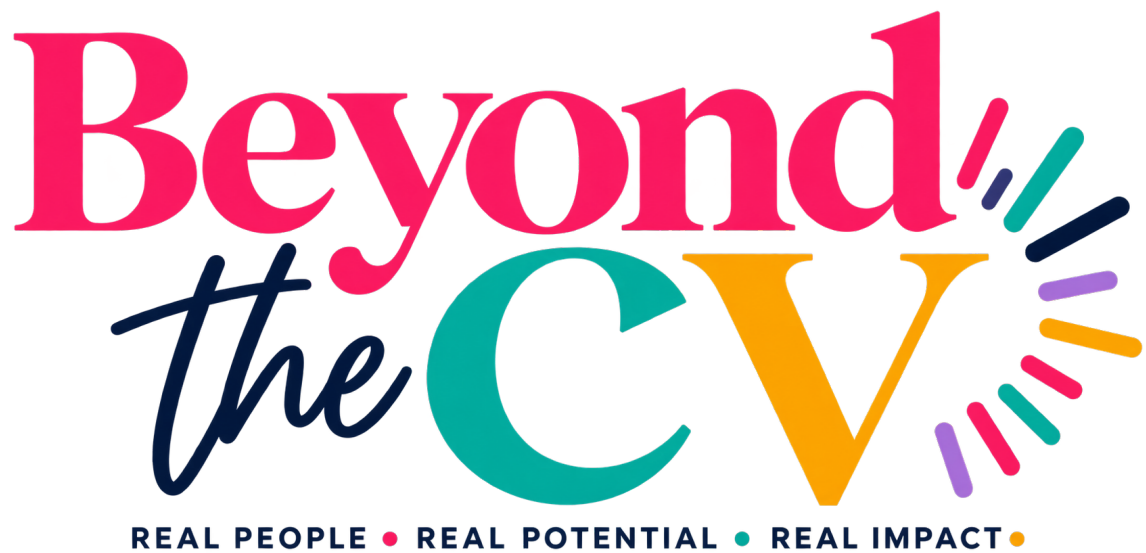




CONVERSATIONS THAT MATTER

A practical guide to supporting military spouses and partners through postings, deployments and changes in family life.

REAL PEOPLE • REAL POTENTIAL • REAL IMPACT

FREE EMPLOYER RESOURCE | OCTOBER 2026

01 Why conversations matter

Employers do not need to be experts in military life to be thoughtful, effective managers. Often, a respectful conversation at the right moment is more useful than an elaborate policy.

What this guide is for

This guide offers practical questions, examples and boundaries for talking with military spouses and partners about changes that may affect their work. It is designed for employers, managers, HR teams and recruiters of organisations of all sizes.

Start with the individual

- Do not assume that every military family relocates, has children or needs flexible working.
- Ask what support, if any, the employee would find helpful.
- Focus on work arrangements, not private details about military operations or family circumstances.

The principle: ask, listen, agree what is workable, and follow up.



02 A posting or relocation

A posting may involve a move within the UK or overseas, but the timing, notice and practical consequences vary widely. A spouse or partner may want to continue working, explore another arrangement or make a different choice.

Useful questions

- "What do you know about the likely timing, and when would it be useful for us to review the situation?"
- "Would you like us to explore whether any part of your role could be done from another location?"
- "Are there handover, equipment, data-security or working-hours issues we should plan for?"

Possible options

Depending on the role: a temporary change in location, adjusted hours, a planned handover, an agreed leave arrangement, or an honest discussion if continued employment is not feasible.

Avoid

Do not assume the employee will resign, or promise overseas working before checking tax, immigration, data protection, insurance and organisational requirements.

Keep decisions grounded in the role and the organisation's genuine needs.



03 Deployment and separation

When a serving partner is deployed or away for training, the employee at home may be managing additional responsibilities. Some want practical adjustments; others prefer their usual routine. Neither response should be presumed.

Open the conversation

- "Is there anything about your working arrangements you would like to review during this period?"
- "Are there particular dates or times we should plan around?"
- "Would you prefer a regular check-in, or to come to us if something changes?"

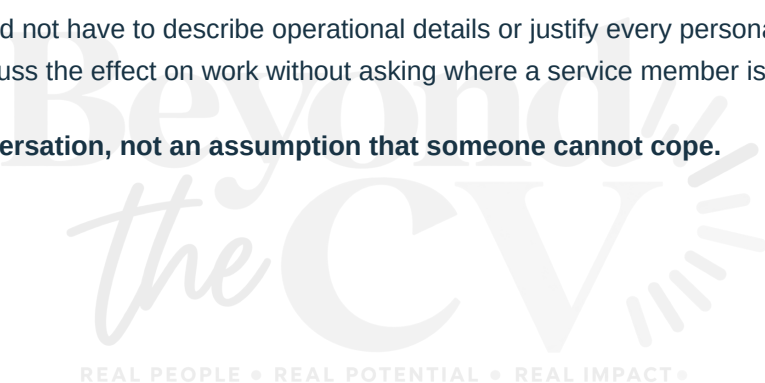
Practical support to consider

- Predictable rotas or notice of shift changes where feasible.
- Agreed flexibility around school collections or appointments, if the role permits.
- A clear point of contact if circumstances change.

Respect privacy

An employee should not have to describe operational details or justify every personal concern. Managers can discuss the effect on work without asking where a service member is deployed.

Support is a conversation, not an assumption that someone cannot cope.



04 Unexpected changes and caring needs

Military family life can involve short-notice changes. It is also important to remember that all employees may face caring responsibilities, emergencies and personal pressures.

A useful manager response

"Thanks for letting me know. What do you need us to consider right now? Let's look at what is possible and agree the next step."

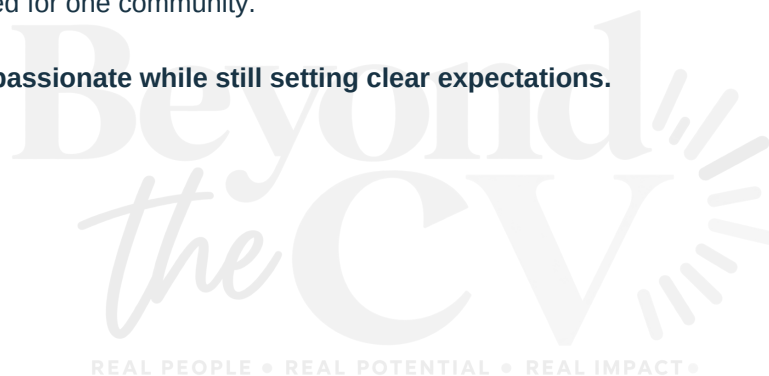
Consider the immediate and the longer term

- What is urgent today, and what can wait for a later conversation?
- Can duties, deadlines or shifts be rearranged without creating unreasonable pressure elsewhere?
- Is there an existing policy or statutory entitlement that may apply?
- Would a short review date help avoid a permanent decision based on a temporary situation?

Be consistent

Use fair, transparent criteria. A supportive approach should be available to employees with comparable needs, not reserved for one community.

You can be compassionate while still setting clear expectations.



05 What to say - and what to avoid

Instead of assumptions, try questions

Instead of: "You'll probably leave when your partner is posted."

Try: "If your circumstances change, would you like to discuss options for continuing in the role?"

Instead of: "You must be used to coping on your own."

Try: "Is there anything we can do to make the working arrangements more manageable?"

Instead of: "We can't make exceptions for military families."

Try: "Let's review the request against the role requirements and our normal process."

Instead of: "Tell me exactly where your partner is going."

Try: "What dates or work-related changes should we plan for?"

Language matters

Ask how someone would like to describe their relationship or circumstances. "Military spouse or partner" is useful broad language, but not everyone uses the same label.

Listen to the answer rather than rushing to offer a solution.



06 A simple five-step conversation

1. Invite

Choose a private, appropriate time. Make it clear the employee can share only what they are comfortable sharing.

2. Listen

Ask what the employee wants to achieve, what has changed and whether support is needed. Avoid making assumptions about family roles.

3. Explore

Consider options against the actual job requirements, service delivery, colleagues' workloads and organisational policies.

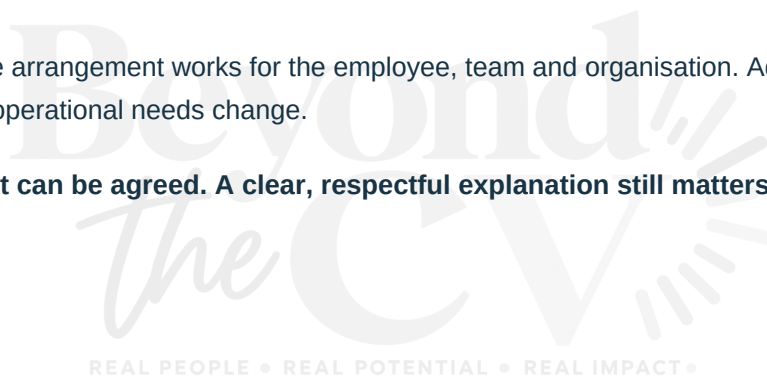
4. Agree

Record practical arrangements: what will change, for how long, who needs to know and when you will review it. Share sensitive information only when necessary.

5. Review

Check whether the arrangement works for the employee, team and organisation. Adapt it if circumstances or operational needs change.

Not every request can be agreed. A clear, respectful explanation still matters.



07 Example: a manager check-in

Scenario: An employee tells their manager that their partner is due to deploy and their childcare arrangements may change.

A constructive conversation

Manager: "Thanks for telling me. Would it help to talk about your working pattern for the next few months?"

Employee: "I may need to leave promptly for school pickup on two days each week."

Manager: "Let's look at the work that needs cover at those times. We could explore an earlier start on those days, but I'll need to check team cover before confirming anything."

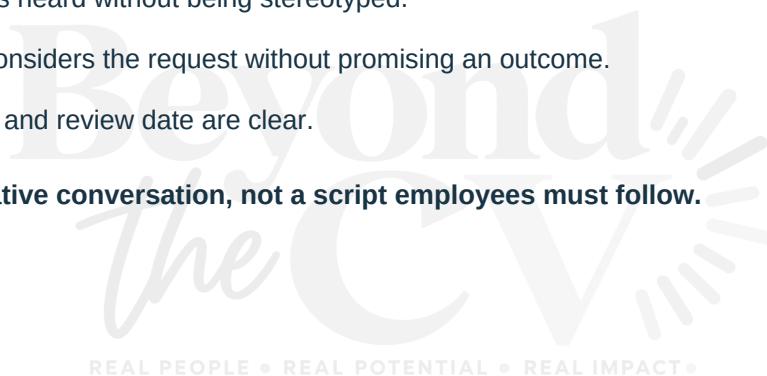
Employee: "That would help. I should know more next week."

Manager: "Shall we review it next Friday? You don't need to share any deployment details - just what would affect the working arrangement."

Why it works

- The employee is heard without being stereotyped.
- The manager considers the request without promising an outcome.
- The next action and review date are clear.

This is an illustrative conversation, not a script employees must follow.



08 Privacy, fairness and good practice

Keep personal information proportionate

Only ask for information genuinely needed to assess work arrangements. Avoid collecting sensitive operational details. Handle any personal information under your organisation's data protection procedures.

Use the same fair process

Assess requests consistently, explain the reasons for decisions and document agreed changes. Military connection should neither guarantee special treatment nor be a reason to exclude someone.

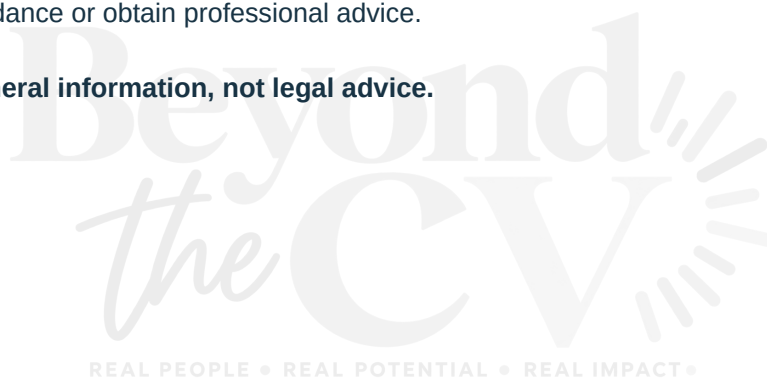
Know when to involve HR

Seek appropriate advice when a request raises contractual, health, discrimination, overseas working, leave or other legal issues. Managers should not improvise legal advice.

Remember legal rights

UK employment rights and applicable policies may be relevant, including flexible working requests, dependants' leave and equality duties. The details depend on the circumstances and jurisdiction; check current official guidance or obtain professional advice.

This guide is general information, not legal advice.



09 Employer conversation checklist

Use these prompts before, during and after a discussion.

- Have we chosen a private, respectful time to talk?
- Have we asked what the employee needs, rather than assuming?
- Are we focusing on work-related impacts rather than military details?
- Have we considered the role, team cover and business requirements?
- Have we explored realistic alternatives where a request cannot be met?
- Have we explained the decision clearly and consistently?
- Have we agreed what information needs to be recorded or shared?
- Have we set a date to review any temporary arrangement?

For your next team meeting

Ask: "What one change could make it easier for staff to raise a change in circumstances before it becomes a problem?"

Small improvements in communication can benefit the whole workforce.



10 Let's have a conversation

You do not need to have all the answers. You just need to be willing to have the conversation.

Beyond the CV was founded by Joanne Bowmer and Amy Lovely to help employers recognise the abilities, ambitions and potential of military spouses and partners.

Joanne and Amy are happy to speak with employers, business owners, managers, recruitment teams and HR professionals **completely free of charge**.

Whether you would like an informal virtual cuppa, a discussion with your HR team or a session with your wider workforce, we would love to hear from you.

No charge. No membership requirement. No obligation.

Whether you employ two people or two thousand, a conversation can be a good place to start.

Visit www.btcv.co.uk to get in touch.

Further reading

For current UK employment rights and good-practice guidance, consult ACAS (acas.org.uk), GOV.UK (gov.uk) and, where relevant, your own HR or legal advisers.

Joanne Bowmer & Amy Lovely

Co-founders, Beyond the CV

Real People. Real Potential. Real Impact.

