



STRENGTHENING PARENTING PRACTICES FOR THE MILITARY FAMILY

Military & Family Life Counseling Program

TRAINING GOAL

The goal of today's course is to provide you with parenting practices that will strengthen your family and build resilience, particularly during times of stress such as deployments and multiple transitions.



COURSE OBJECTIVES

In this course, participants will learn:

The “Three R’s”

Tools for solving everyday problems

To better understand your child’s worries and anxieties about deployment and how to respond appropriately

How to talk to your child about difficult military lifestyle issues based on their developmental level

How to maintain a “united front” when disciplining children

How to manage your own emotions and aggressive responses when disciplining children

How to incorporate the “5:1 ratio” into your parenting practices



INTRODUCTION

- The deployment cycle and multiple transitions are additional and unique types of stressors that military families must face.
- Reestablishing “equilibrium” or bringing “balance” back into the family following major life transitions, or upon a service member’s return from deployment, can be particularly challenging.



GROUP ACTIVITY

Divide into couples (or join together with other single-parents attending) and address the following questions:

1. What are your particular parenting strengths and values that you can bring to these challenging situations?
2. What are your children's strengths that they can bring to these challenging situations?
3. What are some ways your family has confronted and grown from significant military and more general stressors?

Choose one member to share their responses with the group at large.



THE THREE R'S

RULES

ROUTINES

RITUALS



RULES

Two main reasons why there is a natural tendency to be less consistent and relax rules and limits when the non-deployed parent is single-parenting during deployment or following reintegration (or during major life transitions):

1. Exhaustion from the stress of single parenting or transition
2. Parents feel bad/guilty about parental absence

Clear rules and limits are crucial to provide children with a sense of security and predictability during times of adversity.



TIME OUT: EFFECTIVE LIMIT-SETTING TOOL

Generally effective for children from 3-12 years old.

Can teach children behavior management skills when used appropriately.

Used not as a punishment, but used to teach children to manage their emotions in a positive way.

Removes children from the reinforcement of adult attention when engaging in inappropriate behavior.



TIME OUT AREA

Establish an effective time out area

- Free of distractions
- For small children who are not likely to be able to sit still, a time out room may be the best option
- For older children, a chair or steps may be used



BEHAVIORS THAT LEAD TO TIME OUT

1. Defiance of parental authority
2. Difficulty managing their emotions
3. Some behaviors may require one (not multiple) warnings.
4. Use “if....then” statements such as, “If you continue to bang those together, then you will have to go to time-out.”
5. Other behaviors, such as aggressiveness should lead to an immediate time out without a warning. “The rule in our house is that we use our words when angry and not hit, you will need to take a time out.”



LENGTH OF THE TIME OUT

- Typically dependent on the age of the child
- Rule of thumb: one minute for each year of age. For example, a four year old requires a four minute time-out while a seven year old requires a seven minute time out.
- Time out should not begin until the child is quiet. If your child yells, screams, or cries loudly, ignore those behaviors. Once the child is quiet, the time out starts.



PLAN FOR RESISTANCE TO TIME OUT

- Sometimes children will either refuse to go into time out or refuse to stay in time out.
- Best to use time out as the first line of defense; however, if they are unable to successfully complete time out, use a logical consequence.
- Example, “If you do not go into time out and stay in time out, you will lose those toys you were banging around for 24 yours.”
- If the refusal continues, FOLLOW THROUGH!
- There is no better way to give away your parental authority (which results in more defiance), than by making idle threats!



FAMILY ROUTINES AND RITUALS

- During times of adversity and stress, children and parents benefit from predictable routines and family rituals.
- It is helpful for the deployed parent to know that the family is engaging in familiar routines and rituals so that he/she has a sense of what is going on even though not there to experience family life.
- Continuity with regard to rules, routines and rituals provide a means of maintaining family stability in the face of deployment and other military life stressors.



ROUTINES AND RITUALS

Discussion:

What are some routines and rituals that may be challenging to maintain during various stages of deployment and/or transitions?

What will you do to overcome those challenges to create a sense of family stability during times of adversity?



PROBLEM SOLVING TOOLS

- Family Meetings
- Identification of quality support systems



FAMILY MEETINGS

- An excellent vehicle for family problem-solving
- Solving problems as a family is a wonderful tool to help children cope with deployment and other military family life stressors.
- Increases effective communication
- Provides a method for solving everyday conflicts in a cooperative manner



How To Hold A Family Meeting

As family leaders, parent(s) decide to begin holding family meetings.

Work together as a family to get everyone's commitment to the process.

Describe the meetings as an opportunity for the whole family to meet without anything else going on (meals, games, TV, relatives) to talk about goals & plans and strengthen what is already so great about the family.

Decide together when and where to hold meetings.

Parent(s) lead the first meeting and share leader duties as the meetings continue.

Create Family Meeting groundrules at the beginning of the meeting. Some examples:

- Listen to others
- One person talks at a time
- Respect
- Kind words
- No criticism
- No fighting

Throughout the meeting, parent(s) model praise and encouragement, active listening, asking open-ended questions and supporting everyone in sharing.

Try using a "sharing object" to facilitate discussion. Only the person holding the object is allowed to speak.

Or try using the "go around" method. Choose a topic, for example: something nice that happened today or last week, and then go around and have everyone answer the topic.

Before ending the meeting decide on the next family meeting date and put it on the calendar.

End the meeting by having everyone say one thing they learned or gained from the meeting, close with an activity, a game, a story or a fun plan!

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QUALITY SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Discussion

- What are some quality sources of support that will enhance coping of all family members during times of adversity e.g. during the deployment cycle or during life transitions?



RESPONDING TO CHILD ANXIETY AND WORRY

Develop and understanding of your child's cognitive capacities and how much information they can absorb at various developmental stages.

An excellent resource with charts of children's physical, social and cognitive developmental at each stage:

<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/Pages/default.aspx>



BE PREPARED FOR DIFFICULT TOPICS

- Be prepared by role-playing talking to your children about difficult situations that may emerge.
- This type of preparedness will strengthen children's coping and anxiety at stressful times.
- Utilize Sesame Street's, "Talk, Listen, Connect" program for young children.

<http://www.sesamestreet.org/parents/topicsandactivities/toolkits/tlc>



ACTIVITY

Divide into couples (for singles that are attending pair up with another person) and take turns role-playing talking to children about the following situations:

1. Return from deployment has been delayed.
2. Orders for deployment have arrived.
3. Any other difficult situation you may personally be dealing with.

Share the experience and what worked or parts of the discussion that could have been improved.



MAINTAINING A “UNITED FRONT”

Very normal to experience difficulty keeping parenting practices consistent across partners during deployment.

Particularly difficult during reintegration when transitioning from single-parenting to co-parenting.

Weakens parental authority when children can split the parents, can lead to more behavior issues.



STRATEGIES FOR MAINTAINING A UNITED FRONT

Discuss explicitly the importance and intention to maintain a united front

In preparation for key transitions during the deployment cycle and other stressful times, discuss in advance the expectations of each partner's role and responsibilities and co-parenting changes that must take place.

Parents can disagree, but present a “united front” in the presence of the children and discuss the issues later out of ear shot of the children.



DISCUSSION

What signals or cues can couples utilize to stop themselves when noticing they are beginning to disagree in front of the children?

What are the obstacles that may prevent effective utilization of those signals and cues?

What are some strategies for overcoming those obstacles?



MANAGING YOUR EMOTIONS IS A KEY TO EFFECTIVE PARENTING

One of the common reactions upon returning home from deployment may be agitation, and/or becoming easily upset, irritated or annoyed.

Some of the other reactions that service members experience upon returning home, and during other times of adversity, may be linked to difficulty parenting effectively.

Stress reduction techniques and practicing good self care may relieve some of the tension and translate to more effective parenting.



STRESS REDUCTION TECHNIQUES

Some stress reduction techniques include:

- Exercise
- Deep breathing
- Finding trusted people to talk to
- Balancing work and leisure time
- Engaging in healthy activities that bring joy



DISCUSSION

Respond in writing to the following:

- What stress reduction/self care activities are you engaging in right now?
- What are the obstacles, if any, that prevent you from to engaging in these types of activities?
- What is your plan for overcoming those obstacles?

Who would like to share their responses with the group?



POSITIVE AND NEUTRAL INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Giving effective directions to children is a key component of parenting.

Effective directives are short, clear, specific and given in a neutral tone of voice.

Example (in a calm, neutral tone):

“Dinner will be on the table in five minutes so please start getting ready by picking up your toys and putting them away and then go wash your hands.”



ACTIVITY

Divide into couples (or singles pair up) and think of a commonly occurring situation in your household with your children that require you to give clear directives.

Take turns role-playing interacting effectively in those situations.



WHEN EMOTIONS FLARE....

Remaining in control and getting a handle on aggressive reactions is key to effective parenting.

Managing anger and aggressive responses is a skill that requires practice.



ANGER MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

- Recognize anger - know when you are angry
- Generate a plan for dealing with situations that arouse anger
- Practice, practice, practice until your new positive responses become good habits
- Great anger management resource:

<http://www.innerhealthstudio.com/anger-management-worksheets.html>



KNOW WHEN YOU ARE ANGRY

Write down and discuss:

1. Where in your body do you feel anger? List your physical signs of being angry.
2. What is the first sign of anger you notice? List your early warning signs that tell you when you are starting to become angry.
3. If there is an imaginary anger scale that goes from 1-5 (1: not angry at all to 5: enraged), at what point on that scale do you need to leave the situation? Once we get too far up the scale, it is difficult to reign it in!



COPING WITH ANGER

- If your partner or spouse is present, ask them to give you a signal that it is time to leave the situation.
- Walk away
- Exercise
- Talk to someone who you are not feeling angry with
- Distract yourself
- Count 10 breaths
- Write about it
- Come back and deal with it later when you feel calm



THE POWER OF 5:1

- It is normal for stress and adversity to increase the likelihood of yelling, threatening and using other coercive parenting strategies.
- You may use encouraging words, token systems, incentive charts to counterbalance the downward cycle of conflict between you and your child.



THE POWER OF 5:1

Try to provide five supportive, encouraging, nurturing, or rewarding behaviors or statements for every one correction or consequence is delivered to a child.

This establishes a more positive climate in the household.

Helps prevent the use of yelling, spanking and threatening.



ACTIVITY

Divide into couples or join with another single and:

Identify a commonly occurring behavior that you would like to address in a more positive way.

Generate a reinforcement system (tokens, incentive chart, tangible rewards, encouraging words) that you will use to address that behavior.

Example: Your child argues with you every time you direct him/her to help with chores.

Instead of constantly reminding, yelling, threatening or grounding, you will set up a chart with a sticker given every time you ask your child to help and he/she does so without arguing. So many stickers at certain intervals will result in a reward.

Who would like to share with the group?



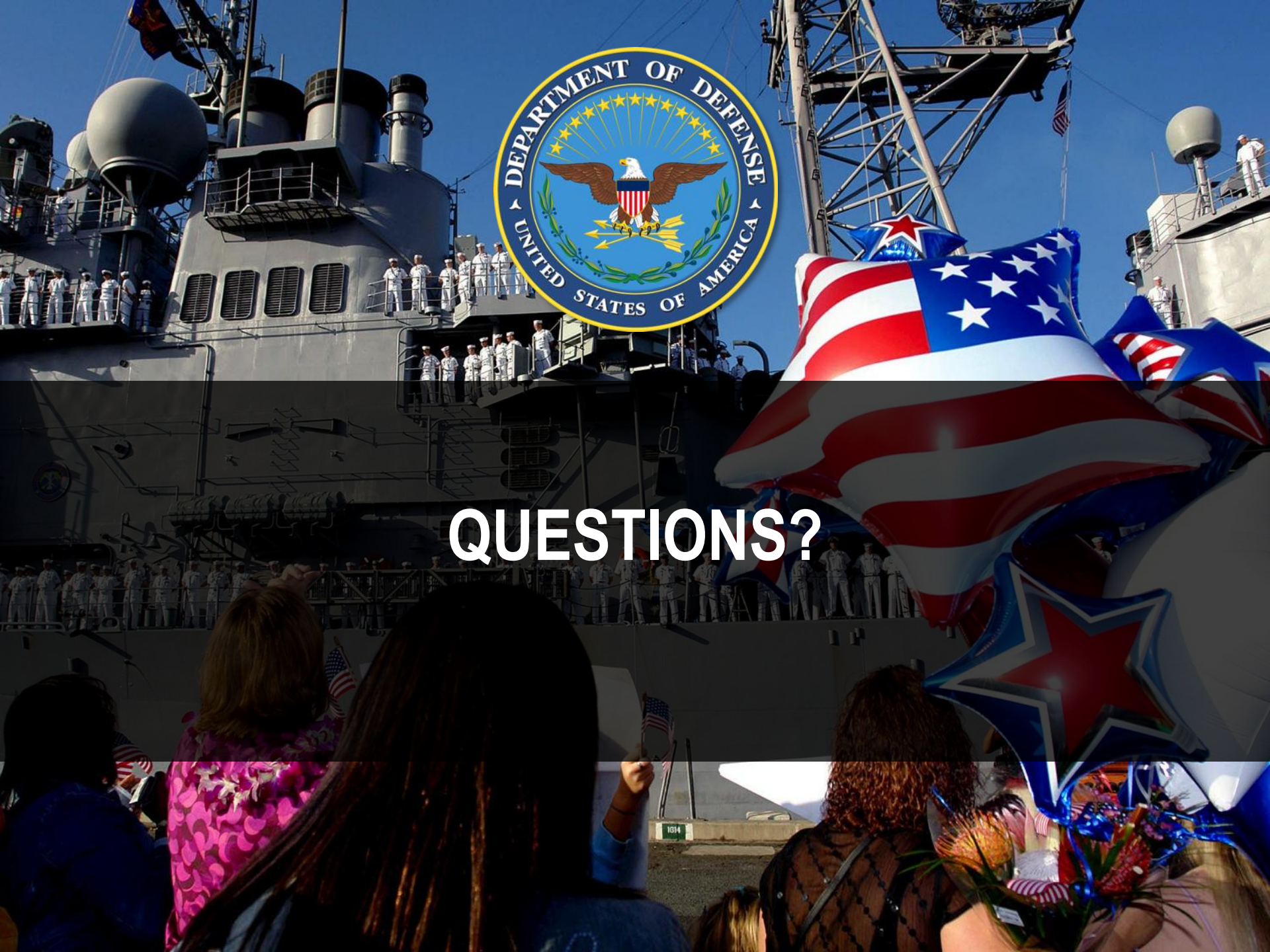
SOME CLOSING THOUGHTS

- The deployment cycle and multiple transitions are additional and unique types of stressors that military families must face and offer prime opportunities to strengthen your already existing parenting skills and learn some new strategies.
- Addressing family stress related to the deployment cycle and multiple transitions will enhance coping among military children.
- It is normal for families to experience challenges when transitioning from single parenting to co-parenting during the reintegration stage of the deployment cycle.
- Military service members returning from deployment often experience difficulty managing their emotions, hence learning and practicing strategies to control anger is a key to effective parenting.
- **Parents in this training are encouraged to make an appointment with the MFLC to focus on any specific areas of difficulty they may be experiencing and/or to reinforce and strengthen the skills acquired in this training.**





QUESTIONS?



REFERENCES

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- National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, “Stress...at Work, DHHS(NIOSH), Publication No. 99-101, www.cdc.gov/niosh/stresswk.html
- National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), 6001 Executive Boulevard, Room 8184, MSC 9663, Bethesda, MD 20892-9663, (301) 443-4513, www.nimh.nih.gov
- Encyclopedia of Occupational Health and Safety, 4th Edition, “Mental Health”; Vol 2, Chapter 34, “Psychological and Organizational Factors,” www.ilocis.org





THANK YOU

