

THE USO PRESENTS



A MONTHLY SERIES FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

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*You're Leaving... Again?*

WITH MATT & CORIE WEATHERS



[www.uso.org](http://www.uso.org)

# You're Leaving... Again?

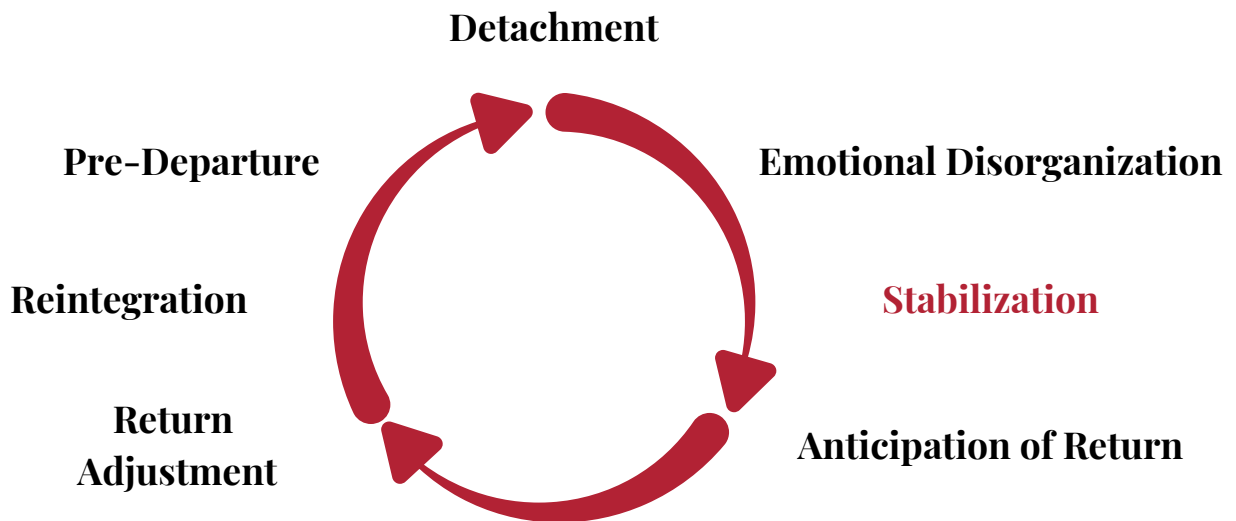
PARENTING FOR ALL STAGES AS A UNITED FRONT  
MATT & CORIE WEATHERS

Spending any time apart as a family can be difficult, but as a military family that happens more often than you would like. In fact, many military families spend almost half of their married time apart.

*How do you keep a marriage and family strong despite the distance?*

This series aims to answer that question. We believe that your relationship can not only stay connected, but it can actually grow and deepen even when you are apart. Whether you are going through a deployment, TDY, unaccompanied tour, temporary geo-batching situation, or other extended separation, this series is for you.

**SEPARATION CYCLE- Finding a new pattern while living apart.**



## PARENTING WHILE APART

Parenting as a team is challenging enough, but trying to do it while apart is especially difficult. Military couples *want* to remain a team during military initiated separations, but this can feel unrealistic if the service member is unavailable for long periods of time or on a mission. The supporting spouse is easily tempted to take the lead on parenting at home while the serving spouse feels disconnected and powerless from a distance. This can create tension, conflict, and a pattern within the marriage and family and that makes reintegration even more challenging.





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## PARENTING THROUGH VARIOUS STAGES

### Important truths to remember:

1. **Comparing yourself to other parents (especially over social media) is not productive or beneficial. Your confidence and strengths may vary in each developmental stage.**
2. **Parenting, especially through a separation or deployment, doesn't necessarily get easier. Rather the joys and demands change each time.**
3. **Kids benefit from different parenting styles from each parent but based on values that are agreed upon by both.**
4. **Consider surrounding your family with appropriate support from those in your community or family (i.e. female or male voices from coaches and teachers).**
5. **Remember each partner's parenting experience is valid and real to them.**

Parenting styles will evolve as your children progress through each developmental stage. It can be easy to worry about your child's development and attachment to the service parent, especially during those early years. However, resist the urge to parent out of fear or create a "good cop/bad cop" scenario. Instead, constantly work through how you can help each other parent successfully from wherever you are.

### Infancy- Toddlers (0-3)/ Pre-school (4-5)

For the supporting spouse:

- Focus on your own self-care.
- Take advantage of childcare support.
- Use resources like USO's Bob Hope Legacy Reading Program that help the service member stay connected.
- Structure benefits you and the child, but should not feel so restrictive that it becomes stressful.

For the service member:

- Find ways to record your voice through videos or the USO's Reading program that can be played at home even when you are unavailable.
- Encourage your spouse to find opportunities for self-care.
- Consider reading books or listening to podcasts on parenting and discuss together when possible.
- Affirm what your spouse is trying to do.

TEDTalk: Let's Talk Parenting Taboos



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## **Elementary (6-11)** **(All of the above +)**

For the supporting spouse:

- Save worksheets and/or coloring sheets as care package ideas.
- Don't forget to set your own personal goals that energize you.
- Invite your service member to help you think of parenting strategies that you haven't tried yet.
- Invite your spouse (when possible) to share in parenting conversations.
- Don't attempt to be both parents at once- just be **YOU**.

For the service member:

- When possible, help (even from a distance) with bedtime or morning routines (reading books, stories, watching a show together, etc).
- Keep expectations low on the amount of time young children can hold a conversation over phone/video.
- Send questions for your kids that your spouse can record answers to with their device and send in between calls.

## **Tweens/Teens**

For the Supporting Spouse:

- Remember this developmental stage looks to peers as support and validation so they may want less time with parents and more with friends.
- Still plan additional family time together (game nights, adventures/vacations).
- Chores and rules can be great opportunities for conversation. When possible, allow youth to "plead their case", negotiate new chores, and adjust rules based on trust established.
- Don't attempt to parent alone. Invite your spouse into decisions, conversations, and developmental "talks".

For the service member:

- Consider apps and games as a way to connect and talk with your Teens (video games, What'sApp, Words with Friends, etc).
- Come to video talks with a discussion starter prepared (i.e. TableTopics Conversation Cards).
- Arrange emails (or conversations when possible) with teachers, coaches, or other leaders to stay involved and engaged.
- Ask your spouse when they need you to listen versus problem-solve on issues at home.



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## COUPLE GOALS

The best teams are made up of different personalities and varying strengths. Take a moment to write out what your parenting strengths are vs. your spouse's parenting strengths.

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When you combine your strengths, how do they complement each other to create a more "whole" team approach?

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## MISSION ANALYSIS

Any individual is more likely to succeed when they understand how the mission (or their part in the mission) is changing.

Keep your spouse **up to date** on:

What you are trying...  
Why you are making changes...  
What works and what doesn't...

**EVERYONE WANTS TO WIN AT BEING A PARENT!**



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## **RESOURCES MENTIONED:**

### **USO PROGRAMS:**

Bob Hope Legacy Reading Program

Coffee Connection

Discovering Your Spark, Brittany Boccher

**DEPLOYMENT MASTERCLASS**, Lizanne Lightfoot

### **RESOURCES :**

"The Lifegiver 5 Minute Check-in©" [www.life-giver.org](http://www.life-giver.org)

Day One Journal App <https://dayoneapp.com/>

Esther Perel: Mating in Captivity

<https://www.collage.com>- Custom photo puzzles

<https://bravecrates.com/> Brave Crates- Care packages for spouses at home.

### **COUNSELING:**

The Lifegiver Directory: (Military spouse, veteran, or culturally competent clinicians)

Lifegiver: Breathe life into your service family [www.life-giver.org](http://www.life-giver.org)

Military OneSource

### **OTHER RECOMMENDED RESOURCES:**

Sacred Spaces: My Journey to the Heart of Military Marriage (Corie Weathers)

Boundaries: When to Say Yes, When to Say No. (Townsend and Cloud)

Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance (Duckworth)

Lifegiver Podcast with Corie Weathers

