



## **Safe Haven: Building on Family Strength**

### **Family Stress**

Stress to families can come in many forms such as divorce, financial problems, illness, or the death of loved ones. Even typical life cycle changes such as marriage, having children, leaving home, or the aging process can cause stress. In addition, military families may face additional stresses such as long deployments, separation, frequent moves, loss of function due to injury, ongoing mental health or substance abuse issues.

What stresses has your family had to cope with over the past year?

### **Family Definition**

Your definition of family may be different from others. Think for a moment. How many people are in your family? Do those you consider family all live in your house? Does your family include a special pet or service animal? Maybe you consider family to include friends, neighbors, or members of your extended family. Does your family include multiple generations? Perhaps you and your partner or significant other make up family.

- What is your definition of family? Who is included?
- Has your definition of family changed over time?
- When was your family's last crisis or challenge?
- How did you draw on each other for strength?
- How did you or your family grow as a result of the crisis or challenge?

### **Family Resilience**

Family resilience is like glue that keeps you and your family together when life stresses are pulling at you. All families face challenges and go through hard times. Resilient families seem to know how to adjust and adapt to change. Each family is unique and each family will have its own unique way of being resilient.

There are particular areas thought to be important features that contribute to a family's strength and resilience: shared beliefs, organization, and communication.

### **Shared Beliefs**

Shared beliefs are the stories and values that inspire us to hold on when we are losing the will to keep going. Each family will have their own unique beliefs, values, and



powerful examples to guide them, and each family has the opportunity to harness these examples to give them strength and direction during hard times.

- What are the shared beliefs and values that keep you moving ahead?
- Whose example do you cling to for inspiration?
- How does your family find meaning in your struggles?
- How does your family stay optimistic, foster hope, and support?

### **Organization**

There is comfort and strength in providing order when you are faced with a crisis. Just like a good business, families that are well organized can ride out difficulties in a more purposeful way than if they are disorganized. When people know who has what roles, what the rules and expectations are, and what the routine is, people function better and get the job done. They reach their goals when these structures are in place.

- Who are your family leaders?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of family members?
- What are your family routines?
- What family rituals or celebrations do you find comfort in?

### **Communication**

Resilient families create a safe environment for members to share feelings openly and appropriately. They practice honest communication. Resilient families work together to problem-solve and are open to the ideas of others.

- How would you describe your family communication?
- How might you improve your family communication?
- How does your family work together to solve problems?
- What regular activities do you engage in that support good communication?
- Do you share supportive feedback to your family members?
- How do you inspire and encourage your family members?

Please contact the Caregiver Support Line if you wish to explore this information further.