



# TALKING TO PARENTS: EFFECTIVE PARENT/CAREGIVER COMMUNICATION

Presented by Military & Family Life Counselors

# OBJECTIVES

- Establishing the Parent/Caregiver Relationship
- Discussing Difficult Issues
- Choosing the Right Words
- Three Highly Effective Communication Skills
  - Active Listening
  - Validation
  - Empathy
- Additional Suggestions
- Summary



# ESTABLISHING A PARENT/CAREGIVER RELATIONSHIP

## Develop Trust:

- Express interest in the parent, not just the child
- Greet the parent each day and ask how they are doing
- Let them know about the positive things their child has done



## Develop a partnership

- Let them know their input and feedback is valuable to you.
- Work with them collaboratively
- Establish an ongoing feedback system between you and the parent



# DISCUSSING DIFFICULT ISSUES

- Find a private place to talk
- Think about and practice in advance exactly what you want to say to the parent and how you want to say it.

## Consider the following:

- How does one respond when they are in a defensive mode?
- Do they listen to what you have to say?
- How can you state this so it will be heard and won't come across as an attack?



# DISCUSSING DIFFICULT ISSUES

CONTINUED

- Start with the positive
- Use non-threatening language
- Be direct and focus on the specific behaviors.
- Ask parent if they have noticed these behaviors at home



# CHOOSING THE RIGHT WORDS

## Don't

- Make broad generalizations about behavior (always, never)
- Attack the child's character (lazy, bad)
- Infer the parent has done something wrong (“you need to...” or “you didn't do....”)

## Do

- Focus on specific behaviors
- Let the parent know you're on their side and want to help
- Ask parent for their input



# THREE HIGHLY EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

1. Active Listening
2. Validation
3. Empathy





# ACTIVE LISTENING

- Make eye contact
- Be aware of body positioning
- Paraphrase back what they said to you so the parent knows that you really heard what they said.



# VALIDATION

- Letting the other person know that you heard them and can see it from their perspective
- Does not require agreement or disagreement
- Increase openness and trust



# EMPATHY

Attempting to feel what the other person is feeling in a situation. Then, reflecting that back to them, like a mirror.

## Empathy can:

- Help the other person understand their feelings better
- Help the other person heal
- Increase trust and bonding



# ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

- Reassure the parent that just because their child may be having some difficulties, it doesn't make them bad parents.
- Normalize the unique issues of military families.
- It can sometimes be a relief to the parent to just talk with someone.
- Learn some new strategies that will give the parent relief.
- Suggest MFLC - Behavioral Specialist as a place to start.
- Suggest that if the parent would like, the specialist can meet them when they come to pick up the child from school.



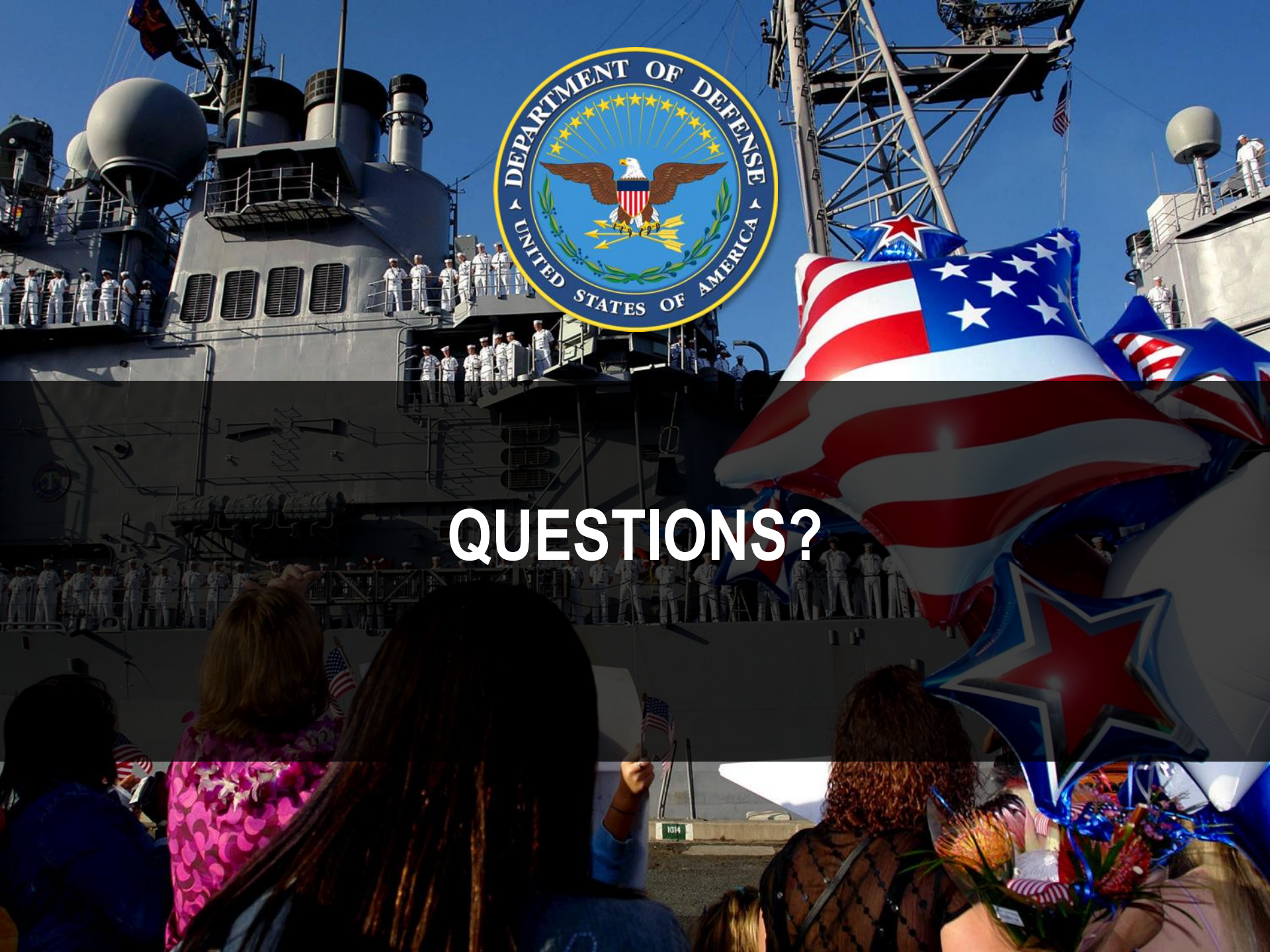
# SUMMARY

- Establish a relationship with the parent and work collaboratively
- Use non-threatening language when discussing difficult situations
- Always start with the positive
- Practice effective communication skills
  - Active Listening
  - Validation
  - Empathy





QUESTIONS?



# RESOURCES

- Military Community Services
- Chaplain and Local Clergy
- Military OneSource (800) 342-9647
- TRICARE: [www.Tricare.mil](http://www.Tricare.mil)
- Behavioral Health Services





**THANK YOU**

