

Checklist for New Military Spouses

Overview

Important information for new military spouses.

- The basics
- Health benefits
- Financial and housing
- Base services
- Resources

Welcome to the military family. As the husband or wife of a service member, you are an active participant in the military lifestyle. You are also eligible for many benefits, including health care, shopping privileges on base, and access to base recreation facilities and other programs. You'll find it helpful to attend orientations and briefings for military spouses, and to read information that comes to you. Once you arrive at the military installation, visit the Community Service Center or Family Support Center as soon as possible to get up-to-date information on benefits and services as well as to enroll in a spouse orientation program. In the meantime, here is a quick checklist to get you started.

The basics

Your spouse, also known as your sponsor, is required to fill out all paperwork that will allow you to receive military benefits.

- *Obtain an original copy of your marriage certificate from the city, town, or county clerk's office where the wedding took place.*
- *Ask your spouse to enroll you in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS). All service members and their dependents must be enrolled in DEERS to receive benefits. This system is what allows the military to verify that only authorized people are treated in its facilities. It is up to your spouse to enroll you. He or she can do that at the uniformed services personnel office. To find the office nearest you, go to www.dmdc.osd.mil/rsl/owa/home. To enroll, you will need certain documentation, such as a copy of your marriage license and the birth certificates or Social Security cards of all dependents, including children.*
- *Obtain a military identification card from the ID card facility. To receive benefits as a military spouse, you will need an identification card. All family members, including children ages 10 and older, will need their own ID cards. Your card will gain you admission to military bases, exchanges, and commissaries, and will allow you to receive medical care. Check with the ID card facility to confirm which documents you need to receive a card. Typically, you will need your marriage license, birth certificate, photo identification, and Department of Defense Form 1172 (application form) to apply for an ID card.*
- *Establish power of attorney. This will allow you to conduct business on your spouse's behalf. The base legal office will help you establish power of attorney.*

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- *Register your vehicle on base.* You can do this through the Provost Marshal or Military Police. Check with them to see what documents you'll need, but expect to bring your driver's license, Department of Motor Vehicles registration, and proof of car insurance.
- *Ask your spouse to list you as a beneficiary on his or her Serviceman's Group Life Insurance (SGLI) policy.* This is also the time for your service member to update his or her record of emergency data sheet (DD Form 93).
- *Determine whether you should change your state and federal income tax status to reflect your marital status.* Check with the legal office or Voluntary Income Tax Assistance program (VITA) on base to ensure you are doing what is right for your situation.
- *Memorize your spouse's Social Security number.* You will need it for all sorts of paperwork and forms. Until you memorize the number, you can always get it from the ID card.

Health benefits

Tricare is the military's health benefits plan. Learn about the three options available at www.tricare.osd.mil.

- *Tricare Prime.* Similar to a health maintenance organization (HMO), patients sign on with a primary care manager and receive medical care from a list of authorized health care providers. This is the least expensive of the three plans and the only one requiring enrollment.
- *Tricare Standard.* Patients can see health care providers of their choosing. This is the most expensive of the three options.
- *Tricare Extra.* Patients may see any health care provider in the Tricare contractor network.

In addition to Tricare, other health care benefits are available to service members and their families:

- *The United Concordia Dental Plan* is offered to dependents of Active Duty service members.
- *Military hospitals.* Also called Military Treatment Facilities (MTF), care is given on a priority basis as follows: Active Duty personnel; Active Duty family members enrolled in Tricare Prime; retirees, survivors and their family members enrolled in Tricare Prime; Active Duty family members not enrolled in Tricare Prime; and retirees, survivors and their family members not enrolled in Tricare Prime. Non-enrolled persons eligible for military health care may be seen at military hospitals and clinics on a space available basis.

Financial and housing

In addition to basic pay, your service member may be entitled to additional pay depending on the branch of service, deployments, duty locations, whether or not you live on base, and other factors.

- *Ask your spouse to update his or her pay status.* This can be done when your service member changes his or her records and enrolls you in DEERS.
- *Familiarize yourself with your spouse's Leave and Earnings Statement (LES).* The LES tells you how much pay, allowances, and leave (vacation) time your spouse has. Visit the Military Compensation Web site to learn about basic pay and additional compensation (www.dod.mil/militarypay).
- *Apply for government housing.* Do this by putting your name on the waiting list at the housing office, or if you prefer to live off base, ask for a list of off-base housing. If you live on base, all your housing costs and utilities (except phone, Internet connection, etc.) will be provided, but you will not receive an additional housing allowance in your pay.

Base services

A number of services are available on base to service members and their families.

- *Family Centers.* This is your first stop for learning about living in the military or about a new installation when you relocate. Your family center can help with relocation information, employment opportunities in the local area, personal financial education, information about local resources and services, personal skills-building classes, deployment planning assistance, volunteer opportunities, outplacement assistance when your service member leaves the Service, and assistance with crisis situations. These services are provided at no cost to you. Each branch of the armed services has a different name for its family center:
 - Air Force Family Support Center
 - Army Community and Family Support Center
 - Navy Fleet and Family Support Center
 - Marine Corps Community Service Center
- *The exchange.* The exchange is a retail store that offers tax-free goods at competitive prices. Its mission is to provide quality goods to service members and their families while using the profits to fund quality of life programs. For more information, or to shop online, visit one of the following Web sites:
 - The Army and Air Force Exchange Service (www.aafes.com)
 - The Navy exchanges (www.navy-nex.com)
 - The Marine exchanges (www.usmc-mccs.org/shopping/index.cfm)
- *The commissary.* Commissaries are grocery stores operated on military bases by the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA). Unlike commercial grocery stores,

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which are operated to make a profit for their owners, commissaries are operated as a benefit to Active Duty service members, retirees, Guard and Reserve members, and their families. Commissaries sell groceries “at cost” plus a 5 percent surcharge that covers the construction of new commissaries and the modernization of existing stores. For more information, visit www.commissaries.com.

- *Legal aid.* Most installations have a legal office where you can get free legal advice and services.
- *Child care.* Military child care centers are tax-subsidized and therefore less expensive than private child care. Fees are based on income.
- *Recreation.* This falls under Morale, Well-Being, and Recreation (MWR), or Special Services and, depending on your installation, may include social clubs, fitness centers, bowling alleys, movie theaters, and more.
- *Aid societies.* Each branch of the military has special assistance organizations that provide emergency financial assistance. Your family center can help you with this process.

Resources

Each branch of the armed forces offers orientations for new spouses. These programs introduce participants to the military lifestyle while offering specific information about customs, tradition, mission, and available resources. Check with your family center to see if your base offers one of the following new-spouse orientation programs:

- U.S. Air Force Heartlink
- U.S. Army Family Team Building
- U.S. Marine Corps L.I.N.K.S. (Lifestyle, Insights, Networking, Knowledge, and Skills)
- U.S. Navy COMPASS

There are also numerous support services available for service members and their families. You can learn what’s available to you and your spouse by visiting your family support service Web site.

- U.S. Air Force Crossroads (www.afcrossroads.com)
- U.S. Marine Corps Community Service (www.usmc-mccs.org)
- U.S. Army Community Service (www.myarmylifetoo.com)
- U.S. Navy Fleet and Family Support Centers (www.ffsp.navy.mil)

Your installation's support services

Depending on your service branch, your Fleet and Family Support Center, Marine Corps Community Services, Airman and Family Readiness Center, or Army Community Service Center can provide you with information and support.

Military OneSource

This free 24-hour service, provided by the Department of Defense, is available to all active duty, Guard, and Reserve members and their families. Consultants provide information and make referrals on a wide range of issues. You can reach the program by telephone at 1-800-342-9647 or through the Web site at *www.militaryonesource.com*.

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