Caring For The Caregiver

I. Introduction and Purpose

1

2

Since 1970, The Navy has acknowledged for some time now that in order to preserve a strong military, the needs of military families must be supported. The equation is simple – healthy families equal mission readiness.

Over the years, military family support services have empowered families to meet the challenges of separations due to deployments, new assignments and other disruptions associated with the military lifestyle. Deployments in particular often increase family stress due to the uncertainty and the inability to communicate with the deployed member.

While all the services work hard to provide communication lifelines for those deployed members and their families, the Navy's Family Ombudsman Program embodies a long and successful tradition of maintaining the well-being and morale of sea service families when service members are away from home.

3

Many Navy families have been helped by the dedication of the spouses who serve as ombudsmen. In addition to being a continuing source of strength to the families, they contribute to the readiness of our Navy by ensuring our Sailors know their families have another resource to turn to that will help them when they are deployed and by allowing them to focus more readily on the important work they do for our country.

Ombudsmen have a wide reaching impact that affects mission readiness. Sailors do not make career decisions sitting in the career counseling office. They do it at the kitchen table with their wives, children and even their parents. When the ombudsmen help family members have a successful tour, they create an atmosphere that is conducive to reenlisting, and retention impacts readiness.

However, this vital role can also have its effects and take its toll on an ombudsman. The devotion, compassion, organization, and caring if not balanced well, can create stress, fatigue and even burnout.

The purpose of this training is to create awareness of stress, preventing and managing stress, and avoiding burnout.

4

II. Learning Objectives

This advanced training topic can be delivered in a one to two hour time frame depending on the size of your audience and whether or not guest speakers and optional activities are utilized.

At the completion of this training participants will be able to:

- Understand what Caregiver Stress is
- Recognize when Caregiver stress occurs
- Implement preventative Caregiver Stress techniques

III. Materials and Equipment

The following items are needed to provide this training:

- Power Point projector/slides.

IV. Outline

1. Balancing Work and Family Life
2. Time Management

   Exercise #1: Time Management Priorities
3. Unique Caregiving Stressors of the Ombudsman
4. Caregiving Stress Stages
5. Recognition of Caregiver Stress

   Exercise #2: Caregiver Stress test
6. Preventative Caregiving Stress Techniques

   Exercise #3: Relaxation Exercise

7. Caregivers Bill of Rights

8. Conclusion and Summary

V. Content

WELCOME participants.

INTRODUCE yourself.

INTRODUCE training by saying, "The purpose of this training is to familiarize you with the effects and causes of stress that come with care giving as an ombudsman."

PROVIDE logistic information if training is not part of a regularly scheduled Ombudsman Assembly Meeting or advanced training: 5

- Restroom locations.
- Smoking area.
- Refreshment/vending machines.
- Emergency telephone number.

ASK participants to:

- "Raise your hand if you have ever felt stress or feeling overwhelmed at times by your experiences as an Ombudsman"

LECTURE the following content:

1. Balancing Work and Family Life 6

An ombudsman's willingness to volunteer is admirable and of great value to the Navy. CO's do not want or expect ombudsmen to invest so much time and energy volunteering that their own family is negatively impacted or that their personal health suffers. Obviously, ombudsmen must have the support of their family if they are to succeed. It is unreasonable to cause one's family to feel neglected by taking on the role of command ombudsman. Therefore it is imperative for the ombudsman to recognize and prevent the effects of caregiving stress.

Caregiving stress may refer to a physical, emotional, and spiritual fatigue or exhaustion that takes over a person. It causes a decline in the person's ability to experience joy, or

to feel and care for others. It is a one-way street, in which individuals are giving a great deal of energy and compassion to others, yet are not able to get enough back to reassure themselves that world is a hopeful place.

Part of dealing with stress, is managing it well. Though this sounds conflicting, there are effective ways for caregivers to have control over the areas that can be managed. It has been stated by former CNO Ombudsman-at-Large, Doreen Scott, "stress is a result of the unknown and the things you cannot control". Managing a balance of work and family life can be very challenging.

7

Below are some keys ways for the Ombudsman to maintain a balance of work and family:

- Set a time when you are available for calls and requests, i.e.

> *Mrs. Jane Doe*
>
> *I am available to assist you any way I can between the hours of: 0900-1700 and 1900-2100. My phone number is:000-000-0000*
>
> *If there is an emergency of any kind, please contact me immediately at any time.*

Setting specific times allowing you to be available for you and your family; dinner, after school, etc. will help you to keep your boundaries.

- There may be a time when several calls come in at once and you may feel a need to address them all immediately. As the calls come in, make a log of who called, what the area of need is, and prioritize who may best be served first. Call each person back to let them know that you will attend to them, but it may take a little while to get back to them.
- Set one night a week that is specifically "family time". This is your time to be with family, put the phone to voicemail, create a theme each week for the family to be able to share in together, i.e. Game Night, Pizza Night, Go to the Park Night, etc. You may want to advertise that Friday night is Family Night at your house so emergency calls only, please.

2. Time Management

At some point in every person's life, there can be a feeling of becoming overwhelmed. "Too little time, so much to do", is a phrase applicable to most caregivers . Because the ombudsmen have such a vital role in the Command, those that need their services often do not recognize they are only human! Good time management can tremendously decrease a person's stress level.

Listed below are some techniques to manage time:

- Buy a personal calendar or Day-Timer, record appointments, both upcoming and one's that have occurred (this will enable you to have a log of where and what your time is being allotted to).
- In your calendar, pre-mark times and/or days that are designated to family and personal time (if you find you don't have any such designations, now is the TIME to create some!)
- Be clear on your priorities. Other's become overscheduled because they add activities into their schedules for the wrong reasons, and end up spending their days doing things that don't reflect their values and priorities. Then they find themselves trying to fit what's really important to them in with all the rest of it, and find out things like adequate sleep and other healthy habits go by the wayside.

Exercise One: Time Management Priorities

Make a list of what's most important to you. List things like; family, career, Ombudsmenship, Church/Spiritual Center, exercise. Look at how you spend your days. Is there a balance? If not, make room on your calendar, color code each category and mark the allotted times you want to allow for each activity in your life. And don't forget about "ME TIME"!!

9

3. Unique Caregiving Stressors of the Ombudsman

Deployment is nothing new to the Navy spouse or Ombudsman. However, with increased OPTEMPO - multiple deployments and unknown timeliness and locations of deployments, and the institution of the Individual Augmentee, the Ombudsman has new challenges. Those new challenges come with additional and higher impact stressors for the caregiving ombudsman. Additionally, some ombudsmen may have a spouse who is impacted by the above mentioned circumstances.

10

Listed below are some support strategies to address these additional stressors:

- Information. As an ombudsman, utilize your ability to both be aware of as much current information as possible, as well as disseminating that information on a regular basis.
- Talk, talk, talk and more talk. Whether it be formally at meetings, or informally over coffee at one another's homes, create a support network among the caregivers. Share your feelings of current events, fears, anxieties, hopes. Remember, if you feel a certain way, more than likely someone else will too! However, do not forget the code of confidentiality and discretion outside of the group.
- As an ombudsman, you may have unique challenges related to managing the stress of spouses whose Sailor is about to deploy. Help and educate spouses to the need for "pre-deployment readiness" – has the pre-deployment check list been completed? Are wills up to date? Is the life insurance policy current? Though it is scary and anxiety provoking to discuss the "what if's" during a deployment, encourage spouses to discuss burial wishes, as well as normalizing this as a standard of practice prior to deployment.
- Know your limits!!! It is OK to let someone know that you are feeling overwhelmed with the stress of your role. It does not mean you are ineffective... it means you are human!! Take a "time out" if necessary, asking a co-ombudsman or member of the Command Support Team to cover for you if you are having a stressful moment. Remember talking and support must also apply within the ombudsman practices.

4. Caregiving Stress Stages:

Because caregivers often forget to care for themselves, caregiving stress can increase and become more problematic if not recognized and addressed.

Listed below are the stages of caregiving stress. Though this may be a review for most from your initial OBT, reinforcing the awareness is a form of prevention of stress.

11

Stage 1: Alarm

This is the initial event that creates a feeling of stress. The body's physical reactions are automatic. The body recognizes stress and prepares for fight or flight. Chronic or potential care giving stress develops when the body is unable to fight or flee and remains in a powerless situation.

Physical reactions include:

- Breathing quickens and is shallow
- Respiration increases
- Heart rate increases
- Stomach muscles release hormones and chemicals in increasing amounts
- Pupils dilate
- Perspiration increases

Psychological reactions include:

- Restlessness/ Sleeplessness
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Anger
- Forgetfulness

Stage 2: Resistance

The body tries to cope and adapt to stress, and begins the process of repairing any damage caused by stress. If the stress can be overcome, the body repairs the damage, the physical signs of stress disappear, and resistance to the source of stress is increased. If the stress continues, a person may:

- Deny their feelings
- Become emotionally isolated
- Narrow or lose interest in everything

Stage 3: Exhaustion

If there is no relief from stress, and the body and mind cannot repair the damage, the result can be emotional and physical problems, including:

- Chronic feelings of frustration, anger, and/or depression
- Interpersonal problems with co-workers, friends and family
- Substance Abuse
- Feeling of meaninglessness

12

5. Recognition of Caregiver Stress

It is said that part of prevention is recognition. In order to prevent caregiver stress, it is vital to recognize it with one's own self as well with fellow ombudsmen. Provided below is a Caregiver Stress Test. It is a simple but effective way to review independently or as a group. It is recommended to take and review the Caregiver Stress Test periodically to become alerted to potential warning signs of Caregiver stress.

Ask participants to take the test. After all have completed the test, ask participants to share their scores and observations.

Exercise Two: Caregiver Stress test

The following test will help you become aware of your feelings, pressures and stress you may currently feel. Please score according to how you currently feel. If you have scored a 3 or higher, you may be experiencing Caregiver Stress.

1. Seldom
2. Sometimes
3. Often
4. Usually True
5. Always True

_____ I find I can't get enough rest

_____ I don't have enough time for myself

_____ I don't have time to be with family

_____ I feel guilty about my situation

_____ I don't get out much anymore

_____ I have conflict with others

_____ I cry frequently

_____ I don't feel I have enough knowledge or experience to give to other's as well as I'd like

_____ My own health is not good

_____ TOTAL

13

6. Preventative Caregiving Stress Techniques

- *What can I do to help myself?*

  Acknowledge your feelings: Your feelings have a lot to do with the way you view and cope with caregiving. All feelings are legitimate, even those that may seem disturbing to you (including anger, frustration, and sadness). Recognizing and accepting your emotions are the first step toward resolving problems of stress. Learn to express your feelings to family members, friends, or professionals.

- *Set Realistic Goals*

  Caregivng has demands on your time. It is important to set realistic goals. Recognize what you can and cannot do, define priorities, and act accordingly.

- *Maintain Your Health*

  Your general well-being affects your outlook on life and your ability to cope. Taking care of yourself is important and involves:

  - Eating three balanced meals daily. Food is fuel for your body. Skipping meals, eating poorly, or drinking lots of caffeine is not good for you. Learn to prepare and eat simple, nutritious, well-balanced meals. Avoid alcohol above 2-3 ounces daily.
  - Exercising daily. Being physically active can provide you with an outlet that is relaxing and makes you feel good. Stretching, walking, jogging, swimming, or biking are examples of invigorating exercises.
  - Getting enough sleep and rest. Sleep refreshes and enables you to function throughout the day.
  - Allowing yourself leisure time. Leisure time allows you to feel better and more able to cope with your situation. Having time to yourself to read a book, visit a friend, or watch TV can also bring enjoyment and relaxation.

- *Laughter is the best medicine*

  Laughter is a proven tension reliever, pain reducer, and over all it elevates the mood.

- *When to seek help*

  Sometimes people handle stressful situations in ways that are destructive. Instead of openly expressing feelings, people may overeat, or use alcohol or drugs to mask their difficulties. Such escapes do not solve the problem and are harmful to your health. You do not have to go it alone. Turn to family members, friends, Chaplain, FFSP for the support you may need to prevent Caregiver Stress.

TELL participants they are now going to learn a Relaxation Exercise.

Exercise Three

READ aloud:

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Close your eyes. Allow your mind to drift a few seconds, go with it wherever it goes. Wiggle your finger and toes, then hands and feet, ankles and wrist. Loosen tight clothes, belts, ties. Sway your head from side to side, gently, gently. Now you have prepared yourself to relax physically and psychologically.
- Now concentrate, still with your eyes closed, on one pleasant thing you really want to think about; maybe it is a place you have visited in the past, or your dream place of your own imagination. It might be the seashore, or high on a hill, or in a field of grass and flowers. Become totally immersed in the place. Smell the smells you best remember. See the sights it has to offer. Hear the sounds. Feel it, whether it be water or sand or soil or snow. Fully realize this place or situation you are in: if it is on the sandy beach, sift your fingers though the warm sand and smell it, hold the sand to your cheek, smell the salt of the sea, search the skyline for gulls and terns and low clouds in the distance. Your body should feel totally weightless. You are totally in control of this scene. It is so relaxing and pleasant and beautiful, you are breathing slowly, peacefully. This is YOUR place and no one can take it from you.
- After you have sufficiently experienced your peaceful imaging, whenever you have a chance, return to your special place, close your eyes again, tune in, relive those special few moments in the world of your choosing where everything is perfect and everything is yours. This relaxation exercise can benefit you all day. Check your local library or book store for books, audiotapes, videotapes on more relaxation exercises.

CONCLUDE and READ "Caregiver's Bill of Rights"

7. Caregiver's Bill of Rights

14

As a caregiver, I have the right...

- To take care of myself – to rest when I am tired, to eat well, and to take breaks from caregiving when I need them.
- To recognize the limits of my own endurance and strength
- To seek help from family, involved parties, and the community at large
- To socialize, maintain my interests, and to do the things I enjoy
- To acknowledge my feelings, whether positive or negative, including frustration, anger, and depression; and to express them constructively
- To take pride in the valuable work I do.

CONCLUSION and SUMMARIZE content covered in this training

15

- Review of what Caregiver Stress is
- Review Caregiver Stress signs
- Review Caregiver Stress Reduction techniques

THANK all participants for the attendance.

VI. PowerPoint Slides

VII. Additional Support Materials

- Relaxation Guided Imagery
- Caregiver's Bill of Rights
- Websites and Resources:
  - Department of Defense Stress Awareness
    www.defenselink.mil/specials/stressawareness03/
  - Fleet and Family Support Center
    www.ffsp.navy.mil
  - Military OneSource
    www.militaryonesource.com
  - National Military family Association
    www.Nmfa.org
  - Military Wives, Inc.
    www. Militarywives.org