

## WVNG Coffey Break

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### Building Resilience through Relationships



"...emergency services? Help!  
I have three minutes to find a  
Valentines card or I'm a dead man."

Welcome to the February 2011 edition of the WVNG Coffey Break, a monthly Wellness publication for all WV National Guard members and their families. The objective is to promote wellness, readiness and resilience by providing information and resources on topics relevant to daily living.

This month's topic stresses the *importance of strengthening resilience* by building and improving

our relationships. Of course, we all know that February is Valentine's Month, a time designated to show that "special someone" that you love them. And although I believe this "holiday" has gotten out of hand regarding expectations attached to it, February is a good month to reflect on the relationships in our lives and take an account of their health status. This article will address four types of relationships: marital, single/dating, the special needs child, and friendships. All of us fit in at least one of these categories. So please, take a few minutes to read the following article before hitting "Delete" on your computer.

**“My wife says I never listen to her. At least I think that's what she said.” ~Author Unknown**

The mission of the National Guard Psychological Health Program is to advocate, promote and guide National Guard members and their families by supporting psychological fitness for operational readiness. For contact information regarding the Director of Psychological Health in your state or territory or other resources, go to: [www.jointservicessupport.org/](http://www.jointservicessupport.org/)

#### Qualities of Healthy Marriage

- Growing in friendship and respect as well as love for each other
- Focus on interdependency
- Share interests and activities together
- Share in decision making
- Live within their financial means
- Show that you're proud of each other's achievements and give realistic praise
- Express more praise than criticism
- Be empathetic and attempt to understand and meet your partner's needs
- Enjoy a healthy, non-destructive use of humor
- Engage in health promoting physical activities together
- Practice forgiveness and be willing to receive forgiveness from your spouse



**Break** (brāk) definition *verb.*  
To interrupt or stop *break a habit*, *noun.* A respite or brief pause *taking a break*.

## Coffey Break

### Qualities of a Healthy Marriage

Anyone who is married can tell you that, while marriage is a fantastic experience, it also requires a lot of work. Movies and books often portray marriage as a solely romantic experience where one is swept away to eternal bliss. This image is harmful to the ordinary marriage because it is not realistic and gives a false impression. Individuals going into marriage with this view are soon disillusioned when they settle into normal, everyday living. And although the honeymoon phase is wonderful, it is virtually impossible to maintain that constant "high" forever. Long, enduring marriages are ones that have experienced and worked through many obstacles. They've weathered storms and come out stronger. How do they do it? Research has shown the most important part of achieving a strong, solid marriage is communication.

### Eight Communication Tips

1. **Know how to say I'm sorry:** Marriage is a partnership, not a competition. There is no reason to feel that you always need to be right, or that you can't acknowledge you made a mistake. The greatest lesson to learn in marriage and the most important of the communication tips in marriage is to learn to say "I'm sorry."
2. **Say what's on your mind, but not everything:** It's important to express what we are feeling. Holding your feelings inside, and letting them simmer, usually results in outbursts, frustration and anger. At the same time, saying everything is unnecessary. Thoughts such as 'you look fat in that dress', 'you really goofed up that job', and 'I wish you were more like so and so' are hurtful and don't help the relationship. Speak your mind, but use tact.
3. **Don't generalize:** Though in the heat of the moment it may seem true, it is unlikely that your spouse *always* forgets to call when she's stuck in traffic, or that your husband *never* cleans up after dinner. If we try hard, we will remember that, even if this is a frequent occurrence, there are times that our partner has been helpful, considerate, and kind. Try and focus on the current problem, and leave what happened yesterday there.
4. **Don't assume your spouse is a mind reader:** Typically, after spending a long time with someone, we assume that they obviously know what we meant or how we are feeling. This is, however, not always the case. Very often when there is a miscommunication and a flare up, mind reading is at fault. Communicate what you are feeling; don't just assume your spouse should know.
5. **Learn to say I love you, and mean it:** You would be surprised at the healing and building powers those simple words can have when said sincerely. Everyone needs to hear these words – and your spouse is no exception.
6. **Listen to what your partner has to say:** Listening has two parts to it: hearing the words and understanding them. Don't assume you know what your spouse is about to say. Actually listen to the words that are being communicated, and process them before you respond. Attend to your partner both physically and emotionally. This means that you stop washing the dishes when your husband needs to talk or you shut off the game if she has something to say. Make eye contact and turn your bodies to face one another. All these will give your partner the feeling that you care and are interested in what they have to say.

"A first-rate marriage is like a first-rate hotel: expensive, but worth it."

~Mignon McLaughlin

7. **Learn to respond without being critical to your spouse:** In the heat of an argument, we often say things we later regret. Remember that this person is someone we truly love. Be sensitive to each other. Think how what you are about to say will make him/her feel. Make your point without breaking your mate.

8. **Communication is not just for arguments:** Most of all, remember that communication is not just for arguments. Talk to each other about your day, your fears, your thoughts and your feelings. Call him/her up in the middle of the day just to say hello. Leave notes to show you care.

## *Breaking Away with Dr. Daniela Lupu*

### The Love Trail

Connection, companionship, love are the elemental experiences of life that we need as human beings to flourish and thrive. They can provide buffers against physical and emotional illness, enhance one's ability to respond to life's challenges and help in reaching one's potential. Finding, choosing a life partner and maintaining a relationship are the most important activities in one's life. Abraham Maslow, a psychologist in the 50s and 60s, identified a hierarchy of needs with belonging and love and esteem needs being at the top. Erik Erikson, another psychologist, described an 8 stage model of normal human development. Based on his model, love/intimacy versus isolation is the primary focus of people between the ages of 20 to 45.

No wonder a multi-billion dollar business flourishes with a primary focus on telling you what is attractive, what to wear, say, and how to behave to attract that special someone. This comes to a full crescendo during the month of February where one is bombarded with TV and internet advertisement showing two lovers embrace as they shower each other with beautiful and expensive gifts. These staged scenarios and messages do sometimes have a kernel of truth but they are not the complete story. If it were as easy as buying and having all the right stuff, break ups and divorces would be figments of our imagination. The more complete image is that the process of getting to this desired destination is like hiking an uncharted part of the Grand Canyon. The path is adventurous, the views are breathtakingly beautiful and at times a bit frightening. It's not uncommon to get lost and need to recalculate the route. Joy, disappointment, hurt, exhaustion and hope are emotions felt along the journey. As any good hiker will tell you, proper preparation and equipment as well as stamina are needed for a successful hike.



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- **TAKE STOCK** What should you carry in your love backpack? Begin by taking inventory of yourself. Knowing yourself better will enable you to make better informed decisions. What are your values, strengths, abilities, interests, passions? What personal areas do you need to grow and change in? An honest account of who you are and what motivates you will help you be more deliberate about knowing what you want and who you are seeking.
- **GHOST OF RELATIONSHIP PAST** Review your past relationships and look at the type of person you gravitate towards. What were the things that worked and how did you contribute to that? If your relationships are full of drama, frequent arguments, intense highs and lows, ask yourself what attracts you toward that type. What is the cost of being in such a relationship to you? How might you contribute to the drama? Are you looking for commitment or afraid of it? Is the drama something you want in your life or want to change? A moth loves the light but more often than not the end is not a pretty one.
- **BOUNDARIES** Have clear boundaries and know ahead of time what is negotiable and non-negotiable for you in a relationship. Maintain healthy connections and hobbies outside of the relationship. Spending 100% of the time with your partner is not healthy for you or for the relationship. Balance the time between being with your love and your other interests and responsibilities. Don't expect that the other person will fulfill all your needs. It's an impossible expectation that ends in disappointment.
- **TIME** Give yourself time to get to know the person. Love makes us do foolish things. Studies of the brains of people in love have shown a decrease in brain activity in areas involving critical judgment and decision making. As with any relationship, patterns do eventually emerge. That's when you can see how the two of you work through differences, approach decision making and respond to those quirks that irk at times.
- **REACH OUT** It may be that you have observed several patterns repeating themselves through your relationships and you may feel stuck. Consider discussing these patterns with trusted friends or family members whom you see as being in *healthy* long-term relationships. Consider also talking with a trained counselor where confidentiality is respected and strategies can be developed.

Ayn Rand said "To say "I love you" one must first be able to say the "I."

Knowing yourself better will enable you to search more clearly and effectively for that special someone. Then will the two of you walk together hand in hand into that beautiful sunset.



## *Cooke's Choice by Donna Cooke*



### **It Takes a Special Village!**

Clearly, one of the most effective ways to create a happy and loving home life is to be a happy and loving parent. Being a parent gets challenging for everyone and it has been said that “it takes a village” to raise a child. But did you know that it really takes a *special village* because it can be an even greater challenge for those parents of a special needs child?

In addition to the inherent stressors all parents face, the physical and developmental needs of the special child pose more worry and physical demands than what we realize. These parents tend to feel guiltier and often wonder how they and their child will be perceived by others. The unexpected need for child care can sometimes be nearly impossible to arrange if immediate family is not readily available. Financial needs are greater due to increased travel to special appointments or services, time off work, and the climate of healthcare in general. Parents of special needs children often disagree with each other on how to best rear their child, causing a strain on their marriage, particularly when one parent is overprotective and the other seeks to foster independence.

How can you help create a *special village* for that special child and make a happier home for all?

- *Develop a friendship* with the family of a special needs child. Special needs parents often feel isolated and alone. Take the first step to become friends. Remember, the parent can be too overwhelmed reach out to you. Perhaps you have a friend or a few ladies from your church that can help. Arrange a meet and greet over coffee.
- *Learn about community resources* available and how to access those resources. Given that resources vary depending upon where you reside, an excellent place to start is with your local Military Family Life Consultant, Tina Nibert, and your Military OneSource Consultant, Patty Snodgrass. State Youth Coordinators, Donna Truman and Susan Izzo have a lot of information available also.
- *Next, roll up your sleeves and offer physical assistance.* Prepare a heat and eat meal when you know there's an all day appointment coming up. Offer to pick up the other children from school or take them to extracurricular activities. Perhaps check on or sit with an elderly grandparent to free up the parent. Assisting with household chores or picking up items at the grocery store can be so helpful. No offer of assistance is too small! Find out all you can about the child's disability. Perhaps you can then train up to provide some childcare if an unexpected situation arises.
- *Arm yourself with information* from Military OneSource, American Red Cross, and your local library.
- *Contact a Director of Psychological Health (DPH)*! We are here to serve and will be more than happy to point you in the right direction. Let's all work together....one happy home at a time!



[WWW.MILITARYONESOURCE.COM](http://WWW.MILITARYONESOURCE.COM)



“Basically, the only thing we need is a hand that rests on our own, that wishes it well, that sometimes guides us.” ~Hector Bianciotti

## *The Final Sip*

As a parent, I've often used quotes in order to make a point to my children, especially when it came to values and relationships. One such expression used was, "In order to have a friend, you must first know how to be one." Far too many people are looking for a friend rather than taking the time required to be a friend.

The definition for "friend" I most like is "a person you know well and trust." Delving deeper into this definition, the word "trust" is one that is often used without giving full thought to its meaning. To trust someone means to have complete confidence in them....that they will have your best interests at heart and be honest with you, no matter what the situation.

Trust is essential to true friendship. We all need someone with whom we can share our lives, thoughts, feelings, and frustrations. We need to be able to share secrets with someone, without worrying that those secrets will end up on Facebook the next day. In true friendship, there is no backbiting, no negative thoughts, no turning away. Real friends encourage one another and forgive one another when there has been an offense. Genuine friendship supports during times of struggle. And if we are really blessed, unconditional love develops.

Thomas Fuller once said "if you have one true friend, you have more than your share." Likewise, I encourage you to be that true friend to someone else. Similar to marriage, friendship takes mutual work. When a friendship becomes one-sided, it ceases to be a friendship. Both must exert the effort to keep in touch and update with each others' lives.

So, I ask you...."Are you trustworthy? Is your life more about receiving friendship or giving friendship?" I encourage you to build your resilience in the coming months by taking time to create a new relationship or nurture an existing one. Identify what qualities you would like in a friend and spend time with individuals who most exemplify those qualities. More importantly, though, once you have identified the qualities you would like in a friend, work on becoming that kind of person. The dividends will be two-fold....becoming the you that you've always wanted to be and attracting a friend that has qualities you most admire.

"Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art... It has no survival value; rather is one of those things that give value to survival."  
- C. S. Lewis



Happy Valentines Day!

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Feedback on this article is welcomed. If you have a concern about yourself or a family member, feel free to contact Donna, Daniela, or myself. Contact information is listed below. Services are free and confidential. We look forward to hearing from you. So.....Step back , take a Coffey Break, and Drink to Your Health!

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