

# PREVENTION IN ACTION

## FAMILIES

### PARENTS AND CHILDREN CAN SHARE POWER AND CONTROL

**Power** is the capacity or ability of an individual to influence the actions, beliefs, or behavior of others.

**Control** is to actually influence or direct people's behavior.

All of us need healthy power and control to lead balanced lives. Children who have healthy power and control are less likely to try and exert their power over others. However, children may see themselves as having little power and control because adults are bigger, make decisions about money, and control schedules and routine.

**Healthy power and control** promotes self-esteem, competence, trust, and responsibility.

**Unhealthy power and control** can cause problematic behaviors (including violence/bullying) and rebellion.

#### Understanding power and control

- You can give power without losing any of your own.
- Two people can have power and control at the same time.
- There is not a finite supply of power and control.
- An increase in bad behavior could be your child's push for power and control.

#### How do we offer healthy power and control to our children?



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#### Recognizing healthy power and control

- Understand your own need for power and control. We all have it.
- Avoid power struggles.
- Do not make threats.
- Grow power and control gradually based on your child's age and developmental stage.
- Respect boundaries and encourage development of healthy boundaries (e.g., not interrupting you while you are on the phone).
- Rules, not a person, are to be obeyed.

#### Making healthy parenting choices

- Ask yourself: Is this a decision my child could/should be making for him/herself?
- Promote choice, not orders. But only promote choice if there is choice.
- Ask for your child's opinion and help. Give the child a responsibility to strengthen empowerment.
- Be interested in your child. Avoid empty praise.
- Follow through on your word.

#### Offering power and control to kids

- Let 4-year-olds decide who their playmates are.
- Let 8-year-olds choose what they want to wear.
- Let 12-year olds pick their activities.
- Encourage teenagers to earn and save their own money.
- Validate children's decision-making. Help with pro/con lists. More power and control in a decision results in more positivity and acceptance of the decision.
- Let your children be responsible for their decisions, good or bad.

For more parenting resources, contact the [New Parent Support Program](#), the [Family Advocacy Program](#), the [Community Counseling Program](#), and [Marine Corps Family Team Building](#).

#### Diffusing power struggles

Power struggles will happen between parents and children.

With [emotion coaching](#), you can help children calm down or find out what to do to help them feel better.

You might say, "You seem to be getting very upset. Let's take some deep breaths together to help you calm down." Or you might say,

"You're so happy and have a lot of energy you need to burn. Let's do some jumping jacks!"

Problem-solve the emotion, encourage your children to try a few different things to help them feel better or calmer and see what works. Some phrases you might use while emotion coaching include:

- "It seems you're feeling sad about this. Is that the case?"

- "You look frustrated. Is that how you feel?"

- "I can see that you're angry right now. Is there anything else you're feeling?"

- "It seems to me you're unhappy, but I want to hear from you how you feel."

- "Tell me how you're feeling and what's going on with you right now." Some phrases to avoid saying while

emotion coaching include:

- "Quit whining; you're fine."
- "Stop behaving this way."
- "Get over it."
- "You're overreacting."
- "You're not upset."
- "It's not a big deal."

—Human Performance Resources by Consortium for Health and Military Performance (CHAMP) at the Uniformed Services University

# PREVENTION IN ACTION WITH COL KEVIN L. DIGMAN

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**Q What role do you play in primary prevention for Marines and their families?**

Marine Corps Community Services programs, along with other Marine Corps organizations and commands, play a role in primary prevention. The Children and Youth Program connects families to resources at their new installation, Semper Fit and Recreation provides access to positive activities, Marine Corps Family Team Building offers skill-building classes, and the Family Advocacy Program and Community Counseling Program offer classes, counseling, and other services. Communications strategy experts support efforts across all of the initiatives through the promotion of skill-building and protective factors. We work hard every day to develop and implement prevention strategies to positively impact Marines and their families. Individual readiness of our Marines and Sailors is not complete without family readiness. Our ultimate goal is to increase the readiness of the Marines and Sailors, which includes support and services to the families. Ultimately, unit readiness and combat capability will increase and improve, resulting in a more effective and lethal organization.

**Q Why are primary prevention activities especially important for families?**

As already mentioned, Marines and Sailors are not ready unless the families are ready. And, for a lot of billets, Marines may work long hours and/or deploy, and spouses/significant others are



The Digman family celebrates Halloween with matching costumes.

responsible for everything in the home life, to include balancing a career. It is important that our families have access to skill-building resources and activities so they also have the tools to successfully navigate challenges within the family. Additionally, it is just as important for family members to have the necessary resilience to meet the demands of the military lifestyle and remain connected to their family member's unit or Service. Those tools exist and are there to support the families just as they support the Service member.

**Q Have you used any programs for families across your career? If so, how were they helpful?**

Yes, we have used some of the available resources. Mainly, we have been part of the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) for about 10 years. One of our children is high-level-of-care autistic and requires multiple doctors, therapists, and a robust special education plan. As many Marines and Sailors know through experience, having an EFMP can become quite stressful at times, and programs and services exist to help families navigate

those challenges. The Marine Corps has always placed me in locations where services and resources are available. I was able to focus on work requirements, and my wife had access to resources and a support structure with minimal worry. I can honestly say the Marine Corps has placed me in locations that enhanced my career while simultaneously providing support and services to my EFM. Great resources are either embedded within commands or within the Marine Corps Community Services construct that can assist Marines, Sailors, and their families. They range from financial counseling/support, relationship resources, new parent support, mental health, transition support, and education opportunities, to just name a few of them. And they do not just support someone after a negative or traumatic event; they are there to assist in building resiliency and skills in Marines, Sailors, and families to prevent those negative outcomes. I highly recommend taking advantage of those resources.

**Q What advice do you have for commanders or sergeants major as they embark on primary**

**prevention activities?**

The resources, services, and experts exist within the Marine Corps to get after prevention. We are working to improve that capability, but much is already out there. It comes down to relationships, collaboration, and coordination. Not all of these resources fall under a single structure. Some are embedded within commands, some are provided through the installation, and some are provided through our medical capabilities. Break down silos among all of the different capabilities, and create a process for collaboration and teamwork among the different capabilities out there. Also, include the community. The majority of our Marines, Sailors, and families live in the community. It is probably safe to say that any issues commands are experiencing with their people, those same issues exist in the community surrounding the installation. Reach out to them for both prevention and response efforts to maximize options and resources for the Service members and their families. I understand it is probably easier said than done, but we have seen it work very well in some locations, ultimately resulting in a more comprehensive prevention effort to get after many different problematic behaviors.

*Prevention in Action interviews individuals in prevention-related positions within Marine Corps Total Force to show how primary prevention is operationalized across the Marine Corps. Efforts to build skills, promote protective factors, and strengthen resilience are ongoing across the fleet.*

**Partners in PROMISE**

Partners in Promise is a nonprofit founded in 2020 to elevate the concerns of military special education students and their families to ensure they have the same access to an education as civilian students.

Led by military spouses with insights about Exceptional Family Members, the group advocates for families and provides resources and information on its website, [thepromiseact.org](http://thepromiseact.org).

**ABOUT THE NEWSLETTER**

The United States Marine Corps' Marine & Family Programs Division publishes Prevention in Action. **The contents of this newsletter are for informational purposes only** and not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment.

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past issues. If you give us your email address, we will use it solely to deliver the newsletter. You may opt out at any time by responding to the sender.

Email [hqmcprevention@usmc.mil](mailto:hqmcprevention@usmc.mil) to suggest topics or ask questions.

*To access links in the newsletter, right-click on link, copy link, and paste it into a browser window.*



**CONNECT WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS DURING THE HOLIDAYS**

Thanksgiving celebrations are different all around, and even when people celebrate with family, friends, and loved ones, they can still feel lonely.

The past two years have been more difficult for some because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some individuals have been unable to visit family and friends during the holidays. Some people may have recently lost loved ones.

People can experience grief and loss for many other reasons during the holidays. Loneliness and isolation are two factors that may play a role during this year's Thanksgiving celebration. This is why it is important to connect with those around you during this time to prevent loneliness, isolation, and in some cases, suicidal thoughts or ideas.

Here are some tips on how to **CONNECT**:

**Connect** with others by scheduling time to talk, share a meal, or do an activity you all enjoy. **Volunteering** is a great way



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to get active and socially engage.

**O**bserve your emotions and physical sensations. For example, stress can be felt as tension in the shoulders or pressure on the chest. Being mindful of how you are feeling emotionally and physically can help increase self-awareness.

**N**ote the nearest resources. Connect with a resource at your **Community Counseling Center**, as necessary, or if you experience any suicide-related

thoughts or behavior. **Military OneSource** and **Military Crisis Line** are available 24/7. You can always contact the **MCCS Suicide Prevention Program** for resources available to you.

**N**udge yourself outside. Connecting with nature can be beneficial to your mental health, whether it is spending time outdoors, or bringing nature into your everyday life. **Semper Fit Outdoor Adventure** activities

include swimming, parks, trails, picnic areas, playgrounds, sports, recreational shooting, beaches, lakes, and competitive events.

**E**mpathize with others by listening to their stories, and share your stories with others who can empathize with you. You will open a healthy space to be vulnerable and feel validated.

**C**oping skills can help you manage difficult emotions. Work to develop your problem-solving skills, and learn mindfulness techniques that can help calm you.

**T**ake care of yourself by setting healthy boundaries with individuals who do not benefit your mental health. Communicate your needs with the other individual, set limits, and practice self-care and self-respect.

For more information, contact your local **Community Counseling Center** or the **Military Crisis Line** at 800-273-8255, press 1, or via text at 838255. Find more prevention resources in the **Prevention in Action newsletter**.

**Strengthen your family's fitness by staying active together**

As a parent, you can help shape your child's attitudes and behaviors regarding physical activity. Children and adolescents ages 6 through 17 years should be physically active at least 60 minutes each day, according to the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.

That may sound like a lot for a school day, but it doesn't have to happen all at once. There are so many ways to squeeze in activity at different times of the day.

**Before school:**

Start the day off right and fit an activity into your routine.

- Walk the dog; walk or bike to school.
- Do morning stretches or yoga.
- Dance around the living room.

**After school:**

When the school day ends, let the games begin. Encourage kids to use their after-school

energy to get active with friends, siblings, teams, or on their own.

- Sign up for an active after-school program or recreation center class.
- Play a team sport like soccer or basketball.
- Ride bikes or play at the playground.
- Help out around the house. Washing the car, cleaning their rooms, or raking leaves in the yard counts as physical activity—and it makes your life a little easier.

**In the evening:**

As the day winds down, find a few minutes to get active as a family. When you move with your kids, you also get the health benefits.

- Take a walk before or after dinner.
  - Turn commercial breaks into fitness breaks when you're watching TV.
  - Start a family dance party.
  - Play active games like catch and kickball.
- When incorporating healthy play into your



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child's routine, the most important thing is to be a role model. Show off your dance moves, model some yoga poses, or teach them your favorite sport. When kids see you enjoying physical activity, they may want to try it, too.

For more ideas to get kids active, contact your local **Child and Youth Programs**, or sign them up for **Youth Sports**. Play an active role in your child's development and sign up to be a coach.

**Manage your family’s holiday spending to avoid debt**

As we approach the holiday season, we are bombarded by messages at every turn.

Stores have been decorated for Christmas since October, holiday music is in the air, and TV shows seem to devote more screen time to ads than the actual program.

It’s so easy to get caught up in the excitement of holiday bargains and tinsel and lights, but that can quickly bring remorse when the credit card bills begin arriving in January.

Consider some tips on managing

your family’s holiday spending:

**1. Make a list and check it twice.**

Lists aren’t just for Santa. Stick to your list to avoid exceeding your holiday spending plan.

**2. Set a spending plan.** Once you know who’s on your list, determine what you can afford to spend.

Most credit and checking accounts feature online budgeting tools, and you can update a spreadsheet every time you buy a gift.

**3. Give gifts a homemade touch.**

Keep in mind the old adage “It’s the thought that counts.” Use your

talents to produce homemade gifts. Take a class with your spouse, friend, children, or neighbors. Your local [library](#) may offer seminars in knitting, photography, or other topics. If you’re short on time, create a holiday coupon book.

Offering to detail your spouse’s car or make dinner for a week are thoughtful gifts. Children will appreciate coupons for a visit to a zoo, a bowling night, or another fun family activity.

**4. Do your homework.** For those gifts you cannot make, research your purchase before shopping to get the best price. Don’t forget to

consider the cost of shipping if you’re shopping online.

**5. Give to others.** If your loved ones have everything they need, consider skipping gift-giving. Instead, collect food for the food bank, volunteer together at a nonprofit, or give to a charity in a loved one’s name.

**6. Make a plan for next year.** The holidays arrive at the same time each year. Begin saving today for next year. Contact your Command Financial Specialist or installation [Personal Financial Management Specialist \(PFM\)](#) for assistance creating a spending plan.

**Promote your family’s overall wellness**

A strong family unit can be strong in many ways, but ensuring all family members are healthy can be the beginning of a strong family that will last for years.

While the term healthy can mean many different things, from mental health to physical health, it is recommended that you and your family get plenty of physical exercise, healthy meals, and good quality sleep.

Being active together is crucial in strengthening your family’s well-being. Physical activity improves physical health, but it also improves mental health. The more time families spend away from a screen, the more engaged they are to provide the necessary support and attention to create healthy relationships.

Try doing things together, such as riding bikes, going on a walk around the neighborhood, or having a family dance party to get the blood flowing and encourage healthy habits.

One of the best ways to be healthy is by creating good mealtime practices. Meals are a time for families to bond and communicate. Sitting down for a family meal has been shown to improve children’s behavioral and emotional health in families.

Eating at home increases the quality of interactions between family members. We can also practice healthy eating by cooking healthy dinners full of fresh veggies, fruits, and lean proteins.

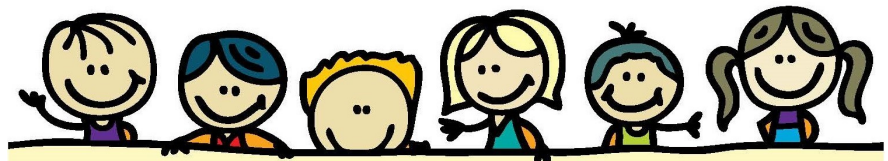
Families should also implement healthy sleep routines. Poor quality sleep affects mood, performance, and energy levels. Try to get your family on a healthy sleep schedule and create a routine with calming activities that do not require technology, such as reading a book or relaxing before going to bed at the same time every night.

Set up bedrooms that promote quality sleep with dark rooms, reduced noise distractions, and proper bedding with a good mattress.

Being busy can quickly lead to becoming sedentary. Practicing poor eating habits and not making time for physical activity can lead to poor health for the entire

**Coping skills for kids**

Encourage your kids to calm down and let out extra energy by suggesting some of these coping skills as part of coaching their emotions. A child should engage in actions such as these before he or she becomes overwhelmed by emotions. Demonstrate the appropriate skills to your kids to model acceptable expressions of emotions. To work well in most situations, each skill should be practiced for at least a minute. After that, if necessary, move on to another. Feel free to add your own ideas to the list, and keep it handy for when the need arises.



Stomp your feet	Take several deep breaths	Have your hand held
Do jumping jacks	Draw a picture	Wrap yourself in a blanket
Run laps outside	Call a family member	Write in a journal
Scream into a pillow	Mold clay	Run water on your hands
Rip paper	Get a hug	Hug a stuffed animal
Do chores	Lie down	Chat with a friend
Snap bubble wrap	Take a bath	Listen to music
Play a sport	Think of a peaceful place	Make a bracelet with beads
Punch a pillow	Talk to a friend	Rub a worry stone
Bounce a ball	Make a collage	Doodle with pencils, markers, or crayons
Pace	Go for a walk	
Read a book	Color a picture	
Get a backrub		
Take a shower		

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family. Prioritizing healthy habits can improve the overall wellness of the entire family. For resources, use your local

[Semper Fit Health Promotion](#) Program to help develop a personalized healthy family plan.