

# *In Love and Deployed: Making the Marriage Decision*

## **Overview**

What to think about before deciding to get married.

- Reasons you may consider getting married
- What a strong marriage looks like
- Questions to ask yourself before getting married

Deciding to get married is one of the most important decisions a couple will make together. If one or both of you are facing deployment, you may feel pressure to get married right away, before you are separated. It is never a good idea to rush into a marriage. If your relationship is strong, it will survive a deployment. If your relationship isn't healthy and happy to begin with, getting married won't make it better; it will only make matters more complicated. Before making the decision to get married, take an honest look at yourselves alone and as a couple and talk together about how you see your future. You may want to meet with a chaplain or respected adviser to discuss your thoughts and your plans.

## **Reasons you may consider getting married**

There are many reasons a couple may want to get married. The trick is to recognize which ones are the right reasons, and which ones are not reason enough to make a lifelong commitment.

Marriage may be right for you if

- *You can imagine yourself together far into the future.*
- *You share the same basic values.*
- *You both feel the same way about having children and agree on how to raise them.*
- *You feel your partner brings out the best in you, and your partner feels you bring out the best in him or her.*
- *You respect and appreciate your partner.*
- *You communicate well with one another.*

You should think twice about committing yourself to another person if

- *You are afraid your relationship will fall apart during the deployment.* If you doubt your relationship will last a separation, it probably isn't strong enough to last a lifetime.
- *You want your girlfriend or boyfriend to be eligible for your military benefits, such as health care and a housing allowance.* While this is certainly tempting, by itself it is not reason enough to enter into a legally binding contract with another person, which is what marriage is.

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- *You think marriage will “change” you or your boyfriend or girlfriend.* Perhaps you think marriage will cause your partner to settle down or give up certain habits or addictions. Keep in mind that marriage won’t change anything. In fact, it may make matters worse by raising the stakes for each of you.

### **What a strong marriage looks like**

The healthiest marriages are ones where communication is open, frequent, and respectful. Here are some common characteristics of a strong marriage:

- *The couple discusses their feelings, hopes, and dreams honestly.*
- *When a conflict arises, the couple talks it through with mutual respect for the each other’s feelings and point of view.*
- *During heated disagreements, the couple will know when it’s time to walk away to cool down and collect their thoughts.*
- *Both members of the couple are willing to make up after an argument.*
- *The partners acknowledge that they will have differences and they learn to accommodate them.*
- *The partners don’t expect one another to stay exactly the same over time.* They learn to appreciate each other’s changing interests, views, and even appearance.

### **Questions to ask yourself before getting married**

A marriage is a coming together of two people, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Within each of these areas fall certain issues that are critical to a successful marriage. To help you determine whether you and your partner are compatible in each of these areas, ask yourself the following questions:

#### **How well do you communicate?**

- *Are you happy with the way decisions are made in your relationship?*
- *Have you discussed and agreed upon your long-term plans? Do you know what each of you will be doing after the deployment?*
- *When you are discouraged and depressed, does your partner offer encouragement and support?*
- *Are you comfortable asking your partner for what you want?*
- *Are you satisfied with the way you communicate with each other?*

#### **How well do you handle conflict as a couple?**

- *Do you tell one another when you are upset about something?* Neither one of you should be afraid to tell the other when you’re unhappy, but you both should be

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willing to try to resolve the matter in a way that is respectful of the other's feelings and viewpoints.

- *Are you or your partner quick to lose your temper?* Do you argue over petty matters? Married partners fare better when they are able to recognize which differences should be aired, and which ones aren't worth getting upset over.
- *Do you criticize one another in public?* Criticizing your partner in front of other people is a sign of disrespect and should be treated as a warning sign of an unhealthy relationship.
- *Do you or your partner frequently bring up past mistakes?* A good way to get along is to leave the past alone and focus instead on the present and the future.

#### Do you agree on finances?

- *Do you know how much your partner earns?* Does your partner know how much you earn?
- *Do you trust your partner with your money?* Are you comfortable sharing a checking account and credit card?
- *Do you have similar financial goals?* Have you discussed savings and investments?
- *Can you develop a budget together and stick to it?*
- *Do you agree whether you should both work?* What about after you start a family?
- *What will happen if one of you becomes disabled?* Will the other be able and willing to help support the family?

#### Do you share the same expectations of physical intimacy?

- *Are you satisfied with the way your partner shows affection?*
- *Are you comfortable talking with your partner about sex?*
- *Do you doubt your partner can remain faithful?* Do you or does your partner become easily jealous? Jealousy can be a sign of mistrust. There is no place for mistrust in a relationship.

#### Are you in agreement about children?

- *Have you discussed when to start a family?* Do you agree on the number of children you would like?
- *Do you agree on how to raise and discipline children?*
- *Do you agree on the role religion will play in your lives and the lives of your children?*

What about family, friends, and personal habits?

- *How do your family and friends feel about your partner?* Things will go more smoothly for you if they support your relationship.
- *How do you feel about your partner's family and friends?* They'll be part of your life after you are married so you should get along with them.
- *Do you agree on how to spend your free time?* You don't need to spend all of your time together, but you should be in agreement on what you do -- together or separately -- when you're not working.
- *Are you generally pleased with your partner's behavior in public?*
- *Do you agree on housekeeping issues, such as how tidy your home should be kept?* Are you in agreement about owning pets?

Marriage is a commitment that should not be rushed into. It's always best to hold off until you or your partner returns from a deployment. Then, take an honest look at yourself, your relationship, and what each of you expects from a marriage before deciding whether to get married. Talk with your chaplain or other trusted adviser. If available, attend premarital classes through your community services center. If you go into marriage prepared for the future, you are likely to enjoy a strong and healthy relationship that will last a lifetime.

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