

Family Optimization

Webinar transcript

Christina Piechoski:

Good morning, and welcome to today's webinar titled, Family Optimization. If you're part of the military family, then you know what it's like to overcome challenges. Time apart from your loved one, frequent moves, constant changes, financial strain and regularly worrying about your family's health and safety are part of your reality. Learn family resilient strategies to get through it together and become stronger, braver and more resourceful. We are thrilled to have with us today, Sarah Steward. Ms. Steward is a social health scientist at Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine, HJF, in support of the Consortium for Health and Military Performance, also known as CHAMP. Sarah is trained in marriage and family therapy and works as part of the Human Performance Resources by CHAMP initiative. Sarah uses her expertise and family system and social fitness to create education resources for the military community. Without further delay, I'll turn things over to Sarah.

Sarah Steward:

Great. Thank you so much. Thank you again and hi everyone. I'm so happy to be here with you today. Again, my name is Sarah Steward and I'm the social health scientist at HJF in support of CHAMP. And today, I'm here to talk with you about family optimization for military families. Before I get started, I want to say that what I'll talk to you about today are my own opinions and do not necessarily reflect the official positions of the DOD, Uniformed Services University or HJF. The information I'll present today is not a substitute for medical care or supervision. Please consult with your health care provider before making any decisions concerning your health. And for those of you watching a recording of this presentation, please note that performance research can change over time. So, please check hprc-online.org for future updates to this content.

So, like I said, I am coming to you today from the Consortium for Health and Military Performances or CHAMP for short, it's easier to say. CHAMP is a center of excellence based out of Uniformed Services University in Bethesda, Maryland. So, our mission is basically to be the premier DOD resource to



conduct, to translate and to share research in Total Force Fitness and Human Performance Optimization, which are two core concepts that I'll explain in just a moment, but just to give you a little bit of an overview. One of the primary ways that CHAMP aims to achieve our mission is through the HPRC initiative. So, through the resources on our website, hprc-online.org and presentations like this we're able to disseminate evidence-based actionable and digestible resources to support service members and their families and others who support them. And much of the information that I will share with you today is available on the HPRC site including even more tools and resources as well.

So, just another quick slide to give a little context to CHAMP, again, we are based within USU or Uniformed Services University and we have three pillars within our mission. Leadership, which is about looking at policy and working with stakeholders to support our service members. And then we have our research branch, which conducts a variety of research studies from cell to animal to human studies within all areas of human performance. And then finally, we have the education branch, which again, is sort of where I'm coming to you from, and our goal within the education space at CHAMP is really to get you the latest research on performance and get that information out to our service members again in military families, service providers and generally others within the military community. And we do that again with HPRC, which is a resource that's really focused on holistic health and wellness. And our team at HPRC is comprised of many subject matter experts from experts in nutrition to performance psychology to physical fitness and injury prevention to experts and spiritual fitness and of course, social health.

So, I am the social health subject matter expert at HPRC. My background and my training is in marriage and family therapy and I have some experience working clinically with couples, families and individuals as well. And just a quick note there to our sister initiative in the education branch, which you might be familiar with, is operation supplement safety which is a DOD-wide, educational campaign to increase awareness within the DOD community about the potential health risks and how to choose safe dietary supplements, which we know is a big issue in the military world.

So, again, I just wanted to give you a little bit of context to where I'm coming to you from today, and with that context in mind, here is an overview of what we will talk about. So first, I want to talk a little bit about the concepts of performance optimization and Total Force Fitness. And again, those are the two concepts or framework that kind of guide our work at CHAMP and what gives the information that I'm going to share with you today a little bit of its unique flavor. So, then we'll talk about family optimization, you know what that is and why it's important. And then, as I mentioned at CHAMP, our goal is to share information that you can actually take and act on and so I'll share some strategies to help you work towards optimizing your family and improving your personal relationships. And then finally, I'll finish off with some references to performance resources for you to use in the future and also just give you a little taste of some of the resources that we have freely available.

So, what does it mean to optimize performance? What is Human Performance Optimization? Put simply, it's about giving special attention to sort of building competencies and giving attention and efforts that help you go a step beyond healthy or just medically ready and to really get to a place where you are sort of the best version of yourself. Certainly, there is an aspect of optimizing performance particularly within the military context where you have to think about prevention as well. So, of course, that is there, but prevention alone, while important, is really maybe not enough to kind of achieve your



optimal wellness. Another way to think about and you might have heard this example, in other contexts is to think of a garden, right? If you want a beautiful garden, it's not just about removing weeds or clearing out a space like yes, you do have to do that. But if that's all you do, you're just going to kind of have a patch of dirt probably. You actually have to plant the flowers and you have to water them and nurture them and sort of keep them up and that's what optimizing performance is.

Another more technical way to think about it in a military context is to sort of think about performance optimization in the context of like a spectrum of health and how the different degrees of health sort of translate to a service member's ability to complete their core and mission essential tasks. So, on the red end, there is kind of health sustainment recovery in the middle, we find prevention where maybe you are able to complete your core tasks. But then in the purple is where you'll find performance optimization where you're really able to kind of exceed the needs and complete your core tasks and really do them well. So, it's a little bit of a different way to think about health. So much of our health education is about overcoming or avoiding illness or dealing with mental health disorders or avoiding. How to avoid dealing with conflict with others. But instead, if we think about building our skills so that we're not just dealing with or avoiding issues, but rather we're nurturing our health, we're nurturing our mental health and we're nurturing our relationships. Even when things kind of feel okay that's kind of where you'll find performance optimization.

So, how do we kind of make that shift in thinking and I know that the text on this might be more difficult to see but hopefully you can see those bigger headings. How do we approach achieving performance optimization? Well, the framework that we use at CHAMP is the Total Force Fitness model and that's what you're looking at here. It's a holistic model of health and it's a model that considers how all aspects of our well-being impact all other areas. So, for example, maybe you have someone who's spending a lot of energy on their physical fitness and eating really well, but they're super stressed at work or maybe their relationship with their partner, husband or wife is struggling. And then are they really at their best, right? You can't neglect the impact that one area or domain of health has on the other areas. So, if I'm struggling in my relationship with my teenager, then maybe I'm more stressed and maybe that makes me distracted at work.

And then maybe I also have a little less willpower to make good nutritional choices, right? So, in the end, it kind of all comes together. But if I'm nurturing all areas of my health, then that is going to have a positive impact and all areas are going to benefit, too.

So, let us talk a little bit more about specifically how relationships impact those other areas of our health and what the research tells us on that front. So first, just a little bit of a closer look so you can actually see some of that text on social fitness in the Total Force Fitness model. This is what our relationships we would focus on in a social fitness context. So, in general, social fitness includes thinking about how one engages with family, within their couple relationship and with friends and it is also about considering how you connect to your community in where one fits in with sort of a larger social context. It is also about of course learning to acknowledge one's culture and the cultural backgrounds of others. And then finally, there is of course a place to consider how team relationships and professional relationships impact our performance and our well-being.



So, how does our social fitness relate to our performance? And again, the research is pretty clear on this. So, those who experience friendships, have strong family relationships and who are connected to others on duty and within their community tend to be physically healthier than those without those meaningful social ties. They are likely to have better cardiovascular health, lower blood pressure and less inflammation as well. And they do tend to recover from illness and injury more quickly and even live longer and the reverse is also true. People who experience loneliness or who do not feel supported by those around them report more health problems. And those with weak relationships are also a bit of a higher risk for earlier death.

So again, I think of how our relationships connect to other areas of our health and it's an area that we often forget but it is a pretty significant area to consider. So again, our talk today is really about considering family relationships specifically and understanding how strong, healthy family bonds impact our performance and we call this family optimization or thinking about how to employ strategies and approaches to really build our family connections that help facilitate sort of optimal being for everyone, including the service members in our lives.

So, let us look at this negative relationship-performance cycle. What happens when things are not going well? And I think in many cases this is kind of what we tend to see or experience more, or at least notice more. We have a negativity bias and tend to notice the bad more. But what I want to share here is that family relationships have a particularly strong connection to our performance at work or when a service member is on duty and vice versa. Our relationships and well-being at work tend to carry over into our relationships at home. And this is especially true now. We are not even really talking about spilling over or carrying over, right? With the pandemic and the increased prevalence of teleworking or virtual learning, everything is just together. There is really no sense of separation for many people. One minute you could be having an argument with your teenager, your spouse or your roommate and then the next minute, you are on conference call.

So, this concept is particularly relevant now maybe more than ever. But again, what we are looking at here is the negative relationship-performance cycle and this is really what we want to avoid. So, think about the direction of sort of work-to-family conflict in this direction where one's work or role in the military interferes with your family life, so you work spills over into your home. Negative experiences at work and with coworkers are linked with depression, anxiety and can again negatively impact your relationship with your partner or other family members. And then the flipside, family-to-work conflict occurs when family demands may get tough to fulfill work responsibilities. So, family-to-work conflict is a little less common, but it has a significant, more of an impact on performance.

So, for example people who experience family-to-work conflict are also less satisfied with their jobs, tend to have more interpersonal conflicts at work and tend to have poor physical health.

Now, let us look at an optimized cycle. And this is what we can see with some focus on family optimization. The good parts of your home life and your work life can actually enrich one another. And when things are going well in one area, there is a chance that kind of those good vibes will carry over across your day whether you are at home or at work. So, moods, behaviors and even skills gained at home can reach your work and vice versa. And positive spillover is related to job satisfaction, resilience, marital satisfaction and psychological well-being. And one of the best ways to increase positive spillover



is through building positive relationships. Relationship with coworkers, with team members and then of course with your family members which is what we will talk about. So, how do we do that? So, more than half of active-duty and reserve forces have family responsibilities. So, whether it is your partner, your kids, older family members, most service members have people who depend on them at home. And as a family unit, you have to navigate operations, moves, relocations, unpredictability, worries about safety and what is more is that the commitment to the job is more than just by choice. Service members are legally bound for years at a time. So, you really do have to find a way to make it work even when the road gets tough.

So, I would like to share some strategies now to help you optimize your family relationships and get through the journey together and healthier and at your best. So, this is a quick overview of the relationship building strategies that I will share. First, we will talk about communication and a few tips for effective communication, then we will talk about family problem solving, the importance of creating a family identity and finding balance in our mindsets and finally, how do we achieve a level of stability as a family unit.

Optimization Strategy No. 1: Communication. And this is an important one so I am going to spend a little bit more time on it. But there is so much to say about healthy communication. The way we talk to each other, the way we show others how we feel through our actions, our words and our body language are all vehicles by which we build and maintain relationships. So, I encourage you to think about your communication style and think about how your family communicates. And let us start with sort of – think about healthy communication. I would argue that the skills of accountability and the ability to utilize validation within our interactions are two of the most important communication skills that we can really have. And on the flipside, I would say that what I call argument traps or listening traps are sort of our biggest obstacles to communication.

So, let us start with accountability. A lot goes into accountability and when it comes to your relationships, you are at least half of the equation. So, it is really important to be able to recognize how you contribute to any positive or negative interactions. A big piece of this is practicing managing your emotions so that you can react and interact with others in a way that is deliberate and thoughtful rather than maybe unhelpful, impulsive or in uncontrolled ways. And one way you can interact thoughtfully and accountably is through the use of “I” statements. So again, really specific skill here that you can use and take away today. An “I” statement requires you to start a conversation with “I” instead of you, right? That sounds super easy but it is not.

“I” statements can be very challenging especially in moments of conflict, right? In a moment where you are heated, you have to be able to slow down. Think about the core of the issue. Why a certain issue matters to you. And then you have to think about what is bothering you about the events that occurred and then you have to connect your feelings to those thoughts and events. So, there is a lot that goes into it. And you have an example here of some “I” statements and some not “I” statements. A good “I” statement might be the difference between saying “I don’t feel heard” instead of saying “You never listen!” Now, it is common to think that a good “I” statement might be “I feel like you never listen,” but that is really just a veiled blame statement, right? A true “I” statement would be something like “I don’t feel heard” or think of a military spouse. Maybe instead of saying, “Why haven’t you called? You never think about others,” we say, “I don’t know if you’re okay or If I don’t hear from you, I start to feel



anxious and worried,” right? That changes the conversation instantly and it changes the direction of the conversation as well.

So, validation. Validation is a response technique and it shows that you accept another person’s feelings and point of view even if you don’t agree. It’s responding in a way that shows the other person that you believe their experience or statement is valid and that you don’t really intend to sort of change it or experience them as being wrong. You can see an example of a validating versus invalidating response here. So, let’s say your teenager is having and maybe expressing some feelings about having to move or relocate, they might say something like, “I’m not going, you just don’t get it.” So, already, they’re setting you up with criticism, right? They’re not using their “I” statements. So, you’re kind of already primed in a sense to come back with a defensive or even dismissive response like “You’re still out of line, don’t be so dramatic, it’ll be fine.”

But what do you think the response to that, if you say that, what do you think the response will be? Chances are, that response like the one shown in red will send the conversation down a path that’s not super productive. Now, taking a pause and choosing to respond in a more validating way can shift the conversation or saying something like, “I understand, that sounds like you’re upset about leaving. How can I support you,” is a much different response. You’re not changing the situation. You’re still going to move. But now, your teen might feel heard and that a high-level validation is about empathy in terms of steps to create a validating response. You want to sort of stick to the facts, mindfully listen, demonstrate that you’ve heard the other person, maybe normalized their experience. It makes sense that you feel this way. And then, of course, repeat back what you’ve heard.

And remember that validating someone doesn’t invalidate your experience. It just creates space for both people to authentically share what they’re feeling. Now, accountability and validation often help us combat some of the negative communication habits or argument and listening traps but it is important to be aware of them so you can sort of do your best to avoid them. So, these are argument traps and these are identified in the Gottman research for reference. So, when looking at this, keep in mind that the goal again is to facilitate productive communication while kind of avoiding escalation or going down a path that’s just not going to be productive.

So, criticism, right? We covered this a little bit. But just to make it a little bit more explicit. Starting a conversation with criticism or the difference between offering a critique or voicing a complaint and kind of personally attacking someone, right? The latter is criticism. So, hallmark of criticism is blame or using “you” statements. And again, instead of using criticism, focus on starting your conversations more gently, use those “I” statements, think ahead about what you need and what you feel.

And then, defensiveness. So again, we touched on this a little bit. But that’s often how we respond to criticism or when we perceive that we’re being attacked. And while it can be a normal response, defensiveness can often lead to escalation. So, defensiveness is rarely going to help somebody hear you, right? And the alternative again is sort of that accountability piece and even validation in your responses.

Contempt is communicating with disrespect. Mocking the other person, using sarcasm, ridicule, name-calling or even using body language like rolling your eyes or scoffing; all of which sort of conveys a sense



that you feel superior, right? So, contempt can be damaging because it's really about making the other person sort of feel small or less than. Instead, focus on communication with respect, appreciation and even gratitude. And I know that can be difficult but it's important to keep in mind because contempt can be really damaging in relationships.

And then, finally, what the Gottmans call stonewalling. And stonewalling is shutting down and withdrawing. Walking or maybe storming away or even just using the silent treatment. And often, we sort of employed this argument trap because we become overwhelmed with emotion whether its anger, hurt or whatever the case may be. And if you reached a point where you are so overwhelmed that the only way to "survive" in a sense is to shut down. Then, it's already too late. Anything after that point is not going to be productive. You won't be able to react rationally or communicate effectively.

So, in order to avoid reaching that point, you need to practice managing your emotions ahead of time. And that means maybe practicing mindfulness or getting in the habit of sort of scaling your emotions. So, instead of waiting until you're at a level 10, right? You start to notice while I'm starting to get like a little bit of sad, I'm at a level three, maybe it's a good time to take a break. And then, take that break and take a break properly which means asking for a break and committing to returning to the conversation at a specific time so that the other person knows that you're not stonewalling; you're just taking a break so that you can have an effective conversation. And those are strategies that are going to end up being more effective.

So again, I would encourage you all sort of keeping in that line of managing your emotions. Think about how your emotions do impact your ability to communicate. And this is true with your kids as well. A couple of quick points particularly around children, it is important to share and show our emotions, right? That models to your kids how to understand what they might be feeling. And using validation and showing empathy will do the same. And the skills again that I've shared applied to your interactions with your kids, too, right? Be accountable for your feelings when you're in an interaction with your children. Validate their experiences, too even if you don't understand them. When my two-and-a-half-year-old daughter has a full breakdown because she wants to wear shorts when it's 20 degrees outside, I can't say that I understand it, but I can see that she's upset, maybe angry, disappointed and I try to honor that for her even if I don't agree. That maybe is the best idea, right? So, avoiding sort of your own reactions and taking time to sit with what your kids are feeling.

Coaching your kid's emotions is also an important communication skill and actually teaches your kids their own emotional management so that they can communicate with others, including you, more effectively. And this is really about giving your kids a vocabulary of emotions. And here you can see an example that we have on HPRC to help you do that. And then, again, scaling your emotions and you have another example of a resource there that's really helpful for kids to sort of see in a visual way. And communication again is a basic skill. And so, we did spend a little bit more time on it. I want to go ahead and move through our next few strategies and we'll end up talking about these maybe a little bit more quickly. But I do want you to remember that communication will really underlie all of the following skills.

Our next optimization strategy: Problem solving. An effective problem-solving in your families. So, as I mentioned earlier, military families encounter all kinds of challenges, right? Lots of them. And it's not



the military that's going to change. So, your family has to be able to problem solve with flexibility to meet those challenges. Resilient families share the responsibility of brainstorming and jointly make decisions when problems and issues or even conflicts happen and they build on success and learn from failures while also looking ahead and trying to prevent things from maybe getting worse. So, just start by taking a moment to think about how does your family solve problems. Maybe it's you and your partner. But also think about how your children problem solved. How do sibling's problem solve? And how do you address problems with the family unit?

In order to solve problems together, obviously, you have to again, keep those communication skills in mind, but they're also the concrete steps that you can take to work through things together. So, first, name the problem. Verbalize it; and verbalize it with your children too, in an age-appropriate way. Children are as we know often more aware than we think they are, particularly when there are issues. But if we don't talk about them, it can be a lot more stressful, right? We think we're protecting them but they sense it. And so, not having words to talk about it makes it more stressful. So, if you can give words to a problem, it not only clarifies the issue for those involved or who can make a change but it also makes tension or changes less scary and more identifiable. I think that's true for adults, too.

So, once you've identified the problem, brainstorm some solutions. Maybe even write them out, get everyone's input when it's appropriate. And then, third, agree to try one strategy and then implement it, right? And then, finally, come back, reevaluate if that strategy was effective, or maybe if you need to try something else in the future.

And these are sort of the technical steps to problem solving and so I'm sure not entirely groundbreaking information to a lot of you out there. But the question is what interpersonal strategies can we use to sort of aid us in actually implementing these steps? So first, I would say, lead with curiosity. Don't assume that you know who or what is the cause of an issue. Don't assume that you understand how the problem or issue is affecting other family members. Instead, coming from a place of information gathering. Ask questions, use active listening and of course check your assumptions. Next, remember to prioritize the team and family needs. When you're approaching family problems, it can help to explicitly talk about them and then talk about what's good for the whole. Brainstorm strategies so that you're getting that right balance. And then also, maybe it's time to have a conversation about what the right balance between individual needs and the needs of the group really is. And finally, I know I sound like a broken record, but focus on managing your emotions so that you can actually have productive conversations about problems or issues. And then again just another quick note, we have a great worksheet on problem solving if you are looking for that type of resource.

Now, let's talk about family identity. So, for military families, a key to optimization is having a strong sense of the values that guide you and provide your family purpose. For some families that might be religion or spirituality that offers those values, while for others you might be more guided by a sense of patriotism, a sense of duty, or maybe even just identifying as a military family. Optimized families also have a strong family story that they have as a unit. So, with your family, sit down and talk about what your beliefs and values as the family actually are. What would you like them to be? How does that balance, conflict, or maybe remain consistent with sort of your family identity as a whole? And then think about developing a sense of family purpose. What do you stand for? Why do your relationships matter? And what does the future of your family look like? In other words, what are you working



towards as a family and within your relationships with each other? And then finally, make sure that you're taking time to make meaning out of the downtime or the adversities. In other words, process those challenges that you faced as a family, talk about how you've grown or maybe even just survive them, and the way that your family makes meaning of those things is a big part of your ability to overcome it in the future. And you want to be incorporating those discussions into your family narrative and into your family story.

So, the optimization strategy of balance. And here we're really talking about balance of time and experience. So, how does your family think about the past, present and the future? Where if anywhere do you sort of dwell in your thinking? How do you process things that have happened, that are happening, or that you might anticipate might happen? And it's important to find balance between learning and growing as I just mentioned from the past and not letting that sort of distract you from the present. Then it can be difficult for example, let's say, to adjust to a new duty station and miss the friends or extended family that you and your kids have left behind. But there is a difference between accepting and acknowledging and maybe even grieving that and letting those feelings overwhelm you to the point where you can't adjust in your new location.

So, think about how you approach issues like that as a family. Conversely are you overly focused on what's next or sort of pushing ahead, and keep in mind that balance is key. And then there's also thinking about balancing the positive and the negative. And this is where I would encourage you to think about how you integrate optimism and imagine what optimism really is because optimism isn't simply about focusing on the positive and ignoring the negative. Rather, it's about focusing your energy where you have control to make the situation better. So, you want to find that balance between the positive and the negative. And then again, learn from challenges. Talk as a family about what you've been through and how you apply, what you've learned to whatever you're dealing with now or what you anticipate dealing with in the future. And then finally, practice gratitude and teach your children to make gratitude a habit.

Gratitude, fosters healthier relationships by sort of reminding you and then binding you to those that help you get through the tough times which can increase your interconnectedness. So, another way to think about balance is to think about how you parent and balancing sort of compassion and control. And when you think of it and I apologize this is actually a control spectrum not compassion but it's really about how you think of the difference between strictness and softness. Just thinking about how much you expect from your children and thinking about how much you expect them to fit within a certain mold, right? Do you demand a lot from your child to help him or her get on the right track or do you kind of let them do as they please? So, ask yourself. How much do you focus on changing your kid's behaviors and setting boundaries? How often do you track their actions? When it comes to responsibilities and interactions with others, how independent are your kids? And how much do you value individuality and uniqueness? And then again, compassion which is actually the horizontal one, the supportive and the difference between being a supportive and a distant parent is about how well you can respond and support your kid's needs.

So, on one end, you can show interest, respect, and caring warmth towards your child or you can show little concern or interest. Parenting with compassion gives your child space to grow while knowing that you have their back at the same time. So, ask yourself, are you in tune with your child's emotions and



interests. When you give in to their requests, how do you decide when to give in? How do you explain your feelings, rationales and reasonings with your child? How consistent are you with discipline and how flexible are you?

Ultimately, your goal would probably be to find the appropriate balance of control and compassion and then hopefully fall within this quadrant here. And we call this a sort of a warm leadership parenting style. And again, it's about balancing with compassion and control. So, warm leaders set firm and consistent limits, but they're also highly responsive to their children. So, these parents expect mature behavior, but they also support their kid's individuality and growth. They watch their children closely but they encourage them to act independently. So, warm leaders are attentive, offer guidance and share experiences together with their kids. And this style of parenting is according to the research, is sort of best for children's development and health. Our final optimization strategy here is stability.

So, optimized families are able to carry a sense of stability throughout the many changes that they face. And one way to get there is to follow certain routines and family traditions. Because maintaining those steady relationships internally also helps when externally, things are maybe a little bit chaotic. So, for example, having a reliable or effective parenting style or keeping your couple or parenting, co-parenting relationship healthy can create stability within your family. And consistency, I want to note that that is not rigidity, in routine gives children a sense of safety, and that can be really important. And traditions provide that same sense of safety and they're an opportunity to sort of grow and bond together as a group.

So, think about what traditions and routines you have in your family on a daily, monthly or annual basis, and then think about what obstacles you might face in maintaining these routines through changes that are coming. And I think this is particularly important again to discuss with military families because it can be difficult to maintain stability within military life. Again, moving a lot in security about a parent's presence or their safety, having to make new friends, frequent separations from a parent. The sense of stability really has to come from sort of within the family unit. So, think about how we can maintain some element of this routine or tradition but in a new way if you're facing something coming up. And I think that the reality is we probably all become experts of this in the last year through the pandemic. So, I don't think that I need to say too much more about it, but it's a good reminder that the value of routine and tradition in the context of family optimization. And then finally, I do want to say that it's okay to obtain or let go of certain things too, right? While stability is important. It's not more important than making your family dynamic work. So, we also get into bad habits. So, reassess on a regular basis sort of what your routines are, and then make adjustments as needed.

So, as we close, I want to share and draw your attention to some specific resources on hprc-online.org. Here's a quick screenshot of HPRC website, and you can see we have information on all areas of Total Force Fitness. So, if you want to find more resources or find anything that I've shown today on families, you can navigate to the social fitness section and check out some of those subsections as well specifically family optimization and couples and intimacy.

And again, everything on HPRC is written so that it's easy to understand but it's also evidence-based content which means that it's grounded within the current research. The site is also open. It's free, it's not behind a CAC or a login or anything, so you can access it anytime. And just another couple of other



quick notes about our resources. So, in the top there, we have the expert feature. You can submit questions on any performance topic and you'll receive a research-based response from one of our subject matter experts. There's so much information online these days which is great. But there's also – it's hard to sit through sometimes. So, if you want to know that you're getting accurate information that's really tailored to your particular issue or question, the Ask the Expert feature is a great place to go. We also have a blog where we get to step away from the research a little bit and hear more personal stories from service members, family members and service providers about implementing some performance optimization strategies. And then we're also on social media. So, certainly feel free to follow us on those platforms so you can get updates and then we also have a monthly newsletter where you can sign up and kind of get the latest and greatest performance optimization in Total Force Fitness.

And here are just a couple examples of resources that we have around family optimization in addition to the ones that I pointed out throughout the presentation. For example, we recently ran a campaign on work life or what we call military life balance. You can find a great resource here on the elements of family optimization again, many of which we have discussed today. We also have a 30-day calendar with activities families can use on each day to improve and build resilience. And of course, we have crossover material, lots of material. I'm using that Total Force fitness model. I'm thinking about how different areas of health affects families and children. So, here specifically as an example of where nutrition and family optimization might overlap. So, at this point, I'd like to go ahead and open it up for questions if there are any. And thanks for listening up until this point.

Christina Piechoski:

OK. If you do have a question, you can type it into the question box. There is one question so far. Is this briefing also available in kind of like a podcast format to see at leisure?

Sarah Steward:

Yes, you can see a recording of this presentation through Military OneSource. I don't know that there's just the audio version but certainly it will include the audio.

Christina Piechoski:

It will be posted on the website, Military OneSource website within two to three weeks. Are there any podcasts that are on your website on the resource that you're just highlighting for us?

Sarah Steward:

Again, we have all this information in various formats on the website. In terms of specific podcasts, we do have three episodes. We did a series on getting through PCSing and going through a move using a Total Force Fitness approach. So, we do have that podcast on the site. And then also we have partnered with other organizations in the past, specifically the Military Family Learning Network to talk about some different relational and family issues and that's sort of what we have in terms of audio content at this point. But it is helpful to know that that is an area of interest and certainly something that we hope



to develop more of in the future, but I would definitely check out that PCS podcast. Again, it's on hprc-online.org and there's three episodes.

Christina Piechoski:

And then another question, are there resources geared for specifically moms who need help with their military son?

Sarah Steward:

So, that would be a great. If you're looking for something specific, I would say send us a message through Ask the Expert feature. We have resources certainly on parenting for children of different ages, all kinds of different parenting resources in the family optimization section. But if you're looking for specifically something about that unique relationship between mothers and sons or maybe if there's a specific issue or age, if you're looking for information about sons at a certain age, send us a message in the Ask the Expert feature and you'll get essentially a full article of information and then that also helps us build out our resources on the site, too.

So, anytime we can get feedback on the types of information that folks are looking for, it helps everybody. And you'll get that response within five to seven days. So, pretty quick turnaround as well.

Christina Piechoski:

And this last one isn't a question, the participant just wanted to thank you for your time and let you know they really enjoyed the presentation.

Sarah Steward:

Oh good. I'm so glad. I just do want to acknowledge that on the next slide. If you have downloaded the presentation, if you want to complete an evaluation about your experience with this webinar, that would be helpful. Again, you can probably copy the link if you download the slides rather than having to type all that in. But if you have a few minutes, definitely share your feedback there. Positive or negative or ideas for improvement as well.

Christina Piechoski:

And two more – one comment, one question came in. One is, thank you for your advice and thank you for this webinar. And another one is are you aware of any factors related to this presentation that attracted commanders to it? Clearly, it would be very beneficial for commanders to know.

Sarah Steward:

That is where a lot of our work at CHAMP stems and trying to get the information at a level where change can be implemented and I think that the Total Force Fitness sort of taking that approach and understanding that "Hey, family relationships impact a service member's ability to do their job," right? It



affects their retention. I mean, there's so many things that it impacts that we don't necessarily think of. I think a lot of the focus has been historically sort of on meeting medical readiness measures and different physical fitness measures and not really considering the other factors in a person's life that impact their ability to be well and the Total Force fitness model is something that has come from the DOD. So, I think that we are getting there. There is that support internally. It's just a matter of sharing the information and that is what a lot of our work at CHAMP is geared around.

Christina Piechoski:

And then there's one last question, but I'm not even sure what the answer is. Now that I have the app downloaded, will I receive alerts of future webinars you offer? I think that's the question we are going to have to get back to you on letting you know how these alerts go out. Sarah, do you have any closing thoughts, any final comments that you wanted to share with everyone?

Sarah Steward:

Sure. No. I appreciate everyone's time and I hope that the information I share today was helpful. Again, I know some of this is basic information, but it's definitely helpful to get more explicit reminders of some of these skills. If you do have more questions, please do reach out to me directly or again use our Ask the Expert feature again if it's a relationship or family question, it will come to me anyway, so you can certainly reach out directly as well. But if you want more information on family optimization or Total Force Fitness, do please visit hprc-online.org. But thank you so much for having me and thank you to Military OneSource for sharing all of your great resources and it has been a real pleasure.

Christina Piechoski:

Thanks, Sarah. I just want to thank you too for sharing your invaluable experience and expertise with us today. And I'd also like to thank our attendees for participating in today's webinar. Sarah's contact information is here, but if you find yourself having any questions after the webinar is over, you can always email us at moswebinars@militaryonesource.com and we can send that information over to Sarah as well. So, thanks again everyone. Hope you have a great day, and this concludes today's webinar called Family Optimization. Thank you.

