

Cohesion is “the bond of relationships and motivational factors that help a team stay together” (ADP 6-22). Cohesion evolves from relationships that are forged over time and is built on a foundation of shared experiences, mutual reliance, and a common perspective. It is the component of unit readiness that enables unit members to sustain their commitment to one another and to the mission during times of stress.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, units are taking preventive health measures like physical distancing, face covering, and avoiding crowded spaces to protect unit and Soldier health. While these measures are vital to help reduce the spread of COVID-19, they may challenge how units develop and sustain cohesion over time.

The following are suggestions for how units can sustain cohesion during COVID-19.

BUILDING COHESION DURING COVID-19

SET THE CONDITIONS

Create an environment that supports the fundamentals of cohesion.

- Maintain routine and consistency for basic unit activities and meetings.*
- Establish the expectation that unit members need to maintain regular contact and work together to defend against social disconnection and loneliness during the pandemic.*

CREATE OPPORTUNITY FOR COMMUNICATION

Connections may be limited to meetings held on a formalized schedule. The space between formal meetings may be gone—and that’s often the time where connections are forged.

- Consider your schedule and consciously build in more opportunities for connection.*
- Hop onto virtual meetings a few minutes early to set the stage for informal connection.*
- Create a buffer between the end of the formal meeting and when leaders disengage. Enable these informal moments to allow for more connection.*
- Schedule your on-site work to overlap with key counterparts to create more opportunities for “doorway” conversations and informal “mask-to-mask” communication.*

EXPAND RESPONSIBILITY

Make sure subordinate leaders and unit members know their role in fostering cohesion during the pandemic.

- Emphasize that subordinate leaders should routinely reach out to team members.*
- Remind unit members that they should routinely reach out to one another.*
- Ensure new unit members get even more direct outreach than usual.*
- Everyone can have a role to play in supporting unit members in quarantine or isolation. Regular texts and spontaneous check-ins can help Soldiers in quarantine or isolation feel less alone.*

CONNECT IN NEW WAYS

Invest in novel methods of connection while reducing the spread of COVID-19.

- Leverage group texts to share humor or accomplishments.
- Celebrate events virtually.
- Share photos of your telework spaces.
- Develop weekly themes for telework backgrounds (like favorite vacation spots or food).
- Get creative—create video birthday tributes; try parallel cooking; watch videos together remotely.

BUILD MOMENTS OF INCLUSION

Going that extra step can help prevent unit members from feeling like the unit is floundering.

- Call someone rather than send an email or text
- Surprise someone with proactive connection. For example, bring a couple of battle buddies to join a new Soldier in a physically distanced workout.

COMMUNICATE BEYOND FACE COVERINGS

Face coverings hide cues to emotions that are important for communication.

- Remember to add emotion words when you communicate to reduce ambiguity (“pleased,” “motivated,” “irritated,” “upset,” “concerned”).
- Ask for clarification if you aren’t sure of what emotion someone is trying to convey.
- Consider the use of transparent face coverings.

WRITE THIS UNIQUE CHAPTER IN UNIT HISTORY

Think about how this challenge will become part of your unit’s story. By frankly considering how this experience will become a part of unit history, unit members can keep perspective and stay motivated to meet this challenge head on.

- Identify shared memories of this experience.
- Select how your unit will commemorate this moment (symbols, hashtags, songs, etc.).
- Track the unit’s timeline as you go.

THINK COHESION 2.0

Share your stories of what works and what doesn’t with other units.

- Learn from others—If it worked, try it!
- Share your lessons learned and best practices with others.
- Remember this is a marathon, not a sprint.

