

# *Readiness and Deployment Support Training*

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Return and Reunion Homecoming Handbook:  
Parents and Extended Family





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## Introduction

Homecoming is such an exciting time for Marines and for their families and friends. It is time to reconnect and get reacquainted with your Marine again. This guide provides suggestions on celebrating homecoming, understanding changes, and re-establishing communication, and addressing any concerns about the effects of serving in a combat zone, and what those effects might have on your Marine. Resources for assistance and information are also included.

Any separation that is Marine Corps related can be considered a deployment therefore resulting in various levels of challenges, concerns, and changes during the reintegration process. Challenges, concerns and changes can be considered as possibilities for every deployment but will vary in significance for non-combat related deployments and may include family relationships, children's reactions, renegotiation of household roles, and communication factors. Keep this in mind that the challenges, concerns, and changes may not have the same possible impact as combat related deployments. Non-combat deployments may include:

- MOS schools (Military Occupational Specialty)
- SOI Schools (School of Infantry)
- Training missions
- Relief Efforts to many countries throughout the world
- Unit Deployment Program (UDP)
- Mediterranean Floats
- Professional Military Education Schools
- Unaccompanied tours

Regardless of the type or length of deployment it is important for our Marine Corps families to always be in a constant state of readiness even when reintegrating as a family. For example, even though you are currently thinking about return and reunion you cannot plan on a natural disaster and Marines can get deployed instantaneously to a relief effort mission. Every deployment regardless of type or length has some kind of impact on Marines and their families and each requires for Marines and families to maintain their family readiness status and "can do" attitude.

The reintegration for each deployment may vary because some are so short that Marines and their families don't go through the typical cycle of emotions, as they would with a six month plus deployment, and some are so long, that by the end of the tour, Marines and their immediate families are so independent, that they may find they feel like they no longer need one another, and this new found independence can be a significant barrier in the entire reintegration process. On the other hand, Marines, their parents and extended family members may have

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issues related to re-connecting and getting to know each other again from extended time periods without seeing each other. Some families that endure non-combat related deployments may not experience more serious issues such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injuries, but instead face the issues as mentioned above.

## Celebrating Homecoming

### ***What's the Plan?***

If you are the one making plans for homecoming, keep them simple and realistic — it is likely that your Marine will be more tired than you expect. Stay flexible and patient, because delays may occur. Plan for how you will spend your first day. If possible, try to discuss with your Marine (and spouse or significant other) what he or she (they) would like to do during your visit together.

Your Marine may be traveling from another country and through several time zones. Many find it hard to sleep prior to homecoming. With all of the excitement and preparations, fatigue is a common homecoming reaction for everyone, including family and friends, as you may have also traveled to the area for the homecoming.

Many Marines say they experience culture shock at homecoming. They are surprised by the bright colors, the climate, and the smells. This shock and fatigue can make decision making hard for them. They likely will be pleased with a simple homecoming.

### ***Fun Things to Do***

Contact the local Marine Corps Community Services (MCCS), your unit FRO, a local travel agency or the local Chamber of Commerce to get ideas of inexpensive things to do such as:

- Concerts
- Dinner
- Beaches
- Festivals
- Zoo
- Movies
- Museums
- Parks
- Bowling
- Picnic Areas
- Botanical Gardens
- Historic Houses

If you are staying at a hotel, they may have a brochure library with information about area attractions.

### ***My Reunion Plan***

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### ***My Marine's (and his/her Spouse or Significant Others) Plan***

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If you have the opportunity, discuss homecoming plans prior to the homecoming so everyone's plans will coincide with one another's. Homecoming plans need to be flexible in case the official return time, date or location changes. Be patient with circumstances.

## **Emotions**

Expect to experience a wide range of emotions. Homecoming is like a family reunion and your favorite holiday rolled into one. What are some of your emotions?

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The days leading to homecoming seem to drag, but then you have so many things to get done – make travel arrangements, pack, tune up the car (if driving), make banners, maybe assist your Marine's spouse with their homecoming preparations (if applicable) – sometimes it seems like there are not enough hours in the day. This is all normal; remember to pace yourself and understand that things do not have to be perfect. Savor the anticipation and emotions and focus on enjoying your time as a family together!

## Changes

Many changes occur over the course of a deployment. What are some of the ways your Marine may have changed?

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You and your family have likely changed during deployment. How have you and/or your family changed?

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How has your home and community changed while your Marine has been deployed?

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You may not notice the changes as much as your Marine will. As often as possible, send pictures and tell your Marine about any changes before homecoming.

You and your Marine have had many different experiences during this deployment, and now you get to come together to reconnect and celebrate a safe return.

## Living with Combat Stress

### ***Returning from Hazardous Duty***

During a combat related deployment, your Marine may have been under the constant threat of danger, known people who were injured or may have lost comrades, participated in convoys or special operations, and cared for wounded comrades.

Your Marine will complete periodic *Post-Deployment Health Reassessments* upon his/her return, but as a family member or friend, you are also likely to notice whether your Marine is having difficulty adjusting to a post-deployment lifestyle. As a matter of fact, you may be one of the first people to notice any changes in your Marine's personality.

### ***Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder***

Most Marines begin to settle back into their post-deployment life within a few weeks. However, sometimes combat operational stress develops into a condition called *post-traumatic stress disorder* (PTSD). In post-traumatic stress disorder:

- Traumatic events are re-experienced.
- Reminders of traumatic events are avoided.
- Marines report a feeling of being disconnected or distant from others.
- Symptoms must last for at least a month to be considered PTSD.

Not all combat operational stress symptoms add up to PTSD. It takes a certain set of stress injury symptoms, for a prolonged period of time and severe enough to affect job performance and relationships, plus a formal diagnosis by a qualified doctor, to be called PTSD.

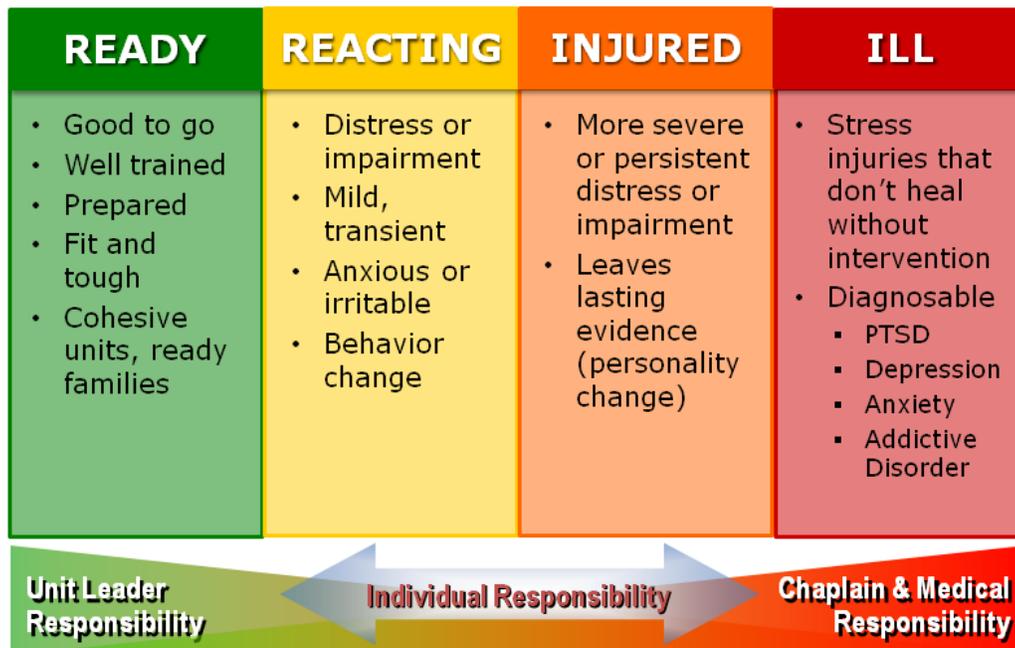
## Combat Operational Stress

Combat operational stress is experienced by all Marines as a part of doing their job. It is normal. After all, uncomfortable living conditions, often confined to a base, hearing explosions and gunfire, and having to be alert to danger for weeks or months at a time is stressful for anyone.

The Marine Corps views combat operational stress along a continuum. Each zone represents how a Marine functions with stress. It ranges from green (ready) to yellow (reacting) to orange (injured) and red (ill). Marines in the orange and red zones need medical evaluation and treatment to improve the quality of life for themselves and their families as quickly as possible.

About 70 percent of Marines exposed to combat operational stress will fall in the yellow zone briefly and then return to normal. However, about 20 percent will have residual symptoms in the orange zone, and 10 percent may develop persistent stress-related disorders, such as PTSD, depression, anxiety, or substance abuse.

### Combat Operational Stress Continuum for Marines



## Stress Injuries

Stress injuries occur when too much stress is placed on a part of the body. You've heard of runners with stress fractures, for example. When too much stress is placed on the mind, injury can occur. There are three types of stress injuries:

1. **Biological** injuries, which affect the way the brain handles information and emotions. As a result, a Marine seems moody, irritable, over-reactive, and impulsive, not the same Marine who left on deployment.
2. **Psychological** changes, which include difficulty making sense of what is happening to them, grief, guilt, a lost sense of safety, and questioning of personal values and beliefs.
3. **Social** changes, which include feeling isolated and that nobody else understands, questioning of society's sense of right and wrong, loss of moral compass, and loss of social support systems.

## Common Stress Symptoms for Marines

READY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Calm and steady</li> <li>•Confident and competent</li> <li>•Getting the job done</li> <li>•In control</li> <li>•Sense of humor</li> <li>•Sleeping enough</li> <li>•Eating the right amount</li> <li>•Working out, staying fit</li> <li>•Playing well and often</li> <li>•Active socially, spiritually</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Feeling anxious, irritable</li> <li>•Worrying</li> <li>•Cutting corners on the job</li> <li>•Short tempered or mean</li> <li>•Grouchy</li> <li>•Trouble sleeping</li> <li>•Eating too much/little</li> <li>•Apathy, loss of interest</li> <li>•Keeping to oneself</li> <li>•Negative, pessimistic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Loss of control of body, emotions, or thinking</li> <li>•Can't fall or stay asleep</li> <li>•Recurrent vivid nightmares</li> <li>•Intense guilt or shame</li> <li>•Attacks of panic or rage</li> <li>•Inability to enjoy activities</li> <li>•Disruption of moral values</li> <li>•Serious suicidal or homicidal thoughts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Stress injury symptoms that last for <u>more than 60 days</u></li> <li>•Symptoms that get worse over time instead of better</li> <li>•Symptoms that get better for awhile but then come back worse</li> </ul>

If you see these signs and symptoms, it is important to know when to get professional help for stress injuries. If you see or hear that the stress is affecting sleep, motivation, judgment and your Marine's ability to function socially or on the job, then additional outside help may be required to address the problem before it worsens.

## **Traumatic Brain Injury**

Another injury you may have heard about is *traumatic brain injury* (TBI). It is more commonly known as a concussion. Concussions occur as a result of a blow or jolt to the head that momentarily disrupts the function of the brain. Of course, not all blows to the head result in TBI. TBI is usually caused by:

- Motor vehicle accidents
- Assaults
- Falls
- Blasts

Severity may range from mild to severe. Mild TBI would occur with a brief change in mental status or consciousness. Severe TBI would occur after an extended period of unconsciousness or amnesia after an injury.

Symptoms of a concussion are mostly internal and may include:

- Headaches
- Excessive fatigue
- Irritability
- Balance problems
- Vision change
- Dizziness
- Concentration/memory problems
- Sleep problems
- Ringing in the ears

If your Marine complains about any of these symptoms, encourage him/her to seek medical assistance. The good news is that 85 percent of service members who experience TBI have no lasting symptoms within one year.

## **Behavioral Health Plan**

Behavioral health specialists will work with Marines to create plans of action for safety, treatment, and resiliency. Upon your Marine's return, he or she is given a Post-Deployment Health Reassessment.

Medical assessments and/or follow-ups are scheduled as face-to-face health assessments with a trained health care provider during in-theater medical out-processing or within 30 days after returning home or to a processing station. The purpose of this screening is to review each service member's current health, mental health or psychosocial issues commonly associated with deployments, special medications taken during the deployment, possible deployment-related occupational/environmental exposures, and to discuss deployment-related health concerns.

Positive responses require the use of supplemental assessment tools such as safety, treatment, and resiliency plans and/or referrals for medical consultation. The provider will document concerns and referral needs and discuss resources available to help resolve any post-deployment issues.

## **Ways to Help Your Marine**

No one wants to stand by while someone they love suffers. Some ways to support your Marine during homecoming include:

- Be loving and caring.
- Express/do not hide your needs to protect your Marine.
- Anticipate that communication may be harder.
- Listen without judging.
- Do not force your Marine to talk about war experience, but be open to it.
- Encourage your Marine to seek assistance if needed.
- Be patient.

It's important to help your Marine understand that a stress injury is an *injury*. Stress injuries:

- Deserve to be fixed like any physical injury.
- Were incurred in dedicated service and your Marine deserves to feel better.
- Are treatable.

## **Stigma**

Marines are trained warriors, at times there is a stigma attached with seeking help for combat stress related injuries often referred to as hazardous duty injuries.

Possible reasons why our Marines may not want to seek help:

- Feeling as though any psychological issues within themselves or others are a sign of weakness.
- Expressing an emotional reaction may be confronted with, “suck it up” or “get over it.”
- Fear that emotional reactions and getting help will negatively affect their careers.
- Fear of their commander having complete access to their mental health records.
- Feel that they have a command climate that discourages getting help.

We have to remind our Marines that seeking help shows strength because it is vital that our Marines and our families are healthy in every way.

## **Take Care of Yourself**

It can be hard to live with someone suffering from a combat stress injury. Here are some suggestions from professionals:

- Seek help, even if your Marine will not. Do not keep everything to yourself.
- Do not turn to addictive substances or behaviors yourself.
- Do not keep hoping things will get better - if they are getting worse, seek help!
- Realize that your Marine's distance or irritability is not your fault.
- Expect that it will take time for your Marine's injury to heal.
- Remember that your Marine is suffering.
- This injury is not your fault or your Marine's fault. Do not blame yourself or your Marine for past decisions and actions leading up to the present situation.
- Realize that your Marine cannot just decide to get well.

## **Suicide Prevention**

A small percentage of Marines will struggle greatly after deployment. If you think your Marine might consider harming themselves, ask them. It won't cause them to commit suicide. If they cannot say unequivocally that they are not contemplating harming themselves, contact the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at (800) 273-TALK (8255) immediately!

## Communication

You've been communicating via e-mail, telephone and letters. At homecoming you renew in-person communication. Marine-to-Marine communication is very different than communication with family and friends. Back slapping, loud voices, swearing, telling someone what to do or being told what to do is normal in their work environment. For months now, this may be the only way your Marine has communicated! Also, your Marine has been accustomed to operating in the military "need-to-know" mode. He or she may need to re-learn the importance of sharing information, and communicating with you as a loved one, and not a fellow Marine!

While you and your Marine may be excited to now communicate in person again, initial conversations may feel awkward. This is normal for everyone. Use basic communication techniques such as:

- Ask open-ended questions, which are those that begin with the words "how," "what" or "why".
- Say encouraging statements such as, "Tell me more," or "Help me understand".
- Use encouraging gestures such as nodding your head, smiling, making eye contact.

A hug and telling your Marine that you love them is usually very much appreciated. Also, don't be afraid of silence. Allow your Marine the opportunity to talk if they want or to enjoy being together with you in silence.

### **Talking About War**

Your Marine may not want to talk about their wartime deployment when they return. War is often a difficult experience with many victims, and deployment experiences may be hard to talk about. In time, your Marine may want to talk about some of their experiences if others are willing to listen patiently and not judge. If your Marine is not ready to talk about his or her experiences during deployment, don't push. They may never feel comfortable talking with you about their experiences. Rather than pushing, offer alternative strategies, such as talking with peers, a chaplain or a medical professional.

However, if your Marine wants to talk, don't stop them from doing so. As you listen, try not to make statements that may be perceived as judgmental, such as "What you had to do was awful," or "You shouldn't have had to do that." No one likes to be told what they should or shouldn't have done. Instead, offer assistance, an open ear, and suggestions.

Try not to use clichés or easy answers when your Marine is talking about war experiences. For example, try not to say things like, "Now that you're back, you can put it behind you." Instead, let them know that you feel for what they went through, you love them, and you're there for them whenever they need anything.

**Future Deployments**

Congratulations! You have successfully supported your Marine through one of the most challenging aspects of the military lifestyle, which is deployment.

What accomplishments did you achieve during deployment that you are most proud of?

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What methods of support were the most successful during deployment?

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What are some things you did to prepare for deployment and/or homecoming that worked exceptionally well?

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What could be improved for your Marine's next deployment?

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**Your family's sacrifices in support of our country are inspiring. Thank you for your service.**

## Resources

The resource section of this handbook is designed to provide resources to complement and assist with post-deployment matters. The information and resources lists included are general helpful websites and resources, and counseling support resources. Most of the resources are listed to provide further insight into the military lifestyle and community support. Additional resources may be obtained from your Marine's Family Readiness Officer (FRO) and the installation Information & Referral Specialist.

### **Helpful Websites, Resources and Counseling Support**

#### **Combat Operational Stress Control (COSC)**

[www.usmc-mccs.org/cosc](http://www.usmc-mccs.org/cosc)

The Marine Corps COSC program coordinates all planning, training for, and implementation of policies and programs to prevent, identify, and manage combat and operational stress. The goals of COSC are to maintain force readiness and preserve the mental health of Marines and their family members. COSC programs are developed in partnership with the Marine Expeditionary Forces with three target audiences in mind: Marine leaders, Marines and Sailors, and families.

#### **Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)**

[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

The Department of Veterans Affairs provides a wide variety of resources for service members who have honorably served in the U.S. armed forces. For service members leaving active duty, the VA may be their primary source of physical and mental health treatment for injuries that occurred during military service.

A booklet is published every year outlining programs and benefits and is available from the VA website. Some of the programs include:

- Health care, including treatment for post-traumatic stress and brain injuries

#### **Family Readiness Officer (FRO)**

The Family Readiness Officer (FRO) is the face of the commander's vision and the hub of communication for the Unit, Personal and Family Readiness Program (UPFRP). The FRO provides direct coordination for the Unit, Personal and Family Readiness Program between the commander, the Marines, the families, and all of the available resources and organizations, both on and off Marine Corps installations.

## **Families OverComing Under Stress (FOCUS)**

<http://www.usmc-mccs.org/cosc/focus.cfm?sid=ml&smid=9>

Families OverComing Under Stress (FOCUS) is a resiliency-building program designed for military families and children facing the challenges of multiple deployment stress and combat operational stress injuries during wartime. It is an eight-week brief intervention that addresses difficulties that families may have when facing the challenges of multiple deployments and parental combat-related psychological and physical health problems. Please visit [www.focusproject.org](http://www.focusproject.org) for area availability on Marine Corps installations.

## **Joint Family Support Assistance Program (JFSAP)**

<http://militaryhomefront.dod.mil>

Joint Family Assistance Program was established to deliver mobile family support and services to military families who do not live near a military installation who face the same deployment-related challenges as installation-based families, but whose access to support is more challenging.

JFSAP augments existing family programs to provide a continuum of support and services based on member and family strengths and needs and available resources. Services are delivered in local communities through collaborative partnerships with Federal, State, and local resources.

JFSAP teams provide the following services and resources:

- Information and referrals to community services and support.
- Non-medical counseling and education to individuals, families, and groups.
- Child and youth services, including assistance locating child care.
- Financial education and counseling.
- On-demand support for the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP) and other deployment events.

## **Marine Corp Community Services (MCCS)**

<http://www.usmc-mccs.org/>

Marine Corps Community Services offers services and activities for military and dependent family members in the following three areas: Marine and Family Services Division, Semper Fit, and the Single Marine Program.

## Marine and Family Programs Division

The Marine and Family Programs Division is designed to assist the individual Marine through centralized information and referral services.

The division's purpose is to assist in having information and human services readily accessible and responsible to individual and family needs. The division also serves as the focal point for information exchange and coordination of military and civilian family programs. Persons in possession of a valid military ID card, and each person enrolled in DEERS, is eligible to use these services. Services include:

- Marine Corps Family Team Building (MCFTB)
- Personal Financial Management (PFM)
- Volunteer Program
- Prevention and Intervention Services
- Family Advocacy Program (FAP)
- Information and Referral (I&R)
- Relocation Assistance Program (RAP)
- Personal and Professional Development (Family Member Employment Assistance Program)
- Children, Youth & Teen Program (CYTP)
- Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP)

## Military OneSource

[www.militaryonesource.com](http://www.militaryonesource.com)

Military OneSource is a 24/7, real-time information and referral service, funded by the Department of Defense. All services are provided at no cost and are available to active-duty, Guard and Reserve personnel and their immediate family members, regardless of activation status.

Military OneSource is a “virtual extension of existing installation service.” Besides helping with referrals, Military OneSource maintains a library of more than 3,000 free educational materials such as CDs, DVDs, and booklets on a wide range of topics. They also offer interpretation and translation services for legal documents in more than 140 languages. Through Military OneSource, you can access up to 12 in-person or telephone non-medical counseling sessions per issue with a licensed counselor. They also offer financial counseling at no charge.

## United Service Organizations

[www.uso.org](http://www.uso.org)

The USO’s mission is to support service members and their families. There are 130 centers worldwide whose programs and services include:

- Emergency assistance: USO centers offer housing and financial information, along with support for military members and their families, especially during emergencies.

- Support groups: With troops deployed all over the world, USO centers have established local support groups where family members of deployed service members can gather to provide support and encouragement for one another.
- New spouse orientation: Moving to a new area is often a difficult transition. Many USO centers offer orientation programs, which help new residents acclimate to the culture and community.

### United States USO Airport Locations

- Columbia Airport
- Dayton Airport
- Norfolk International Airport
- Jacksonville International Airport
- Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport
- Lambert-St. Louis International Airport
- Richmond Airport
- Liberty USO Philadelphia Airport
- Bob Hope USO Lounge Cleveland Hopkins Airport

### Counseling Support Resources

#### Chaplains

[www.anchordesk.navy.mil/HTM/ChaplainRoster.htm](http://www.anchordesk.navy.mil/HTM/ChaplainRoster.htm)

Chaplains play a vital role in helping Marines, and family members during crucial moments in their lives. They are available 24/7 to provide spiritual guidance and help sort through issues or concerns, and are confidential. Through the Chaplain's Religious Enrichment Development Operations (CREDO) free weekend retreats and workshops for Marines and their dependent families are available.

#### DSTRESS Line

DSTRESS Line is an anonymous and confidential, 24/7, Marine-friendly counseling and referral service. DSTRESS Line currently supports all Marines (active duty, Reserve, or veteran), family members, and loved ones.

Phone number: 1-877-476-7734

Please check the DSTRESS website for location availability at [www.dstressline.com](http://www.dstressline.com).

Marines and or family members in areas where the DSTRESS line is not available may continue to rely upon other national call centers already in operation:

- Defense Centers of Excellence Outreach Center: (866) 966-1020.
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and Veterans Suicide Prevention Hotline: (800) 273-8255.

## **Marine and Family Services: Family Advocacy Program (FAP)**

Marine and Family Services Counseling and Advocacy Program (FAP): Personal and family counselors are available at your installation Family Advocacy Program to help your Marine and his or her dependent family cope with the challenges of marriage, parenting, deployment, reunion and reintegration. These challenges can affect your emotional health, relationships, family life, and military readiness — and we are here to help. Counseling services are available at no charge, they are easy to use, and they are just a phone call away.

Guidance is provided on a range of topics from licensed counselors, including:

- Relationships and marital issues
- Family conflicts
- Stress
- Parenting
- Parent and teen communication
- Divorce
- Separation
- Grief and loss
- Life changes

When an appointment is scheduled with a counselor, expect them to help:

- Review the problem.
- Identify key target issues.
- Gain insight into solutions.
- Set clear, understandable and realistic goals.
- Develop a specific plan to obtain goals which may include:
  - Developing interpersonal communication skills.
  - Learning stress-management techniques.
  - Improving relationship skills.
  - Working through the bereavement process.

### **Military Family Life Consultants (MFLC)**

Military Family Life Consultants (MFLC) are funded by the Department of Defense. The MFLC program provides licensed counseling specialists to individual Marine Corps units who are remotely located and unable to access local services.

It has also expanded to augment on-base counseling services for Marines and eligible family members through the Family Advocacy Program (FAP) to provide short-term, situational, problem-solving counseling services and psycho-education to service members and their families. MFLC do not keep records of counseling services, and are confidential.

Services are provided to individuals, couples, families, and groups on issues such as stress, anger, relationships, parenting, conflict resolution, deployment, separation, and more.