



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is Strong Bonds?

Strong Bonds is a unit-based, Chaplain-led relationship program that helps National Guard Warriors and their Families build strong relationships. The program's mission is to build Warrior readiness by strengthening National Guard marriages and relationships.

Strong Bonds offers proven, preventative training that focuses on building and strengthening strong relationships, marriages, and families. There are programs designed to for specific needs, such as a Strong Bonds Singles, Strong Bonds Couples, Strong Bonds Families, and Strong Bonds Pre- and Re-deployment.

Why is Strong Bonds important?

Statistics show that Strong Bonds is a vital and necessary program. A poor family bond is the number one deterrent to troop readiness. Increased demands placed on National Guard Warriors and Families, such as the unprecedented number of deployments following 9-11, add stress to intimate relationships. Furthermore, National Guard Warriors and Families live throughout their communities, geographically isolated from the support of other military families. These challenges compound the rigors of military life. Serious problems such as PTSD and suicide risks tend to rise under these stressful conditions. In addition, recruitment suffers. Research shows that training in communication, intimacy, and conflict management increases marital satisfaction and reduces rates of family violence. A relationship program that supports the Warrior and Family facilitates health, readiness, retention, and recruitment. Preliminary studies show a significant decrease in divorce for couples who completed Strong Bonds training.

What is the history of Strong Bonds?

Recognizing that military marriages ended in divorce more often than civilian marriages, the Army introduced a couples program in 1999, called Building Strong and Ready Families. Satisfaction among attendees was high (95 percent) and the program was extended. In 2005, the training evolved into Strong Bonds and since then, has been expanded to include help for singles, families, and the specific needs of Warriors and Families regarding deployment/redeployment. The program was also extended to the National Guard and Reserves. Since its beginning, over 100,000 Warriors and Family members have participated in over 2,500 events. In 2009 alone, 3,000 Strong Bonds events were scheduled and starting in 2010, nearly \$30 million is budgeted for Strong Bonds events throughout all components of the Army.

How are the Strong Bonds programs delivered?

Strong Bonds programs are fully-funded, directed by commanders, and executed by chaplains who offer training at the unit level. Commanders ensure the program is adequately supported with necessary resources and time on the unit's schedule. The Chief of Chaplains Office – Department of the Army is the Proponent of the Strong Bonds program and delegates to the various components and branches of the Military the guidance for the grant program to commanders to execute events. Chaplains promote the program through public awareness officers and distribution of public service announcements, brochures, posters, ads, and the Strong Bonds website.

What are the benefits?

- Creates a strong support group for National Guard Warriors and Families.
- Connects National Guard Warriors and Families to each other, the unit, and important resources such as chaplains.
- Helps National Guard Warriors and family members develop skills that enable them to build resilient relationships and healthy families.
- Proactive and preventative, designed to recognize and correct any issues before they escalate to crises.
- History shows that National Guard Warriors are born from National Guard Families; as such, strong National Guard Families will produce strong and ready National Guard Warriors.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF CURRENT PROGRAMS OFFERED UNDER STRONG BONDS?

Strong Bonds Couples

The National Guard knows that strong marriages equal a strong National Guard. Currently, 56 percent of today's National Guard Warriors are married. National Guard Warriors with strong spousal support make better National Guard Warriors. The goal of the Couples Program is to strengthen the marital bond, giving couples the tools and information they need for better communication and relationship building. National Guard Warriors and their spouses are able to develop relationships with other National Guard members and build support networks.

Strong Bonds Single Warrior

Of our National Guard Warriors who are single, most will marry while on active-duty. Given these statistics coupled with high divorce rates in general, the U.S. National Guard is committed to taking a proactive stance, providing National Guard Warriors with decision-making and relationship-building skills prior to marriage in an effort to see that military marriages start out with a good foundation.

Strong Bonds Family

For National Guard Warriors and Families, the challenges of maintaining closeness while raising healthy children can seem overwhelming. A large percentage of National Guard recruits come from National Guard Families themselves. Therefore, supporting Warrior Families in the task of raising children is a long-term investment in the future of the National Guard. Strong Bonds Family teaches National Guard Warriors, spouses, and children to work together in order to ensure National Guard Families stay close. Children age 8- years-old and over can participate in most of the training.

Strong Bonds Pre- and Re-deployment

For most Warrior Families, staying connected through the cycle of deployment is the ultimate challenge. Strong Bonds Pre- and Re- deployment provides tools to enable National Guard Families to stay close through deployment, and help them reintegrate more successfully at the conclusion of a long-term separation.

Is Strong Bonds effective?

Impact studies on Strong Bonds Couples Program demonstrated that couples who completed the program showed marked improvement in skills and habits that lead to increased marriage satisfaction and survival. Preliminary data also shows a significant decrease in the divorce rate for couples who completed the training. Couples who attended Strong Bonds also reported significant increases in their connection to the military community and confidence that their marriage can thrive in the military. Over 90 percent reported that the program was helpful and appreciated.

Single Warriors completing Strong Bonds Singles program report that as a result of the training, they will approach the process of selecting and bonding with a spouse differently. Over 90 percent reported that the program was helpful and useful.

How do I access Strong Bonds?

National Guard Commanders and Chaplains who desire to offer Strong Bonds to their Warriors should contact the National Guard Chaplains office at **(703) 607-7710**.

Active Component Commanders and chaplains who desire to offer Strong Bonds in their unit are encouraged to contact the Family Ministries Officer in the National Guard Chief of Chaplains Office at **(703) 601-4448**.

National Guard Warriors or family members desiring to attend Strong Bonds training should talk to their unit Chaplain or go to www.strongbondsn gb.org for information regarding dates and locations of training opportunities, www.jointservicesupport.org, or their local Family Program Office.