

# PREVENTION IN ACTION

## PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT

### PEERS SUPPORT PEERS WITH SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMS

The stress and challenges caused by a permanent change of station (PCS) move can be reduced by taking advantage of the Marine Corps Sponsorship Program, detailed in [MCO 1320.11G](#).

While you may not have heard of the program if you're traveling CONUS during a PCS, a sponsor is beneficial to you no matter what installation you're moving to.

Sponsors are trained service members who help newcomers settle into a new duty station. So, what can a sponsor do for you?

Marine Corps Sponsors are there to:

- Be a friendly resource for information about your new duty station before arrival.
- Give you information about housing options.
- Provide you with info about schools if you have children.
- Be the first friendly face you see.
- Introduce you to key people



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Your sponsor will be the first friendly face you see and might take you on in chess.

in your unit.

- Familiarize you with the installation program offices.

In an effort to match you with the best sponsor, units try to match marital status: single sponsors with single service members and married sponsors with married service members.

Your sponsor has "been there,

done that," so he or she is a great resource to get in the know before you even arrive.

Be sure to request a sponsor for your PCS move. Contact your Unit Sponsorship Coordinator, or the installation [Information, Referral and Relocation](#) office to get a sponsorship request form.

### L.I.N.K.S. volunteers help orient families to life in the Marine Corps

Permanent change of station or PCS season is winding down. Most families are getting settled in their new environments or finding things have changed in places they have lived before.

It's always important to familiarize yourself with the local resources, changes to the Marine Corps, and get the lay of the land. But where do you go to accomplish all of this?

[Lifestyle Insights, Networking, Knowledge & Skills \(L.I.N.K.S\)](#) has your answers.

L.I.N.K.S. is a volunteer, team-mentoring program

designed to teach participants about the benefits, resources, and services available to them.

L.I.N.K.S. is as beneficial for new Marine Corps families as it is for ones with more experience.

Participants learn about Marine Corps history, traditions, rank, local installation resources, services, benefits, military pay, separation, deployment, communication styles, and how to invest in their community.

L.I.N.K.S. is open to all Marines, spouses, children, teens, and parents of Marines, with distinct information for each group, and

different methods of instruction based on the audience.

L.I.N.K.S. is a wonderful way to network and make new friends. Attendees are encouraged to share their knowledge and experiences.

Opportunities are limitless upon arriving at a new duty station.

Please check with your local [Marine Corps Family Team Building](#) office to choose what best fits for you and your family and sign up for the next L.I.N.K.S. Workshop.

### Youth sponsorships ease transitions

Today's youth face many challenges, and being a military kid adds even more to the list. Having a strong network that includes peers can help individuals of all ages face and overcome potential challenges.

Youth sponsorships ease transitions for military children through outreach, newcomer orientations, and peer-to-peer connections.

Peer-to-peer connections can help youth meet new people, learn more about the local area and schools, encourage them to join clubs and activities, and integrate within the new community.

Getting your kids involved in their new community can start with "Welcome Aboard" briefs, camps through schools or Child and Youth Centers, Marine & Family Program events, youth sports, ambassador clubs, extracurricular activities, installation events, and so much more.

Moving while a parent is in the military can be hard, but kids can also have a difficult time when their parent leaves the military.

Schools, community groups, and installation programs can help transitioning military youth acclimate more easily to their new environment.

Ease your children's transition, whatever that transition may be, by reaching out to the [School Liaison](#) or [Child and Youth Programs](#) for information on how they can connect you with services and information.

# PREVENTION IN ACTION

with CDR Stephen L. Cloer, Resiliency Branch Head  
in the Human Performance Branch,  
Policy and Standards Division,  
Training and Education Command (TECOM)



**Q** What does prevention mean to you?

**A** Very simply, prevention is doing as much as possible “left of the bang” in order to be prepared as possible for life’s challenges. We must take the time to educate and equip our Marines, Sailors, and their families with effective tools that are useful to increase overall readiness. The end result will be increased resiliency when faced with adversity and a greater ability to recover well after the event.

**Q** What is your role in the prevention space?

**A** My current role as the Resiliency Branch Head within the Human Performance Branch at TECOM is to develop, coordinate, resource, execute, and evaluate training and education concepts, policies, plans, and programs to ensure Marines and Sailors are prepared to meet the challenges of present and future operational environments.

Very simply, I am looking to improve resiliency efforts across the four areas of fitness: physical, mental, social, and spiritual.

As a chaplain, I find my passion and area of expertise pertains more specifically to Spiritual Fitness. While physical fitness is very tangible and easy to see, spiritual fitness is more intangible thus making it harder to talk about. I enjoy taking on that challenge to assist Marines and Sailors in thinking through the parts of our lives that greatly impact our human performance such as meaning and purpose, ability to forgive and be forgiven, and more.

**Q** How do you create skill-building materials or build skills with those in your sphere of influence?

**A** Spiritual Fitness is a Marine Leader Development topic, therefore my work to develop skills in this area has focused on how to train Marine Leaders. I recently completed my Doctor of Ministry dissertation titled, “Educating, Training, and Equipping Marine Corps Leaders to Lead Marines in Spiritual Fitness.” The project centered around the development of a one day training seminar to equip leaders with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to lead their Marines in spiritual fitness conversations on a periodic basis.

**Q** Are there any resources you can share to help operationalize prevention for our readers?

**A** Here at the Human Performance Branch, we have developed a [resiliency website](#) that contains many tools and resources under all four areas of fitness; physical, mental, social, and spiritual.

Here you will find the Total Fitness Self-Check Tool along with links to the mental, social, and spiritual fitness web pages. I encourage our readers to be sure to navigate specifically to the spiritual fitness page where you will find the Spiritual Fitness Marine Leaders Guide that is a useful tool to begin understanding this topic more.

*Prevention in Action interviews individuals in prevention-related positions within Marine 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.*

## Single Marine Program creates peer connections

The Single Marine Program (SMP) is designed to create peer-to-peer connections between Marines. SMP Marines welcome and support incoming Marines.

They serve as a source of information about the installation, forming a bond with new Marines, and communicating with them about upcoming SMP activities.

Peer-to-peer support is woven into the fabric of this program. It creates opportunities for Marines to connect with one another, meet new people, engage in their community in a way they never have, and experience new things.

The program also strives to create a sense of community among the Marines and with the surrounding community. Because of this unique outlook, volunteering and community involvement is at the heart of SMP.

Benefits of being involved with SMP include:

- Building community connections.
- Connecting and making friends.
- Making spiritual connections.
- Creating a sense of purpose and belonging.
- Developing emotional stability.
- Improving self-esteem.
- Becoming better citizens.
- Improving community relations.

If you want more information on how you can get involved in the Single Marine Program, contact your local [SMP coordinator](#).

## 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.** The content is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment.

If you choose to provide us with your email address, we will use it solely to deliver the newsletter. You may opt out of receiving the it at any time by responding to the sender.

Email [hqmcprevention@usmc.mil](mailto:hqmcprevention@usmc.mil) to suggest topics or ask questions. August’s newsletter topic will be respect, and September’s topic will be connectedness.

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

**OSCAR TEAMS ASSIST PEERS IN MANAGING STRESS**

Even the most motivated and well-trained Marines can find themselves challenged by stress.

From everyday life to mission-driven deployments and combat, stress in the Marine Corps world is inevitable.

Marines can overcome many obstacles on their own. For some obstacles, Marines may need help. Connecting with their unit's [Operational Stress Control and Readiness \(OSCAR\)](#) team provides support to those Marines looking for help in overcoming their stressors.

OSCAR training equips a team of selected Marines, medical professionals, and religious ministry persons with tools and resources to help Marines prevent, identify, and manage stress issues early before medical

problems arise. OSCAR teams are designed to:

- Preserve the force
- Improve mission readiness
- Improve the long-term health of Marines and their families.

OSCAR team members know the Marines in their unit and use [Combat and Operational Stress Control](#) concepts to build unit and Marine [resilience](#). OSCAR teams can assist their units by leading small-group discussions on topics such as: mindfulness, mental agility, self-care, total fitness, stress management, and sleep. These materials are available on the [Marine Awareness and Prevention Integrated Training Dashboard](#).

OSCAR team members are trained via the OSCAR Generation



**OSCAR GEN III**

III course to recognize when something is troubling a Marine within the unit.

OSCAR Marines can refer Marines to professionals and resources that can provide assistance in a variety of areas including relationships, finances, career concerns, and legal issues.

For more information on your OSCAR team or to find out how

to become a team member, contact your unit's COSC representative. If you need help, learn more about the resources available to you by visiting the [Community Counseling Program](#), [Suicide Prevention Program](#), or [Information, Referral, and Relocation Program](#) websites.

**Supporting peers on their terms**

Stress impacts all of us and it's helpful to have tools to support our peers on their terms and not ours.

When someone we care about is going through a difficult time, sometimes we do not know what to say and that's understandable.

You can start by asking "what can I do to help?" Not only does that promote choice, but it also challenges the person to think about what would be helpful. This enables you to support your peers based on what they want and need.

What else can you do?

**Listen.** Be present and listen to what the person is saying.

**Be patient.** Everyone deals with stress on his or her own timeline. Avoid pressuring the person and always promote choice.

**Be open-minded.** It takes courage for someone to talk about what's troubling them. Respect that.

**Use empathy when you can and always be sympathetic.** If you understand what that



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person is going through because you dealt with similar circumstances, tell them. It helps to not feel alone. Always be supportive.

**Validate the person's thoughts and feelings, even if you disagree.** "I understand why you feel that way."

**Follow through on your word.** If you make a promise, keep it.

All of us have been in situations when we were not sure how to help someone we care about. Or, we needed support but did not know how to ask for it. We can support our peers on their terms—and they can return the favor for us when it's needed—if we follow and practice these tools.

I MIG MARINES EXPLORE NATURE AND INTERCONNECTEDNESS ON RETREAT

BY LANCE CPL. AIDAN HEKKER  
I MEF INFORMATION GROUP

**THREE RIVERS, California**—As Marines, our interconnectedness leads to victory on and off the battlefield. However, our mutual trust and teamwork extends beyond the call of duty. It must envelop our daily lives if we are to continue to grow as the nation’s most prestigious fighting force.

Ten staff non-commissioned officers (SNCO) assigned to the I Marine Expeditionary Force Information Group (I MIG) were picked for a three-day leadership resiliency retreat.

I MIG SgtMaj David M. White led the retreat, which aimed to build participants’ knowledge of interconnectedness and a leader’s role in shaping the environments in which their peers and subordinates function. They acquired interpersonal skills to take back to their units and further equip their Marines with individual resiliency and value-based leadership skills.

Numerous guided discussions were held on topics such as critical thinking, intentionality, relationships, and legacy. Self-reflection and communication were also described as vital practices on the road to becoming more competent leaders.

The retreat was held in the deeply rooted forest of the Sequoia National Park. The park’s enormous trees made us feel small, reminding us of our vulnerability and the reality of the natural world around us.

Unlike many other trees, sequoias have no tap root to stabilize them. The giant trees cannot survive on their own. Their roots are intertwined, allowing them to hold each other up.

Like the sequoias, Marines are interlocked, relying on each other to survive in this world. One Marine is formidable. The Marine Corps is unstoppable.

At the retreat, Marines told personal stories and challenged each other’s ideas. They

shared their philosophies on leadership and interconnectedness within their units. All brought unique leadership styles and various experiences to the conversation.

On the second day, retreat participants hiked more than nine miles through the park. They considered personal goals and experiences while enjoying the beauty of the forest around them. They reflected on their leadership skills and the legacies they wish to leave behind.

“It is inspirational. Getting out of your comfort zone in a beautiful environment, it was eye opening,” said GySgt William Zahorak. “I really hope that not only this unit but every other unit implements this because the Marines deserve it. The Marine Corps deserves it.”

The next mission for these Marines is to plant the seeds of inspiration and share their knowledge of interconnectedness in the Marine Corps.

Six tips to boost your social fitness

When your relationships are healthy, you’re likely to feel supported, accepted, and able to cope with issues.

Your social network also can help you meet your fitness and nutrition goals by supporting you and keeping you accountable.

What can you do to make sure your interactions with friends, family, and your unit work *for* you rather than *against* you?

**1. Start with you.** When it comes to your relationships, you’re at least half of the equation. It’s crucial to be able to recognize how and what you contribute to any positive or negative exchanges. Practice managing your feelings so you can react and interact with others deliberately and thoughtfully.

**2. Put in the time (and have fun doing it!)** With demanding and irregular schedules, it’s not always easy

to spend quality time with friends and loved ones. But it’s essential to make **family time** (and time for friends) a priority to keep your relationships strong. Even if you can only play a game with your kids once a week or get together with friends once a month, try to fit it into your routine. Aim to have some fun in all your social and professional relationships. Doing so can help build trust and cohesion.

**3. Keep it real.** Strive to be authentic and trustworthy. If you’re in a leadership role, being transparent and **honest with your team** can help improve teammates’ performance and their level of engagement. At home, building trust in your close relationships allows everyone to be more vulnerable, which builds solid bonds.

**4. Show you’re listening.** Two of the most important communication skills to reduce

conflict and maintain healthy relationships are listening and showing **empathy**. When you empathize with people, you tune in to how they feel and validate their experiences, without necessarily agreeing. Good listeners repeat back what they hear and ask questions. Mind your body language. Put your phone away, make eye contact, don’t cross your arms, etc.

**5. Be the excitement magnifier.** Relationships are built during the good times, not just by being there in tough times. The way you react when others share good news with you can either strengthen or damage your relationships.

When others share good news, try to consciously share in the excitement and help them leave the conversation as, or even more, thrilled. To show you’re interested, avoid focusing on problems, and **resist comparing** your experiences to theirs.

**6. When it breaks, fix it.** Relationships aren’t perfect, so there will be times when problems arise, and that’s okay. Focus on making it through conflicts without hurting your relationship, and work on fixing things when you both have calmed down. For example, if things get heated, take a break from the conversation. When tempers have cooled, discuss what happened and try to **repair the damage**. Focus on accountability, validation, and making an **effective apology**.

A number of Marine Corps Community Services programs can help you improve your social fitness, including **Semper Fit** adult and youth sports, the **Single Marine Program**, **Marine for Life Network**, **L.I.N.K.S.**, **Marine Corps Family Team Building**, and the **Volunteer Program**.

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