

***Left Behind:***  
***Coping with Separation When the One you Love is Long Distance***  
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Are you coping with living alone when you expected partnership? You are not alone. Many women are leading families and trying to maintain a marriage when their spouse is far away. For some their spouse is just at work all day and most nights, others deal with spouses who travel for work, and many are trying to cope with having a spouse who is deployed for months at a time. How do you cope? Here are some tips.

**INDEPENDENCE: DEVELOP YOUR OWN LIFE**

All couples must learn how to have individual lives. You must have your own interests, hobbies and friends as an individual. If you develop this independence it will serve you well when you are separated. Even if you are together all the time (maybe especially then) it is essential to have time apart and give him time apart too. Too much togetherness becomes stagnant and passionless. If you have no outside interests you soon have nothing new to bring to the relationship.

**CONNECT WITH YOUR SPOUSE: DEVELOP BALANCED CONNECTION**

The need for connection varies between two people. One of you will need more space than the other and one of you will need more intimacy. If you are the one who needs more connection, you may need to reassure your spouse that you value his independence and don't want to restrict that by your need for closeness. If you are the one who needs more space you may need to reassure him that you will come back and be close.

**CREATIVE COMMUNICATION: TELEPHONE SKILLS**

Creative communication skills are essential in our fast paced world. If you and your spouse communicate mostly in person it may be necessary to develop some additional skills. Using the telephone while apart requires some different forms of communication. When we have no visual cues to go by, it is much easier to misinterpret what the other person is saying. If we miss the loving look that goes with the words, it is easy to read something inaccurate into what is being said. It is necessary to take extra care with word choice and tone, ask for clarification if you are not sure.

**CREATIVE COMMUNICATION: WRITING SKILLS**

Using email or letters, even if you are not currently separated is a good way to reach out and connect during the day, at work. It also helps you build the skills that are necessary when you are separated. Utilize notes, cards and little presents to help connect when you are apart. When you email, writing can

sound colder that it would sound if you said it in person or over the phone, so it will be important to proof your email or letter for possible misunderstanding or a matter of fact tone that could be misinterpreted. Add warmth to your writing with terms of endearment, loving words, and longer sentences. "Miss you" would sound warmer if you said "I miss you so much every day."

### **DEALING WITH EXHAUSTION: WHEN YOU'RE IN CHARGE OF EVERYTHING**

No matter what division of roles you have in your marriage, your spouse took care of some of the business of living. When you are holding down the fort on your one it is exhausting and difficult. If your spouse is deployed you may not have a lot of understanding and support for the part you are doing for your country. It may be your duty but it is still hard and you need to find support. It is important to connect with other women who are in a similar situation and utilize each other to help out. No one can or should do it all alone.

### **LONELINESS AND TEMPTATION: AFFAIR-PROOF YOUR MARRIAGE**

Maintaining the connection with your spouse is essential to help keep your marriage solid and faithful. While you are alone and lonely, you will need support. But also realize that you are vulnerable and will need to choose friends and support wisely. Choose friends who will support and respect your marriage. Talk with your spouse about the loneliness, acknowledge it, help each other realize it is normal and talk about ways to cope with it. He is vulnerable too and needs to know ways to cope with the separation.

### **REUNION READJUSTMENT: NOW WHAT?**

The readjustment to being together full time again can be just as difficult as the separation. After the first excitement and a second honeymoon stage, reality sets in and there are adjustments to make. You have each grown and changed, developed new parts of yourself and new independence. You will need to find ways to allow the marriage to change to reflect that. There may be some role changes now, he may need help readjusting to normal life, you will have to renegotiate your together time and your apart time. You may miss some of your independence and freedom. Absence does not always make the heart grow fonder.