Relationship Goals: Strengthen Connections this Summer

It’s summer—also known as “PCS” season! Moving is stressful. Saying goodbye to old friends is tough and the process of moving can put a strain on our existing connections. When you arrive in a new place, it can take time to build new friendships, too. However, relationships play an invaluable role in our lives and are one of the Principles of Resilience. All of our connections with others—from romantic and family relationships, to friendships and professional interactions—can shape our outlook, feelings of belongingness and ability to navigate stress. To keep your relationships strong and promote cohesion in your unit, family or community, consider these tips:

Be a good listener. Relationships are built on trust and support. Mutual understanding is important and can only be achieved through active listening. This is especially true during conflict resolution, when the listener is likely to be formulating a response rather than hearing what the speaker is saying. Focus your attention first on what the speaker is saying to you. Then, repeat what you think they’ve expressed in your own words. This opens the dialogue and allows the speaker to determine whether or not he or she feels understood, which can minimize emotionally charged responses and promote understanding. Check out the Human Performance Resource Center’s tips on active listening for more information.

Stay connected, even when apart. “Make new friends and keep the old” may be a nursery rhyme, but preserving relationships should be a priority no matter how old you are. If your buddy transfers to a new command, make an effort to regularly reach out to him or her throughout the transition phase and maintain that frequency in the future. It can be tough arriving to a new duty station, so a reminder that he or she still has friends in their corner can brighten rough days by preserving a sense of belonging. You can also strengthen your family and romantic relationships while navigating the separations that accompany Navy life. Start a book club with your partner and/or children, where you each read the same book and schedule time to “discuss” it through email or social media. Just pulled into a scenic port? Grab a photo of your loved one and snap a picture of it in a cool setting so that you can all “experience” the place together. Explore ways to stay involved in daily life as well, such as video chat sessions to help with homework or a virtual date with your partner. Find more tips on connecting during deployment here.

Communicate through the good and the bad. There is always an opportunity to foster a positive connection. When a shipmate does a good job, offer specific praise explaining what he or she did well. Acknowledging successes, big or small, can be motivating and build cohesion and trust. Conversely, when there is room for improvement, offer direct yet constructive feedback to help steer things in the right direction. Outright criticism can breakdown communication and result in diminished quality of the task at hand, as well as in your relationship.

Take the time to invest in your relationships. Lean on your shipmates for support, schedule time to speak with your leaders and confide in your family members. Having a strong support network can help you stay grounded and carry you through life’s challenges. Nurturing your relationships can help take the stress out of whatever is coming next.

For additional tips and resources to help you navigate transitions and other stressors, like U.S. Navy Operational Stress Control.
Below are sample Plan of the Week notes aligning with topics covered by the Every Sailor, Every Day campaign during the month of June:

1. Summer safety tip: If you’re under increased stress and not feeling like yourself, you can work with your command or medical provider to arrange for temporary storage of your personal firearm per NAVADMIN 263/14. You choose how long it will be stored. Your life counts.

2. Anyone can be at risk of developing injuries and illnesses from stress, particularly after witnessing or experiencing a life-threatening event like a car accident or operational mishap. Check out this article on the different ways the body responds to traumatic stress on the NavyNavStress blog at https://navstress.wordpress.com/2016/06/06/understanding-the-different-responses-to-traumatic-stress/.

3. Men are 24 percent less likely to have visited a doctor in the past year than women. Seeing a medical provider for preventive care is a key component of protecting your health. For tips to keep you in optimal physical, psychological and emotional health, check out the Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center's infographic, “Men's Health: Investing in the Future is not a Game” at https://go.usa.gov/cSdwx.

4. Did you know that you can text 838255 from your mobile phone to access 24/7 free and confidential support from the Military Crisis Line? You don’t have to go it alone—help is just a message away.

### MyNavy Family Mobile App now Available

The MyNavy Family mobile application launched in May, serving as a one-stop-shop for resources to help families navigate Navy life. The app was developed by Navy’s Sea Warrior Program (PMW 240) based on focus group and survey feedback collected from Navy spouses on their military-life experiences. The MyNavy Family app is organized into 11 milestone events including: New Spouse, Mentorship and Networking, Employment and Adult Education, Parenthood, Moving and Relocation, Counseling Services, Transitions and more. While the app is beneficial for new spouses, it’s also practical for experienced Navy spouses who may not be aware of some of the programs and resources available to their families. The app can be downloaded from the Navy App Locker. Learn more about efforts to improve the Navy spouse experience on the NavyNavStress blog here.
News and Resources

- Workplace Mental Health: Data, Statistics and Solutions
- National Institute for Mental Health
- MyNavyFamily App Released
- NavNavStress
- Mental Health Resources for Suicide Survivors
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
- inTransition Provides Free, Confidential Coaching and Resources
- Psychological Health Center of Excellence

Men’s Health Month: Healthy Lifestyle Is Integral to Achieving Career Goals
- Health.mil

PCS Survival Guide: Goal Setting and Flexibility
- Human Performance Resource Center

Taking Care of Yourself During PCS Season
- NavyNavStress

Pledge to Stamp Out Stigma

Security Clearances and Psychological Health Care
- Real Warriors Campaign

Disaster Distress Helpline Provides Immediate Crisis Counseling After Disasters or Traumatic Events
- SAMHSA

Current and Upcoming Events

- SPC Training Webinars
  - June 20, 12 Noon CDT
  - Register here

101 Critical Days of Summer
- Memorial Day—Labor Day

PTSD Awareness Month
- June

Understanding the Different Responses to Traumatic Stress

If you’ve ever directly or indirectly experienced a shocking or life-threatening event—from a car accident or operational mishap, to sexual assault or combat exposure—you may recall your body’s reactions. Your muscles may have tensed, and you may have started breathing rapidly, preparing to protect yourself or escape. Or you may have felt physically unable to move or react; temporarily paralyzed. This reflexive response is known as “fight, flight or freeze.” It is the brain’s pre-programmed way of preparing the body for perceived or actual threats—or temporarily impairing its ability to react to the threat—and is a normal reaction to extreme stress. Once the threat has passed, the body can naturally return to its optimal state, rebalancing functions that were briefly intensified or suppressed.

While the body can self-regulate, some reactions may linger, such as feeling nervous or overly cautious when a situation reminds you of the traumatic experience. These reactions—which may temporarily impair behavior or function—are known as posttraumatic stress. In many cases, posttraumatic stress symptoms will subside naturally within a few days or weeks. Speaking with a chaplain, harnessing the support of friends and family, as well as maintaining a balanced diet and fitness regimen can help ease symptoms and promote recovery. Practicing self-care can also help build resilience after a traumatic experience. Try journal writing to promote calmness while expressing feelings, worries and concerns. If you have questions about your stress reactions or those of a shipmate or loved one, the Defense Centers of Excellence (DcoE) Outreach Center is a 24/7 non-clinical resource that can connect you with answers and additional support tools.

Anyone can be at risk of developing injuries and illnesses from stress. Reactions vary by individual and are influenced by several factors, from genetics and neurobiology to available social support and positive coping skills. Some may not encounter extended or interfering symptoms after a traumatic experience. For others, these experiences may lead to development of more lasting and serious psychological health impacts, such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD is a clinically-diagnosable stress illness where certain symptoms persist over an extended period of time and severely interfere with daily function. Some of the symptoms of PTSD include:

- Re-living the event through flashbacks and/or nightmares, or reacting to reminders of the event (known as re-experiencing)
- Losing interest in previously enjoyable activities and/or avoiding things or people that may be reminders of the event (known as avoidance)
- Becoming easily agitated or constantly feeling on edge (known as arousal)

PTSD can feel like a constant state of “fight, flight or freeze” even when there is no threat present. While PTSD can only be diagnosed and treated by a behavioral health provider, acknowledging your feelings and talking to someone are important first steps toward recovery. You are not alone. At www.maketheconnection.net, you can view video testimonials shared by veterans, service members and their families who have experienced trauma, sought help and returned to living life fully. Additionally, Make the Connection offers customized information relevant to your own experiences, helping you understand and navigate issues while connecting with resources and services near you.

Whether navigating daily stress, posttraumatic stress or PTSD, remember that it’s okay to speak up when you’re down. Seeking the help of a qualified professional can help you understand your symptoms, build new coping skills and return to living a full, productive and meaningful life. For more information on PTSD, visit the National Center for PTSD. For immediate help, call the Military Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255, press 1.