Maintaining Relationships During Assignment

Relationships come in a variety of forms, but one consistent factor is the effort they require to maintain. Whether we are gone on endless fire assignments, or working long hours from our own home units, time spent focused on work takes away from fostering the important relationships in our lives. Be it a significant other, family members, kids, friends, or pets, we need to make time for them to cultivate longevity in the relationship. Some proactive steps taken before we hit PL3 or higher can help maintain long-term connection.

Talk about how you will stay connected. What does it look like when you come home from an assignment or have days off? Will that time be spent doing endless chores that are stacking up or will you allow yourself some grace from the to-do list and instead enjoy spending time with your loved ones? While the to-do list will always be there, make it a priority to engage in the activities that create and sustain connection.

How will you stay in touch? What is that communication plan and is it dependent on cell service? Cell service cannot always be guaranteed when on assignment so make sure your plan takes this into consideration. Even when there is cell coverage, you may be emotionally and physically drained and not have the capacity to engage in a conversation. Sleep might need to take priority over phone calls. Build a communication plan with loved ones based on understanding the realities of remote locations and long days.

Share pictures. Those at home can send a daily picture to keep you connected, it may not come through right away if you don’t have cell coverage, but it will be a cherished surprise that awaits once you have service.

Make sure to engage in your spouse’s and children’s interests when home. Do you know what those are? If not, take some time to learn about their current interests and set aside time to make it all about them when you have time off at home.

Make plans. Make plans for when the season does ease up and we slow to PL2 or PL1. Some of us may be furloughed or reach the end of our seasonal employment. Who will you connect with during this time and what plans will you make with them? Plan a trip, go camping, take that hike you and your best friend talked about for the last two years. Making plans in the future keeps us engaged, it gives us something to look forward to and it keeps us connected with the important people in our lives.

Discussion: As a crew, talk about what ways you all cultivate to keep connections or the lessons you have learned from not keeping those connections. For those of you who have been around awhile, share with the new firefighters and learn about their ideas for maintaining relationships.

For more information on ways to maintain relationships check out these resources:
https://helpvet.net/10-tips-for-keeping-a-relationship-strong-during-deployment-and-separation/
https://www.army.mil/article/66473/copig_with_deployment_separation

If you are experiencing thoughts of suicide or are in distress, dial 988 for free, confidential support available 24/7.

To learn more about the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and suicide prevention efforts visit: https://988lifeline.org/