

Hurry Up and Wait

Are you living on military time?
Here's how to make the most of it.

by Heidi Smith Luedtke, Air Force spouse

Maybe it should be in the vows: "I promise to love, honor and cherish; to move at a moment's notice and to suffer changes of schedule and unexpected delays with a cheerful disposition. I will hurry up and I will wait, so long as my spouse shall serve."

Military spouses have always been subject to military time. We rush or delay wedding plans, induce babies' births, extend our college years and uproot our careers based on our spouse's orders. Since 9/11, operations tempo is fast and furious. Now more than ever, spouses' goals may conflict with the clock.

"Hurry up and wait usually turns into 'hurry up, wait, wait, wait; hurry, hurry, no, wait again. Yes, hurry. No, wait,'" says Army spouse Kim Ross, frustrated by the third delay of her husband's return from Afghanistan. "It's a miracle we aren't all on anti-anxiety medication!"





Milspouses quickly become experts on waiting — everything from homecomings to holiday travel often gets rescheduled.

Worried about the future? Focus on the present.

Here's how

- ✓ Take a deep breath
- ✓ Focus on your feet
- ✓ Savor a treat
- ✓ Phone a friend
- ✓ Lose yourself in a hobby
- ✓ Accept the uncontrollable

Now or Never

One Air Force spouse in San Diego, Calif., was married at the courthouse before her husband left on an unaccompanied tour. "It's been difficult and awkward trying to keep our marriage a secret," she says, "but it would be looked-down upon by most of my family." She's planning a big, formal ceremony this fall, when her husband comes home. By then, the couple will be married almost two years.

It gets more complicated: After the wedding, they will PCS. "I haven't told my employer that we'll be leaving," she says. She's working toward a master's degree and will move before graduating. "Commuting to school from our next duty station is probably not feasible," she says, "at least not for a while." To cope, she tries to see the positive in every situation. A bright spot: They've saved money during his overseas tour that will allow them to buy a home soon.

Army spouse Sarah Coleman also planned her wedding quickly. "We've been married two and a half years and only lived together for five months," she says. "We don't have children yet. I doubt we'll plan around deployments, but we've said

'no children' until we spend a consecutive year together – if that ever happens!"

Out of Control

Military timing can be stressful. You may feel frustrated and helpless when it repeatedly disrupts your plans, said life coach Caroline Adams Miller, author of "Creating Your Best Life: The Ultimate Life List Guide." To regain a sense of stability, figure out what you have control over and focus on that. Right now, Coleman is honing her writing skills as a reporter for the base paper at Fort Polk. "They offered me a shot at the position, in part because I was a military spouse. At a civilian paper, I wouldn't be getting my byline out there nearly as often." Career goals keep Coleman focused while her husband is away.

It isn't healthy to live only in the moment or to put your life on hold. Both short- and long-term goals contribute to well-being, Miller says. If you are absent in the present, you're squandering everyday pleasures like coffee with friends and art projects with the kids.

Working toward a college degree or a promotion isn't futile: Achievement boosts well-being.

Military spouses need to think like chess masters, Miller says. Survey the current situation, learn as much as possible about what might happen and try to plan three moves ahead. Break large goals into steps and aim for mini-milestones. The perception of progress can save your sanity.

Short-Timer Syndrome

Your goals may shift with your perception of time. "When the future seems long and open-ended, people tend to pursue self-expansion goals, like education and career progression," says Laura Carstensen, Ph.D, professor of psychology at Stanford University. When time is limited—right before a deployment or a PCS, for example—people tend to focus on feel-good goals involving friends and family.

Decision-making shifts as well. A short-term orientation may lead you to go with your gut, rather than analyzing all the options, Carstensen says. You may choose a wedding venue overnight or make an offer on the first house you see. That can be good if you have experience. If you don't, trusting your intuition can be costly, Carstensen said. Time pressure can cause you to leap before you look.

Make the Most of It

The military controls many decisions that affect spouses' lives and going with the flow isn't easy. "The lack of control was hard for me to accept, but it's always exciting to think about where we'll live next," Coleman says. "It is a trade-off." Military life reminds us not to take things for granted. Carstensen has found that when time is short, you see more clearly what is important. Trust that things will work out even when the timing is uncertain.

If you are waiting for the perfect time to start a family, earn your degree or switch careers—stop. There's never a perfect time. Take action today to bring your goals closer, even if it will take a long time to complete them. Make new friends, take a class or volunteer on base. Invest in activities that enrich your life now and in the future. Don't let time pass you by. ♥

Feeling out-of-control?

Cultivate an optimistic outlook.

▷ Watch Your Thoughts

When you catch yourself thinking "I'll never have the romantic honeymoon I wanted," stop. Remind yourself: "We'll have years of fun experiences together."

▷ Walk it Off

When you're stressed, get moving. Exercise is a silver bullet. It boosts mood almost instantly.

▷ Take Action

People seldom regret actions they took. They often regret opportunities missed. Try new things and expand your experiences.

▷ Focus on Improvement

Visually track progress toward your goals on a chart. When challenges arise, focus on progress made.

▷ Recognize the Good

Don't diminish good things by focusing on bad ones. Be grateful for everyday blessings. Good grows when we notice it.