

Military OneSource Podcast — Our Relationship

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Episode transcript: Our Relationship Podcast

Intro voiceover:

Welcome to the Military OneSource Podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department with tools, information and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit militaryonesource.mil.

Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the podcast. I'm Bruce Moody. All couples experience relationship challenges, and military couples experience unique scenarios that can add additional stress, so we're talking about deployments and temporary duty assignments, multiple moves, and barriers to spouse employment. Military OneSource offers a range of free support to help service members and their partners navigate challenges and strengthen their connections.

And today, we're going to introduce you to our newest free resource for military couples. It's called OurRelationship. It's an online relationship support program. So, we're going to bring in our guests and we're going to talk about OurRelationship. We're joined today by Kelly Smith, associate director for the Military Community Support Programs, and Dr. Brian Doss, who is the founder of Our Relationship. Dr. Doss let's begin with you. Welcome to the podcast, and why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Dr. Brian Doss:

Yeah, well thank you very much for having me. It's an honor to be talking with you all today. I'm Brian Doss. I am a Professor of Psychology at the University of Miami, and as you mentioned, founder of the OurRelationship Program.

Bruce Moody:

Well, it's good to have you with us. And returning to the podcast is Kelly Smith. Kelly, glad to have you with us. Why don't you introduce yourself?

Kelly Smith:

Thanks, Bruce. I am so excited to be here and to be back with the team. My name is Kelly Smith and I serve as one of the associate directors for Military Community Support Programs and also the program manager for Military OneSource. I'm glad that we're here to talk about the OurRelationship program with Military OneSource.

Bruce Moody:

Great. OurRelationship. Dr. Doss, let's just begin with you. What is the OurRelationship program?

Dr. Brian Doss:

Sure. So, the OurRelationship program is a mostly self-directed program that you can do online or on your phone and complete activities at your own pace. It's designed really as a tool to help you solve a relationship problem or to potentially strengthen your relationship if you were kind of wanting to get a step ahead of any challenges that you can foresee yourself facing in the future.

Bruce Moody:

Okay. So why was this developed?

Dr. Brian Doss:

Sure. Well, I'm trained originally as an in-person couple therapist. And while that approach is very effective, we saw early on that there were lots of couples who either were unable or unwilling to seek in-person couple therapy. There's lots of barriers to doing that. So, we developed the OurRelationship program by translating an effective couple therapy approach into an online or app-based format.

Bruce Moody:

So Kelly, how does this program work?

Kelly Smith:

Yeah. Bruce, there are a couple of ways that couples can access the OurRelationship program through Military OneSource, and we decided to implement this because it allowed for military couples the versatility and the flexibility to use the service based on their schedule. The service member and their partner are able to complete online activities at their own pace anytime, anywhere because it's virtual. After they finish a section, each, them and their partner, will talk about what they've learned together. And they can choose to work with a coach or they can do it by themselves. It's kind of is really meeting the service member and their partner where they are.

Now, when folks use the coaching option, that helps to supplement the online activities, and this is kind of based in five 20-minute calls with that coach. The OurRelationship program also helps couples to identify changes that can help strengthen their relationship and teach them new ways to communicate. And on average, it takes about four to six weeks for couples to complete the program.

Bruce Moody:

So, you mentioned a coach.

Kelly Smith:

Mm-hmm.

Bruce Moody:

Yeah. And tell us more about this coach. So, what do these coaches know about military life, military relationships? What's their role? What can someone expect?

Kelly Smith:

So Bruce, I'm going to toss that question over to Dr. Doss, because he's very familiar with the coaches.

Dr. Brian Doss:

Yeah. So, the coaches are all trained in delivering the OurRelationship program. And the role of the coach is primarily to kind of help couples expand on what they learn and what they experience in the online program. So, we're going to help couples stay on track, and the coaches are going to kind of really allow couples to dig a little bit deeper than what they did through some of the conversations that they had in the program, and also kind of help them celebrate some of the gains and the insights that they're getting.

These coaches have all been trained in delivering the OurRelationship program, but for the Military OneSource offering, we also have trained them specifically in the challenges that military couples experience. And several of them are either active-duty service members or Guard or reserves or otherwise connected to the military.

Bruce Moody:

Oh, that's really interesting. So, they're actually from the military community.

Dr. Brian Doss:

Yes. I think that was one of the kind of reasons that these coaches decided to get involved in the program in the first place, is because they wanted to. They've experienced kind of these own challenges in their own relationships and want to be able to give back to the community.

Bruce Moody:

Okay. So Kelly, how does OurRelationship round out the other relationship care resources that are offered on Military OneSource?

Kelly Smith:

Bruce, this is such a good question, because I was happy when we were able to add this to our suite of relationship support offered through Military OneSource. So, the OurRelationship program is flexible, as I mentioned, and it's a self-paced format that allows a couple to complete it on their own time, whether they're together or whether they're separated through deployment or TDY or for other reasons. It's a good option also for those that have schedules that may vary. So, you may have a service member that's out in the field and their partner may be running their business at home or working traditional business hours. And so, this allows for them to have that flexibility that we know military couples need.

And also, it's a great step for those that may feel that they're not quite ready just yet for non-medical counseling, whether that's through Military OneSource or through one of our Military and Family Life Counselors. Or they might be concerned about privacy, but this allows them to do it at their own pace, online and with having that coaching option, it's kind of like an on-demand option, so to say. And that service member and their partner don't have to be face-to-face to do the work. They can do it independent on their own devices, then come together to talk about the results of their responses and different activities that they've completed.

But I like to think of it across our continuum of support for Military OneSource around relationships, whether a couple wants to do Love Every Day, which is that 21-day text-based, fun, reconnecting type of resource, all the way up to non-medical counseling where they're getting those 12 sessions, short-term solution focus, that more traditional counseling that people are used to. This is kind of in the middle point where couples have that flexibility to go at their own pace, to use the coaching option and to help supplement any other activities they may be doing to support their relationship.

Bruce Moody:

And that's really interesting. So, we talk about the stressors of a military couple, certainly deployments fall into that category very neatly. And so, it sounds like what you're saying is that given time, and because you can return to the course over the period of time, a couple could actually look for the opportunity to complete this program during a deployment.

Kelly Smith:

Yeah. It really is at their own pace. Now ideally, it can be from four to six weeks we want people to finish the program. But we understand that life happens, and so sometimes it may take a little bit longer. But that also is what the coaching option is there for, to help people kind of be accountable. Dr. Doss, help me out if I'm misspeaking here, but it kind of helps people to work through the program and work the program to the best for their relationship.

Dr. Brian Doss:

Absolutely. Yeah. If people are deployed when they're doing the program, I think they're certainly welcome to do it on their own without a coach. And that may be easier to coordinate their schedule with their partner. The program will bring them together to kind of have structured conversations to share what they've been working on individually. But working with a coach, if we can make the schedules work with that, I think that also offers the additional benefit of having a third party there, both to kind of help the two of you share and have some of these conversations, but also to keep you on track.

Bruce Moody:

So Dr. Doss, you had mentioned before, it sounds like the OurRelationship program is something that existed, and an adaptation of it was created for the military community. Would that be correct?

Dr. Brian Doss:

That's correct. So, we originally developed it for the general community, nationwide in the United States. And then, also we have versions for low-income couples, same-gender couples, also a version tailored specifically for military couples and the challenges that they face like deployments.

Bruce Moody:

So, when you look across this program, how do you go about measuring the success that you've had with this program?

Dr. Brian Doss:

Sure. So, we've done several nationwide randomized trials of the program. And what we can see in those studies is that couples who do the program, compared to couples who are on a waitlist and don't have the opportunity to do the program, the couples who do the program experience a number of benefits, not only in their relationships, so things like decreased arguments, increased intimacy, communication, things like that. But then, they also see improvements in their own mental health, their own physical health, and even kind of the functioning of their children, which is really great.

Bruce Moody:

Great, great. Interesting. Kelly, I'd like you to talk about privacy. You mentioned privacy, and when somebody registers for this course online or they're putting the information from the various sections and they're saving it online, how is privacy maintained? Same goes for their sessions with a coach. And there's two aspects of the privacy that are interesting to me. One is simply online privacy, which we would be concerned with wherever we go, but also, does a service member's command necessarily know or get notified that somebody has signed up for this program?

Kelly Smith:

So, this is a question that we get often about the services that are offered through Military OneSource in general, because we understand that confidentiality, as well as privacy, are very important to the military community. And I think it directly impacts readiness as well when it comes to someone seeking help or asking for help.

So, when someone initiates contact with Military OneSource or begins the process of using Military OneSource OurRelationship program, there is no connection with command or with leadership about their involvement in the program. When they sign up online, there is some very basic demographic information that is collected just for the purposes of the services wanting to know utilization, how many soldiers versus how many airmen versus how many Marines or sailors might have used the program. But it's not going to be any type of identifying information that would be shared with leadership around their use of the program.

There are some limits of confidentiality, which comes across just helping services in general. So, if a service member or their partner indicates any harm to themselves or someone else, if there are indications of domestic violence or child abuse, then our team is required to report that for safety reasons and for mandated reported reasons. But outside of that, there is no tracking when it comes to someone using this service, or even if someone is contacting Military OneSource for help, wanting to get more information about the OurRelationship program. So, we pride ourselves on offering services that are confidential and that allow for someone to feel safe in asking for support or for help.

Bruce Moody:

Interesting. Good. Thanks for going over that. And Kelly, just to stay with you for another moment, we're going to put in the program notes a link to Military OneSource. It'll take you directly to the page that addresses OurRelationship. So, talk about that link and talk about how somebody really gets started with learning more and signing up for this.

Kelly Smith:

So Bruce, this is where service members and their partners can get to the goods. If they go to militaryonesource.mil/ourrelationship, that'll take them directly to the Military OneSource Our Relationship program. They'll be able to view the program, look at the frequently asked questions page, explore who the coaches are if they're wanting to use the coaching option. They can get all that good information and they can actually begin the process of registering for the program.

Now, if they want to give their relationship a boost, and they're not really sure if the OurRelationship program is the best step for them, they can take a look at that page, but then they can also go to the militaryonesource.mil/rethewe, that's R-E-T-H-E-W-E, Re the We page. Now this page has a ton of information about a variety of different types of relationship support for military couples. There's also support there for service

providers, for leaders, for someone recovering from a breakup, just a variety of different topics around relationships on Re the We landing page.

Now if someone's not really tech-savvy, they don't want to go on the website, they don't want to use the Military OneSource app to peruse all the relationship resources, they can just call Military OneSource. That's the good old-fashioned way of picking up the phone and dialing 1-800-342-9647. And they can talk with one of our consultants that can help them determine what may be the best path for them when it comes to looking for relationship support. So, there are many touchpoints that folks can go to when looking for relationship support.

Bruce Moody:

Excellent. So, we'll take those touch points, they'll be in the program notes. People can then find the preferred door in. All right. Well, this has been a really interesting conversation and I appreciate the both of you being with us today. Let's get some last words. Dr. Doss, let's begin with you.

Dr. Brian Doss:

Well, I really appreciate just the opportunity to share the OurRelationship program with your listeners. I think we've had a lot of successes. Most people, 94% of people are satisfied with the program. 97% would recommend it to a friend. But I think we still have kind of that challenge sometimes of getting the word out, so I really appreciate the opportunity to speak with your listeners today.

Bruce Moody:

Again, thank you. Kelly, last words, go to you.

Kelly Smith:

Yeah. Thank you, Bruce and team, for the opportunity to share about Military OneSource's OurRelationship program. We just want couples to know that they have options when it comes to looking for relationship support within the military community. We are honored to have the OurRelationship program as an option and as an entitlement, as a benefit, that couples can use at their own pace, at their own timing. And it's an evidence-based program, which we know is really important to our leaders to have good information out there for couples. So, just thank you again for the opportunity.

Bruce Moody:

Well, I appreciate the both of you being with us today, really great conversation, really appreciate it. Kelly Smith is the associate director for Military Community Support Programs, and Dr. Brian Doss is the founder of OurRelationship. I want to remind you that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We're a website. We're a call center. We're all over social media, and now we're a podcast. So please subscribe. We cover a wide range of topics to help military families navigate military life. I'm Bruce Moody, and thanks for listening. Bye-bye.