

Adapting Evidence-Based Relationship Education for Defence and Veteran Couples

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What will be covered?



- Background to the program
- What is Relationship Education?
- CoupleCARE overview - program and units
- Program trial
- Reflections and next steps
- Question time

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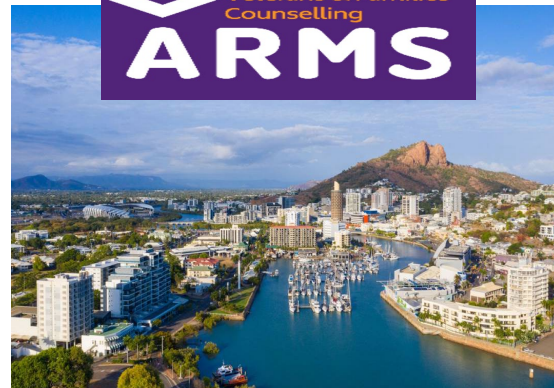


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Unique challenges for Defence and veteran couples

Deployment and prolonged separations

Frequent relocations (postings) and disrupted support networks

Transition from military to civilian life

Service-related physical and psychological injuries

Depression, anxiety, PTSD and sleep difficulties

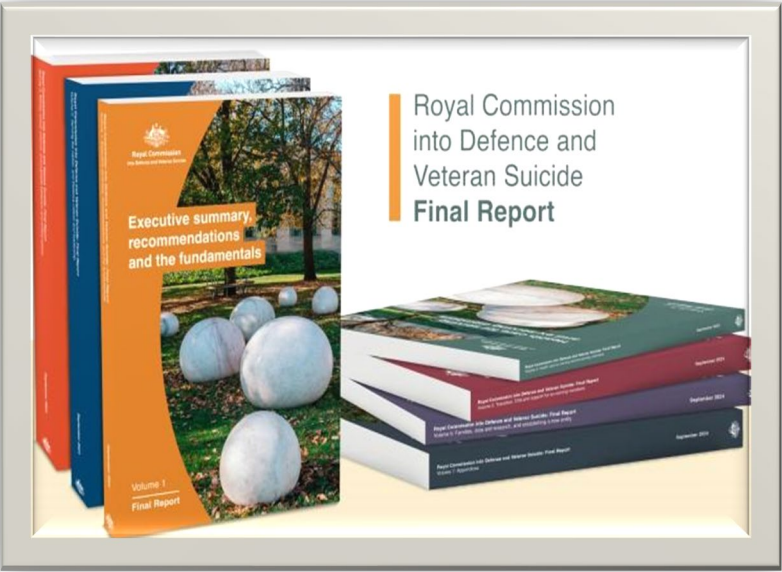
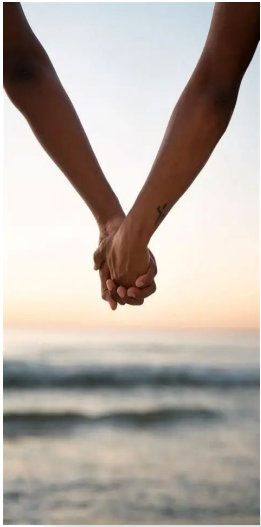
Increased caregiving responsibilities

Parenting during absences and reintegration

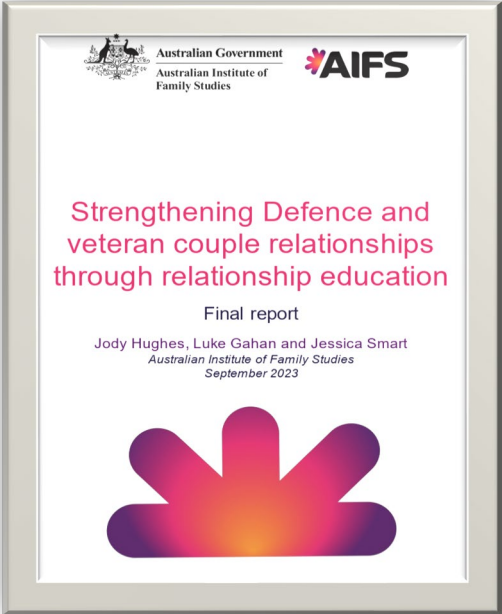
Communication and emotional connection challenges

Social isolation and loss of military community after discharge





[Home](#) > [Reports & data](#) > [Veterans](#) > [Serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force members: suicide monitoring 1997 to 2023](#)



Why Relationship Education?

Prevention / early intervention for satisfied to mildly distressed couples

Structured, skills-based approach

- Communication, conflict management, intimacy, navigating change

Substantial evidence-base

- Enhancing and maintaining relationship satisfaction, stability
- Promising results replicated across multiple studies:
 - Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) (Markman et al., 1988)
 - Couple Commitment and Relationship Enhancement (Couple CARE) (Halford, 2011)
 - Couples Coping Enhancement Training (CCET) (Bodenmann & Shantinath, 2004)
 - OurRelationship (Doss et al., 2016)

CoupleCARE: Couple Commitment And Relationship Enhancement

Widely researched, trialled with thousands of Australian couples

- Effective in enhancing relationship satisfaction and stability (Halford et al., 2004; 2026)
- Program format allows flexible-delivery (online, remote)
- 6 x weekly online modules and session with Relationship Educator
- Adapted for multiple populations: new parents, same-sex couples, ADF couples (Bakhurst et al., 2017; Pepping et al., 2020; Petch et al., 2021).

Importance of an Australian program for current- and ex-serving ADF couples

- Australian cultural context
- Data security and privacy
- Procurement and cost effectiveness.



Strengthening Defence and
veteran couple relationships
through relationship education

Final report

Jody Hughes, Luke Gahan and Jessica Smart
Australian Institute of Family Studies
September 2023



- ✓ Targeted focus groups
- ✓ Stakeholder consultations
- ✓ Rapid Evidence Assessment
- ✓ Scoping Reviews

Co-design principles

- Lived experience expertise
- Cultural safety & military context
- Trust and transparency
- Trauma informed approach
- Strengths based focus
- Clinician experience expertise



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- ✓ Iterative testing collaborative workshops with stakeholders (lived experience & clinicians)
- ✓ Incorporating feedback
- ✓ User acceptance testing
- ✓ Project team composition
- ✓ Translating lived experience into evidence-based practice

Co-design themes

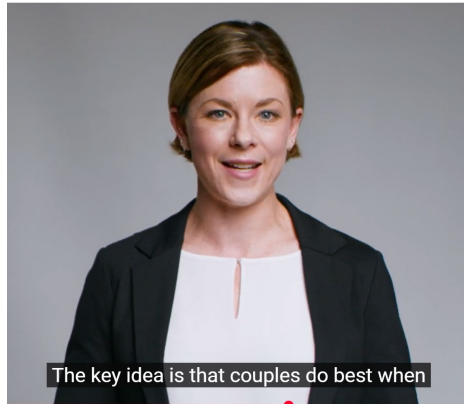
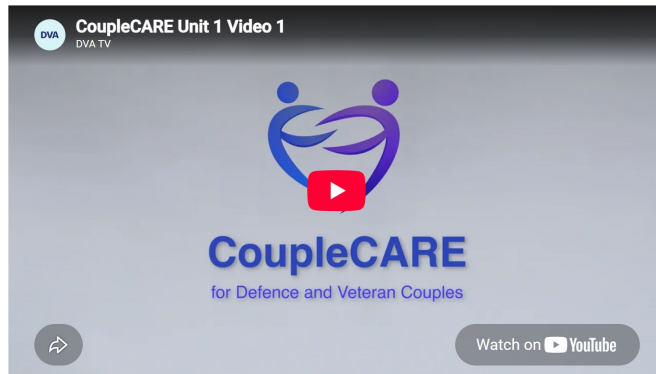
- ✓ Program relevance
- ✓ Defence-specific relationship challenges
- ✓ Delivery format
- ✓ Content adaptation



Overview of Program

Unit 1: Self-change	Relationship standards and expectations, relationship vision, introduction to self-change.
Unit 2: Communication	Couple communication, speaker-listener skills, self-evaluation of communication.
Unit 3: Intimacy and Caring	Social support, expressing caring, balancing individual and shared activities.
Unit 4: Managing Differences	The benefits of differences, conflict guidelines and ground rules, self-evaluation of conflict style, re-establishing positive feelings after conflict.
Unit 5: Sexual Intimacy	Attitudes towards sex, communicating about sex, self-evaluation of sexual satisfaction and communication.
Unit 6: Looking Ahead	Managing change, maintaining a relationship focus, what to do when things go wrong.

To get started, watch the following video [13.26 min].



Approaching the activities

As you work through the unit, the following activities are suggested.



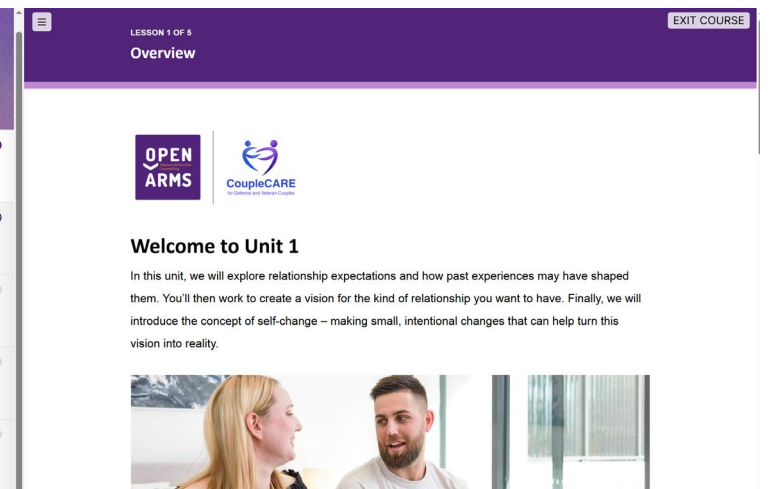
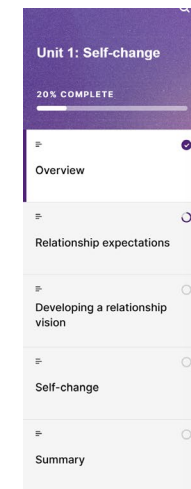
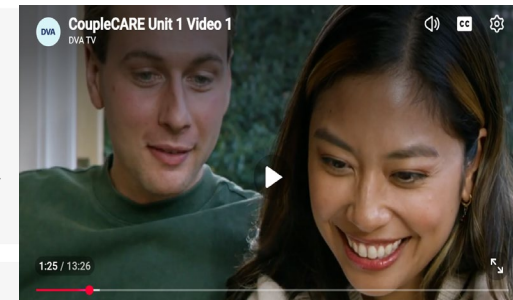
On your own

- Complete exercises reflecting on factors that may have shaped your expectations of your current relationship, including your past relationship experiences and your experiences with military life.
- Complete exercises to help you develop your personal relationship vision.
- Develop a self-change plan to enhance your relationship.



As a couple

- Discuss the joint strengths and weaknesses of your expectations.
- Discuss your relationship visions.



Relationship Educator Training



One day intensive
online training for
new Relationship
Educators



Competency
self-assessment and
video role-play



Ongoing supervision

Evaluating the program

- Single arm trial with mixed methods design
- Aims to evaluate the effectiveness and acceptability of the adapted program, CoupleCARE for Defence and veteran couples, with the Australian Defence and veteran population
- Eligibility: Current- and ex-serving ADF members and their partners in the Open Arms regions of North Queensland, Sydney and Greater NSW, and Western Australia.

Outcome measures

- Surveys pre-program, post-program, 3- and 6-month follow ups:
 - *Couple Satisfaction Index-16*
 - *Couple Flourishing Measure-16*
 - *Depression, Anxiety & Stress Scale-10*
 - Confidence Scale
 - *Consumer Satisfaction Questionnaire* (post only)
- Interviews (optional) with participants post-program
- In-depth case studies
- Focus groups with Relationship Educators and other Open Arms stakeholders to inform broader implementation and potential national rollout.

Reflections and next steps

Co-design improves fit and credibility

Adaptation is more than content editing

Accessibility and fidelity must be designed together

Implementation capability is not an 'add-on'

Collaboration and communication yield positive results

Sep 26 – June 28

60+ couples
3 regions
16 RE coaches
Evaluation
T4T

National roll out

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QUESTIONS



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Thank you for your interest

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