spouse doesn’t care.

Like anything in life, preparation, follow through and being realistic can help you keep your special bond strong during deployment.