



Deployments are never easy and as most military couples know, they can be hard on relationships. As a dual military couple and veterans of several long term deployments, we can honestly say that using the tools of the weekend, especially dialogue; can help keep you connected heart to heart. We know it is not easy and that in many cases daily dialogue as we learned it will not be possible, but with a little adjustment and effort couples can make dialogue happen and being able to connect on a feeling level can make all the difference in your relationship. Here are a few things we recommend.

BEFORE DEPLOYMENT

Before the deployment we encourage you to make daily dialogue a priority. It can help you deal with the stress and in some cases draw you closer together. Here are 13 questions to mix into the dialogue questions you have already selected. Remember it is important to mix things up with serious and fun questions. The most important thing is to share your feelings!

What is one special thing I would like to plan for us to do when you/I get home? How do I feel sharing this with you?

What is one household task of yours that I do not look forward to?/What is one household task of mine that I will not miss? How do I feel sharing this with you?

What will I miss most about you while we are apart? How do I feel about that?

What is one thing I will do to deal with stress while we are apart? How do I feel sharing this with you?

How do I think we will best be able to communicate during this deployment (phone, email, letters, all)?
How do I feel about this?

What bills would I like to get paid off with the extra money from this deployment? How do I feel sharing this with you?

What portion of deployment pay do I think should go right into savings? How do I feel sharing this with you?

What is one new thing that I would like to learn during this deployment? How do I feel about that?

What is my greatest fear as this deployment approaches? How do I feel sharing this with you?

Which memory of us will I hold on to during this deployment? How do I feel sharing this with you?

What is one thing I would like to do together before you/I go? How do I feel sharing this with you?

How much personal spending money do I think I will need each month? How do I feel about that?

DURING DEPLOYMENT

During the deployment is when daily dialogue becomes challenging, but not impossible. We wrote a dialogue each day using the questions on the calendar. We just spent a little more time describing the feeling since the verbal part of dialogue was not always possible. Sometimes we would do a running

letter and include dialogue. This allowed us to add a few lines during the day when we had a minute or two and then end that day with the question, "What was my strongest feeling today?"

In this age of electronic communication, sometimes email is regularly available to the one deployed. While this can make dialogue easier, we would encourage you to also use regular mail for your dialogue letters. There is something so much more personal about a handwritten letter that can be held and kept and read again, and that can be missed on a computer screen. An actual letter can provide a much stronger sense of connection with the loved one so far away.

Another way to dialogue during deployment is to use Scripture dialogue. This can also help you to stay spiritually connected. Chose a book of the Bible to start with and agree on a segment (usually a chapter) to read each day. For example if your deployment goes through Easter, you could choose the Acts of the Apostles as a starting point then continue to the Epistles. If you have a pamphlet publication, like Magnificat or Living with Christ, which provides you with the daily readings, you can perhaps decide on writing your letter on the Gospel reading of the day. Your question might be, "What do I hear God telling me in this reading and What are my feelings about that?" This method of dialogue can help you to transform a deployment into a significant faith journey.

If you choose not to use the calendar or scriptures, send each other a list of questions and then agree on the order that you will use them. A few hints for communications during deployment:

1. Remember that mail is not always consistent. Number and date your letters and packages so when things arrive in batches, they can be opened and read in order.
2. Remember that sarcasm doesn't translate well in letters or emails. Even though you think that your spouse will know that you were only joking, it is best to avoid this.
3. During phone calls pick one of the feelings that you shared since the last call and dialogue on that feeling as best you can.

Even though communication is not always easy or consistent during this time, making the effort to share feelings with each other can create a heart to heart connection between you in spite of the distance. Don't forget to pick some fun questions to help you both stay positive.

AFTER

People think that this should be easy, but anyone who has been through it will tell you that it can be a time of tip toeing around each other as you try to reconnect. If you have been 'dialoguing' in whatever way worked for you, you may find it a little easier to reach out to each other. One thing you can count on is that there will be issues that need to be resolved. Dialogue tenderizes your hearts and allows you to approach those issues with full knowledge of the feelings involved. Sometimes this provides a new lens for seeing what is important and allows you to face those issues together rather than from opposing sides. As you return to daily dialogue there are a few things you should keep in mind.

1. This is a 10 and 10- 10 minutes of written dialogue and 10 minutes of verbal dialogue. Do not try to make up for the time you were apart.
2. Stick with the feeling during the verbal dialogue. Do not try to solve problems or find solutions. Remember, being able to experience your spouse's feelings can help to change the lens that you use when you address the issue outside of dialogue.

3. Give yourselves permission to enjoy the process of reconnecting both physically and emotionally.

This time is a new beginning for you as you go back to daily dialogue. It can be a time of growth and discovery. Remember lots may have changed while you were apart. Use dialogue as part of rediscovering the person you love. You might even want to consider making another WWME weekend as a welcome home gift to each other.

What was my strongest feeling when we spotted each other at the homecoming? Describe feeling in loving detail.

What did I miss most about you while we were apart? How do I feel sharing this with you?

What is one thing that I would like to do together during our leave? How do I feel sharing this with you?

What did I learn about you during this deployment? How do I feel about my answer?

If we could afford to go anywhere on vacation, where would I choose? How do I feel sharing this with you?

What is one of the tasks you normally did that I enjoyed doing while you were gone?/ What task that I normally did before deployment do I look forward to doing again? How do I feel sharing this with you?

What is one thing that I do differently now than I did before the deployment? How do I feel sharing this with you?

How do I feel sharing a bed together? Describe feeling in loving detail.

What was the hardest thing for me to get used to while you/I was gone? How do I feel sharing this with you?

What was my biggest frustration during this deployment? How do I feel sharing this with you?

How successful were we in paying off bills during this deployment? How do I feel about my answer?

How successful were we at savings during this deployment? How do I feel about my answer?

We know that deployments and redeployments are never easy, but we believe that our WWME weekend strengthened our relationship and using the tools that we learned helped us to not only survive several, but to grow closer to each other. It is a Journey of Discovery...Enjoy!

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(Both Retired US Army)*