

Leveling up from Battle Buddy to Fire Team: Talking with your significant other about having children

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Posted in Junior Officer Forum on 10 July 2018

Dual-Military Series: [Intro](#), [Resources](#), [Initial Steps](#), [Name Change](#), Kids 1/3

Discussing kids becoming a part of your life is the focus of this topic as part of the Dual-Military series here in the JO Forum.

This topic will be divided into 3 parts: the discussion and decision to have kids (via pregnancy or adoption), the transitional period of pregnancy or adoption, and then finally, adjusting to life with new children.

If there's one thing that I've learned since joining the Army and observing deployments, FRG events, unit family days, mission cycles, and everything in between, it is that once kids enter the picture, things quickly become complicated. One of my siblings has bluntly explained it to me as "kids [screw] up your life." Another friend (also dual-military), describes it as "playing life on the advanced level." As two people in my life who seem to always have their act together, I get the feeling that's due to their rigid home schedules, and maybe just barely pulling off a scheduling stunt or two. To some, this precision may be extraordinary. To others, this life of balancing and acrobatics is simply called Parenting. The struggles are a given. Put quite simply, it's the way things are when raising kids. First though, let me back up a bit. I haven't even said why I am the one saying these things, or what "these things" are!

You first may be wondering how someone without kids can talk about what it's like to have them? Well, I'll talk about expectations from the Army and resources available for when a Soldier is pregnant, using my Army experiences and Regulations to tell that story. Then, I'll bring in some dual military parents to tell their stories, too. This may get uncomfortable for you, maybe a lot and maybe a little. Talking about having children, either by biological means or adoption, means talking about blood and mucus and feces, about hospital bills and government processing fees. It means talking about expectations, being prepared to be disappointed, and about the possibility of experiencing loss of a miscarriage instead of a live birth. Turns out,

having – much less raising – children involves multiple taboo topics. Having an informed discussion requires openly talking about difficult subjects.

Without diving into the nuances of personal preferences or religious beliefs, let's kick off here by saying that deciding to add another person to the relationship between yourself and your significant other will change the status quo of your relationship. You'll read shortly what Heather has to say about how less than a year into her marriage, her and her spouse doubled the people in their household, and how that's changed beyond what she expected. To that effect, I suggest that if you want to have children as a dual-military couple, you think about how your pregnancy or adoption relates to your military career, and the restrictions and complications that come with it. For some folks, that may look like planning when to conceive by discussing birth control or family planning techniques. For others, it may look like a reoccurring (e.g. monthly or quarterly), detailed conversation about career timeline, upcoming events (such as military education or deployment), and how the incorporation of children might influence those events and the career / family intersection. For example, you may need to consider that as a pregnant Soldier, one of you cannot attend military education. This is not explicitly due to the pregnancy, but because courses require a PT test at the training site and a pregnant Soldier is not authorized to take a PT test, therefore a pregnant Soldier cannot attend PME. So, to assist you in your conversation with your significant other, here are some potential questions to discuss over several conversations with them:

Do you want children? Have either of you put any thought into having kids at a younger or older age? How would you divide the responsibilities of parenting given job stressors? Can your salaries afford a nanny, au pair, or other in-home care? What child care centers would be available for consideration, and how would that tie into your current and future work schedule and expectations? Would you be willing to accept free childcare from family or close friends, and what are your feelings on those arrangements? What would it mean for both of your careers to have kids before or right after military school...a key developmental assignment...command? What are your goals for your career and how do children intersection with those plans? What events are red-lines for each for your careers? How would you react if you found out you were pregnant today?

In short: reflect, consider, and discuss the logistics of having a child. Legally, emotionally, and socially, kids require 24/7 supervision for the first decade and a half of their lives (and that's just the start), so how would you make that work?

Let's see what Heather (Medical Service officer with 10 years of service) and her spouse Michael (Field Artillery officer, 8 years of service) have to say about the planning and birth of their twins. As of this writing, they've been married about one and a half years. Both having been in the military a decade each, they understood the magnitude of the decision on their careers they were making with their marriage as a dual-military couples, and so they enrolled right away into MACP (with ease!, Heather noted). After their marriage, they bought a house and a dog, thinking they would talk and plan about kids after getting settled and adding a pet to their household first. "Although we never actually discussed in-depth having kids or timing, we were pregnant within 6 weeks of getting married. I found out I was pregnant at 6 weeks of pregnancy, and we started discussing our futures in the Army immediately. I was counseled on a Family Care Plan at 7 weeks, and at 8 weeks pregnant I finally had my first doctors appointment. I was at 10 weeks when we found out we were having twins and everything got even more complicated, but nothing could have prepared us for what was to come after their births."

Interested to find out what you need to consider to help guide your career as a Soldier when pregnant / adopting, or how to conduct counseling for a Soldier expecting?

Stay tuned for the next part in this topic!