



Social Media Guide For Military Families

Blue Star Families

www.facebook.com/BlueStarFamilies



Social media has changed how servicemen and servicewomen stay in touch with their families and friends. Until recently, military families were only able to stay in touch through letters and long distance landline telephones. Today Facebook enables military families to share, connect and be part of events in real-time – from daily updates about “what’s for dinner” to milestones like birthdays and graduations.

“I cannot tell you how much Facebook has played a role in helping us keep in touch with not only my family but military friends all over. It is the way our family gets to see birthdays and holidays. The way we share a lost tooth or owie. It is how I update our day for family and friends, the best way to be a part of each other’s lives. We share photos, including milestones in our lives. We were so very separated from family before Facebook. Now with the holidays approaching, we will use Facebook to be a part of family’s holidays and them part of ours!”

~ Veronica M.

According to the Blue Star Families’ Military Family Lifestyle Survey, a majority of military families are using Facebook. Not only are more military families using it to stay connected, the Department of Defense (DoD) has embraced the safe use of social media, recognizing that “internet-based capabilities are integral to operations across the Department of Defense.”¹

We have created this guide relying on our own experiences at Blue Star Families with our military family members and friends, and by having special access to Facebook staff to understand and best convey the site’s products and policies. We hope this guide will show how you and your family and friends can best use Facebook and how to navigate operational and personal security issues.

6 Ways Military Families Can Use Social Media and Maintain Security

1. Stay in touch with family and friends.
2. Stay informed of DoD, branch and unit policies and relevant information.
3. Learn to maintain Operational Security by knowing what to and what not to communicate.
4. Learn to maintain Personal Security on Facebook through privacy and account settings.
5. Thank your military family and friends and stay up-to-date on Facebook resources.
6. Use Facebook as a professional development resource.

If you don’t have a Facebook account, it’s simple to create one by visiting <https://www.facebook.com> and following the directions to sign up. If you have any questions, visit the Facebook Help Center www.facebook.com/help.

1. DoD Directive Type Memo 09-026, Responsible and Effective Use of Internet-based Capabilities, February 25, 2010.

1. Stay in Touch

Facebook allows military families to remain connected to friends as they move from duty station to duty station as well as stay in touch with deployed servicemen and servicewomen. Here are some of our favorite ways for military families to stay in touch on Facebook:

- Status updates
- Photo and video uploads
- Messages
- Groups and Pages
- Chat and Video Chat

Post a status update on your Wall or Timeline. A status update can be anything from a short sentence about the line at the commissary to a longer update about moving to a new base.

Upload photos and videos and tag family and friends to make sure they don't miss a thing.

Learn more about tagging: <http://www.facebook.com/help/tagging>.

Learn more about photos: <http://www.facebook.com/help/photos>.

A note about geo-tagging: geo-tagging sometimes occurs when a person uses a location-based device, such as a smartphone, to post a status update or upload a photo or video. The U.S. Army recommends that soldiers conducting operations in classified areas not use location-based devices in order to ensure their safety and the safety of other soldiers. For more information, please reference the U.S. Army Social Media Handbook <http://www.slideshare.net/USArmySocialMedia/social-media-handbook-2011-8992055>.

Want to send a private note to your friend or family member? Use the Facebook **Messages** feature <http://www.facebook.com/about/messages> to send private messages. You can attach files, photos, or videos in Messages. Note: Messages are private and do not appear in your friends' newsfeeds.

"I can connect with friends, family and colleagues (past and present) in real time on Facebook. Feeling connected rather than disconnected during times away from my spouse!"

~ Response to Blue Star Families' 2012 Military Family Lifestyle Survey

"Seeing Facebook Posts from my son to his wife, friends and family let me know he was OK. I could relax a bit knowing he was thinking of us and safe."

~ Army parent

Facebook **Groups** <http://www.facebook.com/groups> are an online space where people can interact and share with others. This is a great way for friends, co-workers or family readiness groups to communicate privately. You don't need to be Facebook friends with someone to interact with him or her in a group. For example, you can create a group for a deployed service member and his or her family so that they can communicate in a closed setting.

"My family has a closed group on Facebook. We live all over the world, so the group lets us share pictures and news about our lives and deployments. When my nephew arrived safely in Afghanistan, we all knew within a few hours thanks to our Facebook group."

~ Danielle, Army spouse and Marine aunt

Important tip: In a military readiness setting, we suggest you create groups that are "closed," not "open." This means that while the list of group members is public, the content of the group is private, available only to group members. This helps protect the privacy of your participants.

When a group member posts something in the group, such as a link to an article, a question or details for your next family reunion, other members will be notified depending on their notification settings. For more information on Group notification settings go to: <https://www.facebook.com/help/?faq=187225274663021>.

"[Facebook] allows me to be in touch with other Marine & military families throughout the U.S.; it allows me to see a 'green dot' by my son's name in chat. A 'green dot' tells me my son is safe for another day!"

~ Response to Blue Star Families' 2012 Military Family Lifestyle Survey

Facebook Chat

With Facebook Chat, you can see when your family and friends are online and available to chat. If you prefer to video chat, Skype is now incorporated into Facebook. With face-to-face video calling, now you can watch your friends smile, wink and LOL.

Learn more about chat: <http://www.facebook.com/help/chat>.

Learn more about video calling: <http://www.facebook.com/videocalling>.

Facebook Mobile

You can stay in touch when you are on-the-go by downloading Facebook and Facebook Messenger applications and receiving updates via SMS. Learn more about mobile: <https://www.facebook.com/mobile>.

As mentioned above, the U.S. Army recommends that soldiers conducting operations in classified areas not use location-based devices to ensure their safety and the safety of other soldiers. For more information, please reference the U.S. Army Social Media Handbook: <http://www.slideshare.net/USArmySocialMedia/social-media-handbook-2011-8992055>.



Case study: *"My children use Facebook to stay in touch with their uncle while he's stationed in Afghanistan. My youngest son and my brother, Uncle Bryan, each have matching stuffed turtles. We post photos and videos of the boys with their turtle and tag Uncle Bryan. Uncle Bryan does the same, posting photos of his turtle in Afghanistan. The kids love it and they stay in touch in a very real way."*

~ Stephanie, Army National Guard Sister and Navy Spouse

2. Stay Informed

Many units have created their own official space on Facebook. In most cases, the Family Readiness Officer (FRO) or Family Readiness Group (FRG) will maintain these pages, post pictures and pass along information. For most units and/or squadrons, the pages will not allow for posts from anyone other than the administrator – this allows the group to maintain control over the information and limit gossip and rumors.

These pages are particularly helpful during the deployment cycle: pre-deployment, deployment and post-deployment. The FRO/FRG will share specific dates/times for pre-deployment briefs, post-deployment support and more. The FRO/FRG will also post reminders about family services such as L.I.N.K.S classes, financial classes, childcare and more. The FRO/FRG may also link to base community pages, the school liaison's page and others. Many family members feel adrift during deployments, and Facebook allows them to maintain unit and family cohesion and serves as a reminder that having a service member deploy does not mean the family is cut off from the unit and its support systems.

Some unit commanders will even update the page throughout the deployment – this is a very effective way for the unit leadership to connect with the service member, and his or her family.

Case study: *The Commanding Officer of a Marine unit, deployed to the Pacific, updated the unit Facebook page several times each month throughout their seven-month deployment. Included were posts about promotions, awards, “quals” (qualifications), general schedule changes, and squadron milestones. He also used the page to educate the families about the squadron’s background – posting important dates and historical notes.*



When checking into a new unit, find out if there is a Facebook page or visit your local base website and find the Facebook icon. If you are doing a general search on Facebook, make sure it’s the unit’s official page by confirming with the FRO or FRG.

Military branches maintain lists of official social media websites. Check these directories for official presences on social media:

Army	http://www.army.mil/media/socialmedia/
Navy	http://www.navy.mil/media/smd.asp
Air Force	http://www.af.mil/socialmedia.asp
Marines	http://www.marines.mil/usmc/Pages/SocialMedia.aspx?pid=banner_socialmedia
U.S. Coast Guard	http://www.dhs.gov/xabout/gc_1238684422624.shtm

3. Maintain Operational Security (OpSec)

Service members are far more versed in how to maintain Operational Security, OpSec, as they are privy to information – much of it classified – and are aware of the dangers of sharing that information. Today’s military families and spouses are kept far more informed about troop movements, unit locations, unit activities and more than in years past but have less training on how to maintain OpSec. Before posting information on Facebook, it’s crucial for your safety as well as the safety of your service member and his or her unit that you remember OpSec. Remember to maintain OpSec across all forms of communication, including phone, email or other social media sites.

Be mindful of the following:

- Unit activities, while deployed or at home, are fluid and change rapidly. The information you may have might be incorrect or outdated.
- Facebook posts about a service member’s activities (troop movements, homecomings, deployment dates) violate OpSec (see below), but they may additionally put you in a vulnerable position since they signal to others that you are home alone.



Common misperceptions

It's OK to post about key milestones on my Facebook profile, for example: "My husband returns from deployment in 3 more months!"

It's only my friends reading my Facebook updates.

If I accidentally violate OpSec, then I'll just delete the post.

I have a right to let people know where my service member is located.

I'm not a member of the military so the rules shouldn't apply to me and I want to share the fact that my soldier is coming home.

Reality

Strangers may now know you are alone for several more months; non-friendly individuals or organizations know that troops will be on the move in three months.

Even if your privacy settings make your information visible to friends only, any digital information can be copied, pasted and distributed in ways you didn't intend. Think before you post and make sure your post does not put your service member at risk.

Deleting should only be a last resort. Your service person's security is at risk the moment you post something that violates OpSec, and while deleting may help, it doesn't change the fact that information was seen by others.

At the end of the day, violating the OpSec policy by listing troop locations is putting your service member and others at risk.

Turnover on the battlefield is an extremely tense period in which attacks on troops could increase as 'troop congregations' are particularly vulnerable. i.e.: buses going to airport, commercial flights, etc. Remember that you are part of the military community and you are responsible for keeping them safe.

For More Resources on Operational Security Go To:

Department of Defense	http://www.defense.gov/socialmedia/education-and-training.aspx/
U.S. Army	http://www.slideshare.net/USArmySocialMedia/social-media-handbook-2011-8992055
U.S. Navy	http://www.slideshare.net/USNavySocialMedia/safe-and-responsible-personal-use-of-social-media-16-september-2010
U.S. Air Force	http://www.slideshare.net/jtmcddc/new-media-and-usaf
U.S. Coast Guard	http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/foia/mgmt_directive_110601_operations_security_program.pdf

4. Maintain Personal Security (PerSec)

Aside from Operational Security, it's also important for military families to be aware of personal security online and on Facebook. Some privacy tips:

- Use Friends Lists to share different posts with different groups of friends.
- Only accept friend requests from people you know.
- If using a public or shared computer, be sure to log out of your accounts when you're done and consider enabling secure browsing.
- Learn how to use your privacy settings and update them regularly.
- If you have children online, make sure they understand how to maintain privacy online and on Facebook. Please note that a person must be at least 13 years old to have a Facebook account.

The first place to go to for more detailed information about privacy settings is The Facebook Family Safety Center at <http://www.facebook.com/help/safety>.

Creating Friends Lists on Facebook

Friends Lists are a great way to organize your friends on Facebook so you can post an update to specific people from one part of your life, like your family, coworkers or friends who live near you: <https://www.facebook.com/help/friends/lists>.

You can add your friends to the "Close Friends," "Acquaintances," or "Restricted" lists, or you can create custom lists based on your own criteria. The "Restricted" list is for people you've added as friends but would like to have limited ability to view your information. People frequently put coworkers or a boss on a Restricted list. When you add people to your Restricted list, they will only be able to see your public content (<https://www.facebook.com/help/?faq=203805466323736>) or posts of yours that you tag them in.

Your friends won't be notified that they have been added to a list.

Establish secure browsing if using a shared or public computer

Secure browsing is an advanced setting that you can enable and allows you to use Facebook safely in public hot spots. This does several important things:

- On an open wireless network, it prevents attackers from stealing your Facebook network connection or eavesdropping on your communication.
- It uses certificate verification to make sure that you are connected to Facebook and not an imposter website pretending to be Facebook.



To enable, go to the Account Settings from your Profile or Timeline, click Security on the left bar and then click Secure Browsing and enable.

How can you tell that you are browsing on a secured connection? You will see an “https” at the beginning of the URL as well as a padlock icon on your web browser.

Navigating Privacy Settings on Facebook

You have the opportunity to review and adjust your privacy settings at anytime. To view your privacy settings, click the downward arrow at the top of any page and select Privacy Settings in the dropdown menu. Privacy settings fall into five categories:

1. **Control your Default Privacy**
2. **How You Connect**
3. **How Tags Work**
4. **Apps & Websites**
5. **Limit the Audience for Past Posts**
6. **Blocked People & Apps**

Below we explain each of the categories briefly. For more details, including step-by-step guidance, see <http://www.facebook.com/settings/?tab=privacy#!/about/sharing>.

1. Control Your Default Privacy

Under Control Your Default Privacy, you have the choice to set your privacy to “Public,” “Friends” or “Custom.” The Department of Defense recommends that all military personnel use a maximum visibility setting of “Friends” as the standard setting. ²

To see how your Profile or Timeline will appear to people who aren’t your Facebook friends, as well as to any specific friend whose name you enter, use the View As tab under Profile Settings. <http://www.facebook.com/help/?faq=240378842640511#How-can-I-see-what-my-profile-looks-like-to-other-people>.

2. How You Connect

The “How You Connect” section controls who can see the information you’ve filled out in your profile, and how people can find and connect with you on Facebook.

3. How Tags Work

In the “How Tags Work” section you can control what happens when friends tag you or your content.

4. Apps and Websites

This section controls what information is shared with the companies that create Facebook apps (e.g. games played on Facebook like Farmville). It also controls what information is searchable on search engines (like Google, Yahoo!, etc). You can view and adjust your apps, remove any you don’t want to use and adjust what information is shared at any time.

5. Limit Audience for Past Posts

In the “Limit Audience for Past Posts” section, you can limit the audience for all the posts you shared with more than friends. This is an easy way to restrict the audience of your posts all at once.

2. See, e.g., Department of the Navy Chief Information Officer, Recommended Facebook Privacy Settings, June 25, 2010.

6. Blocked People & Apps

This section lets you block people from interacting with you or seeing your information on Facebook. You can also choose to ignore app and event invites from specific friends, as well as see a list of apps and people that you've blocked from accessing your information and contacting you. You can also add people to your "Restricted" list of friends.

Remember to visit the Facebook Family Safety Center (<http://www.facebook.com/help/safety>) for more information, tools and resources about staying safe online.



5. U.S. Military on Facebook Page & 'A Nation Gives Thanks' Facebook App

Facebook launched U.S. Military on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/USMilitary>) to provide servicemen, servicewomen, veterans and their families with tools and resources on ways to use Facebook. The page also has an application 'A Nation Gives Thanks' that allows Facebook users to thank the military community, a specific service member, veteran or military family members.

To get started, like <http://www.facebook.com/USMilitary>. Then click on the 'A Nation Gives Thanks' tab. Once you give the app permission to access your profile, you can send a message of thanks to the military community in general, or to your military friends and family.

6. Network and Develop Professionally

For most military families, a busy schedule makes it challenging to find time to connect with co-workers and network out of the office, or to stay abreast of professional opportunities before rejoining the work force. Facebook can make the challenge easier. In this section we highlight some ways you can use Facebook as a resource for professional development.

A great way to use Facebook in professional development is to like Facebook pages that relate to your interests, job or businesses you are interested in working for. This includes your professional association and conferences you attend. When you like Facebook pages that are relevant to you, it will save you time by delivering resources of interest directly to your News Feed.

You can also create a Group on Facebook for those in your career field or even specifically for military families and veterans in your career field. Doing so provides on-demand opportunities for professional development, knowledge exchange and the ability to easily share content or even your Microsoft Office files with the Docs.com Facebook App.

Remember you can use the audience selector (<https://www.facebook.com/help/?faq=120939471321735>) when posting or creating a friends list (<https://www.facebook.com/help/?faq=200538509990389>) specifically for co-workers and use your privacy settings to screen what you share with different groups of people. For more information on how to do this, see [http://www.facebook.com/help/?faq=124794780932930#How-can-I-use-lists-to-control-what-I-share-\(ex:-create-a-limited-profile\)](http://www.facebook.com/help/?faq=124794780932930#How-can-I-use-lists-to-control-what-I-share-(ex:-create-a-limited-profile)).

Networking and Employment Resources Available on Facebook

Networking and Employment Resources Available on Facebook	
Army Spouse Employment Partnership	http://www.facebook.com/ArmySpouseEmploymentPartnership
Hiring Our Heroes	http://www.facebook.com/HiringOurHeroes
Military Spouse Corporate Career Network	http://www.facebook.com/MSCCN
Military Spouse Employment Partnership	http://www.facebook.com/MSEPOnline
Military Veterans Employment Network	http://www.facebook.com/MVENetwork
Military Spouse JD Network	http://www.facebook.com/groups/160135920719440/
National Military Spouse Network	http://www.facebook.com/NSMNetwork
VA Careers	http://www.facebook.com/vacareers



Case study: *“I like to keep in touch with my former sailors and former co-workers on Facebook. I have a ‘professional’ friends list set up to make it easier to network when I need to. In an instant, I can see what everyone is up to and it makes it much easier to stay connected.”*

~ Trey, Navy Veteran

Other Resources

Service Social Media Directories	
U.S. Army	http://www.army.mil/media/socialmedia/
U.S. Navy	http://www.navy.mil/media/smd.asp
U.S. Air Force	http://www.af.mil/socialmedia.asp
U.S. Marines	http://www.marines.mil/usmc/Pages/SocialMedia.aspx?pid=banner_socialmedia
U.S. Coast Guard	http://www.dhs.gov/xabout/gc_1238684422624.shtm



Blue Star Families (<http://bluestarfam.org>) is a national, nonprofit network of military families from all ranks and services with a mission to support, connect and empower military families. Blue Star Families works to make military life more sustainable through moral and empowerment programs and raises awareness of the challenges and strengths of military family life.