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
Establishing a Parent/Caregiver Relationship (continued)

» 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
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.
» 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.osd.mil

» Behavioral Health Services