

# **KEY SPOUSE PROGRAM**



## **Commander and First Sergeant Reference Guide**

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## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Air Force KEY SPOUSE Program. The KEY SPOUSE Program is a formal unit program that offers informal peer-to-peer/Wingman family support. There are a number of imperatives for a revised emphasis on this program: Impact of the war's OPSTEMPO, force reduction, and the Community Action Information Board feedback show signs of spouse stress with increases in domestic situations and suicidal gestures and attempts. Unit participation in this program is voluntary; however, AF leadership highly encourages involvement on all levels to strengthen family resiliency--particularly during deployments.

The Key Spouse Reference Guide for Commanders and First Sergeants is designed to provide a practical approach to develop an effective unit Key Spouse Program. This guide defines roles and responsibilities of the unit's team: Commander, Key Spouse Mentor, First Sergeant, Key Spouse, and Airman and Family Readiness Center (A&FRC). The goal is to have a cadre of trained spouse volunteers who can support military families.

As the Commander and First Sergeant, you can expect: (a) Guidance and support to get started or to strengthen your existing program, (b) support team feedback, and (c) Key Spouse (s) to receive supplemental training on topics that will aid them in performing their duties.

The rollout of the AF standardized Key Spouse Program is the result of 2008 CORONA spouse feedback and the dedicated efforts of Air Staff, MAJCOMs, Airman & Family Readiness Centers, spouse volunteers, Guard and Reserve. A special thanks to Mrs. Susie Schwartz for her vision and input. This program continues to evolve; therefore, your comments and suggestions are important.

HQ AF Airman and Family Services Branch wishes you and your team success as you implement the Key Spouse Program.

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## HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

The Key Spouse program was developed as a Quality of Life Initiative out of concern for the Air Force Families. Forerunner: Navy Ombudsman Program. AF tested similar programs at five bases ('96-'98). Voluntary implementation was encouraged Air Force-wide as part of AF family support outreach program ('99). For many years, the program has been base or command-specific. The AF standardized and deployed the Key Spouse Program, March 2009.



### Why is this Program Important?

- Promotes individual, family, and unit readiness
- Establishes continuous contact with spouses/families
- Encourages peer-to-peer Wingman support
- Links to leadership
- Provides an informal sounding board
- Strengthens leadership's support team
- Vital to building strong AF communities

### KEY SPOUSE Program Outcomes

- Increased awareness of installation/community resources
- Identified/resolved issues at lowest levels
- Enhanced up/down information flow
- Prepared/supported families during separations
- Increased sense of unit support
- Improved Quality of Life among unit families
- Increased readiness and retention
- Enhanced family resiliency

## BUILDING THE TEAM: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Key Spouse Program is a Commander's program. The Commander establishes and maintains the program within the unit. The team is comprised of the Commander, the Key Spouse Mentor (KSM), the First Sergeant, the Key Spouse, and the Airman & Family Readiness Center (A&FRC).

### Commander

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- Establishes & maintains the unit's Key Spouse program, Template E
- Selects/appoints/replaces Key Spouse

- Sample appointment letter, Template A
- Sample dismissal letter, Template C
- Provides resource support
- Encourages unit spouse participation
- Supports Key Spouse meetings/functions

### **First Sergeant**

The First Sergeant monitors the Key Spouse Program and is the commander's "go to" point of contact. Specifically, the First Sergeant:

- Primary point of contact for Key Spouse
- Link between CC and Key Spouse
- Assists in recruiting/selecting Key Spouse
- Meets with Key Spouses regularly
- Assists with administrative and logistical support
- Provides access to updated rosters

### **Key Spouse Mentor (KSM)**

- Mentors junior spouses
- Takes strategic vs tactical program perspective
- Advocates unit concerns
- Attends trainings
- Encourages spouse/family interactions with each other/unit
- Recognizes contributions of Key Spouse

In the event the unit commander is not married or spouse chooses not to accept KSM role, the Commander can appoint an individual into that position (Senior Officer or Senior NCO spouse).

### **Airman and Family Readiness Center (A&FRC)**

- Primary "go to" agency
- Provides oversight and assistance
- Facilitates Key Spouse training
- Provides information & referral support
- Provides continuing education and training opportunities

### **Key Spouse**

- Face of unit leadership to families
- Peer-to-peer Wingman support
- Force multiplier

### **Key Spouse Responsibilities**

Caring for families on the homefront allows the warfighter to focus on his/her mission at home and downrange.

The Key Spouse's performance directly impacts unit families' morale. The Commander and First Sergeant rely on the Key Spouse's judgment, reliability, and positive attitude to accomplish program goals. Key Spouse role/responsibilities:

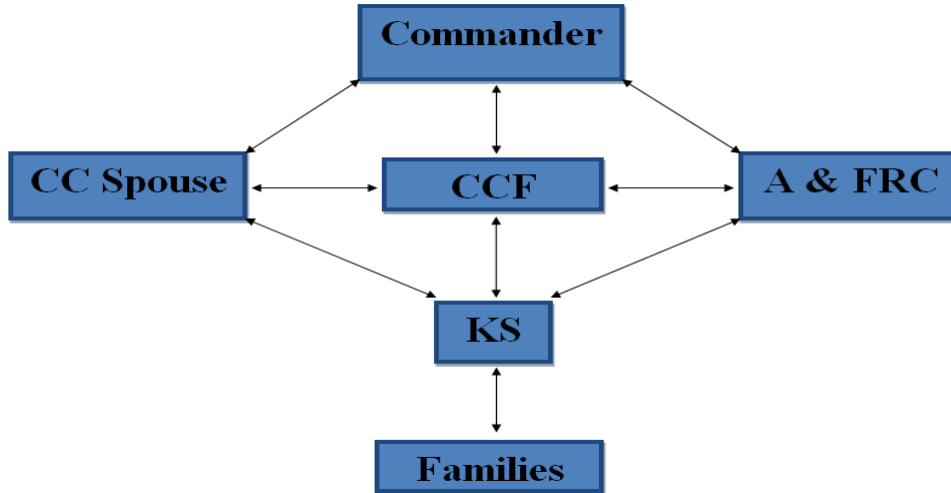
- Trained volunteer
  - Interviewed and chosen by the Commander in writing
  - Minimum 1-year commitment
- Official unit representative
- Works directly with the First Sergeant
- Role model for family members
- Keeps current roster/database of unit family members
- Establishes and maintains contact with
  - All unit families
  - Incoming unit families
  - Deployed members' families
- Visible at unit/group/wing, and A&FRC events
- Track and report trends that affect family readiness—"big picture" snapshot
  - Shares potential issues or concerns with unit leadership
- Maintains professional image at all times
  - Reference Protocol handout

#### **Key Spouses Are**

- Volunteers
- Trained
- Active
- Visible
- Available
- Team players
- Conduit of information
- Official unit representative

#### **Key Spouses Are Not**

- Counselors
- Babysitters
- Taxi Drivers
- Fundraisers
- Gossips
- Working alone
- To assume leadership authority

**Diagram 1: Unit Team**

## IMPLEMENTING AN EFFECTIVE UNIT KEY SPOUSE PROGRAM

### Selecting a Key Spouse

The ideal candidate will have the following characteristics:

- Unit family member
- Positive attitude about the Air Force
- Ability to communicate and listen
- Passion, time and energy to do the job
- Organizational and coordination skills
- Ability to follow directions and understand the chain of command
- Trustworthiness
- Dependability
- Outgoing, friendly and self-confident
- Key Spouse Job Description, Template D



### Interviewing Candidates

Questions to consider:

- Does this person seem competent?
- Can this person work as part of a team?
- Will this person work well with staff and base agencies?
- Does the candidate's family support spouse's desire?

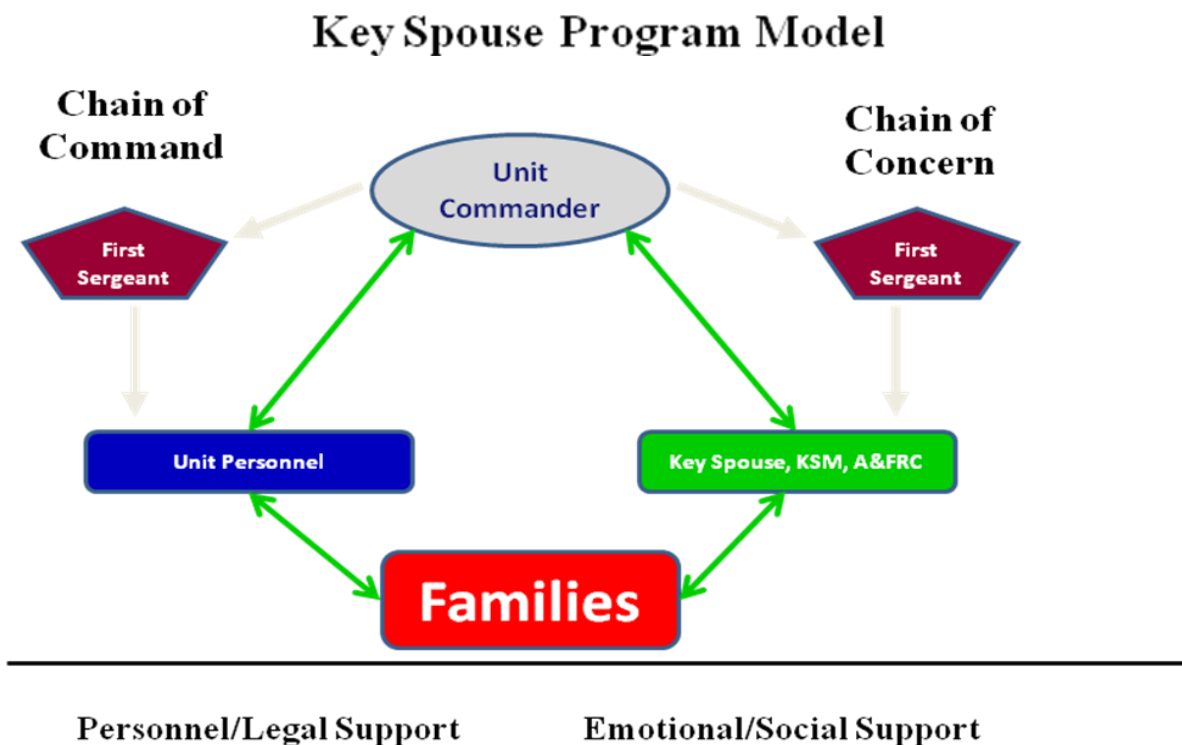
### Steps to Take After Selecting a Candidate

- Sign and send letter of appointment to A&FRC (must be re-accomplished on annual basis)
- Schedule initial Key Spouse training
- Formally meet with Key Spouse to communicate expectations
- Introduce Key Spouse to the Unit

### Establish Communication Process

- Meetings frequency (suggest at least quarterly)
- Feedback the unit expects
- Information Flow, up/down chain
  - During emergencies
- Incoming families notification
- Logistic support required (typically, Key Spouses work from their home)
  - Meeting space
  - Use of telephone/computer if needed
- Grounds/procedures for dismissal or replacing Key Spouse volunteer

**Diagram 2: Team Communication**





## Training

When the A&FRC receives a copy of the Key Spouse Appointment Letter, the Key Spouse is scheduled for appropriate training. Required Key Spouse training includes:

- Initial Key Spouse Training
- Heart Link
- Spouse Suicide Awareness Training (CBT)

Key Spouses trained at a previous installation will need to provide Certificate of Training. If the Certificate is misplaced or lost, contact the A&FRC. Encourage the Key Spouse to schedule an appointment with the unit's Community Readiness Consultant (CRC).

Commanders and First Sergeants working with Key Spouses for the first time may benefit from a Key Spouse Program overview from your unit CRC.

## Motivation and Recognition

A highly motivated Key Spouse will provide extensive outreach to unit families. Some tips for rewarding and motivating Key Spouses:

- Express sincere, personal thanks for their efforts
- Introduce Key Spouse(s) during incoming briefs or unit functions
- Respect their opinions and suggestions
- Support the program by giving time
- Hail and farewell Key Spouses

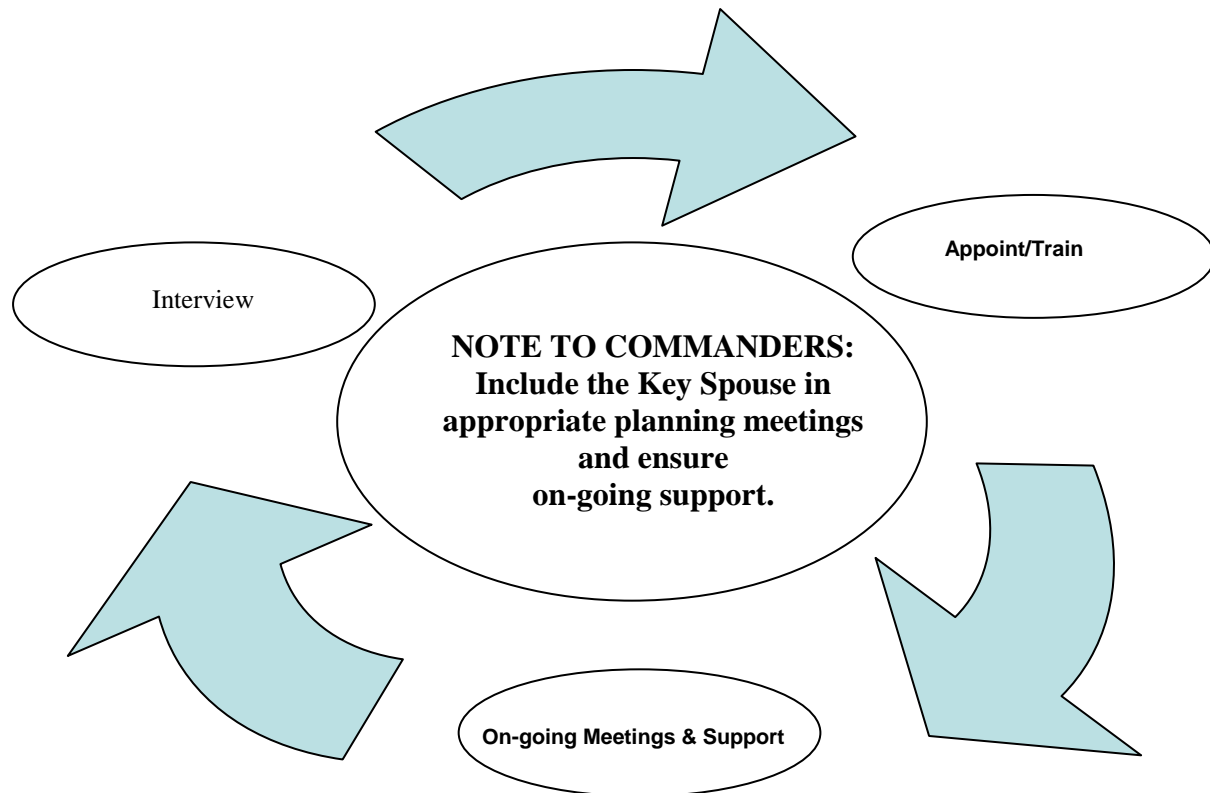
## Reappointing/Replacing a Key Spouse

When there is a change of command, the new Commander may re-appoint the current Key Spouse(s) or select a new one. Generally, the Key Spouse(s) are retained unless there are sufficient reasons to dismiss. The current Key Spouse(s) are re-appointed in writing. The new Commander should schedule a meeting as soon as possible to provide guidance and receive updates on the Key Spouse Program. This makes the transition more amicable.

Consider replacing the Key Spouse when:

- Performance is unsatisfactory
- Confidentiality is breached
- Unable to follow-through on assigned tasks
- Unwilling to participate in unit-specific events
- Loss of confidence
- Burned out

If any of the above is violated, the Commander's right of dismissal is absolute. All dismissals need to be clearly worded to avoid misunderstanding and, whenever possible, communicated in person and followed up by a letter. A Key Spouse may choose to resign when life circumstances change, Template B. A smooth transition is encouraged to ensure program's integrity.

**Diagram 3: Process for Selecting and Communicating with Unit Key Spouse(s)**

### Transitions

Key Spouses are encouraged to begin with the end in mind and plan their transition. Key Spouses transition for several reasons:

- Permanent change of station
- Spouse assigned to another unit
- Change in family situation
- Personal goals inconsistent with unit requirements

Key Spouses are encouraged to return sensitive information to leadership; ask leadership for a letter of recommendation, and develop a resume with A&FRC assistance. Smooth transitions help maintain unit integrity and ensure families are protected.

## Template A

### Key Spouse Appointment Letter

#### Organizational Letterhead

MEMORANDUM FOR (Organization Address)

FROM:

SUBJECT: Key Spouse Appointment Letter

1. The following individual is selected as a Key Spouse for (name of unit). This appointment is contingent upon completion of Key Spouse Program training and expires one year from the training completion date.

Name

Address

Phone Number

2. The Key Spouse acts in an official capacity and may be given access to Privacy Act information to carry out certain tasks. The (KS POC in unit) will assign duties and provide any needed supervision.

(Commander's signature block)

cc: CCF  
Key Spouse

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**Airman and Family Readiness Center use only.**

#### VERIFICATION OF TRAINING

The above named unit spouse volunteer has completed the Key Spouse Training Program and can be officially recognized as (name of unit) Key Spouse.

\_\_\_\_\_

(Name)

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

Community Readiness Consultant

(Base) Airman and Family Readiness Center

**Template B**  
**Resignation Letter**

DD MMM YY

MEMORANDUM FOR [Unit CC]

FROM: [Key Spouse's Name]

SUBJECT: Key Spouse Resignation Letter

1. I hereby resign my appointment as Key Spouse for [Unit], effective [DD MMM YY] for the following reason(s):

- a. PCS
- b. Personal reasons
- c. Health issues
- d. New child
- e. Other (please specify)

2. I would like to express my sincere appreciation for having had the opportunity to volunteer in this capacity.

[Key Spouse signature block]

cc:  
CCF  
A&FRC

**Template C**  
**Dismissal Letter**

DD MMM YY

MEMORANDUM FOR [Key Spouse's Name]

FROM: [Unit CC]

SUBJECT: Key Spouse Dismissal Letter

1. One of the greatest honors anyone of us can do is serve others. Thank you, First Name, for your commitment and service to Unit's Name families in your role as a Key Spouse. One of the most difficult roles of a Commander is letting go of a valued member of the team. Per our discussion on \_\_\_\_\_, we both agreed your resignation from the KEY SPOUSE Program is in the best interest of the organization.

2. I appreciate your willingness to serve. If you have questions, please contact me at [Unit CC's telephone number].

[Commander's signature block]

bcc:  
CCF  
A&FRC

## Template D

### Key Spouse Position Description

(Optional Use at Unit Discretion)

**PURPOSE:** The primary purpose of this position is to work with unit leadership to plan, coordinate, and execute the unit's Key Spouse Program. This program impacts mission readiness and retention by ensuring families have appropriate information and resources to meet their needs. The Key Spouse is appointed, in writing, by the Unit Commander.

**ELIGIBILITY:** Spouse of a unit member

#### **DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- Provides peer-to-peer support to unit families
- Serves as a link between unit leadership and families
- Provides information and referral assistance to families during crisis
- Welcomes families and cultivates relationships within the unit
- Maintains and updates community resources and services
- Actively participates in unit's Hails & Farewells, squadron functions, spouses' group functions, and A&FRC meetings/training
- Tracks and maintains a unit family call log; records action taken and provides feedback regarding family readiness issues
- Troubleshoots issues and reports back to families and/or unit team
- Serves as a role model/mentor for unit spouses
- Attends scheduled meetings with the Unit Commander and/or First Sergeant and provides feedback regarding family readiness issues
- Record volunteer hours and information disseminated on a data spreadsheet

#### **Other Duties May Include:**

- Provides newsletter input
- Distributes unit's newsletter to families
- Performs other unit-related duties as determined by unit leadership

**Desired Skills:** Good communicator. Optional, knowledgeable of Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Publisher. Professional; person of integrity and standards; adheres to privacy and confidentiality guidelines, and loyal to leadership.

**Required:** 12 hours of training (Key Spouse Program, Heart Link Orientation, and Spouse Suicide Awareness (CBT)). Continuing education to remain current on Air Force and command trends/issues.

## Template E

### Commander's Implementation Checklist

#### Review Commander's and First Sergeants Reference Guide

#### Identify Current Key Spouse Program Participants

Commander

Key Spouse Mentor (typically CC's Spouse)

First Sergeant

A&FRC Community Readiness Consultant

Key Spouse (Target 1 per 100 unit members)

#### New Key Spouse Appointment

Identify potential candidates

Interview & select

Sign appointment letter and forward to A&FRC

Upon receipt of appointment letter, A&FRC will schedule required training

Once training is complete, schedule unit team meeting

Introduce Key Spouse(s) to unit members

#### Communication

Provide rosters/unit family contact information

Establish unit meetings/feedback frequency