

SECTION IV

ROUTINE ACTIVITIES

A. OVERVIEW

For members of the Key Volunteer Network, many of the efforts and activities will include interacting with the unit families through the use of the telephone.

This section addresses issues and suggestions relating to these activities.

Most of the contact with families will be routine: to pass information, clarify, or answer basic questions. These contacts are easily handled. Some situations, however, will be unusual.

When serious or unusual issues do arise in dealing with unit families, Key Volunteers must remember that they are not counselors. The primary focus is to help individuals and families by connecting them with existing support systems when needed. A further focus is to help families recognize their capabilities and become self-sufficient.

Basic training helps Key Volunteers learn to avoid "owning the problem" of others and to focus on providing basic information and referral services. Key Volunteers are a major link between the unit families through the Key Volunteer Coordinator to the unit (CO, FRO, SgtMaj, Chaplain, etc.), other resources within the unit, the surrounding community, and other Key Volunteer Networks. The concept of referrals to appropriate resource providers is essential to the Key Volunteer Network's effectiveness.

B. MAKING THE FIRST CONTACT

The first contact with families will influence future relationships. The Key Volunteer should strive to make first contacts pleasant and at the same time collect the information needed to update rosters and to assist these families in the future. It is helpful if the calls are made when the Key Volunteer is feeling enthusiastic and upbeat. Some guidelines for making this first contact include:

1. The Key Volunteer should state her/his whole name clearly and be prepared to restate the name since this may be the first contact with this family. Example: "Hello, this is Jane Smith, may I speak to?"
2. After the Key Volunteer clarifies her/his name and title, the purpose of the call should be stated. Example: "I am a Key Volunteer of H&S Battalion and am calling to acquaint you with our Key Volunteer Network."

3. The Key Volunteer should ask about any previous experience this family has had with the Key Volunteer Network and/or similar programs. Emphasis should be placed on explaining the Network activities such as unit newsletters, information and referral assistance, the Network telephone tree, and available emergency assistance.
4. The Key Volunteer should conduct this first conversation in a manner that will convey a sense of sharing mutual concerns. This will tend to relax the family member and provide a more comfortable lead-in for future calls.
5. If the opportunity is presented, the Key Volunteer should use this time to ask for information to complete the unit Family Contact Sheet.
6. If appropriate, the Key Volunteer should relate any unit news and invite the family members to upcoming events.
7. This first contact should conclude with the Key Volunteer providing her/his telephone number and preferred calling hours for non-emergency phone calls. The Key Volunteer should indicate that the caller is welcomed to contact the Key Volunteer at any time in cases of emergency. Also, convenient times for the Key Volunteer to routinely contact the family should be established.

A few calls may be abrupt or uncomfortable due either to the family member's lack of interest in becoming involved or because of an unfortunate past experience with the Key Volunteer Network or similar program. The Key Volunteer should respect these opinions without feeling personally responsible, and inform the family member who declines to become involved that they will be welcomed as a part of the Network at anytime in the future.

For those families without phones the first contact may be by letter. These individuals may rely on the Network newsletter as a means of obtaining unit-related information, or may arrange to call the Key Volunteer at a time when they have access to a phone.

C. RECEIVING CALLS

To concentrate fully when a family member calls, the Key Volunteer should take a moment to remove distractions, clear her/his mind and take on a professional, non-judgmental attitude. If calls come at a time when life is busy for the Key Volunteer, the Key Volunteer may ask to return the call within a reasonable time, and do so. The caller could also be referred to another source of support. Log each call and describe it briefly, including what referrals were made and when follow-up is needed.

The calls received as a Key Volunteer may typically fall into one of the following six categories:

1. Information Call.

- Objective: Provide accurate information.
- Description: The caller is seeking information about resources, directions, etc. These are generally by way of straightforward questions and should be answered by providing the appropriate information or referrals. If the requested information is not readily available, the Key Volunteer may either redirect the caller to the most appropriate referral (such as the Family Service Center, Red Cross, Navy, and other parts of the Society, etc.) giving the telephone number, or offer to obtain further information and contact the caller at a later time.

2. Social Calls.

- Objective: Provide a sympathetic ear.
- Description: The caller may be lonely or having difficulty adjusting to military life (the Marine Corps, the duty station, a deployment, children, etc.), or perhaps is experiencing feelings of inadequacy. The Key Volunteer should help the caller to clarify the reason for the problem. This caller usually just needs a sympathetic listener. If appropriate, the Key Volunteer should arrange a "phone buddy" for future calls. A phone buddy is another person in the unit who might enjoy longer talks and is a good listener.

3. Settle-the-Argument Calls.

- Objective: Listen objectively and refer to the FSC or chaplain, if necessary.
- Description: The caller usually has a conflict with someone about something. The Key Volunteer must be firm and fair and not take sides. Do not let the conversation continue for a long time. Once the case has been stated, the Key Volunteer should provide an unbiased summary of the issues to let the caller know that the issues have been understood and ask how the caller will resolve the conflict. Refer serious conflicts to a third party such as the chaplain or an FSC counselor.

4. Complaint Call.

- Objective: Determine which service or resource can best resolve the issue and make the appropriate referral.

- Description: The caller wants to report the misconduct of an agency or a person. The Key Volunteer writes down the facts and refers the caller to the appropriate resource for resolving or registering the complaint within the unit. Do not get involved in defending anyone or any agency. Often the FRO is the appropriate resource within the unit for handling complaints having to do with other government agencies or facilities.

5. Crisis Call.

- Objective: Identify the problem, calm the caller, and refer the caller to the appropriate source of help. Follow up within a brief period of time.
- Description: The caller has been confronted by a situation or problem which seems emotionally overwhelming (death, rape, suicide, accident, etc.). The Key Volunteer must remember that some callers who have a seemingly ordinary problem may perceive it as a crisis. Sometimes a crisis call may come from a third party or may first appear to be an "information" call as a way to check out the Key Volunteer as a helper. The Key Volunteer must remain calm and unemotional, but sympathetic. The Key Volunteer must provide a sense of stability to the caller. The Key Volunteer should collect the facts by writing them down, be reassuring and help the caller clarify the situation. The caller should be referred to the appropriate resource such as a counselor, social worker at the FSC, the medical treatment facility, etc. In very rare instances, the Key Volunteer may need to call for emergency services to assist the caller. As a follow-up to these incidents, the Key Volunteer should make sure contact was made and help received. (For additional comments on Crisis Intervention see Section IV, F.)

6. Rumor Calls.

- Objective: Stop rumors from spreading, set the "story" straight.
- Description: The caller wants to share rumor or gossip heard. Sometimes he/she wants to tell stories about what someone else is doing. As soon as the Key Volunteer understands the nature of the call, i.e., a possible rumor call, she/he should listen very carefully, especially if the subject of the call is possibly damaging to an individual or to the command. If the Key Volunteer is able to correct the information she/he should do so. If necessary, the Key Volunteer should tell the caller not to call others until the Key Volunteer can check or verify the facts.

If the "facts" are not verified, the Key Volunteer should urge the caller to seek evidence from appropriate sources. In any case, the Key Volunteer should strongly discourage unnecessary passing of questionable information to third parties other than the subject.

D. COMMON PROBLEMS

Key Volunteers can expect calls concerning a wide variety of problems. It seems that most "common problems" occur while spouses are deployed, although that is not the only time telephone calls will be made about these issues. There are almost always agencies in place that are ready to help with these problems. The unit's FRO will acquaint Marines with both their readiness responsibilities and the resources available to meet family needs. However, problems continue to arise whether or not Marines prepare, and whether or not they deploy.

The following is a list of common calls and some suggested solutions that will aid the Key Volunteer in assisting callers.

1. Allotment Concerns.

The best solution is to call the FRO. He/she will have access to the Disbursing Office, an appropriate referral resource. If the Marine is deployed, the Key Volunteer Coordinator, FRO, or Rear Party or Rear Detachment Officer may refer the family member to the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS), Kansas City for more information. Additional assistance may be obtained from the FSC or Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society.

2. Car Problems.

Marines should be advised to maintain records on all car maintenance, repair and part replacement services. Also, each family should maintain their own list of preferred service station(s), automotive dealerships and parts stores. The Key Volunteer should also advise callers to: keep auto repair receipts, call for auto repair estimates or to ask other spouses or friends for comparisons. The Key Volunteer might also suggest that callers check with the installation's service station and auto hobby shop to see if there are any hobbyists in the area who are willing to give a fair estimate for repairs.

3. ID Cards and DEERS (Defense Eligibility Enrollment Reporting System).

Holding a valid ID card does not always mean DEERS is current. To be eligible for various benefits, the DEERS database must contain current sponsor and family member information. The database is updated when a new Uniformed Services Identification Card is issued at the

Real-Time Automated Personnel Identification System (RAPIDS) office. Should an ID Card expire during a sponsor's deployment, the CMC (MHP-20) will authorize reissuance providing the individual concerned is registered in DEERS. The FRO, Rear Party or Rear Party Detachment Officer or FSC can assist in making contact.

4. Emotional Problems.

If a caller relates that he or she is seriously distressed or having emotional problems due to deployment separations or the stress of coping with everyday events, the response could be, "Would you like to talk to someone else about this? A counselor or chaplain might be a great help to you." Encourage the person to contact the FSC or chaplain to discuss these feelings further. Give the appropriate referral and phone number and call back to see if contact has been made.

5. Financial Aid.

Some areas to check for possible financial aid would be:

- Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society.
- American Red Cross.
- Chaplain (emergencies only).

Depending upon the particular problem, these sources may be able to help. However, if they cannot help with the problem, they should be able to identify further resources that can. The Key Volunteer should become familiar with the policies of these organizations to be certain the problem falls within assistance limits. If unsure, refer the problem to the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society or the FSC.

6. Lonely People.

Suggest that the caller may like to get involved with one of the various clubs, unit sponsored events, community projects or local services, or volunteer services at such places as American Red Cross, Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society, FSC, etc. Ask other spouses in the unit (whose spouses are also deployed) to call and keep in contact. Make an effort to plan a "networking" event.

7. Deployment Mail.

Check with other spouses whose servicemember is on the same deployment to see if they are receiving mail. If not, check with the unit to see if there are problems with sending or receiving mail. Remind the spouses that the military member has no control over mail flow.

Recommend that families NOT compare addresses with those from other units, as military addresses are not unit specific.

8. Rumor Control.

Contact the Key Volunteer Coordinator for the unit. They should be able to confirm or dispel any rumors about unit activities. Ask callers to question the reliability of "unofficial" information about the unit.

2. BASIC STEPS FOR HANDLING APPROXIMATELY 90% OF ALL CALLERS

1. Establishing and Maintaining Contact.

- Indicate to the caller that he or she did the right thing in calling, and that you will try to help.
- Reassure the caller with careful listening and giving the appropriate information.

2. Identifying and Clarifying the Problem.

- Identify the appropriate resource agency; information and referral calls are not difficult.
- Help to clarify the problem if a person is troubled or in a crisis state. It may be the most helpful thing that can be done.
- Clarify the most important issue if several problems are presented.
- Help the caller to select the most important issue if the caller is too upset to decide which problem is the most important.
- Help the caller to clearly state the problem. This offers reassurance and may perhaps suggest possible solutions.

3. Helping the Caller Identify and Clarify Feelings.

- If the caller has confused and contradictory feelings, let the caller know that you are trying to understand how he or she feels and that you are not critical or making judgments.
- To help clarify feelings is especially important and may be the only thing that can be done when someone is on the phone who is really upset.

- Try to anticipate how a person might feel after the phone call. Assure the caller that another phone call will be welcome. Example: "If you don't feel like talking right now, that's fine. But if you feel like you'd like to talk some more, please call back."
- Help the caller develop options and alternatives which may assist the caller in deciding what to do.

Showing an upset person that he or she does have some choices is the best reassurance that can be given. The Key Volunteer can admit that it may be a tough situation, but should also add that there are alternative solutions. If necessary, the Key Volunteer should ask the caller for time to check into some alternatives. It is very important that the Key Volunteer then follow through and get back to the caller as soon as possible. Failure to follow through will have a negative impact on the credibility of the Key Volunteer and the entire Network.

F. CRISIS INTERVENTION

"Crisis" is experienced when things happening to an individual are more than she/he can handle. When events are too great a person experiences crisis. At times a person behaves as if she/he is acting on feelings only. The person is often experiencing a combination of the following emotions:

1. Anger.

Often hidden behind expressions of other feelings. It may be directed at another person or turned inward, resulting in depression. An example would be a caller referring to her/his spouse in a sarcastic way.

2. Helplessness.

Unable to cope, and nowhere to turn. An example would be a caller who says she/he is just not strong enough to be a Marine Corps spouse.

3. Anxiety.

An unreasonable feeling of worry and uncertainty. This is a normal response in challenging situations. Excessive anxiety produces confusion, poor judgment, questionable decisions and self-defeating behavior. At the extreme, it can immobilize a person. As an example, the caller may have just heard her/his spouse will be deploying soon and doesn't think she/he will be able to get all the things done that are necessary before the servicemember leaves.

4. Lowered Self-Esteem.

The person cannot see herself/himself as competent. The caller may, for example, refer to herself/himself as "never having been successful at anything."

Since normal coping ability is challenged in crisis, an individual finds her/his world shaky and uncertain.

Letting people know that their feelings are a normal part of an event rather than proof that they are "disturbed" is helpful. Assure the individual that these feelings, whatever they may be, are OK to have. Refer the caller to professional sources of assistance such as the Chaplain or the FSC. Follow up to make sure the caller did receive the assistance needed.

Other things to remember when dealing with a crisis call:

1. Distinguish between a moderately stressful problem and a crisis state. (Is this situation demanding ALL her/his energy or is she/he functioning fairly well? Do the above characteristics apply?)
2. Calm the caller so that she/he regains some measure of control. The Key Volunteer should remain calmer than the caller. Panic and extreme agitation can be contagious. Be reassuring. Remember that there are many resources at hand. The problem belongs to the caller.
3. If necessary, be more direct and firm without being authoritative. Obtain the essential information if required: address, telephone numbers, etc. In some cases, the decision may be to call for response from professionals through 911.
4. If referrals are appropriate, keep them to a minimum. The caller should take the information, act upon it, and report back if more referrals are needed. Call back; it is critical that the Key Volunteer follow up to be sure the problem is being handled.
5. Be sure that the information given is clear. Having the caller write it down and repeat it gives the caller a chance to get control again since she/he can act upon the information.
6. Focus on the present. If necessary, shift the conversation away from irrelevant material that the caller may wish to discuss. (Example: a spouse may call with a set of problems she/he has with the present deployment and then begin to shift to problems she/he has experienced with past deployments.) In cases such as these the Key Volunteer should tactfully refocus the discussion to the present situation.

7. Do not expect that all calls must end with a referral or an answer. It is helpful just to be there to listen and understand. Let the caller know she or he is not alone and that the feelings are realistic because of the situation. Do not be afraid to take time to think about what to do. Unless the safety of persons or property is at stake, the Key Volunteer can ask to call back in order to have the time to find the appropriate information.

A sense of caring and desire to help will always communicate itself to the individual in need.

G. PASSING INFORMATION FOR THE UNIT

When a CO wishes to activate the telephone tree, the Key Volunteer Coordinator will contact all Key Volunteers. It is important that the Network be reserved for unit information. It may be tempting but is inappropriate for the Key Volunteer to pass along a personal perspective, opinion or information from other sources.

The Key Volunteer should write down the message given verbatim and repeat it in the same way to each person on her/his list. There should be no speculation about the content. Any guess or comment made becomes part of the "official" message because of the Key Volunteer position. Time is a factor and the Key Volunteer must, therefore, defer questions until all the calls on the list have been completed. However, the Key Volunteer should offer to call back in response to questions or issues raised by the caller.

H. REVIEW OF GOOD LISTENING SKILLS LEARNED IN BASIC TRAINING

1. STOP TALKING - LISTEN! A person cannot listen if she/he is talking. Polonius (Hamlet): "Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice."
2. PUT THE TALKER AT EASE - Help the caller feel that she/he is free to talk. This is often called permissive environment.
3. SHOW HER/HIM THAT YOU WANT TO LISTEN - Act interested. Listen to understand rather than to oppose.
4. REMOVE DISTRACTIONS - Turn radio or TV down low so it cannot be heard by caller.
5. EMPATHIZE - Attempt to walk in the caller's shoes; attempt to feel what the caller feels.
6. BE PATIENT - Allow plenty of time. Do not interrupt the caller.
7. HOLD YOUR TEMPER - Do not let anger interfere with listening.

8. DON'T ARGUE AND CRITICIZE - Do not put the caller on the defensive. The caller may "clam up" or get angry.. Don't argue; winning can be losing.

9. ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS - Encourage the caller and show that you are listening.. It helps to develop points further.

10. STOP TALKING - LISTEN! This is first and last, because all other commandments depend on it. A Key Volunteer can't do a good listening job while she/he is talking. A Key Volunteer listens best when she/he is quiet.

Nature gave people two ears but only one tongue, which is a gentle hint that we should listen more than we talk.