

Speaker Notes

Parenting Skills for the Single Service Member

Page 1 – Title Slide

None

Page 2 – Agenda

None

Page 3 - Introduction

- Ask participants if they can think of other issues the single parent in the military faces.
- Increased financial concerns:
 - Financial support from the non-custodial parent is sometimes inadequate or non-existent.
 - Serving in the military comes with a commitment that is different from most other jobs. It is a commitment to serve and defend the country. There is a sense of honor and a sense of duty that is stronger than in most civilian jobs. There are also different separation issues, some of which can come up unexpectedly
 - (Examples: overnight duty, sudden deployments, early morning physical training).
 - Finding dependable and affordable childcare can be challenging.
 - These problems can all create conflicting feelings between family and job, which can lead to feelings of guilt. (discussed in following slides).
- Relocation issues: Difficulties with finding adequate childcare in a new location can make it very difficult to find any free time for the parent.
- Unique separation issues: Deployment, relocation, emergency assignments
- Relocation issues: Finding new housing, new schools, doctors, dentists, and dependable child care

Page 4 – Letting Go of the Guilt

- Realistic expectations: We get into trouble when our expectations don't meet our reality. Were you expecting to be super mom or dad? Did you expect not to snap at your children from time to time? What other expectations do you have that might contribute to your sense of guilt?
- Remember what's important: As long as you are providing a sense of security and unconditional love to your children, congratulate yourself on what you've achieved. When you are comfortable with your life, chances are your children will be comfortable too.
- Single parents raise healthy children: One study from Cornell University in 2004 found that being a single parent does not have a negative effect on the behavior or education performance of children, and that two parent households lacking positive parental traits may actually be more harmful. (Being a Single Parent: Strategies and Support for Parenting on Your Own – Borchers, Gaines, Engber Ceridian Corporation)
- Focus on what's positive: Avoid focusing on what's wrong with your life and enjoy all that is good.
- When you are comfortable with your life, your children will feel more comfortable too. They pick up on your moods even if they are very young.

- Talk with other single parents in the military. Other parents may not have all the answers, but sometimes it helps just talk to someone in your position who has a sympathetic ear.
- Perfect parenting isn't possible. All parents, whether single or with a partner, make mistakes. The best a parent can do is learn from the mistakes and move forward.
- Children are resilient. Be patient with yourself and realize that you will make mistakes from time to time, but your child will be OK.

Page 5 – Positive Aspects of Being Single in the Military

- Many single parents find that being in the military provides a stable income and other benefits that add to the security of the family. It is sometimes a better job opportunity than jobs in the private sector.
- Children of single service members may feel they are making their own contribution to your career and to their country.
- Ask participants what other positives they see about being a single parent in the military.

Page 6 - Discipline

- Without a second parent to share the burden with or provide emotional backup, there may be times when you feel overwhelmed. All children test limits – that's their job – so be prepared by coming up with some age-appropriate disciplinary measures that you can apply consistently and firmly.
- Separation from the children requires coordinating with other caregivers. The parent must make sure they are using the same discipline methods and following the same rules and consequences. It's important to have this consistency. Without it, the lines become blurred regarding what the children can and can't do and what the consequences will be. It will also make returning home more difficult if you have to reorient them to your discipline methods each time you come home.
- The following slides give basic discipline guidelines.

Page 7 – Discipline Guidelines

- It is normal for children to test limits. If you are inconsistent with what the limits are, then you will be encouraging more misbehavior.
- Even though it may not seem like it, children actually want discipline from you. Clear rules and consequences provide an important structure that helps the child feel safe, secure and in control. The goal is for your children to learn through your modeling how to provide this structure for themselves as they grow and mature into responsible adults.
- Avoid yelling, since this can teach your child that it is all right to yell if you get mad. If things are escalating too much, take a break until you regain your composure.
- Make sure the child understands that you are unhappy with his behavior, but still love and accept him.
- Offer positive reinforcement of desirable behavior and avoid stating it in negative terms. For example: It's better to say "I like that you put all of your clothes away," rather than, "Well, you finally got around to putting your clothes away." Reward good behaviors, but do not offer bribes. A reward is something your child receives after he has done something, but a bribe is given beforehand, to try and persuade the child to do what you want. This puts the child in the power position and decreases your authority.

- Children depend on caring adults to provide them with role models for appropriate behavior. If you yell and speak to others in a disrespectful way when you are angry, this teaches them to do the same.

Page 8 – Establishing Rules and Limits

- Rules provide stability: Having parents who set firm boundaries is actually reassuring to kids, even though they will probably not express it. Setting rules and consequences lets them know you care about them and are interested in their welfare. They need you to set limits they can't set for themselves.
- Age appropriate rules: Don't demand that a 12 year old be in bed by 8:30pm on the weekend. You're setting yourself up for conflict and setting the child up to disobey the rule.
- Age appropriate consequences: Time out is for younger children under the age of 10. Natural and logical consequences have more impact and are more effective. (This will be covered on the next slides.)
- Have your child participate: Having them help set rules and consequences gives them a sense of control and greatly reduces the number of arguments you'll have. The children cannot then claim that punishments or expectations are unfair if they help set them. Parents can then take on the role of calmly enforcing the pre-arranged consequences.
- Be consistent: Make sure you set limits and consequences that you are going to enforce. Kids need to know that you mean what you say.
- If consequences cannot be completed quickly, they lose impact, and the child loses incentive. It's important to give children lots of opportunities to demonstrate appropriate behavior so that they can learn. Giving them opportunities also lets them know you trust and have confidence in them. This helps build self-esteem.
 - Example: Your child comes home late from an activity. If you say, "You have to stay home for the next 2 weeks," it loses its impact after a couple of days, and the child has no incentive to try to maintain appropriate behaviors. It's better to say, "You came home very late after we agreed on a time, so tomorrow you will have to stay home. After that, we'll try it again." This way the child has an opportunity to try again right away.
- Natural and logical consequences: Experiencing the consequences of their choices teaches self-discipline. (This will be discussed on next slide.)

Page 9 – Natural Consequences

- Example of a natural consequence: The child is supposed to put dirty clothes in the laundry hamper. After a couple of reminders, the child's dirty soccer uniform is still on their bedroom floor. Natural consequence: The child isn't able to wear the uniform to the soccer game. (The consequence is not imposed by the parent, because the child and parent have a prior understanding that the child takes care of their own clothes)

Page 10 – Logical Consequences

- Example of logical consequence: The teen wrecks the car. The teen loses car privileges for a set period of time (imposed by the parent).
- When the teen is very clear on the rules and consequences, and has participated in setting them, the parent or caregiver can calmly impose the consequence without becoming angry or upset. They can remind the teen that they have made a choice. They choose to break the rule and suffer the consequence. Next time, they can make a better choice.

Page 11 – Time-In

- Children see parents as setting limits for them and imposing consequences when they misbehave. It's important for children to also view parents and caregivers as people who offer a lot of positive attention.
- Give physical attention: Hugs, smiles, pats on the back. Young children respond especially well to physical affection.
- Be specific: Tell them exactly why they are being praised. For example, "You did a great job of playing nicely with your little sister."
- Immediate feedback: To be effective, the praise must be immediate.
- Plan parent-child activities: For example, going to the park or playing a game can be used to reward positive behavior. This increases the parent/child bond and is usually more effective than a material reward.
- Catch them being good: Observe your child frequently and offer praise when you see them acting appropriately. Do not wait for them to do something extraordinary to offer praise.

Page 12 – Time-Out

- Keeps the child from receiving attention that may inadvertently reinforce inappropriate behavior.
- Used to shape behavior, not as punishment: Do not use it to humiliate the child in front of peers (for example, don't put the child in the corner).
- Consistency: Time-out should be used unemotionally and consistently each time the child misbehaves.

Page 13 – Making Time-Out Work

- Prepare the child by briefly helping him or her connect the behavior with the time out.
- To be effective, it must be immediate. A prompt, cool, matter-of-fact approach can prevent angry protests. Use simple and direct language such as "Because you threw your toy, you have to go to time out."
- Remain calm. The louder they yell or scream, the softer you should talk. This will calm them and let them know you are serious.
- Choose a boring place. The location should not have any built-in rewards. Their room may not be the best choice. A specific chair in the living room with the television turned off may be a better alternative.
- Keep time-out brief (around 1 minute per year of age).

Page 14 – Tips for Communicating During Conflict

- Be consistent. Kids need to know you mean what you say. Establish rules and consequences and stick to them. Always be consistent in your follow-through.
- Use statements like, "When you...I feel...because." This lets the child know how their behavior affects you, but it doesn't convey an attack on them.
 - Example: "When you come home late, I feel worried, because you might be hurt."

Page 15 – Special Considerations When a Parent Deploys

- Changes in the child's role in the home:
 - Different routines
 - Increase in responsibilities
 - Financial stressors

- Change in residence and/or school
- Changes in moods and behaviors:
 - Increased irritability
 - Feelings of anxiety and sadness
 - Increase in problem behaviors occur when the child does not or cannot verbally state their fears and anxiety
 - Withdrawing from family and friends
 - Loss of appetite, sleep disturbance
 - Decline in grades
- Preparing your child:
 - Give as many details as possible
 - Encourage them to talk, but don't pressure them
 - Listen without being judgmental
 - Encourage them to connect with peers and stay involved in outside activities
 - Keep teachers and school counselors informed
 - Develop plans for staying in touch with the deployed parent

Page 16 – Talking About Deployment

- Anticipate questions: Children need lots of reassurance and will have lots of questions about their safety and yours. Talk with them about:
 - Everyone who will be taking care of them while you are gone.
 - Things you'll do when you get back.
 - Ways you will be protected while you're away.

Page 17 - Talking About Deployment (Continued)

- Importance of your job: Talk with your children about the importance of being in the military and how your assignment serves your country and its citizens.
- They're not to blame: Sometimes young children will have guilt, thinking you are leaving because of something they said or did. Make sure they understand why you're leaving and what you'll be doing.
- Use visuals: Kids are visual learners. Show them maps and pictures of where you'll be. Show them equipment and protective gear you'll have with you, such as your helmet, boots, vest, and uniform. Talk with them about how these will help keep you safe.

Page 18 – Single Parent Deployment Readiness

None

Page 19 – Single Parent Readiness (Continued)

None

Page 20 – Parenting Long Distance

None

Page 21 – Positive Aspects of Separation

- Sometimes parents and children can actually get to know each other better through correspondence. Sometimes it feels safer to write about feelings than it does to talk about them.

Page 22 – Building Support

- Building a support system is one of the most important and helpful things a single parent can do. It provides not only child care support, but emotional support for both you and your children.

Page 23 – Taking Care of Yourself

None

Page 24 – When to Seek Help for Your Child

None

Page 25 – When to Seek Help for Yourself

None

Page 26 - Summary

None

Page 27 - Questions

None

Page 28 - Resources

None

Page 29 – References

None

Page 30 – Thank You

None

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