



Marriage introduces many changes to a relationship, including financial adjustments. This checklist, supplemented with information and referrals from Army Community Service Center (ACS) staff, can help you assist a newly married Soldier and their spouse organize their finances efficiently and work through many of the other changes that come with their new status.

HANDOUTS

- ✓ My Rating As a Money Manager
- ✓ Financial Values
- ✓ Spending Plan Worksheet
- ✓ Major Purchases
- ✓ 5 Rules of Buying a House
- ✓ Military Retirement
- ✓ Thrift Savings Plan
- ✓ Free Credit Monitoring
- ✓ Paying Off Student Loans
- ✓ Sources of Help for Military Consumers
- ✓ Military Consumer Protection
- ✓ Education Benefits & Savings
- ✓ TRICARE Overview
- ✓ Estate Planning
- ✓ Understanding Credit
- ✓ Survivor Benefits Overview

Use the checklist as a solution-focused tool to help a Soldier, in a one-on-one conversation, set goals, establish priorities, and develop a family action plan. Space is provided to add local resources and reminders about additional topics.

Counselor: Ask the Soldier about their relationship: Are they engaged? Previously married? Married already? Blending families? Dual military? Is your spouse foreign-born? These and other factors may affect some of their financial priorities. Inform them you will review some actions they will want to take to set their new household on a strong financial foundation, with good financial communication at the very top of the list.



COMMUNICATION

Assess your financial communication. On a scale of 1 – 4, with 1 = poor and 4 = very good:

1	2	3	4	Discussions about current assets, including savings and investments
1	2	3	4	Discussions about current debts.
1	2	3	4	Discussions about current spending habits.
1	2	3	4	Discussions about long-term financial goals like home ownership, college savings for children, and retirement.
1	2	3	4	Awareness of Household finances. (If one spouse is responsible for paying bills, saving, and investing, is the other informed about financial choices and the household's overall financial condition?)
1	2	3	4	Agreement on a "spending threshold" (i.e., an amount above which purchases can only be made with mutual consent).
1	2	3	4	Regularity of financial reviews. (Do you put it on the calendar to make sure it happens?)

Counselor: Using the questions on the Soldier's checklist as a starting point, ask the couple to discuss their financial communication. How comfortable is each partner with what they know about their current assets and debts, and saving, investing, and spending practices? In what ways do they share financial management responsibilities? If one spouse is responsible for paying bills and making transfers to saving and investment accounts, how does that partner inform the other about financial choices and their household's financial condition? How have they handled questions or conflicts about spending? When do they review household finances? What changes to current practices would they like to implement?

Inform the Soldier to take advantage of other free services on marriage and pre-marital counseling, available through the chaplain's office or the Army Community Service Center (ACS) to help create and strengthen strong communication skills.

- Complete the "How Do I Rate as a Money Manager?" and "Financial Values" handouts. Fill out the inventories individually, then compare and discuss your results.

Counselor: Distribute the "How Do I Rate as a Money Manager?" and "Financial Values Clarification" handouts. Allow spouses to complete the inventories separately, then compare and discuss results. (Note that depending on the level of existing financial conflict in the Soldier's relationship, you may need to guide the discussion.) Encourage them to not let money problems lead to relationship problems. Stress the importance of clear and honest communication around finances, including existing assets, debts, goals, and plans for major purchases and retirement.

- Seek out the Family Readiness Groups for new spouse support on your base.

Additional notes: _____



DOCUMENTS

- Obtain an original copy of your marriage certificate. Make sure to get several official copies. You will need them to change your name on your Social Security Card, driver's license and passport.

Counselor: Remind Soldiers that their marriage certificate is not the same thing as their wedding license or the certificate they may have signed on the day of their wedding. In most places, an official marriage certificate is issued by the clerk's office (in the city, town, or county where the wedding took place) after the officiant has signed the license and returned it to be entered into the marriage register. Soldiers should be sure to research the source for official documentation, costs involved, and the time frame for processing in that location. Note that if the new spouse is foreign-born, some expenses related to applying for U.S. citizenship may be reimbursable. The Soldier should discuss his or her circumstances with unit leadership and the Military Personnel Section (MPS) office on base. (References: Joint Federal Travel Regulations (JFTR) Chapter 5, Part C, Section 3, Paragraph U5215 and forward; [www.defensetravel.dod.mil/Docs/perdiem/browse/Travel_Regulations/Regulations_Changes/Monthly/2013/Appendices/APPChange\(313-567\).pdf](http://www.defensetravel.dod.mil/Docs/perdiem/browse/Travel_Regulations/Regulations_Changes/Monthly/2013/Appendices/APPChange(313-567).pdf).)

- Obtain birth certificates (and Social Security Cards, if available) for your new spouse and any dependent children.

Counselor: Remind Soldiers that an official copy is often embossed or certified in some way. Court documents may be notarized. To replace a lost or misplaced birth certificate, parents should check with the Bureau of Vital Statistics in the state where the child was born or see <https://www.usa.gov/replace-vital-documents> for information on how to obtain a replacement.

- If you or your spouse changes his or her name, update Social Security records and other forms of identification (driver's license, passport, military ID, etc.) to reflect the change.
- Update Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System/Real-Time Automated Personnel Identification System (DEERS/RAPIDS) to reflect your new marital status and add your dependents. Bring your marriage certificate; your spouse's birth certificate, Social Security Card, and photo ID; and/or your child's birth certificate or adoption papers to the nearest DEERS/RAPIDS office.

Counselor: Remind Soldiers that this must be done in person. They may view a list of acceptable identification documents at www.cac.mil/Portals/53/Documents/List_of_Acceptable_Documents.pdf. They can find the nearest DEERS/RAPIDS office at www.dmdc.osd.mil/rsl/appj/site.

- Get ID cards for your spouse and any dependent children.

Counselor: Remind Soldiers that a child under 10 generally does not need a military ID card and will not usually be issued one.

- Check your Leave and Earnings Statement (LES) after DEERS updates.

Counselor: Remind Soldiers to verify the requested changes have been made and they are receiving the correct pay and allowances. Suggest they be especially careful about overpayments, as these will be recouped. Remind Soldiers to set aside money from an overpayment. Tell them that if they do not know where money comes from, they should probably save it until they find out.

- Review the "Estate Planning" handout and see your base legal office (or other legal counsel) to establish or update estate planning documents.

Counselor: If the Soldier does not yet have an estate plan, provide the "Estate Planning" handout and suggest that he or she develop an estate plan with assistance from the base legal office (active duty) or civilian legal services (Reserve; legal services are sometimes available through civilian employers). To help active-duty Soldiers learn more about Army legal services, refer them to <https://myarmybenefits.us.army.mil/Benefit-Library/Federal-Benefits/Legal-Assistance-Services>. Suggest to Soldiers that they should seek legal assistance as soon as possible. They should not wait until right before temporary duty (TDY) travel or deployment, when appointments may be difficult to get.



FINANCIAL PLANNING

- Make a spending plan (budget) for your new household, or revise your current spending plan to account for new income, expenses, indebtedness, and contributions to retirement accounts.

Counselor: Inform Soldier(s) a "Spending Plan Worksheet" is available from the ACS as well as more detailed templates with features that can help them understand their financial condition and reduce excessive debt.

- Establish an emergency fund. Financial experts agree you should keep at least three to six months of living expenses in reserve.
- Make banking and credit card arrangements that work for your new household.

Counselor: Ask if both spouses will continue to use their existing separate bank or credit card accounts. Will they close existing accounts or add the new spouse to an account? Or will they open one or more new joint accounts at a new bank or credit union?

- Establish a bill paying system that is effective for your new household.

Counselor: Remind Soldiers the first and most important step toward a good credit score is to pay bills on time.

- Ensure that your new spouse is listed as a beneficiary of your TSP account, as desired.

Counselor: Note that both spouses may want to ensure that their spouse is the beneficiary or joint owner of other investments, as appropriate.

- Review your retirement savings goals with your new spouse. Non-military spouses may have retirement plan options through their employer to consider. Spousal Roth or Traditional IRAs might also be appropriate to consider. For more information on components of military retirement, refer to the handout entitled "Military Retirement."

Counselor: Encourage Soldiers to visit www.tsp.gov and learn more about investing for retirement.

- Review the "Survivor Benefits Overview" handout for more information on financial resources available to eligible dependents.

- Seek out and take advantage of financial workshops at ACS.

Counselor: Promote workshops that are available through your ACS (share your Center's schedule with the Soldier(s), the Army Emergency Relief (AER), or similar providers in other services (e.g. Air Force Aid Society) on a joint base.

- Analyze your housing and transportation needs and be sure to prepare your finances for any major purchases. Review the handouts on "Major Purchases" and "5 Rules of Buying a House" for more information.

Counselor: Remind Soldier(s) to speak with financial counselors on their installation to build and review their spending plan before taking on any major purchases.

- Get credit reports for both spouses, including credit scores. Review the "Understanding Credit" handout for more information about credit reports, credit scores and managing credit.

Counselor: Remind Soldiers that they may be able to get a free copy of credit reports from financial counselors at ACS. They can also help them interpret their reports and discuss what they need to do to improve their scores.

Additional notes: _____



HOUSING

- Consider updating any real estate deeds to include your new spouse, if you intend to own property jointly. Speak to the Legal Service Office on your installation for more information about your specific situation.

Counselor: Remind Soldier(s) to investigate the tax advantages or disadvantages of joint property ownership. If joint ownership is desired, Soldier(s) will need to research the location of the courthouse where the deed is held and the costs for changing records. This task may require an in-person application.

- Work with the base housing office for any housing needs related to the change in your marital status.

Counselor: Remind Soldier(s) that if they are renting a new residence, to be sure their lease contains a military clause.



AUTOMOBILES

- Speak with the Legal Service Office to discuss updating your car title(s) and registration(s) to include your new spouse, if joint ownership is desired.

Counselor: Remind Soldier(s) to investigate the tax advantages or disadvantages of joint property ownership. Inform Soldier(s) that if joint ownership is desired, titles and registration can be changed at a local office of the state's department of motor vehicles. (Note that in some states, there may be tax advantages to titling vehicles in the service member's name only.)

- Update your auto insurance policies, to inform your insurance carrier of your new marital status.



EDUCATION

- Review the "Education Savings and Benefits" handout to learn more about financing education, available benefits, obligations, and repayment options.

Counselor: Remind Soldier(s) to check on GI Bill benefits, tuition assistance, and the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) to help cover or offset costs of higher education. Suggest, they may want to investigate if an income based repayment plan is appropriate for their new family size.



INSURANCE

1. Health Insurance:

- Enroll new family member(s) in TRICARE (active duty), TRICARE Reserve Select (Reserve members) or other health insurance plan. Review the handout "TRICARE Overview" for more information. Visit www.tricare.mil to find out more about your options..

Counselor: Note that TRICARE Prime and TRICARE Select require annual enrollment. Soldiers may also want to reassess their own TRICARE plan. Refer active-duty Soldier(s) to www.tricare.mil/Plans/HealthPlans. Refer Guard/Reserve Component Soldier(s) to <https://tricare.mil/Plans/New/NewNGRM>. Remind Guard/Reservist that they must ensure continuous, regular payments to stay enrolled in TRICARE Reserve Select. Irregular drill pay can cause service members and family members to be dropped until the next open enrollment period. Remind Soldier(s) with civilian insurance plans to review available policies for features like deductibles, copays, prescription coverage, costs for in-network and out-of-network coverage, and other options that can affect the true cost of health care.

- If your spouse is employed and also has health insurance (OHI or "other health insurance"), arrange coordination of benefits with TRICARE or other insurance carrier.

Counselor: Normally, TRICARE becomes secondary insurance for a spouse with OHI. Some civilian insurers will not allow coverage under more than one policy.

- Enroll new family member(s) in the TRICARE Dental Program. Monthly premiums and copays will apply. Visit www.tricare.mil/Dental for more information.

Counselor: Refer Soldier(s) to 1(844) 653-4061 or to www.tricare.mil/CoveredServices/Dental/TDP to learn more. Guard/Reserve members should examine available programs to determine the best insurance available for their situation.

2. Property Insurance:

- Review and update your homeowner's or renter's property and liability insurance policies to ensure that they are adequate for your new circumstances.

Counselor: Note that Soldier(s) may have more property after the wedding than before, or their new spouse may bring a pet into the household increasing the risk of harm to neighbors. If the marriage brings children, counselees should be sure they have enough liability insurance to cover injuries to playmates occurring on the counselees' property. Suggest they consider purchasing an "umbrella" or excess liability policy in addition to homeowners or renters insurance.

3. Life Insurance:

- Update the beneficiaries of your Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI), if appropriate.

Counselor: Note that Guard/Reserve members assigned to a unit scheduled to perform at least 12 periods of inactive duty creditable for retirement purposes can purchase full-time SGLI coverage that is in effect 365 days of the year. They are also covered for 120 days following separation or release from duty. Refer Soldier(s) to www.benefits.va.gov/insurance/ for more information. Inform Soldier(s) that the SGLI Online Enrollment System (SOES) allows service members with full-time SGLI coverage to make fast and easy changes to their life insurance coverage and beneficiary information at any time without completing a paper form or making a trip to their personnel office. To access SOES, they must sign into www.dmdc.osd.mil/milconnect and go to the "Benefits" tab, Life Insurance SOES-SGLI Online Enrollment System.

- Enroll your dependents in Family Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (FSGLI).

Counselor: Inform Soldier(s) that FSGLI provides up to \$100,000 in coverage in \$10,000 increments for as little as \$0.45/month. (Children are automatically covered at \$10,000 as soon as they are registered in DEERS.) Refer Soldier(s) to www.benefits.va.gov/insurance/fsgli.asp for more information.

- Evaluate your life insurance needs to ensure you have enough coverage, the right type of coverage, and correct beneficiaries. A simple method to calculate your life insurance needs is to use the acronym LIFE. Start by totaling all four categories listed below.

L liabilities	Debt you would like to pay off, like a mortgage, auto loan or credit card(s).	\$
I ncome to be replaced	Income you would like to replace. Multiply targeted annual income amount by the number of years to replace.	\$
F uneral and final expenses	The amount you would like to set aside for final expenses.	\$
E ducation and other goals	The amount you want to set aside to fund education and other goals for family, friends, or charitable organizations.	\$
	Total life insurance need	\$\$\$\$

If you determine your need for life insurance coverage exceeds what SGLI provides, there are many types of private life insurance policies such as term life, whole life, universal life, etc. Be sure to research and understand the costs, benefits, terms and conditions of any policy you consider purchasing.

Counselor: Tell Soldier(s) that financial counselors at ACS can help them determine the types and amount of life insurance they need to fill any coverage gaps.

Additional notes: _____



TAXES

- Review your new tax situation and change federal and state withholding as needed via mypay.dfas.mil.

Counselor: Remind Soldier(s) that for additional help, such as deciding whether to file tax returns separately or jointly, they may wish to consult with a financial counselor at ACS.

- Update personal property tax records in your city and/or county to reflect your new marital status, if appropriate.
- Review the Military Spouse Residency Relief ACT (MSRRA), which protects tax, voting and property rights of military spouses. A military spouse may keep their tax domicile (legal residence) if they move because their military spouse is transferred out of state.

Additional notes: _____

