

Strong Bonds, Strong Couples, LLC™

Becoming a Couple Again: A Group for Post-deployed Military Couples

Since February 2006, Strong Bonds, Strong Couples (SBSC) has provided educational and experiential weekend programs to post-deployed military service members and their spouses. The goals of the SBSC weekend program are to:

1. Support soldier re-integration and couple stability post-deployment.
2. Build a post-deployment resource – the secure bond between partners – to contain or ameliorate combat stress or post-traumatic stress symptoms.
3. Prevent couple and family distress, breakdown and divorce resulting from partner's inability to reconnect post-deployment.

The Value of a SBSC Program

- When SBSC participants were asked to rate whether they “gained some self-awareness about the dynamics of my marriage,” 95% answered with a 4 or 5 (scale of 1 – 5, 5 for “strongly agree”).
- When participants were asked about this program increasing their individual self-awareness, 91.5% answered with a 4 or 5.
- When asked about increased awareness of their spouses' feelings, needs, and responses, 94% answered with a score of 4 or 5.

These very high numbers reporting increased awareness of self, spouses, and their marriages reflect the high value our program provides for soldiers and their spouses. Participant comments echo these statistics.

- *“This seminar and group session provides an outstanding platform for learning,”*
- *“Excellent and concise presentation about emotional isolation and connection – things I always felt but could not verbalize,” and*
- *“The questionnaire asked questions that I've always wanted to ask but did not know how.”*

The information and interventions provided to soldiers and their spouses are based on Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) – one of the world's most empirically validated models for improving couples relationships. The impressive statistics quoted above correspond with the overall effectiveness and high success rate of EFT throughout North America and Europe. The SBSC program helps couples nurture the emotional bond that is vital to successfully reconnecting emotionally after deployment. The reestablished emotional connection helps both the soldier and spouse contain and ameliorate the negative impacts of deployment and combat, prevent PTSD, and minimize the likelihood of divorce.

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How the SBSC Program is Different

The nature of the SBSC program and its distinct, proven approach, distinguishes it from other traditional programs used by the military. Many participants commented about the relevance of SBSC's leading edge curriculum. Comments included:

- *"The emotional part cannot be over emphasized. That was what was missing from our past counseling,"*
- *"We were able to address the sources of friction and work together to resolve them. We had REAL conversations,"*
- *"My wife and I were able to discuss issues (on-going) to a level we were not able to do before," and*
- *"It (the weekend) has allowed my wife and me to communicate in a more effective method by understanding how emotions affect the communications process."*

How the SBSC Program Works

At your location, we conduct our program for 25 - 50 post-deployed military service members and their spouses. Our two-day program offers a total of 12 hours of large and small group education and experiences led by two presenters and assisted by additional facilitators. Each participant will receive a workbook that they will use individually and with their spouse throughout the weekend and after the event.

Train the Trainer Option

We realize that organizations often like to build internal capacity among their personnel to serve as SBSC facilitators. SBSC can train military personnel to replace and/or augment the SBSC provided (EFT trained) facilitators who assist in the small group sessions that occur throughout the weekend program. The benefits include reducing program costs (especially for recurring programs) in addition to developing a deeper institutional knowledge of the SBSC proprietary approach to serving post-deployed couples.

Background on Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT)

Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) is now the best extant empirically based couple intervention. It not only attains superior outcomes, 75% of couples recovering from relationship distress and over 86% attaining significant improvement in a relatively short number of sessions, the process of change is

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also documented, the targets of change substantiated by research into the nature of marital distress, and the theory of adult love on which it is based is well substantiated and supported by hundreds of studies. EFT has also been used for the last 15 years for couples struggling with depression and anxiety disorders such as PTSD. The focus on building the secure attachment bonds that promote personal healing and resilience, also makes EFT an ideal approach for working with couples dealing with traumatic experience.

Strong Bonds, Strong Couples Principals

Sue Johnson, Ed.D., is Professor of Clinical Psychology at the University of Ottawa in Canada and Research Professor at Alliant University in San Diego, California. She is also Director of the Ottawa Couple and Family Institute and the International Center for Excellence in EFT. She is the main proponent of EFT for couples and travels all over the world presenting workshops on this model and on adult attachment and emotion in psychotherapy. She is a Fellow of the American Psychological Association and has received numerous awards over the years, including the Outstanding Contribution to the Field of Marriage and Family Therapy award from the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy in 2000.

Kathryn Rheem, M.S., is a licensed clinical marriage and family therapist, certified EFT therapist and supervisor, and has worked extensively with combat-related trauma and the impacts of high stress on couple dynamics for military service members and their spouses. She is the director of The Couple & Family Therapy Center, LLC, located in Bethesda, Maryland, which serves military and civilian couples and presents nationally to groups of CEO's and their spouses.

For more details and further information, please visit www.strongbondsstrongcouples.com or contact Kathryn Rheem at krheem@hotmail.com.

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