



DIRECTORATE OF PREVENTION, RESILIENCE AND READINESS

Resilience In Focus March 2026

Building Connection: Tips for Soldiers and Families

This article is based on insights from Matthew Dorey, a performance expert with the R2 Performance Center at Fort Lee, Virginia. He explains how Soldiers and Families can strengthen connections both on and off post.

Army quality of life isn't just about physical fitness or career success. Feeling connected and being part of a community plays a big role in morale and well-being. Soldiers, Families and those around them benefit when they nurture bonds and strengthen their social ties.

This article will explain:

- How connection affects morale and well-being.
- How social skills from military life transfer to everyday situations.
- How to use practical strategies to strengthen bonds at work and in the community.

Why connection matters

Connection builds trust, improves communication and boosts morale. Soldiers, Families, friends and colleagues experience less stress, stronger networks and higher overall well-being when rapport deepens. Strong ties within a unit or group also increase cooperation and create a support network. And meaningful connections help Families feel secure and help communities flourish.

How social skills transfer to everyday life

Empathy, active listening and clear, thoughtful communication apply in both military and civilian life. These skills help people understand others, build trust and solidify relationships.

Empathy means trying to feel *with* someone by considering their perspective. It involves slowing down, listening and trying to interpret what an experience is like from another person's point of view, which establishes closeness.

Sympathy, by contrast, is feeling *for* someone without trying to understand their viewpoint and usually stops short of building a true bond. Showing sympathy might sound caring, but it does not create the same closeness as empathy.

Active listening means being fully present in a conversation. It includes paying attention, asking follow-up questions and showing interest in what the other person shares.

Many people fall into passive listening, especially with those closest to them, because of stress, distraction or daily routines. Active listening helps reduce misunderstandings and shows others that they matter.

Practicing these skills on post translates to improved communication at home, at work and in the community. Even brief chats that involve asking about someone's Family or a small achievement reinforce bonds.

Simple strategies for building connection:

- Ask about weekend plans, hobbies or goals, and listen for three to five minutes. Genuine curiosity matters more than the length of time you engage.
- Join a club, sports team or interest group to meet others regularly. Shared activities make it easier to bond.
- Remove distractions during important discussions and focus fully on the other person.

THIS IS OUR ARMY.

@ArmyResilience     
www.armyresilience.army.mil

Resilience In Focus March 2026

Common pitfalls

When stress starts to take over, it can be easy to pull away from others. Taking time for yourself is important. But too much alone time can lead to feeling isolated or even more stressed, which can prevent a sense of belonging. Another pitfall is simply not reaching out. When we avoid meeting new people or stepping into new situations, friendships don't have a chance to grow.

Also, people sometimes stay quiet because they think others will not understand what they're dealing with. Service members may assume that friends, Family or people outside the military cannot relate to their daily life, which can prevent sharing. When people stop talking, misunderstandings can grow. Even sharing small ideas or feelings helps others see things through another person's eyes and strengthens relationships.

Tips for building connection:

- Check in regularly with teammates, neighbors or Family members.
- Invite someone new to a meal, a workout or a gathering.
- Listen actively, ask follow-up questions and show interest in what others share.
- Learn something new about someone every day, even through short conversations.

Why practice matters

Connection improves with consistent effort. Regularly talking with others, attending events and practicing social skills strengthen relationships.

Even brief actions, such as asking about someone's weekend or listening without distraction, help Soldiers, Families and those around them nurture bonds and create a healthier community both on and off post.

Resources

Building Connections Through Shared Experiences

https://www.army.mil/article/280390/building_connections_through_shared_experiences

Building Resilience in the Army Community With Social Support, Connection

https://www.army.mil/article/283703/building_resilience_in_the_army_community_with_social_support_connection

Building Resilience Through Effective Communication

https://www.army.mil/article/244415/building_resilience_through_effective_communication

Community Connections and Soldier and Family Readiness Groups

<https://www.armyresilience.army.mil/qualityoflife/community.html>

Quality of Life: Support and Resilience

<https://www.armyresilience.army.mil/qualityoflife/resilience.html>

Rebuilding Your Support System After a PCS: Why Community Matters More Than Ever

<https://www.militaryfamily.org/rebuilding-your-support-system-after-a-pcs-why-community-matters-more-than-ever/>