

## ***Positive aspects of PREP Marriage Enrichment:***

- A great re-connect.
- I like that it makes the other person feel important.
- Speaker/listener techniques (multiple responses)
- Forgiveness and reconciliation
- Communication skills (multiple responses) **#1 Positive response**
- We learned to value our time together
- Will actually use the skills and techniques we were taught to use
- Helped us to address personal issues
- It reminded us to really listen to each other.
- Conflict resolution/management
- Staying sensual in your everyday life.
- It forced us to "play" and spend uninterrupted time with each other. This was the first time that our time didn't involve our kids, my school, volunteering, his job, our other peoples needs. We actually were required to have fun; thus we were forced to spend time actually talking. That was by far the most beneficial aspect of the weekend.
- The most frequent comment I hear from spouses are how much their husband benefited from the info on communication, specifically how men and women differ in their communication styles. I've had military wives tell me that they believe attending a seminar saved their marriage. When a husband turns to his wife and says, "I had no idea that when I *said* .... you might have *heard* .... I'm so sorry." The marriage enrichment seminars are a great help during this time of constant deployments when communication is strained and often in the form of e-mails or short telephone conversations. The better the family communicates, the better their chances to preserve the marriage.
- The soldiers and families I have spoken to were very impressed with the seminars and they helped them communicate better and cope with issues better after attending.
- It was a great tool in helping us relearn how to communicate with each other. I think that if couples go into the seminar to make it a learning experience it will, but if they are going just to get a weekend away, although they may not get a lot from the seminar it will have given them time to themselves.
- The one thing that I can say is that if you go into it thinking that it is going to solve your problems for you, you are going in for the wrong reason, as like anything that's worth having, your marriage is work, for both partners.
- It is a great tool to relearn communication, and to help strengthen your marriage, but it is not the only tool. We both really enjoyed the course and got to meet new people in the process. It is well worth the time.

- I believe that it would very beneficial to returning soldiers, my wife and I had a hard time for about the first month and half of my return, but everything is about to get settled down. This is something that I feel should be pushed harder.
- Thanks to marriage enrichment, my husband and I are able to communicate much better with each other using the speaker/listener technique.
- We've re-discovered "dating" each other and make it a point to go out on a "date" at least once per week. We have also learned about each other's love language so that each of us knows what really makes the other feel loved and appreciated.
- Some of the exercises that we did like role playing. Ways to handle getting your point across and ideas of how each is feeling.
- Different emotions that may happen while the soldier is deployed and how to keep him/her connected to the homefront.
- The best part for me was learning how to listen, so I could really understand what my husband, as well as our children, were saying. Assumptions are a big problem, and definitely inhibit listening to someone you love. Thinking you know what your spouse is going to say and assuming you know how they feel, well, you are usually wrong. The listening tools were the best thing I have ever learned to use, and I try to get my adult children to use them also.
- The nicest part was that we weren't under a microscope-not judged, pushed into anything, forced to reveal things we didn't want to publicly.....
- They kept a very difficult subject light and easy going. Everyone shared and joked and that helped keep things upbeat and manageable.
- Learning how to communicate more openly was a big thing that we both picked up on from the seminar. I, especially, am one to immediately get defensive instead of remaining calm and talking things through. We each had changed a lot during the deployment and that was a big adjustment in working out the details once again of becoming a married couple and learning how to work together as a couple.
- It was a great experience in that it allowed us 'couple time'; it brought into focus the right way to listen to your partner; and we still use the "I've got the floor" method when we really need to get our spouse to listen to what we have to say. Sometimes when they have been gone so long, it seems like we have to talk like we did on the rare phone calls (as fast as you can so you can get everything in).
- I think that it was very good for my husband to see that other couples have the same problems and some have even bigger problems than ours. Two of his buddies also attended the program with their wives and since being back from Iraq, he enjoys any time he can spend with any of the guys who were over there with him.
- Both my husband and I agree that the best part of the program was the floor tile exercise. We didn't realize that we were not listening to each other. Let

me clarify that each of us knew that other was not listening but neither of us realized that we were not listening to the other. Yes, we do still disagree and have arguments but we now have a better time understanding the other person's point of view and resolving our conflict.

- The part of the program that has made an impact on our marriage was the floor exercise. That has helped us to control our arguments. (multiple responses)
- The best part of the program was that it was presented by local National Guard clergy men who understood our lives outside of just being married.
- The night before the program started we did a round table exercise that allowed us each to meet and greet a handful of the other participants. That really helped to go into the session not feeling like we were the only ones that could use some new communication skills.
- Biggest part of the program that has made a difference for us, is that family is stressed here back at home and that its also stressed in Iraq. My hubby said that they get talks about what we are going through and how there is a war going on back home.

### ***Suggestions for Improvement:***

- More time to do assignments, then regroup
- Provide childcare away from the location. Then it will let the couples fully use that time to work on their assignments. Otherwise couples lose the "marriage enrichment" mindset. Maybe you want romance because he's actually listening to you! **#1 Improvement suggestion – Childcare Issues**
- Provide overnight childcare if held on site.
- Should be done 3-5 months after return. Sooner rather than later. (multiple responses on this issue)
- Would have liked for couples to be able to share stories more with each other.
- Should be available before as well as after deployment.
- More interactive things during lessons to keep everyone's attention.
- Needs to talk about the hard times you are going through right now, but it will get better if you hang in there. Really pump it up!
- Program needs a divided time (men and women) to talk about problems you faced when they came back from deployment; then bring us back together and have someone discuss these issues aloud by reading a list that was made during each groups discussion.
- Need a program to help children and spouses while the soldiers are deployed, and a program to help families adjust to being a family again. It has taken my husband and I two years to get back to normal.

- I feel the seminar should be mandatory for all military personnel, not just the ones who have been deployed.
- Signs and symptoms of what spouses could expect from returning soldiers and how to deal with some problems of attitude, personalities, mood swings, are they the same person now as when they left, etc. How to overcome these problems.
- Has not been offered in our area. (multiple responses) **#2 Improvement suggestion – Not universally offered.**
- I felt the information provided by PREP was good; however the presentation was not effectively delivered and thus lost a great deal of impact. To be able to best impact the families, I feel the National Guard is missing the mark by not having fully qualified PREP instructors present this course.
- The downfall of some of the marriage enrichment seminars is when no form of child care is offered while mom and dad are actually in the classroom. If the family can't pay attention and mom and dad have no time to seriously discuss the great info being presented, it doesn't do much good.
- Make it longer - ours was a four hour afternoon session!
- I would say to use some more crisis intervention techniques with the program. In most cases there has been a long deployment and PTSD is in some form a part of the relationship. In some cases there is substance abuse and plain ugly abusive behavior. Giving some tools to help a spouse recognize that and to help them both reach out for help, would be a useful part of the PREP. Listening skills are a great tool to learn to use, but not so great if one is suffering from PTSD and the other does not know exactly what it means.
- Most (90+%) of the couples there that weekend were of soldiers that returned from a combat tour and I think it would be good to discuss how a tour changes you, BOTH of you! And how we see things differently. I think that the largest frustration with the Vet Couples is that they both change SEPARATELY and not always in the same direction. My husband came home expecting everything to be done with military precision, but I learned while he was gone that, "it can wait until tomorrow!" I think discussing some of the stresses both sides go through during the deployment would open each other's eyes and help each understand the other better.
- There needs to be some type of marriage seminar "before" the deployment as well as continuing PREP afterwards. My thought on having seminars prior to deployments is that if you work in the beginning for making a marriage stronger then maybe you can work on saving that marriage before it is too late. Often times, once the deployment is in force or that soldier returns, it is too late to salvage the damage. If the marriage is strong in the beginning, you may reduce the divorce rates after deployments. I have suggested this to my state representatives however, I feel very strongly about this and would like to see more workshops in the future prior and following deployments.
- The one down side is that they promised to pay the soldiers for attending; and 3 months later that has not happened. However, my husband and I agree

that we would have gone without that incentive, it's just that it seems to take the military so long to follow through; and it might discourage others from attending future sessions if they hear the soldiers remarking about the pay issue.

- About the only way it could be improved would be to have some kind of group event planned (wouldn't have to be something major) that would allow you to interact with more participants - could be organized charades or games of some kind that would allow interaction with more than a handful of other students
- Right before he returned it was advertised that we would all have a chance to go to PREP training soon after they returned, and my husband and I were planning to do whatever it took to attend. However, the only training that ever materialized was months after their return, and gave only about a week or two notice. None other has been offered since.

### ***Other Relevant Comments:***

- Took while we were dating. Very effective. Open up to those people too?
- Maybe combine with suicide prevention information.
- Can we do it before he goes?
- Afterwards, go away for 24 hours right away with each other, then have the kids come the next day.
- People who lead it know you and I think it presents a trust factor. You share very personal issues and do you know if it will be plastered all over your state?
- We have hosted three events with an overall total attendance of 60 couples. Each one has been a little different. Plus, we have not had the same instructors at all seminars. At the last one, the Air Guard chaplain did the session on Sexuality and had the couples slow dance at the start of the session. Most all really enjoyed doing that even though it was early on Sunday morning. It was a great lead in to the topic. Our chaplains like for the couples to "plan a date" for Saturday night. At the last seminar, our Family Program volunteers did a super job setting up a wine and cheese party at the conclusion of the Saturday session. It actually was a wine punch and non-alcoholic punch was served too. The wine was purchased with private funds (must emphasize that). We had a room that was dimly lit and was perfect for such an event. The volunteers decorated the tables with hearts and flowers - - really looked nice. They had an Italian wedding cake and another cake as well as cheese and crackers. The couples really enjoyed that and felt it was a great start for their Saturday evening "date".
- The most disappointing (and this was expressed by all the members soldiers/spouses in our Battalion) was the fact that communication post deployment and the unique stressors caused by deployment was not touched on. Save the hair cuts and the physique of the service members, you would

not have been able to distinguish this group of military members from that of a group of church or corporate members. We all arrived with the expectation to help us learn to deal with the unique communication/relations challenges post deployment and deployment wasn't mentioned.

- I personally know of four soldiers whose marriages ended shortly after our return, and believe that the situation could have been resolved provided the right counseling was easily obtained.
- I still know people personally, reservist in the Guard and even other branches of the military, who have been through deployments and who would go out of their way for some help in reconnecting. This kind of format is a lot different than seeking out a chaplain because you are admitting you are having a lot of trouble.
- Our Family Readiness Group provided your book to participants at a Marriage Enrichment program.
- I love the program and have seen the benefits of it. I hope that every family will eventually get the chance to go through the class.
- We were very impressed that the NG embraced this activity for it soldiers and their families. The fact that they kept sending out that it was **NOT** therapy got some of the soldiers to come.
- This sorely needed program is not being provided for these reservists, many of whom had their first experience with year long deployments and reunions during the past two years. This isn't the only area where there are problems for reservists, as I'm sure all are aware. I had hoped that a method of using local Red Cross buildings as meeting places for family support groups might be pursued, and that maybe PREP seminars and other deployment, readiness, and reunion issues for the very much spread out reservists might be possible.

I appreciate being a part of trying to make this program the best it can be, and more accessible to all who want to attend. The responses I received were overwhelming positive and PREP is definitely making a difference in the reduction of divorce and possibly also suicide rates. I found that those who responded to my questions trusted me with their replies. I'm proud of that.

As a professional trainer, please know that I'd like to help in any way I can from this point on. If I can be utilized as an effective trainer or facilitator for PREP I'd be glad to. I've been a communications skill trainer for over 20 years and I believe I'm a trusted member of this military family community. Thank you for all you are doing to work on the program.

Respectfully Submitted,

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