

TASTE OF OXYGEN

TRAINING



After The Storm: Understanding Trauma's Impact on Love and Connection

STRONGER FAMILIES®
Oxygen for Your Relationships

Check the Scale 1-10

Including your spouse as part of your support system when decompressing is often beneficial, as long as healthy boundaries are respected. It is important to recognize that sharing graphic details from a difficult deployment, mission, critical incident, or other occupational exposure can unintentionally create secondary trauma for your spouse. Because of this, couples should openly discuss what types of information feel appropriate to share, where the boundaries are, and how those boundaries will be honored.

Rate yourself on a scale of 1–10 regarding your comfort level with hearing or discussing work-related details:

1–2 | Very Limited Detail

I do not want specifics about calls, incidents, or traumatic exposures. General statements ("I had a hard shift") feel acceptable, but details feel overwhelming.

3–4 | Minimal Detail

I can tolerate broad descriptions, but I have limits. Graphic or emotionally intense details may feel distressing.

5–6 | Moderate Detail

I am open to hearing some details, especially when it helps my spouse process, but I need awareness around content and may need boundaries depending on the situation.

7–8 | High Comfort

I am generally comfortable hearing significant details and can be part of my spouse's decompression process, while still recognizing I have limits.

9–10 | Very High Comfort

I feel secure discussing most work-related experiences, have a strong awareness of my own limits, and generally do not feel a need to be shielded from details.



Check the Scale 1-10

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Compare your ratings as a couple.

If your ratings are within 3 points of each other:

You are generally aligned. Discuss:

- What kinds of details feel appropriate to share
- What topics may be off-limits
- How either of you will communicate when a boundary is being reached
- How you will revisit these boundaries over time

If your ratings are 4 points or more apart:

This may indicate a need for clearer boundaries and additional support. Discuss:

- What limits need to be in place around sharing details
- What should stay within the marriage, and what may need another outlet
- What support system will help the service member debrief and decompress, such as:
 - Chaplain
 - Peer support
 - Culturally competent therapist
 - Trusted clergy member

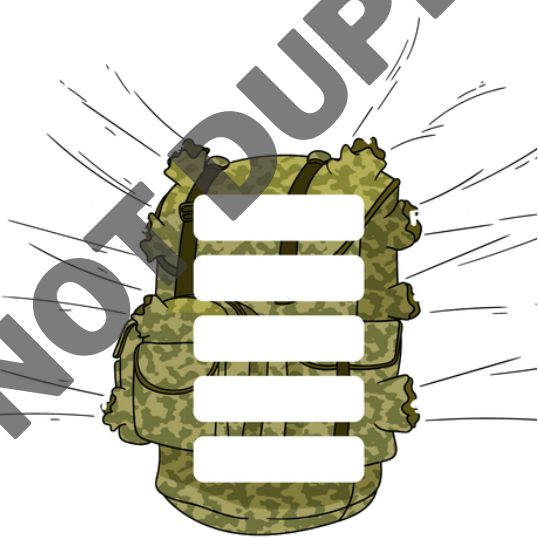


Unpacking the Rucksack

We carry so many things around with us every day, without even thinking about it. Life in general brings its own stress, trauma, and struggles that we are forced to manage. Military service can take on additional stress and trauma, combined with what life brings. The PCSing, the deployments, the separation from family, the combat situations. In all this, our rucksacks can become dangerously full very quickly. Some of the things that are in our rucksack have been in there for years.

Being able to identify some of the things that have been stuffed in the rucksack is one of the first things that you can do in walking towards healing. There is incredible power in identifying those things weighing on us and sharing it with your partner. It can lead to deeper connection, understanding, and empathy.

The purpose of this exercise is to unpack some of what we have been stuffing, strengthen how we can support our partner, and build connection.



1) What is currently in your rucksack that you haven't had a chance to unpack?

This can be an emotion, or a specific event/incident.

- Is this something that is service-related, or is this from my past?

- FOR THE SPOUSE

- Is there anything in your rucksack that is a result of secondhand trauma from your partner's service in the military?

Rucksack Sharing Exercise: Start with a "3"

Keeping in mind what was discussed about boundaries on pages 2 and 3, it is time to share something from your rucksack with your partner.

For this exercise, choose something that feels no larger than a 3 on your personal emotional intensity scale—something meaningful, but manageable. This is not the time to share your deepest wound or most difficult trauma. The goal is to practice the process of healthy sharing, not to test your limits.

Even if both of you rated yourselves high in your comfort with hearing details, keep this exercise at a "3." Stay with a light lift.

We are learning a new and healthy practice:

- Sharing with intention
- Listening with care
- Respecting boundaries
- Building trust through manageable disclosure

Focus less on the size of what you share, and more on learning the concept. Start small, practice the process, and build confidence before moving into heavier material over time.

FEELINGS INVENTORY

FEELINGS WHEN YOUR NEEDS ARE NOT SATISFIED

AFRAID

apprehensive
dread
foreboding
frightened
mistrustful
panicked
petrified
scared
suspicious
terrified
wary
worried

ANNOYED

aggravated
dismayed
disgruntled
displeased
exasperated
frustrated
impatient
irritated
irked

ANGRY

enraged
furious
incensed
indignant
irate
livid
outraged
resentful

AVERSION

animosity
appalled
contempt
disgusted
dislike
hate
horrified
hostile
repulsed

CONFUSED

ambivalent
bewildered
dazed
hesitant
lost
mystified
perplexed
puzzled
torn

DISCONNECTED

alienated
aloof
apathetic
bored
cold
detached
distant
distracted
numb
removed
uninterested
withdrawn

DISQUIET

agitated
alarmed
discombobulated
disconcerted
disturbed
perturbed
rattled
restless
shocked
startled
surprised
troubled
turbulent
turmoil
uncomfortable
uneasy
unnerved
unsettled
upset

EMBARRASSED

ashamed
chagrined
flustered
guilty
mortified
self-conscious

FATIGUE

beat
burnt out
depleted
exhausted
lethargic
listless
sleepy
tired
weary
worn out

PAIN

agony
anguished
bereaved
devastated
grief
heartbroken
hurt
lonely
miserable
regretful
remorseful

SAD

depressed
dejected
despair
despondent
disappointed
discouraged
disheartened
forlorn
gloomy
heavy hearted

hopeless
melancholy
unhappy
wretched

TENSE

anxious
cranky
distressed
distracted
edgy
fidgety
frazzled
irritable
jittery
nervous
overwhelmed
restless
stressed out

VULNERABLE

fragile
guarded
helpless
insecure
leery
reserved
sensitive
shaky

YEARNING

envious
jealous
longing
nostalgic
pining
wistful

DO NOT DUPLICATE

We have already discussed how the career in the military is unique, therefore making the dynamics of a “military relationship” unique. Reflect on your relationship and the impact military service has had on it.



Use the quiz that you took as a guide to answer the following questions.

1. Looking at your primary pattern from the quiz, what resonated most? Was anything surprising or uncomfortable to see named?

2. Where have you noticed stress from this career showing up most in your relationship?

- Is there still a sense of emotional safety between you?
- Has connection or intimacy shifted over time?
- Is there one area that feels most strained right now?

3. What are the first signs that one of you is overwhelmed?

For example: Isolates and shuts everyone out / Becomes irritable or picks fights / Changes their routine / Goes quiet

Does your partner know these are your warning signs? Do you know theirs?

4. When you're struggling, what does support actually look like for you?

- Do you need space, or connection?
- Do you need someone to listen, or help problem-solve?
- Does your partner know this about you, and do you know it about them?

5. When stress builds between you, what cycle do you tend to fall into?

For example: One of you pursues connection while the other pulls away / You both go quiet and distance grows / Conversations escalate quickly and don't resolve

Based on what you've seen today, what is one small shift you could make this week?

ACTION PLAN: From Field to Home

Using the "From Field to Home" chart, or another method not listed, select an activity that you will implement to help decompress, and find the "Window of Tolerance".

When:

Where:

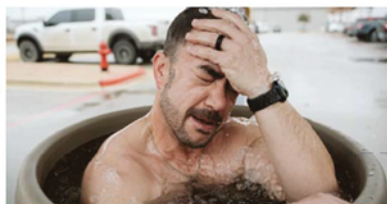
Activity:

Desired Outcome:

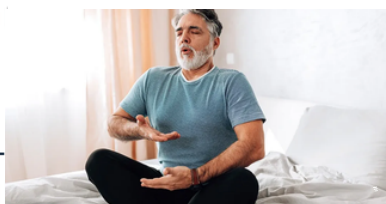
Anticipated Obstacles to Success:

During this 30-Day challenge, how many times will I complete my activity?

How can I include my partner when transitioning From Field to Home?



When you finish your detail, take a cold shower! The goal is to work your way up to 4 minutes.



Find some space to yourself. Work through the 4-7-8 breath. Get through 10 rounds, and see how you feel.



Open your journal and write down anything that happened or may have triggered you during your detail.



Look at your Feelings Inventory on page 6. Write down the feelings you associated with the event that triggered you.



Why the journal? Because you and your counselor can track progress, see what is going well, where you can make improvements, etc.



Say out loud, "I release this now. I choose to leave this here. I release this stress, trauma, and drama." Do your 4-7-8 breathing again for 5 minutes. Pray or meditate to release the junk.



Write down 3 things that you are thankful for.



Pick a spot on your way home (geographical) where you dump those feelings, emotions, stress, and trauma one more time before you get home. You want to release and prevent stuffing those emotions.



Have a preestablished code word that you can say to your partner or family at home so they know you had a rough detail/assignment. Be aware of boundaries when sharing about what you experienced. If you are sitting in heavy emotions, break out your journal and write about it.

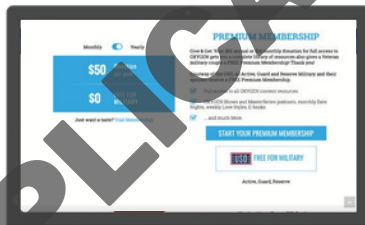
MORE WAYS TO GET HELP FOR YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

Additional Resources for Your Relationship

Let Stronger Families help you build a deeper, more joyful connection in your relationship.

Visit www.strongerfamilies.com/resources and for free tools you can start using today.

- Podcasts with nationally acclaimed relationship experts
- Creative date-night ideas
- Tips for improving romance and intimacy
- Much more!



JOIN US ON SOCIAL

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SHARE YOUR OXYGEN EXPERIENCE

How did your OXYGEN experience go? Did a tool or concept stand out, or is there anything we could do better? We'd love to hear your story — email events@strongerfamilies.org or scan the QR code to take our post-event survey.

