

## More Than a Military Spouse

Investing in yourself makes every part of your life better.

by Heidi Smith Luedtke, Air Force spouse

**E**ven if your role as a military spouse is central to who you are, there's no doubt that you're more than a milspouse. You may be a mother, a friend, an employee or a student. You may be a writer, a runner or rodeo clown (well, probably not a rodeo clown). But if you've put others' needs first for a long time, you may not be in the habit of defining—and developing—your individual self. If that's the case, take note: Self-development is important.

### IDENTITY 101

"Self-aspects are like the facets of a diamond," says Virgil Zeigler-Hill, Ph.D, associate professor of psychology at the University of Southern Mississippi. "As you turn a diamond, you have a slightly different view of what it looks like because you see it from a different perspective." In the same way, developing diverse aspects of yourself gives you a richer understanding of who you are.

When you think of yourself as a milspouse, you may focus on love, dedication and sacrifice. Considering yourself as a mom, you may feel responsible and playful. As an employee, you may feel experienced and

### DEVELOPING DIVERSE ASPECTS OF YOURSELF GIVES YOU A RICHER UNDERSTANDING OF WHO YOU ARE

confident, or novice and insecure. Perhaps you're also a tenacious athlete or a creative writer. Your focus may shift from one aspect to another, depending on life events, Zeigler-Hill says. During a PCS, you may focus mainly on your role as military spouse. When your spouse is away, you may take on additional responsibilities at work or at home.

Having many distinct but overlapping self-aspects makes you a healthy, well-rounded person.

### LET YOU SHINE THROUGH

Nurturing your own interests is empowering. "If you feel angry, resentful, bitter or jealous, it is probably because you aren't taking care of yourself," says life coach April O'Leary. So it's vital to put yourself, and keep yourself, on your list of priorities. No one else can do it for you.

As you grow, acknowledge both your positive and negative aspects. Compartmentalizing negative things—maybe you think you're socially awkward or bad with money—doesn't make them go away. Resilient people accept themselves without denying imperfections. Like a diamond, you don't have to be flawless to be beautiful! So read on for details on why and how to develop every aspect of your unique, milspouse-plus-so-much-more self. ♥



*Power up!*

Download life coach April O'Leary's free Personal Power workshop at [apriloleary.com/speaking/](http://apriloleary.com/speaking/)

## 5 great reasons to invest in yourself:

### 1 — Less stress

Self-complexity improves your ability to cope with stress, says Zeigler-Hill. If your marriage defines you almost exclusively, you may feel lost when your spouse is away. Pursuing your own interests provides ways to cope with separation. And positive feelings you have about one self-aspect (say, parenting) may lift your spirits when you suffer a setback in another (perhaps work).

### 2 — Smoother moves

It can be more complicated to relocate when you're in school or working, but "personal accomplishments give you a sense of optimism and resilience," says life coach Corinna Bowers. That feeling of forward momentum can actually make transitions less difficult.

### 3 — More career choices

Some interests start out as hobbies, then turn into part- or full-time employment. Even if your passions aren't promising work opportunities today, the skills you build may open up options tomorrow. Don't discount them.

### 4 — More to love

We all want to be interesting to our spouses and fun to befriend. Investing in your own development makes you feel alive and engaged. Hobbies help you connect with others and give you something to talk about.

### 5 — More to give

"Taking care of yourself will make you a happier, more productive, more loving and more fulfilled human being," says life coach April O'Leary. That makes you a better spouse, sibling, friend and neighbor. When you are fulfilled, you have more to give.



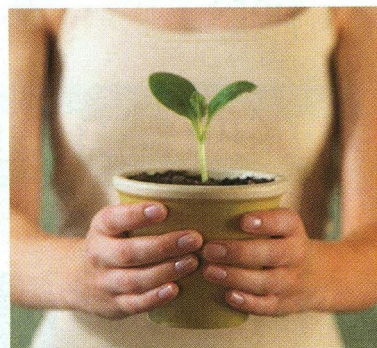
# Go Away, Guilt!

Life coach Corinna Bowers says it's common for women to resist investing time and resources in their own development. And of course, the traditional role of military spouse sets us up for self-sacrifice. Hear this: personal growth isn't selfish. You'll hold yourself back if you think "hobbies are frivolous," "I don't deserve it," or "things might get better on their own," Bowers says. Here's how to claim some space:

**Accept responsibility.** You have the power to expand yourself. Claim it! "Stop waiting for others to make you happy," urges life coach April O'Leary.

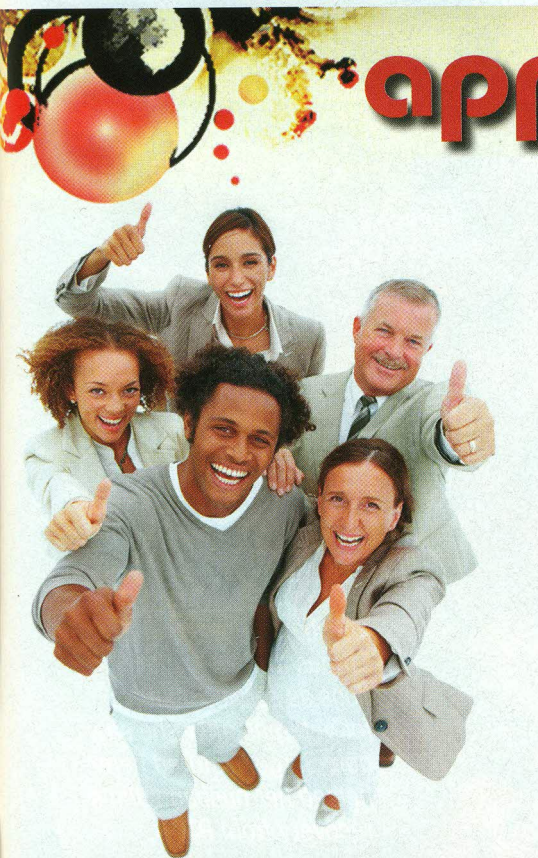
**Take action.** Change course now, not later, O'Leary says. A new pattern will emerge when you make a series of small investments in yourself.

**Friend yourself.** Imagine your best friend is feeling incredibly guilty and selfish for pursuing her passions, says Bowers. What would you say to her? Tell yourself the same thing.



## Here Are Some Great Growth Opportunities!

- Take a class*
- Run a race*
- Learn a language*
- Volunteer*
- Join a club*
- Create art*
- Keep a journal*
- Make friends*
- Travel*
- Date your spouse*



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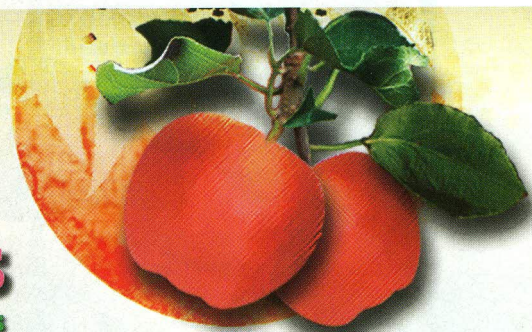
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