



Keeping Relationships Strong



Our relationship is a connection of love between us – even when we are apart.

Figuring It Out Together

Your relationship is always there – across the miles, months, and years. Whether you are together or apart, your relationship with your child is there too. Even if you are the parent who is physically away, you are present in your family member’s memories and lives.

Adults can hold the picture of others in their minds, even though videos and photos are still treasured and enjoyed. This is not true of a

young child before age 2. Even when he can hold a picture of his most important adults, that picture can grow fuzzy or disappear when he is stressed or tired. Your child relies on you to help him feel safe. Your presence energizes him to be able to play, explore, discover, and learn.

During a deployment, there are many things you and your partner can do together to keep your relationship strong – and your relationship with your child strong.

Before Deployment

Take a moment to notice things you do each day that keep your relationships with your partner and child strong. These hold the seeds of how you can keep relationships strong when you are apart. Here are some examples to get you started thinking about what you do to keep your relationship with your partner strong:



Share daily routines.

Routines are like familiar dances where everyone knows the rhythm and steps. They can be comforting and reassuring. Routines can be making the coffee in the morning, emptying the dishwasher every evening, or buying muffins on Sunday morning.



Talk together about how you and your child are growing and learning.

For example, meet with your child’s teacher, talk with her healthcare provider, or discuss these Family Pages with each other and with your home visitor.



Support and reassure each other during bumpy times–

There will be difficult times at work, at school, with other family members, or with friends. Show your support by having a weekly time that you arrange for child care and take a walk or go out for dinner to check in and talk about life. Leave each other *I’ve got your back* notes on the bathroom mirror or on the fridge.



Enjoy family photos, videos, and stories.

Are there photos around your home? Do you regularly scroll through photos and videos on your phone? Are there stories that get repeated often. You are creating your family’s history.



Listen to music, sing, and dance together.

Hearing and moving to music can be very relaxing.



Laugh together.

Watch cartoons or share jokes or something you or your child said or did that is funny.



Other ideas?

There is a lot of overlap with how you keep your relationship strong with your child. Here are some ideas to start you thinking about the things you do:



Share daily routines,

such as mealtime, bedtime, diapering and toileting, bathing, and dressing. Talk, sing, and be together during these parts of daily life.



Comfort your child when he is upset.

Hold him. Listen to him. Rock him. Rub his back. Assure him you are there to keep him safe or help him calm down.



Enjoy family photos, videos and stories.

Sharing family photos, videos, and stories can be special moments that deepen and celebrate your family and your relationship.



Listen to music, sing and dance together.

Hearing and moving to music can be very relaxing.



Laugh together over silly games, songs, and jokes.

Whether on the couch, at the kitchen table, indoors or outdoors, on a bus, in the car, at the store or waiting at the health clinic, laughing together brings you and your child closer.



Other ideas?



During Deployment

Build on what you already do to keep connections strong when a parent(s) is away:



Bridge the distance and keep communication open...

Through phone calls, texts, emails, web chats, packages, and letters.



Keep routines consistent.

Talk about “Mommy’s place at the table” as you and your 2-year-old eat dinner. Mention how Daddy keeps his boots here on the rubber mat too when he is at home.



Create physical reminders of the parent who is away.

For example, your child might be comforted and fall asleep with a t-shirt that belongs to and smells like his deployed parent. (You might want to have one too.) Other examples could include keeping the away parent’s coat hanging on the coat hook and having plenty of family photographs around the house; make sure some are at child-level.



Make videos of the deploying parent singing, getting ready for work, washing dishes, or whatever else that parent does around the house before deployment.

Then watch and enjoy the videos while that parent is away.



Record the away-parent reading a few bedtime stories.

Listen to them, at bedtime or during the day – whenever the time is right.



Share family photos and stories from home and away.

Share photos and stories of the amazing, funny things your child says and does. Your Service member can also share photos of daily routines – activities that a child is familiar with like eating, dressing, or sleeping but be careful not to worry or scare the child.



Laugh and play together even though you are apart.

Family members can participate in the same activity as the Service member who is away, such as reading the same book, playing the same game, or working on the same puzzle. You can sing and dance together on video calls.



Other ideas?
