

## FAMILY ADVOCACY: GROWING UP

### DISCUSSION LEADER'S OUTLINE

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Good morning my name is \_\_\_\_\_. Today we will be talking about growing up; a brief introduction to the normal stages of childhood development.

The **ground rules** for this discussion are:

- (1) No personal attacks on anyone's opinions
- (2) Allow each participant to express themselves
- (3) Make head calls at your leisure, just don't interrupt the group
- (4) Keep your language clean as not to offend others
- (5) PARTICIPATION BY ALL!!!!!!

#### **Gain Attention:**

Sgt Jenkins and her spouse had their first baby 3 months ago, a girl they named Caroline. Like most new moms, Sgt Jenkins often shares the developmental expectations she has for her daughter. Some of her expectations are unrealistic and concerning to you as a mom of three. For instance, she is having a tough time because Caroline isn't sleeping all night, and her expectation is that the baby should be doing this by now. Sleeping through the night at 3 months old is not unheard of, but it's rare, and pushing a child before they are ready can have serious repercussions.

**Key points** for the discussion today will be:

- (1) Children learn at different stages
- (2) Maintain a healthy outlook
- (3) Resources

**Learning Objective:** This guided discussion will give you a better understanding of some normal stages of child development, help you examine your expectations related to your developing child, and keep you from placing false expectations on your child that can create emotional or psychological harm.

#### **DISCUSSION**

One afternoon, after an appointment with the pediatrician, Sgt Jenkins brings Caroline in for a visit. You are the parent of three girls, one under a year old, so Jenkins begins to ask you questions about eating habits, height and weight, and sleep patterns. During the conversation, you advise Jenkins not to compare Caroline's patterns and behavior to other children because they are all very different. Before long, Jenkins is pointing her finger at Caroline, speaking in a stern tone, and telling her she is being a bad girl for not keeping her pacifier in her mouth. Sgt Jenkins then proceeds to place the pacifier back in her mouth telling her she better not spit it out. You notice how Caroline responds whenever Jenkins speaks to her, prompting you to tell Jenkins that Caroline doesn't understand what is being said to her, but is responding to the tone of her voice. Convinced that Caroline could become shy and develop low self-esteem from Jenkins' unrealistic expectations, you share a story about your oldest daughter, Evelyn, who seemed to test your every limit. From touching things low enough for her to reach, like the DVD player, candles, and other household items to chewing on things and putting everything in her mouth, it seemed as if no matter how many times you redirected Evelyn, she continued to do the same things over and over. Have you had an experience like this with your child? You tell Jenkins that after being constantly frustrated, you decided to reach out to the Family Advocacy Program (FAP), where you received literature that described the normal stages of a child's development. You also tell her that you learned that at 9 months, Evelyn wasn't being "bad," she was exploring the world around her. In

addition, because Evelyn was teething, chewing on things helped her gums stop itching, and this behavior was all perfectly normal. You remind Jenkins that Caroline is developing every day and adapting to the world around her, so the tone of Jenkins' voice, body language, and facial expressions when interacting with her all play a crucial role in how Caroline will develop.

#### **KEY POINT 1**

1. Understanding the normal development process for your child is very important as it establishes your child's sense of self-esteem and worth. Making your child feel supported can be accomplished through realistic expectations and healthy interactions.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, having unrealistic expectations, such as expecting a 2-year-old to tie his/her shoes perfectly, belittling, and harsh interactions negatively affect the child and their sense of who they are. In order not to negatively affect the process of normal development, it is important not to place pressure on a child. This is why it is important to know some basic milestones associated with the age of your child. FAP has several materials and resources available to help you gauge where you should place your expectations based on where your child may be developmentally. Remember that each child is different and will reach milestones at different times. Some basic milestones include:
  - 0-6 months: copies sounds, begins to sit without support, responds to own name, likes to play with parents, and strings vowels together when babbling
  - 6-12 months: shakes head for yes or no, waves bye-bye, says mama and dada, pulls up to stand and responds to simple requests
  - 12-18 months: walks alone, says several key words, plays simple pretend (such as feeding a doll), points to show others something of interest
  - 2 years: says sentences with two–four words, gets excited when around other children, kicks ball, follows simple instructions, points to things on pictures when they are named
  - 3 years: carries on a conversation using three–four sentences, climbs, shows affection, plays make believe, copies others
  - 4 years: hops and stands on one foot, tells stories, would rather play with friends than be alone, plays cooperatively and can draw people with 1-4 body parts
2. These basic milestones are provided solely for reference and should not be used to set rigid expectations. As long as you and your pediatrician haven't noticed any developmental issues, it is okay for your child to develop at a faster or slower pace than other children, including siblings. Do not panic if your child doesn't exactly match up to general milestones; more often than not, there are simple explanations. For example, a baby that is used to having his bottle held for him may not hold his bottle for himself as soon as expected, just like a child that is used to being held on someone's lap may not sit alone even if they can do so without support. Should you have any concerns or questions, consult your pediatrician, FAP, the New Parent Support Program, and/or Marine Corps Family Team Building (MCFTB). Each one is a great resource that offers information, education, and programs to address your specific concerns or needs.

#### **KEY POINT 2**

1. A lot of people will offer advice about how children should develop, and it isn't always positive. Grandparents, other parents, and peers can sometimes fuel insecurity about how your child is developing by comparing them to other children or pointing out some of your parenting

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/school-readiness/qa/how-do-i-help-my-9-month-old-be-more-active-and-motivated-to-explore.html>

techniques they don't agree with. Have you experienced this? At times like this, it is important to maintain a healthy, realistic outlook. If these types of interactions cause you stress, think about what it does to your child. Children of all ages need clear, consistent, unconditional love and support. One way to do this is to offer them reassurance by smiling, hugging, and maintaining a warm and caring tone in your voice. This will help your child recognize that you care especially in times of uncertainty. Remember to view your child as an individual and do not get frustrated when they fail to meet your expectations; this builds upon and protects the bond you have with your child. If your child takes longer to walk or feed themselves than other children, understand that they are still feeling out the world around them and that forcing them isn't safe or healthy. Lastly, remember that self-care is essential when raising your child. Caring for yourself benefits your child as well. Remember to do the things you enjoy like taking walks, listening to music, going for a bike ride, having lunch or dinner with a friend, staying connected to your support system, and processing your expectations and concerns with other parents who can offer positive insight and experiences.

### **KEY POINT 3**

What resources are available?

1. Peers and friends
2. Chain of command
3. Chaplain
4. Marine Corps Community Services (MCCS)
  - a. FAP, New Parent Support Program
  - b. Community Counseling Program (CCP)
5. MCFTB
6. Family Resource Officer
7. Pediatricians, Medical
8. Military and Family Life Consultant (MFLC)
9. Military One Source

### **SUMMARY/CONCLUSION**

Knowing what to expect during the different stages of development, viewing your child as an individual, and understanding that children develop at different rates help you set realistic expectations and maintain a healthy outlook as your child develops. Some children reach certain milestones sooner than others, which is why it is important to remain flexible and maintain realistic goals. Understanding your role as a parent, being aware of the emotional climate, maintaining a healthy outlook, and viewing your child as an individual are all important aspects of positive parenting as children navigate through the different stages of development.

#### **Closing Statement:**

The Marine Corps offers resources to assist you, including FAP, the New Parent Support Program, MCCS, and MFLCs. Taking advantage of education courses, parenting groups, and utilizing available resources provided by MCCS and FAP will provide a wealth of useful information. These resources can help you keep things in perspective by helping you lessen the stress between you and your child as they develop. Check your installation MCCS office to find out what is available in your area.

### **END OF DISCUSSION**

**RESOURCES**

1. "Just in time parenting" <http://www.jitp.extension.org/>
2. MAPIT Guide. Retrieved from [http://bhin.usmc-mccs.org/uploads/MAPIT\\_Guide.pdf](http://bhin.usmc-mccs.org/uploads/MAPIT_Guide.pdf).
3. Marine Corps Family Advocacy and General Counseling; MCO 1754.11
4. Marine Corps Family Team Building
5. <http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/school-readiness/qa/how-do-i-help-my-9-month-old-be-more-active-and-motivated-to-explore.html>