



Coast Guard  
Ombudsman Handbook  
2010

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## Chapter One Command Selection

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This handbook provides basic guidance about Coast Guard policy and typical activities undertaken by the unit Ombudsman.

This section is for the Commanding Officer/Officer-In-Charge

### **Ombudsman Selection**

*The selection of an Ombudsman is a major decision impacting the entire unit. The Ombudsman Program was established to enhance the quality of life of the Coast Guard Family\*, which is directly related to the retention of experienced and productive Coast Guard members. The Ombudsman is a vital resource to assist the Command with the welfare of unit families. **The Ombudsman Program belongs to the Command.** The Ombudsman is appointed by and works for the Command. The level of support, program policies, and points of contact for the Ombudsman will be set by the Command. The Ombudsman program is only as effective as the Command makes it. The time and effort put into selecting an Ombudsman will have great benefits in the long run. Selecting the wrong person as Ombudsman is worse than having the position vacant. The tone of the entire programs is set by proceedings as if hiring a key employee.*

\*The Coast Guard Family is all active duty and reserve components, their immediate family members, and others designed in writing by the unit members.

### Effectiveness of the Ombudsman Program

The major factors defining the effectiveness of the Command's Ombudsman Program are:

- The responsibilities assigned to the Ombudsman are given with clear direction
- Establishment of communications and expectations between the Command and the Ombudsman are accomplished as quickly as possible
- Support, visibility, and encouragement from the Command are contagious to the rest of the unit
- Appointing a POC to support the Ombudsman's administrative needs
- Mutual agreement of confidentiality and courtesy between Ombudsman, Command and support personnel

## The Ombudsman as Liaison to the Coast Guard Family

The Ombudsman serves as a liaison between the Command and the unit families. The role of liaison includes:

- Communicating official information from the Command to the unit families
- Informing the Command of common concerns of the unit families
- Serving as a resource and referral source for families
- Promoting family readiness as a factor in unit operational success

## Command Communications with Families

The Ombudsman provides communications from the Command to the families by:

- Attending regularly scheduled meetings with the Command
- Editing or contributing to a unit newsletter (if used by the Command)
- Establishing a phone tree to quickly reach all families
- Providing an Ombudsman welcome letter for the Welcome Aboard Package
- Providing Ombudsman contact information for official websites
- Giving presentations at pre-deployment briefs (if applicable)
- Maintaining a unit care line with frequent updates (if applicable)
- Using e-mail when appropriate

*Begin the search for a unit Ombudsman with advertising the position at quarters, in the plan of the week, and a letter to unit families with the duties and qualifications. Request resumes or Form CG-6078 Application to Volunteer as a Coast Guard Ombudsman.*

## Ombudsman Eligibility

Coast Guard spouses of active duty or reserve members, Reservists and Auxillarists are welcome to apply for the position of Ombudsman. The Ombudsman candidate must:

- Have no record of family violence in the past five years. A records check with the servicing Work Life Office will be required once the Ombudsman is selected. The records check may prevent a candidate from being appointed.
- Not be the spouse of the Commanding Officer, Officer-In-Charge, Executive Officer, Executive Petty Officer or Command Master Chief.
- Have time to fulfill the responsibilities of the position, including participating in required training.
- Have the ability to be confidential and impartial when referring families to appropriate resources.
- Hold a positive view of the Coast Guard and the Command while understanding and supporting policy decisions, traditions and missions.

## Resume/Application

Commanding Officers and Officers-In-Charge may ask candidates to submit a resume or application. The application (CG 6078) can be found in Enclosure (3) of COMDINST 1750.4 series. The application and resume are to be used as tools to gather background information on the Ombudsman candidates. **Background information should include: education, training, employment history, experience, communication skills, honor/memberships and references.** The Command may want to consult other key personnel (XO, XPO, Chaplain, CMC, etc) concerning the candidates, since they will be working closely with the Ombudsman.

## Interview

The Commanding Officer or Officer-In-Charge may call all candidates for interviews. (Enclosure 5 of COMDINST 1750.4 series contains sample interview questions). This interview gives the Command the opportunity to explore the candidates' qualifications in greater detail. The Command should be looking for:

- A positive attitude
- The ability to work closely with the Command and ALL families
- The ability to maintain confidentiality
- The ability to clearly voice the concerns of families to the Command
- Personality characteristics of maturity, flexibility, friendliness, assertiveness, stability and empathy
- Someone who is a good role model for other spouses
- Someone with personal knowledge of Work Life resources, permanent change of station, deployments and TRICARE
- Someone with knowledge of personal computers and e-mail
- Someone with the support of his/her family for the time commitment needed for this position and required training
- Prior Ombudsman and other volunteer experience may be an advantage

The Command should screen out candidates that:

- Cannot maintain confidentiality
- Gossip and spread rumors
- Do not have time to fulfill his/her duties, including mandatory training
- Do not have the necessary communication skills
- Are volunteering to advance his/her spouse's career

After interviewing all candidates, the Command should choose the applicant most qualified to serve as the Ombudsman. The applicant chosen will undergo a required Work Life Central Registry check. Potential Ombudsman with a family violence history shall not be appointed as Ombudsman unless cleared by the servicing Family Advocacy Specialist.

## Appointment

The Command shall provide an **appointment letter** stating the duration of duty, responsibilities, as well as the level of administrative and financial support that will be given to the newly selected Ombudsman. The duration of duty may be limited to a three or six month period of time as a trial period. At the end of the stated time period, the appointment can be renewed with the consent of both parties. It should be understood that resignation or dismissal is possible at any time with an agreed procedure. This protects both sides should either find it necessary to terminate the agreement.

The appointment letter is presented to the Ombudsman. If circumstances allow, the presentation of the appointment letter should take place in front of the crew. For an Ombudsman to serve more than one unit, appointment letters should be signed by each Commanding Officer or Officer-In-Charge.

The Command must ensure the Ombudsman completes a CG Form 6078 Application to Volunteer as a Coast Guard Ombudsman. The Ombudsman must read and initial item 14 which stipulates the Ombudsman's services are voluntary and without compensation.

The unit shall retain the original CG Form 6078. A copy of the appointment letter and the CG Form 6078 shall be sent to the Ombudsmen Coordinator at the supporting Work Life Office. The Ombudsman Coordinator will retain copies of the appointment letter and the CG Form 6078. The Ombudsman will be contacted by the Ombudsman Coordinator to set up Indoctrination training within three weeks of appointment. The Ombudsman will also be required to complete Coast Guard CORE Ombudsman Training within one year of appointment. Once training has been completed the Ombudsman will receive an **Ombudsman pin** (round with blue Ombudsman logo). The Ombudsman will wear the Ombudsman pin to all official unit functions, making the Ombudsman easy to recognize by crew and family members.

## Introduction

The Command will introduce the new Ombudsman to the crew and families. This may be done with an official letter to the families, during quarters or at a unit function that includes families. This introduction serves as **an official announcement to the crew and families that the Ombudsman serves as a unit staff member working directly for the Commanding Officer/Officer-In-Charge**. This position shall also be acknowledged on the unit organizational chart.

- The Command may present the Ombudsman's official appointment letter before the crew and families
- The unit may post a photo of the Ombudsman on the unit bulletin board with contact information and a brief description of services the Ombudsman provides
- The Ombudsman may submit a welcome letter to the Command to be included in the Welcome Aboard package (if used by the unit)

- The Command may feature the Ombudsman in the plan of the day or other unit publications
- If the Command is a deploying unit, the Ombudsman should be introduced to the point of contact (POC) designated for support during deployments

## Training

It is essential that the new Ombudsman receive training in the skills needed for the position. Initial indoctrination training with the Ombudsman Coordinator should occur within three weeks of the appointment. Coast Guard CORE training must be completed within one year of appointment. Training includes, but is not limited to, COMDTINST 1750.4 series, ethics, confidentiality, roles and responsibilities, communications, resources, emergency and crisis situations, and self-care.

- The Ombudsman Coordinator or a Coast Guard Certified Ombudsman Trainer shall provide the indoctrination training within three weeks of the Ombudsman's appointment. Training materials and resource information will be provided.
- The Ombudsman Coordinator shall contact the Ombudsman with other training opportunities as they occur in the local area, online or when possible, arrange any specialty training as the need arises.
- Ombudsman are required to complete CORE training within one year of his or her initial appointment
- Ombudsman are strongly encouraged to attend training sessions given at the unit, including reserve drill periods, on topics such as suicide prevention, domestic violence or other training applicable to the Ombudsman or unit families.
- Ombudsman will attend AOR specific training and/or maintenance training
- Ombudsman may attend Navy Webinar training scheduled through the Ombudsman Coordinator
- Workshops or briefings given by local social service agencies and training opportunities with other military service organizations are also encouraged. (Red Cross, Armed Services YMCA, Crisis Hotline, etc.)

Ombudsman training records will be maintained in the unit Ombudsman Administrative file. Ombudsman service hours are to be recorded and forwarded to the Ombudsman Coordinator. Ombudsman service hours should also be maintained in the unit Ombudsman Administrative file.

## Command Support

The Command is responsible for supporting the Ombudsman. The unit will supply administrative support and financial support through appropriated and non-appropriated funds in accordance with COMDTINST 1750.4 series.

- The Ombudsman should be introduced to key unit personnel (XO, XPO, CMC, YN, etc)
- The Command may add the Ombudsman to the routing of all relevant publications (Coast Guard Magazine, The Reservist, etc)
- The Command will meet with the Ombudsman as soon as possible after appointment and on an agreed upon basis thereafter.
- The first Command meeting will define expected roles for the Command and Ombudsman. The Command will set priorities, policy and maintain Coast Guard regulations concerning unit families. (Guidelines should be given concerning when to notify the Command of specific issues, especially during deployments. The use of INMARSAT and cell phones should be discussed. The Command should provide the Ombudsman a definition of what issues should be considered routine and are able to wait for a later discussion.
- The Command will assign a point of contact for routine and emergency matters
- The Command will provide the Ombudsman with an updated unit roster on a regular basis. The roster will contain the following contact information: member and spouse's name, home address, home telephone number and cell phone numbers. This roster is to be used for **official use only and is covered by the Privacy Act.**
- The Command shall establish a funding line item to support their Ombudsman program
- The Command will provide the Ombudsman the equipment necessary to carry out his/her duties. The loan of any items will be documented on a DD 1149 and all loaned equipment will be returned at the end of the appointment. Items that may be loaned are: telephone, answering machine, laptop and/or cell phones.
- Deploying units may designate a telephone number/Careline for recorded information. Ombudsman may update the recorded information with Command approval, being conscious of OPSEC. The set up and payment for this service will be done through the Command.
- The Command may allow the Ombudsman to be a passenger in a government vehicle when deemed necessary to fulfill official duties as an Ombudsman
- The Command may authorize funds for mailing materials, using office equipment and supplies and may also provide the Ombudsman with a brief case and file cabinet. Any brief case or file cabinet provided by the Command must be returned at the end of the term of appointment
- The Command shall reimburse the Ombudsman for childcare (not to exceed the rate of the local Child Development Center or amount specified by the servicing Work Life Family Resource Specialist) for care necessary to allow the Ombudsman to fulfill his or her duties as an Ombudsman.
- The Command shall reimburse the Ombudsman for mileage as documented in a travel log/journal, parking and tolls upon presentation of receipts, telephone calls as documented in a telephone log and limited use prepaid telephone cards.
- The Command will recognize the Ombudsman's service through: letters of appreciation, nomination for volunteer awards, certificates of performance, public service awards and observance of the annual Ombudsman Appreciation Day (the last Friday in March)

## Termination

The Command will relieve any Ombudsman who no longer maintains the eligibility requirements as earlier stated. Situations leading to termination are: breaking confidentiality, gossiping, breaking the chain of command, non-support of Command policies, continued inaccessibility to unit families and unwillingness to participate in training. The Command will:

- Write a letter of termination to the Ombudsman. (COMDTINST 1750.4D enclosure (7))
- Notify unit families to address concerns to another POC or another Ombudsman
- Notify the Ombudsman Coordinator

The Ombudsman will:

- Turn over all resource files
- Return all equipment documented on the DD 1149
- Shred all phone logs
- Stop all official duties immediately
- Submit any outstanding reimbursement claims
- Refer subsequent calls to the new POC or another Ombudsman

Terminating an Ombudsman is a major disruption for a Command and the morale of the members and their families. This action should not be taken lightly however there should be no hesitation to use this action in cases where the Ombudsman has broken confidentiality. The impact of the termination should be mitigated as soon as possible using key personnel and community resources.

## Resignation

When an Ombudsman can no longer fulfill the duties or, no longer desires to fulfill the duties, of the position a letter of resignation will be submitted to the Command. The Ombudsman will automatically resign the position upon:

- Permanent Change of Station (PCS) orders
- Resignation/Retirement/Discharge of the Sponsor
- Change of Command\*

\*The incoming Command/Officer-In-Charge may decline the resignation. Since the search, selection and records check have already been completed the procedure continues with a new appointment letter, notification to the Ombudsman Coordinator and an initial Command meeting.

## Chapter Two – Ombudsman Role and Responsibilities



The Coast Guard has a variety of commands, each with its own mission, unit size, and geographic location. These factors will influence the tasks assigned to the Ombudsman by the Command. All Ombudsmen have general functions in common, but the Command will structure its Ombudsman program to best suit the needs of the crew and families.

**The Command will set all priorities and responsibilities for the Ombudsman**, within limitations of COMDTINST 1750.4(series). The Ombudsman works directly for the Commanding Officer/Officer-In-Charge.

### *Role*

The Ombudsman is first and foremost a **liaison between the Command and the unit families**. In this capacity the information through the Ombudsman flows in two directions – information from the Command to the families and from the families to the Command. The Ombudsman is a valuable advisor for the Command and a source of information for the families. The Ombudsman does not get involved in work related issues between the crew and the Command. Crew members will be directed back to their chain of command.

### *Responsibilities*

- The Ombudsman will **report directly to the Commanding Officer/Officer-In-Charge** or the designated point of contact as per assigned responsibilities. These assigned responsibilities are stated in the appointment letter. The Command and Ombudsman should meet on a regularly scheduled basis, as well as meetings scheduled as needed. Once a date and time are established the Command may send the Ombudsman an agenda and discussion points while the Ombudsman also sends discussion points to the Command. This procedure allows both parties to gather and bring materials to the meetings. During the meeting the Ombudsman should take note of actions required, points of contact, and time/deadlines. All discussion points should be followed-up as requested and reports made back at the next meeting or sooner if needed.
- The Ombudsman will **keep all issues within the chain of command**; the only exceptions are the mandated reportable incidents. Taking issues out of the chain of command and above the Command are grounds for immediate termination.
- The Ombudsman will **maintain confidentiality at all times**. The protection and respect for problems and their resolutions are essential in building a trusting relationship with unit families. The Ombudsman cannot pass information, even to facilitate solutions, without the permission of the individual concerned. This information is handled on a need-to-know basis within the chain of command. Confidentiality is considered paramount in the Ombudsman's responsibilities.

Breaking confidentiality is grounds for immediate termination. Confidentiality also covers the unit roster, ship movement and unit schedules. Coast Guard regulations, the Privacy Act, and command policies all cover this information.

- Ombudsmen are mandated by law to **report suspected or substantiated cases of family violence or neglect, threats of suicide, homicide, violence or life endangering situations. DO NOT attempt to personally intervene** in any of these situations. You need to contact the Command and appropriate authorities. If immediate intervention is required call emergency services for your local area (i.e. police, ambulance, etc.). The Ombudsman's involvement ends with the reporting; no follow-up action should be expected or taken.
- The Ombudsman will serve **as a communications link**. All information coming from the Command to the families needs to be passed in a timely manner. This can be done through phone tree messages, Careline messages, e-mail distribution lists, newsletters and informational briefs. Major or common issues facing unit families are to be taken to the Command. Ombudsmen report situations without taking a position unless the Command requests their opinion.
- The Ombudsman will **maintain a resource file**. This information will be used to direct families to the most appropriate source of needed services, or as resolutions to problems. It is necessary for the Ombudsman to be knowledgeable on not only Coast Guard life and policies, but local resources as well. Families given resource information should also be guided toward family readiness and self-sufficiency. Families need to learn to solve problems and navigate through the military system.
- The Ombudsman will **advocate for Work Life programs and events**. These programs are directed to improve the quality of life for all Coast Guard members and families. Work Life programs often stop problems before they happen or at least ease their effects, lightening the load on the Ombudsman. Therefore, it is important that all Ombudsmen communicate program information to their unit families and encourage them to participate in programs offered. Ombudsmen should acquaint themselves with the Work Life staff and the assistance offered.
- The Ombudsman may be asked to serve as the **command representative** on boards, committees, or at community functions that directly affect the well being of unit families. The Ombudsman will include information from the meetings and functions in the regularly scheduled meeting with the Command.
- The Ombudsman may **welcome new families** to the unit. The Ombudsman may include an informational flyer about the Unit Ombudsman program in the welcome aboard packages sent to new families. By welcoming new families and providing information, the Ombudsman can affect the attitude and morale of both the member and the family. (Ombudsmen are not sponsors to all new families. See the Work Life Transition/Relocation Manager for sponsorship information).
- When the **unit is in crisis**, the Ombudsman will follow the guidance of the Command and under no circumstance act independently. Ombudsmen should be made aware of the Command Crisis Response Plan and the Coast Guard policies in the event of a crisis or natural disaster. The Ombudsman will stay in close communication with the Command at all times. If the unit is deployed, contact will be with the assigned point of contact. The Ombudsman will act as the

primary point of contact for all unit families and supply information from the Command. The Casualty Assistance Officer may contact the Ombudsman for updated contact information. Release of information for this purpose is authorized.

- The Ombudsman will keep a Roster of the units Family's Emergency contact information, this will help ensure that all families will be contacted in case of a Disaster ie: Hurricanes, Earthquakes.
- The Ombudsman will promote Disaster preparedness to families.
- Families calling with a **personal emergency** (i.e. serious physical injury, illness or death) will be given appropriate referrals and Red Cross information. Additional resources may be obtained from your Chaplain and Work Life office. The Command will define circumstances of emergencies and provide policy on emergency leave and return of service members deployed with the unit.

### ***Not Responsibilities***

The Ombudsman position is often attributed responsibilities that are not assigned to the position. Unit families should have a clear understanding of the Ombudsman's role. **The following are NOT responsibilities of the Ombudsman:**

- Organizing social events for the unit
- Loaning money
- Providing temporary lodging in the Ombudsman's home
- Providing transportation services upon demand
- Providing child care services
- Providing counseling services
- Giving personnel recommendations to business or service companies (i.e., car repairs, babysitters, hair dressers, etc)
- Acting as the sponsor to every incoming family
- Making Red Cross contact for families or passing messages for families
- Doing for others what they must learn to do for themselves

### ***Data Collection***

Ombudsmen maintain and report certain types of data. Generally, Ombudsman should try to maintain as little personal data as possible about individuals under the provisions of The Privacy Act of 1974.

### **Routine Data Collection Requirements**

Ombudsmen are required to keep a daily log of telephone and e-mail contacts. They are required to submit a monthly or quarterly report to the commanding officer or POC.

### ***Privacy Act of 1974***

Privacy is a cherished American value, closely linked to concepts of personal freedom and well-being. Mindful of the potential for misuse of federal records on individuals, the

U.S. government adopted laws to protect privacy. The Privacy Act of 1974 was enacted by Congress to safeguard individuals against the invasion of personal privacy, to limit the government's collection, use and disclosure of personal information, and to allow individuals access to government records pertaining to them. The Privacy Act was updated in 1988 with the Computer Matching and Privacy Protection Act and again in 1995 with the Privacy Principles developed under the Clinton administration.

The Privacy Act does allow the disclosure of information without the consent of an individual if there is a compelling need to know by selected officers and employees of the Coast Guard in the performance of their duties.

Appropriate disclosure examples include:

- Contacting the police and providing the name, address and telephone number of a spouse who tells the Ombudsman they have taken a drug overdose in a suicide attempt is an appropriate disclosure of personal information.
- Informing the command and the local police that one of the command's family members has a gun and plans to kill her husband's girlfriend is an appropriate disclosure of personal information
- Providing information to the Family Advocacy Program representative or to the local child protective agency to report suspected child abuse is an authorized disclosure of personal information.

Family members can disclose problems that place the service member's professional career in jeopardy. These include, but are not limited to, substance abuse by the service member, severe financial problems or involvement with child pornography. It is important that the Ombudsman be knowledgeable about the CO's reporting requirements. Ombudsmen also need to ensure families are informed of these requirements. Some Ombudsman periodically publish in their newsletters the types of items they must report.

### *Safeguarding Information*

Every effort should be made to protect an individual's personal information. Rosters, logs, contact forms and other information that contains an individual's identifying information should be kept in a secure area. Official command rosters can make individuals particularly vulnerable and should not be made available to anyone without the Command's permission. No one, including the Ombudsman's spouse or children, should have access to information about families who contact the Ombudsman in the Ombudsman's official capacity.

Electronic rosters and other computer files that contain personal identifying information should NOT be kept on the computer's hard drive but should be stored on a disc or memory stick that can be safeguarded.

At the end of the month or quarter the Ombudsman will be required to submit a report to the Command. After the report has been made all copies of individual contact forms, contact logs and other personal notes for that reporting month should be destroyed.

## *Contact Log*

To gather data for reports, most Ombudsmen document their calls on a contact log. A contact log helps the Ombudsman:

- See trends in types of calls, such as a number of requests for financial counseling, child care resources or spouse employment issues
- Follow up with people who contacted the Ombudsman for information and resources that needed research
- To see if the Ombudsman is continually providing the same information to the same people
- To track workload and hours spent working on the program

Most Ombudsmen do not log each individual who contacts them about a ship's return. Because there can be many of these types of calls the Ombudsmen often combine these calls into a category called "deployment" or "command schedule" only provide a tally on the required reports.

## ***Funding and Budgeting***

Commands may use appropriated funds or non-appropriated funds in support of the Command Ombudsman program. It is important for the Ombudsman and the CO to discuss the program's budget and determine what support can be provided for the program.

COMDTINST 1750.4 series requires every unit with an Ombudsman to establish a funding line item. Ombudsman must be acting in an official capacity, as directed by the CO/OINC, to receive reimbursement.

The following items may be reimbursed:

- Child care – Reimbursement may not exceed the local rate of the local Child Development Center (CDC). If there is no local CDC the Family Resource Specialist (FRS) at the servicing Work Life Office will provide the local rate. Total reimbursement of ALL child care costs shall be reported to the Ombudsman Coordinator
- Mileage, parking and tolls – Reimbursement shall be paid at the current government reimbursement rate for privately owned vehicles. Receipts are required for reimbursement.
- Travel expenses – Expenses incurred during participation in training, conferences and other approved events are authorized. Travel must be approved in advance and reimbursement must be in accordance with the Joint Federal Travel Regulations. Invitational travel orders must be used for travel.
- The CO may use non-appropriated funds for individual Ombudsman appreciation dinners, plaques and awards. The limit is \$50 per Ombudsman per year. Cash awards are NOT authorized.

Administrative support such as paper, envelopes, pens, copier service, clerical assistance, command telephone cards and government vehicle transportation should be budgeted and

may be provided by the Command from appropriated or non-appropriated funds, as Command resources permit.

The Command assumes all costs for the production and delivery of Ombudsman newsletters. Newsletter content must be approved by the Command before distribution. If the newsletter is produced solely within the Command, the Command is responsible for providing technical and administrative support, paper, printer access and delivery costs (stamps/bulk mail, etc).

### ***Claims for Reimbursement***

To receive reimbursement the Ombudsman must document expenses and provide receipts as well as a Claim for Reimbursement for Expenditures on Official Business SF 1164.

### ***Resignation***

The Ombudsman **will resign** the position upon permanent change of station (PCS) orders, separation/retirement/discharge of the sponsor, and at change of command.

1. **Command Notification.** If the Ombudsman is making a permanent change of station (PCS) and has a departure date, he/she should plan to turn things over at least one month prior to his or her move. Notify the Command with all your tentative dates. This gives the Command a chance to start the search for a replacement before the departure. If personnel conflict or grievances with the Command are the cause of the resignation, notify the Command as soon as possible.

2. **The resignation letter.** The letter should be addressed to the Commanding Officer/Officer-In-Charge and include the reason for resigning, the last day of Ombudsman service and (when appropriate) some expression of appreciation for being part of the Coast Guard tradition and the opportunity to serve the unit families. This letter should be kept brief. The Ombudsman should maintain a copy of the letter for his/her records and send a copy to the Ombudsman Coordinator.

3. **Aide in search for new Ombudsman.** The Command may ask the Ombudsman for recommendations. They may also ask for interested people to contact the Ombudsman for information. While the Ombudsman may offer recommendations and provide information, the appointment of the new Ombudsman belongs solely with the Command.

4. **Turn over resource files.** If at all possible, a face to face handoff of the resource files should be completed. This is the best time to provide the new Ombudsman with all the pluses and minuses, newsletter editing, how to tips, and community points of contact. Ombudsman DO NOT turn over the phone log sheets. All log sheets are shredded to maintain confidentiality.

**5. Request a letter of recommendation.** This is a great letter to add to a career folder. It can be used for employment, or as a character reference for a future Ombudsman position.

## Chapter Three – Ethics and Confidentiality

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Ethics and confidentiality are essential elements of the Coast Guard Ombudsman Program. It is vital that all Ombudsmen know and understand the value of ethics and confidentiality to their success as unit Ombudsman. The commitment and responsibility to these values is required throughout the term of service.

### *Ethics*

The Coast Guard Ombudsman will:

- **Support the Command's mission and policies.** The Ombudsman will not speak or act against the policies set by the Command. Any disagreement should be made directly to the Command.
- **Always work within the chain of command.** The Ombudsman will bring all matters directly affecting the unit to the Command and follow the chain of command to the conclusion of the matter. If a matter might be handled more effectively elsewhere the Command will direct that action.
- **Maintain confidentiality.** Any personal or family situation discussed with an Ombudsman will stay between the Ombudsman and that person unless it meets the reporting instances set by law/policy. The Ombudsman will inform unit family members of confidentiality rules and reportable circumstances.
- **Meet the standards of professionalism.** Ombudsman will act in a skillful, businesslike manner and dress in clothing appropriate to the occasion. The Ombudsman's effectiveness depends on their credibility with both the families and the Command.

### Supporting the Command

The Commanding Officer/Officer-In-Charge is responsible for the command and everything that happens to it twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. He/she has specific ideas as to how they will operate their Command. Ombudsmen are only a small part of the whole command.

- Some of your ideas may be in conflict with the best interests of the Command. Though you are an important element in dealing with family issues, there are other elements that must also be considered in making decisions for unit families.
- Commanding Officers/Officers-In-Charge has very busy schedules. Inability to get on his/her schedule immediately does not mean you lack importance.
- The Command must operate within policy, regulations and budget constraints. These issues impact all decisions for the unit.
- Your understanding of this is very important but your support of the Command to the families is essential.

## Confidentiality

Confidential information is sensitive information about a service member or family member. It is kept within the CO's designated network and is for official use only. Ombudsman must adhere to the strictest code of confidentiality to protect the privacy of individuals and to maintain the credibility of the Ombudsman program. Confidentiality means that a person may talk to an Ombudsman about a problem or family matter and be sure the conversation will remain private between the Ombudsman and that person. This crucial aspect of fulfilling trust will establish your professionalism. The family members will be watching you as you act in your official capacity and as a private person. Any perceived inappropriate behavior will harm your effectiveness for the Command. Ombudsmen are chosen after careful consideration for this important position due to personal qualities and skills. It is important that your actions reflect the Command's trust and confidence in you.

The only exceptions to the rules of confidentiality are specific instances when a situation must be reported as mandated by law or policy. Ombudsman must inform anyone wishing to discuss a personal matter of the expectations to confidentiality and mandated reporting.

A failure to maintain confidentiality results in a lack of confidence in the Ombudsman by the CO and the affected individual. It can also cause severe and irreparable harm to individuals. Types of confidential information Ombudsman may hear include:

- Marital problems
- Substance abuse issues
- Financial difficulties
- Parenting challenges
- Work performance issues
- Infidelity
- Violations of law
- Child neglect or abuse
- Medical issues
- Domestic abuse
- Suicidal or homicidal behaviors

Family members contact the Ombudsman to ask for information, guidance and referrals, or they just may want to discuss their concerns with a caring person.

The following examples may help to clarify the concept of confidentiality.

- ❖ A newly married spouse calls and tells the Ombudsman she thinks she and her spouse need marriage counseling because they are arguing all the time about the upcoming ship schedule. The Ombudsman assures the caller that it is normal for a couple to have stress before an upcoming deployment. Without providing names or specific details, the Ombudsman calls Work Life to see what services

are available to the couple in their area. This is not a breach of confidentiality because no identifying information was revealed.

- ❖ Jane Doe calls and tells the Ombudsman that she and her husband need marriage counseling because they are constantly arguing about financial problems. The Ombudsman assures Jane that it is normal for couples to be under stress when there are financial difficulties. The Ombudsman then calls Work Life and speaks to the Command Financial Specialist providing Jane's name and contact information. This is a breach of confidentiality because the Ombudsman did not ask Jane for permission to provide her name and contact information or information about her situation to Work Life.

Other ways to protect confidential information include:

- Keeping the Command roster in a secure location
- Protecting electronic rosters with a password
- Answering calls in a private area
- Discussing trends rather than specific calls or e-mails received
- Maintaining call logs in a secure place

### Non-confidential information (Reportables)

Confidentiality is not withholding information from the CO and those in the Chain of Command who have a need to know. Families must understand that not all communications with the Ombudsman is confidential, and some information is required to be disclosed to the Command and other authorities. Reportable information involves situations where someone's "safety" and "well-being" are at stake.

Ombudsman must report:

- All suspected or known child abuse/neglect
- Alleged domestic abuse
- Suspected or potential homicides, violence or life threatening situations
- All suspected or potential suicide risks
- Any other issues identified by the CO as reportable

Whenever an individual contacts the Ombudsman and discloses a reportable issue, the Ombudsman should inform the caller that a report must be made and make every effort to connect the caller with appropriate resources. If the situation warrants immediate attention contact your local emergency services.

### Trustworthiness and Credibility

Unit families look to Ombudsmen to keep promises and deliver information. Any failure to keep promises or follow through on giving information will decrease trust and credibility. All care should be taken when offering assistance. Avoid using the word "promise" and use phrases like "try to find". Do not make promises on behalf of the

Command or the Coast Guard, in general. Ombudsmen offering to find information should include a time when the family member may call back. The call back should give the information or the progress of the search for the information. This type of follow up shows concern and reliability, and builds a trusting relationship with unit families.

### Professionalism

- To fulfill your role as the Ombudsman, Core Training is necessary to prepare you for all the demands of this position. Specialty training will give information in specific areas of concern for unit families.
- The role of Ombudsman should be taken seriously. All interaction with families and support services should reflect the trust and confidence the Command has invested in your appointment.
- Part of being a professional is knowing when and how to separate your personal life from your position. Objectivity and patience will be needed in this position. You will also need to accept criticism, do not take it personally.
- Unit families will look at you as an Ombudsman and as a private person, as a role model. Your behavior will affect their perception of you, impacting on your effectiveness as an Ombudsman.
- As Ombudsman you will be asked to attend events, meet with resource and support personnel, and deal with families. Dressing in appropriate attire for each occasion contributes to your professionalism.
- Ombudsmen deal with a variety of military and civilian personnel. It is a professional courtesy to address each person by his/her title (i.e. Captain Smith, Mrs. Smith, Master Chief Jones, Mrs. Jones, etc.)
- Ombudsman must show professional courtesy when dealing with family members, members of the Command and representative from other agencies

### Professional Courtesy

Professional courtesy includes addressing all members of the Command by their title (Captain Smith, Master Chief Wilson). Use Mr. or Mrs. when referring to a spouse. It is permissible to call a spouse by their first name once they have given you permission. It is never permissible to refer to the CO by his or her first name.

In addition professional courtesy include:

- Responding promptly to phone calls and e-mails
- Privately handling disagreements
- Paying attention to detail
- Offering solutions to problems
- Respecting the opinions and beliefs of others

### Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest can occur between an individual's personal interests and their official duty as an Ombudsman. This can exist whether or not money is involved and whether or not the conflict is actual or perceived. Ombudsman may not use their position

to solicit individuals they come into contact with as a result of their volunteer work.  
Examples of soliciting that are not permitted include:

- Selling baskets, scrapbooking supplies, kitchen products, insurance, real estate, etc to command personnel and their family members
- Taking orders for products
- Distributing business cards with the exception of their ombudsman business card
- Providing information about private businesses during a presentation
- Hanging posters or information about private businesses at the unit
- Advertising personal businesses in a command sponsored newsletter

## Chapter Four – Ombudsman Support Network



*There are a number of people that will work with you to support your unit families and yourself. Each has his/her own role within the Coast Guard and the military community.*

### ***Unit Level***

#### **Commanding Officer/Officer-In-Charge (CO/OINC)**

The Commanding Officer/Officer-In-Charge enters a relationship of trust with the Ombudsman. The Command sets parameters for emergency contacts, routine meetings, administrative support, problem solving and setting policy. **The Ombudsman program belongs to the Command.**

#### **Executive Officer/Executive Petty Officer (XO/XPO)**

The Executive Officer/Executive Petty Officer is often designated as a point of contact for routine issues. As the XO/XPO oversees the administrative and personnel matters of the unit, he/she is a good choice to give and receive information on unit members and family concerns.

#### **Command Master Chief (CMC)**

The Command Master Chief is a natural for giving advice and information. This person might also be designated as a point of contact. The background and experience of this individual often brings a very effective way of dealing with members and families.

#### **Command Cadre Spouses**

These senior spouses have the opportunity to be involved with the support of unit families at whatever degree suits their time and desire. They make take up the unit social activities or turn them over to a committee. These spouses usually have access to resources and senior personnel. It should be made clear to unit members and families what the role of these spouses and the Ombudsman will be to each other and to the families.

#### **Mutual Assistance Officer**

The Mutual Assistance Officer has been designated to administer financial assistance to unit members and families under a variety of circumstances. During emergency situations this person may have the ability to release much needed funds. It is important to understand the regulations and policies that govern this program in order to utilize it to its full potential.

#### **Command Drug and Alcohol Representative**

The Command Drug and Alcohol Representative is a resource for identifying and assisting with referrals for treatment for addictions related conditions. This individual

receives specialized training and is aware of the Coast Guard policies and regulations concerning treatment, referrals and reporting requirements associated with drug/alcohol use.

### ***Sector/District Level***

#### **Public Affairs Officer**

The Public Affairs Officer will be involved within a short time after any significant incident. If there are any injuries or deaths, the names will not be released to the press before the next of kin are notified. All media inquiries should be addressed to the Command or Public Affairs Officer.

#### **Chaplain**

The Chaplain is responsible for the spiritual well being of the members and families of the Command and keeps all conversations totally confidential. The Chaplain is a great advisor and resource and is well acquainted with family life in the military.

Chaplain locations: <http://www.uscg.mil/comdt/cocg/locations.asp>

#### **Housing Officer**

The Housing Officer is the key person with the regard to the Coast Guard leased or owned family housing. Often they may also assist with locator or referral resources, transient accommodations, housing referrals and as a liaison with Department of Defense housing. All incoming personnel should make contact with the Housing Officer prior to making any other housing arrangements.

### ***Work Life Staff***

**Work Life Supervisor:** He/she is the primary representative for all Work Life initiatives within the designated Area of Responsibility (AOR). The supervisor works closely with all staff members to meet the needs of the programs provided by Work Life.

**Transition & Relocation Manager (TRM):** The TRM facilitates access to a full range of relocation services, information and assistance. The TRM is also responsible for coordinating transition/retirement seminars. In addition, the TRM administers the Spouse Employment Assistance Program (SEAP) and sponsorship training. The TRM is the “go to” person for anything concerning relocation, career assessments, retirement or transition from the Coast Guard. The following are just some of the services offered by the TRM:

- Relocation Information and resources
- Sponsorship training and information
- Spouse employment assistance
- Assistance with Federal Employment Searches and applications
- Workshops on resumes, interviewing skills and employment skills assessments
- Information on entitlements during relocation
- Referrals to Transition/Retirement Seminars

**Health Promotions Manager (HPM):** The HPM educates and encourages the improvement of health and well being through the voluntary adoption of a healthy life style. The major elements of this program are nutrition, weight control, physical fitness, tobacco cessation, prevention of alcohol and substance abuse, stress management and education aimed at the reduction of injury and disease. HPMs offer a variety of services including:

- Distribution of educational and promotional materials on wellness
- Maintains a library of publications and videotapes on all elements of Wellness
- Designs and administers a wellness program for the AOR
- Provides referrals for workshops, assessments, health fairs, seminars
- Provides education and training in health related topics including smoking cessation and personal fitness
- Provides cholesterol screenings, fitness assessments, health risk appraisals, nutrition assessments, and weight management training and assistance.
- Provides information and training on stress management and stress mapping.

**Employee Assistance Program Coordinator (EAPC):** The EAPC is the point of contact for all employee assistance issues within the AOR. The EAPC ensures that the EAP contract allows services to be provided to all Coast Guard personnel and their families. Some of the EAPC responsibilities are:

- EAP awareness training
- Promotion of the EAP program
- Distributes EAP literature
- Maintains a database of life skill resources within the AOR
- Maintains a lending library of employee assistance videotapes and literature
- Suicide awareness and prevention training
- Work Place Violence awareness and prevention training

**Family Advocacy Specialist (FAS):** The FAS has a primary function of reduction and prevention of family violence within the Coast Guard. Some of the services that are provided by the FAS are:

- Professional intervention in family violence related matters
- Case management of family violence incidents
- Training on identification, prevention and reporting family violence

**Family Resource Specialist (FRS):** The FRS is available to provide information and referral services regarding dependent care options, this includes both child and elder care, and the Special Needs Program. The FRS offers a wide range of services including:

- Maintaining a resource file of dependent care providers within the AOR
- Case management of persons involved in the Special Needs Program
- Certification of child care providers in C.G. owned or leased quarters
- Answering questions regarding the reimbursement of adoption expenses.
- Providing information to persons seeking resources or assistance for the adoption of a child

**Ombudsman Coordinator:** This person is the point of contact for the ombudsman within the AOR. They provide timely information and updates to the ombudsman, schedule and carry out training and have a vast wealth of information available to assist the ombudsman at the local unit.

**Casualty Assistance Calls Officer:** The person is assigned to help families in the death or fatal injury of a military member. The Casualty Assistance Officer is responsible for completing paperwork and assisting the family in applying for benefits and assisting with funeral arrangements.

It is never appropriate for the Ombudsman to accompany the CACO when the notification of death is being made, however the Ombudsman may choose to offer support and resources after the notification has been made.

**Education Services Officer:** This person is available to work with military members and spouses concerning education and degrees. The ESO also administers CLEP and DSST exams free for Coast Guard Spouses. There is a full time ESO at each District and in many Sectors.

### ***Other Resources***

**Department of Defense (DOD) Resources:**

Our sister services have family support centers like our Work-Life centers. They have great information and offer a variety of workshops and briefings. You may use these resources and recommend them to your unit families:

**Fleet and Family Information Center (FFIC) (Navy)**

**Personnel Support Center (Marine Corps)**

**Community Service Center (Army & Air Force)**

**Employee Assistance Program: (800) 222-0364**

EAP is a support system for all employees (military, civilian and their families), with personal, family or job-related problems, providing an umbrella of various services to enhance the well being of Coast Guard employees and families. To use EAP counseling services call the following toll free number. This service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. (800) 222-0364

EAP services are confidential within the limits of the law. Your counselor may be required by law to report a threat of serious harm to yourself or another person. In general, information from the EAP may be released only with your prior written permission. Issues of confidentiality will be reviewed with you during your first EAP session.

## Work Life 4 You: 800-222-0364

You've got a lot going on. That's why we are pleased to introduce WorkLife4You -- a U.S. Coast Guard-paid benefit that offers expert guidance, helpful educational materials, personalized referrals, and an interactive web site to assist with all of your everyday and one-of-a-kind challenges:

- Pregnancy and adoption
- Child care and parenting
- Adult care and aging
- Health and wellness
- Education
- Financial and legal concerns
- Pet care, relocation, and other daily life issues

WorkLife4You is available 24/7 to all active duty members and civilian personnel and their family members. <http://www.uscg.mil/worklife/worklife4you.asp>

## Navy Knowledge Online (NKO)

All Coast Guard members and dependents registered in DEERS have access to NKO. NKO houses a wealth of information, including CLEP preparation information, audio book and e-books available for download, K-12 educational tutorials, and financial planning information. <https://wwwa.nko.navy.mil/portal/home/>

## Chapter Five – Serving Unit Families and Single Personnel



### *Setting Expectations*

Ombudsmen are appointed to serve Coast Guard families. This includes members with families, single members, single parents, dual military couples, reservists on active duty, members' parents and siblings, and others at the discretion of the commanding officer/officer-in-charge. Establishing clear expectations and credibility are very important and should be done soon after the appointment process. The families need to know what services the Ombudsman will and will not provide. Ombudsmen will provide guidance while families learn to use Coast Guard and civilian programs to become self-sufficient. **Set hours you will be available for routine matters, along with what constitutes an emergency versus routine concerns.** This is easily communicated with an Ombudsman letter in the Welcome Aboard information, or during phone calls to newly arrived families

### *Unit Families*

This is the population the Ombudsman position was created to serve. Most efforts will be concentrated on providing them with information, support, encouragement, and practical advice. The Ombudsman is their access to the command and a voice for their complaints and concerns. The Ombudsman can correct wrong information, have a calming effect, and suggest alternative methods for coping. With guidance from the Ombudsman and command, families will be able to meet the challenges of Coast Guard life.

### *Single Personnel*

Single personnel may have parents and siblings back home, or a significant other, who are concerned about them. Single personnel should be encouraged to supply the Ombudsman with contact information for their families and a list of who they would like the Ombudsman to share information with. The Ombudsman can be very helpful to them, especially during deployments. Families back home may contact the Ombudsman for information about ship location, or a general health/welfare checks when they have not received communications for an extended period of time. When possible, the families may be added to the mailing list for the unit newsletter. Ombudsman should also be alert to resources designated for single personnel (i.e. MWR). The Ombudsman may assist with programs initiated to draw single personnel into the “command family”, such as pen pals or holiday adoptions.

### *Single Parents*

Single parents in the Coast Guard are solely responsible for their children while fulfilling their assigned duties, which may involve extended hours or deployments with little notice. Ombudsman can provide resources for childcare or support groups. Single parents

must have family care plans for any likely event, including supplying the command and Ombudsman with emergency contact information.

### ***Dual Military***

The dual military couple faces the challenge of raising children in a home where one or both parents may be deployed, called to work extended hours, or sent TDY. These families also have a great need for dependable childcare and are prone to having “latch key” children. They should also have a family care plan. The dual military couples are also faced with trying to arrange transfers beneficial to their careers while in the same geographic area. There is no guarantee that dual military couples will be assigned to units within the same state. In these circumstances family care plans are essential.

### ***Special Needs***

Some families have members who require special services to meet educational, medical, physical, or psychological needs. COMDINST 1754.7 **mandates** enrollment of family members with long-term, diagnosed needs in the Special Needs Program. This program enrollment is confidential. Some families may be open to sharing information or asking for assistance for resources, while others may prefer a “need to know” approach. Families needing guidance or having questions concerning special needs should be referred to the Family Resource Specialist at the servicing Work Life Office.

### ***Reservists***

Reservists may be called on to work with your command on a full or temporary basis. Your services as an Ombudsman extend to them the same as any other unit family. The Reserve families should be included on the official roster, telephone tree, and invited to all functions, especially pre-deployment briefings. The Reserves have different rights and benefits, but referrals are handled the same as you would for an Active Duty member or family.

## Chapter Six – Verbal Communications

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Communication is a vital role of the Ombudsman. Communicating involves sending (speaking) and receiving (listening) messages. This seems like a simple process, however most people place obstacles in the way. To be an effective communicator these obstacles must be set aside. All assumptions, differences, and emotions can block true communication.

Ombudsmen are communicators. To be a good Ombudsman you must communicate effectively, both speaking and listening. Most of your responsibilities will be done by communicating with various people in your community. Within a matter of minutes you could be talking with a unit spouse, the Commanding officer, and a social service agency. With each person you will use a different method to communicate information. Everyone develops his/her own style of communicating, but there are some techniques that can help.

### *Active Listening*

This technique helps you to understand what another person is really telling you. After listening to what was said, you can attempt to identify the feelings and the message. Don't assume you understand what is meant. The speaker will know you are trying to understand their situation and will help calm them and transition to problem solving.

“I've been up all night with my baby. I've tried everything but he's still fussing and wouldn't eat. I called the clinic every 10 minutes since they opened. I can't get through. I know you have children. I was hoping you could help me”.

1. **Listen for the key words.** This is what will identify the issue or concern, the rest is usually details.
2. **Listen for the emotions.** This will help you understand the importance of the matter to the speaker.
3. **Observe body language.** (If talking face to face) Watch the facial express, hand motions, and posture.
4. **Restate the situation.** This will clarify the situation. If you are wrong, it will encourage the speaker to further explain the issue. Keep it short without approval/disapproval. “You sound worn out. Your baby is ill and you're afraid you won't be seen at the clinic today.”
5. **Do not talk about yourself or offer advice.** Do not use phrases like “you should” or “you never”.

6. **Use open/closed questions to gather more information.** Open questions require an explanation. Closed questions require only a yes or no answer.  
*Open – “What phone number have you been calling?”*  
*Closed – “Does your baby have a temperature?”*
7. **Do not use leading questions.** These type of questions put pressure on the caller to conform.  
*Leading questions- “You understand all that, right?” “You totally agree with me, don’t you?”*

### ***Basic Problem Solving Techniques***

It is likely that your unit will have young people away from home for the first time. Some of them might not have good coping skills that involve basic problem solving ability. And people in crisis often have difficulty putting their problem strategies to work. Whatever the difficulty for the inability to solve their problems, you may find yourself in the middle of the turmoil trying to offer assistance. This is a basic guideline to walk someone through a problem solution:

- 1) **Listen to the whole story.** Sort out the extra information. Identify the problem.
- 2) **Brainstorm possible solutions.** Take the best three solutions. For each solution think through all the possible positive and negative factors that might lead to the solution.
- 3) **Allow them to decide** on the best of the three solutions, and begin the process.
- 4) After **a reasonable time have them re-evaluate the situation and the solution.** Make any necessary corrections to the solution set. If the solution set isn’t working, start the process over. They may identify another problem or better solution set.

### ***Rumor Control***

Rumors can be extremely destructive to a command. It can undermine the command and destroy morale; needless to say it will do the same to the unit families. With email, phone calls, and written communications, rumors can spread very rapidly. Any Ombudsman that repeats a rumor makes it “official”, therefore it is vital that you do not pass on any rumor.

If you are called to confirm a rumor, give the command’s official word. If you have had no word from the command answer with a statement like, “Until I hear it from the command, it’s not official. Please do not continue to pass on your information. When I hear something official I will let you know.” Inform the command of rumors. This will let them take action at the unit.

Rumors circulating about individuals can be just as destructive. It is important to stop all “trash” talk among unit families. The old adage of “Don’t say anything if you can’t say

something nice” holds true. Reminders of the dangers and consequences of gossip and rumors should be published in the unit newsletter periodically.

When the target of the rumor is you, do your best not to react. Simply thank whoever told you for their concern, then change the subject and don't mention it again. Don't take the bait and start a verbal war with another unit spouse. You have to be the example for others.

### ***Careline Messages***

Deploying units are encouraged to have carelines. This dedicated phone line goes to a voice message system and is used to provide updates on the unit and events for families. This information is then accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Ombudsman records a message based on the information received from the command, or events planned for the families. Unit families can in turn leave voice mail for the Ombudsman. The command is solely responsible for the setup and billing of the careline.

*Messages concerning the deployed unit must not include locations and dates. This information would endanger the security of the mission.* Remember everyone with a telephone has access to this information. Operational Security (OPSEC) minimizes the risk that critical information might be used by an adversary.

Publish the careline number in every newsletter and include the information in pre-deployment briefings. It is important that all unit families, including the parents of unit members, have access to this information. Informed families are happy families!

### ***Briefings/Presentations***

The command may call upon you to give a briefing or presentation before the crew or the unit families. This will probably include welcome to new families after the transfer season, pre-deployment briefs, or unit training. This is your opportunity to explain your support program including the resource and referral process. Here are some topics to include:

- **Brief biographical information** – This helps to establish your credibility, especially if you have had a long association with the military, and the Coast Guard in particular.
- **General Ombudsman Program information** – This helps explain the general framework of the program and how each command shapes its own program. Explain how the appointment process briefly and how you fit in the organizational chart. Stress you are there as a liaison between the families and the command. Any problems the crew has will be handled through the chain of command, not you. You are there for the families.
- **Ombudsman responsibilities** – A list of services you will provide, and a list of things you will not provide. These lists will set limitations and expectations.

Stress your role as an information and referral resource, not as a trained counselor.

- **Confidentiality/Reportable Incidents** – Reassure your listeners that what they tell you is confidential except for reportable situations. (Refer to Chapter Three – Responsibilities) Go through the list of reportable situations. Explain your role in reporting and that you have no role after that.
- **Contact information** – Include the emergency/crisis, careline, your phone number, email addresses, telephone tree, and newsletter distribution. This is the time to stress gathering family contact information. Family members in other locations will not be included in communications unless the unit members provide the contact information.
- **Encourage families to prepare** – Always work toward family self-sufficiency. Families that are ready to take care of themselves are happier and make your job easier. Their ability to cope directly relates to their quality of life.
- **Encourage family participation** – Feelings of belonging are important to your unit families' adjustment to the Coast Guard life style. Participating in unit events, spouses' association, and Coast Guard community events are avenues to belonging to the community.
- Explain your relationship with **Work-Life and the Chaplain** – Your listeners need to know that you are part of a support team there to help them.

### ***Media Guidelines***

Think back to the last big crisis covered by the media in your area. You saw background footage, interviews with key personnel and eyewitnesses, then emotionally distraught individuals. Now stop and think how that would be played out if the crisis were on your unit or housing area. The media would be searching for those key personnel, eyewitnesses, and emotionally distraught individuals. That means they could be looking for you or some of your unit family members. Now is the time to prepare.

The First Amendment gives you the right to speak to anyone you want. You and unit family members are legally free to accept or decline media interviews. In your role as Ombudsman, you are an official representative of the command and have built a confidential and trusting relationship with your unit families; a quote taken out of context could end all of it. You are strongly encouraged to decline all contact with the media. Refuse all requests for contact information for unit families. You are bound by the Privacy Act not to disclose roster information of any kind.

If the media seeks you out, refer them to the Public Affairs Officer at the nearest, large unit or your District Office. You will need to find out who that person is for your unit/geographic area and have their number in your resource list. If it is after working hours, call your Command Center.

## Chapter Seven – Written Communications

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### *Newsletter*

Newsletters are excellent communication tools. You can disseminate information to unit families while keeping the Ombudsman program in front of them. Newsletters give your families a sense of belonging to an organization or family. This is also an avenue to dispersing information and referrals along with how-to articles for family preparedness. And by printing frequently requested information, you can cut down on phone calls.

In this technological age, the personal computer is in most houses, or people have access to one at work. Most computer users have some knowledge of word processing, and using software. If you have never done any kind of newsletter before, don't worry. There's lots of help out there. Look over the newsletters from other units or organizations. Ask other Ombudsmen or the Ombudsman Program Coordinator for some tips. And check your own computer. It may have come pre-loaded with a newsletter template.

### Command Input

While meeting with your commanding officer discuss the unit newsletter. He/she may have some guidelines and restrictions that must be followed. Take along newsletters from other units or organizations for ideas.

- Logo/Name
- Newsletter style
- Length
- Content
- Article contribution
- Review and approval
- Printing
- Distribution

### Purpose

What is the purpose of the Ombudsman program and the newsletter?

- Communicate the concerns of the command to the families
- Inform families of Coast Guard policy, rights and benefits
- Inform families of services available
- Educate families in areas of family preparedness
- Help families feel they are connected to the command and are part of the command family
- Convey encouragement and inspiration with a focus on common interest
- Remind family members of the roles of the Ombudsman
- Remind families what information is reportable

## Style

- **Letter** – This is an easy format. You simply write a letter, “Dear USCGC GONE Families,” like you would write to a friend. With permission, use the unit letterhead. Write short informative paragraphs. Keep the length to two pages. And sign your name at the end. This can be sent as e-mail or an e-mail attachment.
- **Newspaper** – This format is more work pulling the overall formatting together. Like a newspaper it contains headlines, articles, clipart/graphics, and special columns. This style usually runs 4 pages and up.
- **Combination** – This format uses the unit letterhead, but has typed paragraphs with bold headings, and limited use of clipart. This would be two to four pages.
- **E-Mail** – Some Ombudsmen choose to use the e-mail format to keep their families up to date. This is a quick way to convey information and the families can choose to print out information they would like to keep for future reference or just allow it to remain in its electronic form.

## Format

Logo/Name – this should convey some sense of the unit or its geographic area.

The Cimarron Sentinel – USCGC CIMARRON

Rush Ramble – USCGC RUSH

Walnut Web – USCGC WALNUT

Dockwatcher Family News – USCGC JARVIS

Article Content – this information should answer all the commonly asked questions: who, what, when, where, why, and how much. Keep the sentence short and clear. Make sure to check your spelling, punctuation, grammar, and facts. If you reprint an article from another source, give credit to that source.

Get to know your unit and families before you publish your first newsletter. Select the articles right for your unit.

*Example: young singles, newly married – budgeting, buying a car*

Ombudsman letter - this should follow regular letter writing guidelines: greeting, body, closing, and signature. The Ombudsman letter should be warm and personal in tone. Limit it to a few paragraphs.

Commanding Officer letter – some commands like to write informative letters about the unit to the families on an occasional basis. The letter writing guidelines might be helpful.

Clipart /Graphics – try to match the picture with the content of the article or announcement. Use clipart sparingly. Too many “cute” pictures suggest writing for children instead of adults. Use clip art software instead of copying a picture, copyright laws apply here.

Overall Formatting – the layout of the articles with the headlines and clipart should have balance and lead the eye to flow through the newsletter. Watch out for: too much blank space, too many font styles and sizes, article blocks off center/balance, and uneven margins.

### ***Content: Do***

- Ombudsman letter
- CO letter
- Unit event announcements
- Information on rights and benefits
- Information on local military services available
- Volunteer opportunities
- Ombudsman contact information
- Unit contact information
- Educational articles (relocation, parenting, finances, cooking, fitness)
- List of frequently called numbers
- Awards and achievements of crew members
- Family news – new babies, graduations, etc. – only with permission of the family
- Work-Life articles/programs
- For deploying units: pre-deployment checklist, what to expect with the ship home/gone, mail drops, careline, phone tree

### ***Content: Do Not***

- Make announcements for local churches. Only Coast Guard Chaplain/Chapel or Dept. of Defense Chaplain/Chapel programs.
- Mention/advertise home businesses run by unit members/families
- Mention or endorse any for profit businesses or organization
- Give out baby sitter referrals other than the Coast Guard Child Development Center or regulated home care providers
- **Print the ship's schedule and locations (or other classified information)**
- Print political announcements of any kind – Only reminders to vote

### ***Printing and Distribution***

You will need to discuss with the Command how the newsletter will be distributed. In some cases the command may direct you to send it electronically to save money. The command may allow you to use the copy machine to run off the newsletter. A point of contact may be assigned to schedule a time and to teach the operation of the equipment. If the unit is deployed, secure paper before they leave, contact Work-Life or MWR for the availability of the copy machine. If you are at a remote location, the unit may need to setup an account at a copy service.

For newsletters two pages or less, use envelopes to mail the newsletters. Newsletters three pages or more may be folded in half, stapled, addressed on the outside page, and mailed. If this method is selected, make sure the newsletter format allows for the back page to have the mailing information layout.

Newsletters ready to mail should be brought back to the unit to be mailed as official mail. If the unit is located at a base/station/Sector/ISC/ District, newsletters may be brought directly to the mailroom.

Remember to include the Ombudsman Coordinator on the mailing list.

### ***Newsletter Editors Not Ombudsmen***

Ombudsman, with permission from the command, may have another spouse act as newsletter editor. In this event, the unit members and families need to be reminded this person is strictly the newsletter editor, and does not act in any way as the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman Program Coordinator should also be informed of this action. This editor will also have to adhere to the newsletter guidelines given above.

### **Sector/Command Newsletters**

At some units the Command Secretary will actually prepare the newsletters. As the Ombudsman you will be asked for submissions for either a monthly column or general information that can be distributed to everyone. If you are working with a Command Secretary you will need to discuss deadlines, formatting, and content so your submissions can be included without editing.

### ***Letters and Notes***

You may be called upon by the command to write letters to family members while the unit is deployed. The command will give you guidance on acting on their behalf. In most cases these letters or notes will be the typical 'sunshine' variety (i.e. condolences on a death, congratulations on a birth, graduation, promotion, or job well done). The command may provide letterhead stationery. If you decide to use your home computer to word process, you may want to use the unit logo or design a letterhead for these official purposes. If you design letterhead stationery, it must be approved by the command before you use it.

### ***E-Mail***

Email is a quick and easy way to communicate with anyone. Some commands find this a good way to keep up with their busy Ombudsman. Deploying units are also turning to email for communication, especially with family members. However, e-mail messages in the Coast Guard system need to follow policy and regulations. Emailing to deployed units requires short messages without attachments, without mentions of unit location, and without dates of movements.

Email to unit families is a quick way to update information between or in place of newsletters. Families must first give their permission to be included on your e-mail distribution list. **When sending out an e-mail the Ombudsman must use the blind copy (bcc) to avoid releasing the family e-mail addresses to others.** Everyone on the distribution list must understand this list is for official business purposes only and families may not use it (like the telephone tree numbers) for social, religious, or business purposes (i.e. chain letters, invitations to home business parties, jokes, daily devotions, etc.). You should have an e-mail address strictly for Ombudsman issues. Many ombudsmen use something like: CGNeverSailsOmbudsman@XXXX.XXX

All information should be short and concise. Remember to answer the who, what, when, where, why, and how questions. Proof read your message twice for mistakes before you send it. Keep a copy for your files, printed or in a computer file. If the message contains sensitive/important information you may ask for a return message verifying it was received and read.

#### E-MAIL Guidelines

- Use the blind copy (BCC) field to send e-mail to all recipients in a distribution list without revealing any recipients' e-mail addresses. Whenever the Ombudsman sends e-mails to a distribution list the BCC field should always be used to protect the privacy of those on the distribution list.
- Write a meaningful subject line
- Keep e-mails short and to the point
- Include a proper signature
- Use care when using acronyms and emoticons (smileys)
- Keep OPSEC in mind
  - Never try to talk around classified information
  - Avoid discussing ship movements, port calls, TAD locations, etc.
  - E-mail is a non-secure system and it can be intercepted
  - E-mail can be forwarded to anyone and everyone
  - Never attach classified or sensitive documents

#### *Websites*

There are special guidelines for information that you may post on a website maintained either by the Ombudsman or the unit. It is very important that any information posted not violate the Privacy Act or Operational Security (OPSEC). If the unit website will be used there are very specific guidelines that must be followed. The unit webmaster will be able to assist with the most current guidelines and requirements.

If you have a personal website that you will be using for Ombudsman purposes you must still adhere to OPSEC rules. You may not post information on ship movements, personal member information or anything that would violate privacy or OPSEC rules. Remember to keep the site updated and take it off line when you resign.

## *Social Networking*

Social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace and Twitter have become very popular ways to keep in touch as has blogging and vlogging. The Ombudsman, and all family members, must keep in mind that these types of internet postings make it possible for adversaries to compile sensitive information about unit morale, location, organization, personnel and family members. Remember to practice safe information sharing.

Safe information sharing includes:

- Keep personal information to yourself.
  - Do not post your full name, address or phone number
- Limit who can view your profile or postings
- Consider not posting your photograph online
- Update your status messages with caution
- Do not use countdown tickets for deployments
- Do not post plans to visit a liberty port
- Be mindful of how much information you are sharing about yourself and others

## Chapter Eight – Information and Referral Resources



Information and referral (I&R) is the backbone of the Ombudsman program. Customer service, a knowledge of resources and the ability to problem solve are all essential skills needed to perform this function.

To fulfill this need you must:

- **Identify Resources** – look for health/medical care, social services, housing, education, recreation, legal services, financial assistance, relocation services, etc.
- **Gather the information** – collect the information from the resources. When at all possible, visit the resource for first hand knowledge and developing points of contact.
- **Organize the information** – compile the information into a system easily accessible for you (i.e. list, rolodex, filing cabinet, computer files, etc.)
- **Update the information** – the information needs to be checked for accuracy on a regular basis. This can be done annually for large organizations with stable delivery of services, and quarterly for organizations with a frequent turnover rate.

### Customer Service and the Ombudsman

#### PACT Model

Information and referral involves determining the caller's needs and finding a way to meet those needs. An easy-to-remember formula for structuring an information and referral call is the PACT model, PACT stands for:

P – Problem  
A – Assess  
C- Choose  
T – Try

Problem Identification – to determine the caller's needs or problem, listen carefully to what the caller is saying. Determine what the caller wants to accomplish. Ask:

- How can I help you today?
- What have you already done to try to resolve this situation?
- Is this urgent? (Does the caller have enough food and other necessities? Is the caller being evicted? Are utilities being turned off?)
- What resources does the caller have?

Realize the real reason for the call may not be the presenting problem. The presenting problem may only be a symptom of a bigger issue that the caller may or may not be willing to address. Active listening and asking the right questions will help you separate the symptoms from the problems.

Assess the options – A person often gets stuck in their ability to see potential solutions to a problem. They may only see one answer. The Ombudsman can help an individual think of other possible options and solutions to the situation.

Realistically explore available options and solutions. Ask the caller to brainstorm solutions to their problems without evaluating them at first. The Ombudsman may have to provide a few suggestions. Ask open-ended questions and encourage the individual not to immediately dismiss suggestions.

Focus on the exceptions to the problem. What is going on when the caller is not experiencing the problem? This provides hope and builds confidence that a solution can be found.

Determine the caller's thoughts and feelings about each option. What are the benefits and risks of implementing each option?

Resolving the problem may require an interruption or a substitution of a behavior pattern. Help change the caller's interpretation of the situation and their behavior or response may change.

There are some problems that cannot be resolved such as death, serious illness or divorce. Ombudsmen can still help the individual by being supportive, empathetic and by providing resources for additional support.

Choose an option – After thoroughly evaluating a caller's needs and determining that a referral is the most appropriate response, take the following steps to make a successful referral:

1. Explain why a referral is necessary. For example, Ombudsmen do not maintain food pantries, but there are many organizations that do provide emergency food assistance, such as community food pantries and local churches.
2. Suggest organizations capable of meeting the caller's needs. Provide enough information about the organizations so that the caller can make an informed choice. Do not provide so much information or the names of so many organizations that the information is overwhelming.
3. Link the caller to the service. Let them know what to expect, how the agency works, etc. Also, let the caller know there are other resources and that they can call back for more names if necessary.

4. Give the caller specific name(s) and number(s) to call. Ensure that the caller writes down the information.
5. In certain circumstances, and with the caller's permission, it may be necessary to make the contact for them. If it appears the caller does not have the capacity to follow through to resolve a problem but wants help, it may be in their best interest for the Ombudsman to make the contact. If the Ombudsman has conference calling, they can offer to make the call with the caller and do a "warm handoff" to the agency respondent after identifying the reason for the call.
6. If someone calls but is unwilling to accept assistance, explore the reasons. What is the real reason for the call? The initial question may be a presenting problem while the actual problem has not been addressed. Is the need for food assistance due to a substance abuse problem? A lack of knowledge or skill in budgeting? Due to a pay problem?
7. Understand services provided by frequently used resources within the community. Knowledge of the services allows an Ombudsman to accurately match family members' needs with appropriate organizations.
8. Contact the Work Life office or assist the caller in contacting Work Life for information and referral if appropriate referral sources are not known.

Try referral – A plan may be a simple phone call or multifaceted. If a plan has many steps, it helps to prioritize. Perhaps the caller can do Steps 1 and 2 and then get back to the Ombudsman to discuss additional steps. Be careful not to overload a caller with too much information. Callers who are in crisis or overly stressed may only be able to handle one piece of information at a time. Rarely should more than three resources be provided. It is too easy for a caller to get confused or overwhelmed and then do nothing.

Follow-up can help a caller implement their plan, because the Ombudsman acts as a reminder and clarifier. A follow-up contact helps to ensure the families receive the needed services and helps to update the Ombudsman's referral list if there are changes.

Remember never do anything for callers they can do for themselves. The primary goal of information and referral is to help the caller resolve their problem, but a strong secondary goal is always to help them help themselves by empowering them with information and encouragement but not *doing* for them.

## Customer Service

Ombudsmen are in the business of providing information and referral services to families – their customers. Everyone likes to be the recipient of good customer service, and Ombudsmen should provide the best possible service to their customers. Customer service is defined as the ability of a person or organization to constantly and consistently

meet and exceed the customer's expectations. To ensure good customer service, whether in person, over the phone or via e-mail:

- **Do not make promises.** Reliability is key to good customer service. If you say you will attend the spouse club meeting on the 16<sup>th</sup> of the month, be there (and show up at least 15 minutes early!) “Walk the talk”. If you say you are going to do something, than keep your word
- **Listen to customers.** Is there anything more exasperating than telling someone what you want or what your problem is and then discovering that person has not been paying attention? Take the time to identify customer needs by asking questions and concentrating on what the customer is really saying. Listening to their words, their tone of voice, body language and, most importantly, how they feel.
- **Deal with complaints.** No one likes hearing complaints, but complaints are a second chance for you to make it right.
- **Get regular feedback.** Encourage and welcome suggestions about how you could improve.
- **Pay attention to details.** Smiling when answering the phone or providing the most up-to-date information will make a positive impact.
- **Listen.** Provide many avenues for your customers to communicate with you including via e-mail, talks with family members and ask how you are doing or how you could improve your services.

### *Identify Resources*

What resources will you need? That depends on the needs of your families in your geographic location. Stop and think of all the problems and concerns they may have. Collect resources that would meet those needs.

1. Start with your **Work-Life Office**. The staff works with several government and local agencies. Each staff person will have specialized information on his/her area of responsibility. For example: the Family Resource Specialist would have information on child care, special education, adoptions, elder care, and scholarships. Your Ombudsman Program Coordinator will also be able to give you resources or problem solving suggestions. Some Work-Life Offices have a lobby or waiting area with informational displays. Feel free to visit, ask questions, and take information.
2. **Other Ombudsmen** have been through the same resource building process. Don't be shy. Ask them to share their information with you. And when you are asked, pass the information on to them.
3. Coast Guard resources are essential. (See the Resource List at the end of this chapter.) Gather the contact information for:
  - Servicing Personnel Office (SPO)** – all pay questions
  - Command Center** – this office is staffed 24 hours a day and can help you find Coast Guard personnel in service/support positions

**Legal** – Located at the District level they can offer advice and referrals on landlord tenant issues, family law issues, wills, powers of attorney, etc.

**Health Benefits Advisor** – call for health and dental program information

**TRICARE** – Plan information for your geographical area

**Officer of the Day (OOD)/Command Duty Officer (CDO)** – this person is on duty during and after working hours

**Mutual Assistance** – financial assistance for emergencies, educational loans and grants, new baby layette

**Morale Welfare and Recreation (MWR)** – use of facilities and recreational programs

**Exchange** – contact for clothing, jewelry, and small household items

4. Your local **telephone book** has a section for government, usually divided into city, county, state, and federal agencies. Look for resources like: WIC (Women, Infants & Children), Food-stamps, Motor Vehicles (driver's license, vehicle registration), pet registration, social security, Internal Revenue Service, passport agency, the Better Business Bureau, the postal service, domestic violence hotlines, education, etc.
5. Read your **local newspaper**. This will give you local resources and a sense of how well they are functioning. It will also give you insight on local support for the Coast Guard. Look for programs open to your families and issues that will impact them.
6. Save the annual **Combined Federal Champaign Donor Brochure**. This lists charitable organizations that have met the CFC standards. The list has non-profit organizations (i.e. YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, National Military Family Association, etc.) and associations dealing with major illness, diseases, or disabilities (i.e. the Epilepsy Foundation of America, Hospice Foundation of America, etc.) The listing usually includes a brief agency description, phone number, and email/website addresses. **The United Way's Information Line Resources Directory** is similar for local information. This may come in very handy if your unit has reserve families spread over a large geographic area.
7. Tap into the **Department of Defense (DoD)** resources at other military bases near you. They have family support program similar to our Work-Life program. A visit to one of these offices to collect information and meet staff members is a good investment.
8. **Military Publications** this provides insights into the organizational operations and planning, gives some background information, and speaks to future planning. Your unit probably receives a lot of these magazines, newspapers, and newsletters. Make sure your name goes on the routing slip attached to the cover. Try to be the last one on the routing slip, that way, if the unit doesn't need the publication back, you will be free to read, clip, and recycle them at your leisure.
9. The **Internet** holds a world of information if you know how to search the different sites. This can also be very convenient, working at home when your schedule permits. Once you find a good site, just add it to your favorites list to keep it handy.

10. Your **local library** has resources in their reference books, magazine, newspapers, community bulletin boards, and informational search materials (i.e. micro fiche and internet access).
11. Don't pass up your **Chamber of Commerce**. They can tell you all sorts of interesting things about the town/city and the surrounding area.
12. **National Resources** can be obtained by dialing **211**. Callers are connected with information about critical health and human services available in their community. 211 can provide information on basic needs (food banks, shelters, rental assistance, etc.), physical and mental health resources, employment support, support for older individuals or individuals with disabilities, support for children and families and volunteer opportunities. You may also visit [www.211.org](http://www.211.org)

### ***Gathering Information***

What information will you need from the resources you have identified? Go back to the needs of your unit families. What information would be useful to them?

1. What is the name of the agency/organization?
2. Who is the contact person?
3. What is the phone number/s?
4. Who makes the initial contact with the agency/organization? (i.e. referral, spouse, member, command)
5. Are appointments necessary? Are walk-ins taken?
6. What services/programs are offered?
7. Are there eligibility requirements? (i.e. income, residency)
8. Is documentation required? (i.e. birth certificate, lease agreement, copy of orders, LES)
9. Is there any cost associated with the services provided?
10. What are the business hours?
11. Where is the agency/program located?
12. How would you get there? (i.e. mass transportation, van pickup, parking lot provided)

### ***Organizing Information***

Now that you have piles of paper and pamphlets everywhere, organizing them into some type of system will be necessary

- Sort the information into categories.
- Some information might belong in more than one category. Cross referencing may be necessary to find the information when you're searching and talking to distraught person at the same time.
- An alphabetical listing of resources may be handy if you are making a quick reference list, organizing a rolodex, or entering information in your address book.
- Next step is to physically organize the information into some kind of filing system.

- You may want to start with a large notebook with dividers and pocket inserts.
- Once you outgrow your notebook, you may want to expand to a small file cabinet.

### ***Updating Files***

The information you have is only useful if it's accurate. You will need to update your files periodically.

1. Periodical Updating – Every six months start going through your information files. Call the agency/organization and check out the information you have is still the same. Note any changes.
2. In your routine use of a resource you may discover by chance that changes have occurred. Change your notes and update again at the next scheduled date.
3. Share your information with other Ombudsmen, and the Ombudsman Coordinator.

## Resource List



The Reference List has contact numbers you may need to give out as a referral on a frequent basis. Fill in the names and phone numbers. Make copies. Keep one by your phone and one in your phone log notebook. Feel free to add contacts specific to your area and unit needs.

<b>Commanding Officer(CO)/ Officer-In-Charge (OINC):</b>		<b>Executive Officer (XO)/ Executive Petty Officer (XPO)</b>	
Unit		Unit	
Home		Home	
Cell		Cell	
Pager		Pager	
INMARSAT			
<b>Command Master Chief</b>		<b>Officer of the Day (OOD)/ Command Duty Officer (CDO)</b>	
Unit		Unit	
Home		Home	
Cell		Cell	
Pager		Pager	
Work Life Office		Command Center	
Chaplain		Legal	
Morale Welfare and Recreation (MWR)		Servicing Personnel Office (SPO)	
Mutual Assistance Officer (CGMA)		ID Card Office	
Red Cross		Public Affairs Officer	
Other Ombudsman		Careline	
Housing		Food Stamps	
Domestic Violence Hotline		WIC (Women, Infants, & Children)	
Fire		Police/Base Security	
Ambulance		Poison Control	
Humane Society		School District Office	
DMV/BMV		TRICARE	
UCCI		EAPC 800 Number	800-222-0364
MTF Appointment Desk		CDC/Family Child Care Providers	
ESO		Health Benefits	1-800-9HB-AHBA

## Providing Referrals

Ombudsmen, serving as information resources, receive a variety of phone calls. Your ability to help people will be defined by how well you listen. Do not take their problems upon yourself or give advice about it. Try to stay clear of being given "historical" background and excuses for present problems. Offer suggestions and referrals when the caller has run out of alternatives. Your goal is to help callers become responsible for themselves and aware of the consequences of their actions.

*Get ready for phone calls by setting up a work area near the phone. You'll need a supply of pencil/pens, notepads, referral number file, resource list, roster, and phone logs. Remember, when you're not working with your roster and phone logs, keep them in a locked drawer or file cabinet.*

### **Referrals**

Types of calls:

1. **Information** – These calls are requests for routine information. This usually involves giving out information on a agency/organization such as a phone number and a point of contact.  
*Response: Give the referral, and enter call in log.*
2. **Complaint** - These calls usually center around the caller being unable to access services or the services was not what they thought was appropriate.  
*Response: Use active listening, get full information, give referral/problem solve, enter call in log, and follow-up.*
3. **Reassurance/Recurring** – Some people will call on a continual basis to use you as an emotional prop, or to constantly complain.  
*Response: Set time limit of no more than 5 minutes, listen, do not get pulled into the situation.*
4. **Demands for Service** – These calls come from people unfamiliar with your duties as Ombudsman and demand that you provide services to them yourself (i.e. last minute babysitting, rides to the doctor, etc.)  
*Response: Empathize with their need, explain that is not your responsibility. If you have a list of volunteer spouses offering service in these situations give one of their names.*

### **Call Protocol**

1. **Greeting** – This should be a positive/friendly way to begin the call.  
*For example: "Hello! Smith residence. May I help you?"*

The caller will then try to identify the Ombudsman.

*For example: "May I speak to the Ombudsman?" or "Are you the Ombudsman?"*

You should respond in an official manner and identify the caller.

*For example: "Yes, this is Joanie. I'm the Ombudsman for USCGC GONE. May I ask who's calling?"*

2. **Record keeping and Confidentiality Statement** – At this time write the caller's name in the telephone log with date and time. This is the time to give your confidentiality statement.

*For example: "I will be happy to assist you. Everything you tell me will be kept confidential except in cases of domestic violence or abuse, alcohol or drug abuse, or threats of suicide or homicide. In these cases I am required by law to report them. What can I do for you today?"*

3. **Purpose of the call** – This is the part where the caller explains what they need. This might require active listening, and open/closed questions in order to identify the issue.

*For example: "I just called the bank and the automatic deposit is almost \$300 short. I won't have enough money to pay the bills and buy groceries. We haven't changed anything on the deductions. The ship isn't due in for midpatrol break for awhile."*

*"Let me make sure I have all this. Your pay was \$300 short and you're worried you won't be able to pay the bills."*

*"Yes, that's right. And my children are going to need diapers and milk."*

*"How old are your children?"*

*"They are one and two and half."*

4. **Appropriate Action** – Now you make a referral, or delay while researching. You summarize the action planned and make sure the caller understands. Enter the referral on the call log.

*For example: "OK. I've got a couple of referrals for you. Do you have a pen to write this down? I'll wait while you get one."*

*"I'm ready. Go ahead."*

*"The first number is for the Servicing Personnel Office (SPO), they handle all our pay records. If you have a PO, they will be able to see if a mistake was made. Call 555-5555 between 730 AM and 330PM and ask for Petty Officer (PO1) Helper. Read that back to me so I'm sure I didn't mix up the numbers. "*

*"I've got it. That's 555-5555 and ask for PO1 Helper. I'll call right away."*

*"Yes, call right away. When you get through call me back. There are a couple of other resources like Mutual Assistance and WIC I'd like to talk to you about."*

*"OK. I'm just eager to get this whole mess cleared up first."*

5. **Closing** – Reassure the caller you are there to help. Ask them to call back if there are any problems with the referral. Offer to help in the future.

*For example: "I'm here to help you. If you have any problems call me back.*

### ***Giving Referrals***

- Make sure the caller has the correct information and procedure. Have them repeat it back to you.
- Give only a two referrals at a time. Don't confuse the issue by giving several places to contact at once.
- If you don't have a referral tell them you will have to research the issue and get back to them. Give them an approximate time you will take before contacting them. If your search takes longer, call them at the appointed time and let them know your progress.
- Follow up with the caller to make sure they were able to access the service needed.
- DO NOT give any counseling referrals other than to the Work-Life Center staff, the Chaplain and the 800 phone number for the EAP line.
- DO NOT give referrals to any "for profit" business or organization. (i.e. car repairs, teenage babysitters, hair dresser, tax service

## Chapter Nine – Emergencies and Crisis Situations

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Although most all of the calls Ombudsman handle will be routine, they need to be prepared to handle emergencies and crisis situations.

### ***Personal Emergency/Crisis***

Handling crisis calls will be difficult, but they are a very important function of the Ombudsman. It is only normal to dread these types of calls. Again, remember you are not a counselor! You are to assess the situation and refer them to help. This section will assist you in making those referrals.

*“Crisis” is unique to each person. What is a crisis to one person is not to another.*

*Don't feel responsible for the caller's crisis.*

*Make sure your resource numbers are up to date: police, fire, ambulance, poison control, battered women's shelter, Red Cross, Command Center, Chaplain, Ombudsman Coordinator, Work Life Supervisor, Family Advocacy Specialist, Mutual Assistance Officer, etc.*

### ***Domestic Abuse***

Domestic abuse is a pattern of behavior resulting in physical/emotional/psychological abuse, economic control and/or interference with personal liberty when such violence is directed toward a person of the opposite sex who is:

- A current or former spouse
- A person with whom the abuser shares a child in common
- A current or former intimate partner with whom the abuser shares or has shared a common domicile

Domestic abuse is an offense under the United States Code or the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) that involved the use, attempted use or threatened use of force or violence against someone who meets the definitions above.

The cycle of violence explains the dynamics of how domestic abuse often, but not in all cases, becomes a pattern. It encompasses the following three stages:

1. Tension Building:
  - a. Stress builds
  - b. Victim senses danger
  - c. Minor conflict may occur
  - d. Victim hopes things will get better

2. Violent episode:
  - a. Abuser blames victim for the abuse
  - b. Victim may escape and return after the abuse ends
  - c. Serious injury or death can occur
3. Honeymoon phase:
  - a. May last days, months or even years
  - b. Family in shock
  - c. Batterer feels remorseful, shame and guilt
  - d. Batterer seeks forgiveness and may be kind and loving
  - e. Victim denies and minimizes the abuse to cope

All allegations of domestic abuse must be reported. The Ombudsman must inform the family member of the importance of reporting cases of domestic abuse. The abuse must be reported to the Command and the Family Advocacy Specialist at the servicing Work Life office.

If the Ombudsman feels that life, health or safety of an individual is in imminent danger, contact 911 or the local emergency services. The Ombudsman should not intervene nor place him or herself in physical danger.

### ***Suicide***

Ombudsman should not worry about using the right words if they get a call from a potentially suicidal person. A concerned tone of voice and knowledge of resources to help the caller is what is most important.

#### *Listen*

Let the person unload despair and ventilate anger. If given an opportunity to do this, they may feel better by the end of the call. No matter how negative the call seems, the fact that it exists is a positive sign – a cry for help.

Remember this simple mnemonic as an aid for what to do when you suspect someone is thinking of suicide:

ACE: Ask – Care – Escort

Ask: This is not an easy thing to do but it is essential. Asking does not put the idea in someone's head. It may be helpful to lead into a question with a statement of your observations.

*“You made a comment about ending your life and that concerns me. Are you thinking about killing yourself?”*

If the individual attempts to make a joke or gives other indications of attempting to deflect the question, hang in there and ask the question again, letting the person know

you are serious. Be aware you may be “tested” in this way and that the person may want some indication of your sincerity before opening up.

Ninety-five percent of all suicidal callers will answer “no”. Simply talking about their problems for a length of time helps the suicidal person by giving relief from loneliness and pent-up feelings, increasing awareness that another person cares and allowing feelings of being understood. They also get tired – their body chemistry changes. Talking about their emotional pain takes the edge off their agitated state.

If the person responds in the affirmative, other otherwise indicated he/she has had thought of suicide, get additional information on how bad the situation is:

How – Is there a plan and does he/she possess the means (pills, gun, etc)  
Situation – Is he/she alone? Have they been drinking?  
History – Prior attempts you are aware of

Care: Be willing to listen and allow the person to express feelings. Talk openly about suicide. Active listening is likely to produce relief. Take a deep breath. Be calm and listen. Encourage the person to seek help. Do not promise confidentiality instead consider something like this:

*“I have to make sure you get the help you need and that requires others know what you’ve told me. I’m sorry if that upsets you but I’d have a tough time forgiving myself if I did nothing and you tried to kill yourself”*

Escort: Get assistance from others. Engage the Command and/or the local emergency services providers.

Sources of assistance:

Work Life EAPC – 1-800-872-4957  
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1-800-273-TALK (8255)  
Employee Assistance Program – 1-800-222-0364

Ombudsman are encouraged to attend advanced training to recognize the signs to watch for. Additional training is available through the EAPC at the servicing Work Life office.

### ***Emergency/Crisis Call Protocol***

*Use the call protocol and include the following*

- **Stay calm** – You can’t help if you get pulled into the emotional turmoil.
- **Calm the Caller** – Assure them you want to help, but you need to be able to understand all the facts. Take the time to let them take a few deep breathes, get a tissue, or a drink of water. Do these whenever they lose control.
- **Use Active listening** – You will need to get the important details when it may come with lots of extra details.

- **Assess what family members are involved** – You need to help each family member according to need.
- **Make very specific referrals/ Red Cross procedure** – This is where your up to date resource numbers will be used.
- **Follow up** – Make sure to check back with the caller in the immediate future.
- **Ask permission to contact a friend or relative** – If they decline, do not break their confidentiality.

*Emergency leave can only be granted by the commanding officer/officer in charge. If the unit is deployed, consideration to the unit's location, mission, member's role in the mission, and weather will greatly influence the outcome. **Never** promise emergency leave*

### ***Command in Crisis***

When your unit is in a crisis, it will be hard to function worrying about your own spouse. Above all else, stay calm!

- You are the link to the command. The families will be counting on you to keep them informed.
- Tap into your own personal support system to help you emotionally.
- Coordinate with any other unit Ombudsmen. Plan and act together. Be prepared for numerous phone calls. If you are the only Ombudsman, you may want to call on a neighboring unit Ombudsman to help out.
- Remain in contact with your point of contact or the command center. They will give you the facts as they can.
- Stop all rumors! Don't let guesses and assumptions take on the air of truth. This is just borrowing trouble when you don't need it. No news is good news!
- Decline any media contact, refer them to the Public Affairs Officer.
- If the families want to wait together, find a location that will be suitable, especially if the wait will be extended.
- Call the Work-Life Center for advice and assistance!

### ***Casualty***

In the event there is a casualty on the unit, a Casualty Assistance Officer will be assigned to the case.

- The next of kin will be notified. This is not your responsibility. Do not get involved. If the relatives should contact you before Casualty Assistance calls them, refer them on to the Casualty Assistance Officer.
- The Casualty Assistance Officer will call on the immediate family, usually accompanied by the Chaplain. The Casualty Assistance Officer may also be the Decent Affairs Officer, who handles the paperwork and financial matters on the case.
- The family/families may need assistance with various tasks. This is where your list of volunteers will come in handy. Rally support for them.
- The Work-Life Center should be called for advice and assistance.

- The Critical Incident Stress Management Team can be invited by the command to assist the unit. This is strongly recommended.

Since the Ombudsman may be called to offer assistance it is important the Ombudsman understands the cycle of grief. The death of a parent, child, spouse, or for some even a pet can be devastating. Many families are young and have not experienced the death of a loved one before. According to Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, a psychiatrist who wrote extensively about death and dying, there are five stages associated with grieving:

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance

Not everyone goes through them or in a prescribed order. These stages are often experienced in sequence, but individuals can cycle through these feelings in a different order and can return to previous phases as grief is processed.

The anger may set in quickly and can be directed at anyone. There is a need to know why this happened and whether the loss could have been prevented – who is at fault? Some may turn their anger inward and blame themselves for what happened. Be calm, listen and do not take anger directed at you personally.

### ***Crisis Intervention***

Crisis intervention can be described as emotional first aid. The goals of crisis intervention are to:

- Restore the individual to pre-crisis functioning level
- Cushion the effect of the stressful event by offering practical and emotional support
- Identify and mobilize resources to cope with the crisis event
- Understand events leading to the crisis

Remember, not every problem may be an actual crisis by definition, but the individual may experience it as a crisis. Perception is key! Do not alienate the individual by placing your definition of crisis on the caller. Crises are different for each person. The Ombudsman's role is to assist not judge.

It is important for the Ombudsmen to take a facilitative role. The Ombudsman can provide additional information to empower a crisis victim and give referrals to professional services. By empowering an individual in crisis, the individual grows. They gain valuable coping and problem-solving skills, the ability to tolerate frustrating and painful situations, knowledge of resources and a sense of accomplishment.

## Crisis Intervention Do's and Don'ts

### DO:

- Make sure the individual is safe
- Listen attentively, but do not force them to talk
- Get the caller's name and phone number without being intrusive
- De-escalate distressed clients by talking in a soft, calm voice and encouraging them to focus on what they are requesting
- Show concern, support, acceptance, hope and a positive attitude. This is wonderful medicine and has a more powerful impact that most people realize
- Be tolerant of intense emotions. Be sensitive to the fact that a crisis brings a flood of emotions. Be careful not to take things personally
- Be nonjudgmental. The individual has to take the path that is best for him or her
- Maintain confidentiality. Inform the individual of the situations that have to be reported
- Listen. It seems so simple, yet so many of us are not good at it. Sometimes a listening, concerned, understanding ear is all that is needed
- Use caring words and phrases such as:
  - "I'm sorry this has happened"
  - "It's not your fault"
  - "I cannot imagine how difficult this is for you"

### DON'T:

- Give unofficial information about the situation
- Focus the conversation on you
- Give advice or opinions
- Offer false hope. No one has a magic wand to make everything better for an individual
- Be a hero or rescuer, or get in over one's head. Helpers should not bring people home, offer to take care of children or promise punishment for a wrongdoer
- Fail to get assistance.
- Use phrases such as:
  - "I know how you feel"
  - "It's God's will"
  - "You are so strong. I know you can handle this"
  - "Tell me what I can do for you"
  - "You'll get over this"
  - "Just be thankful that ..."

## *Natural Disaster*

In the case of a natural disaster (i.e. hurricane, flood, earthquake) there should be a plan clarified in advance. Check with your unit for this information. If your unit is deployed at the time of the disaster, your command will try to contact you as to the welfare of the unit families.

- If you evacuate, take your roster and emergency numbers with you. If possible take a cell phone with you.
- The Command Center will be notified when the disaster plan goes into effect and the word will be spread.
- Start your phone tree and update your careline.
- Keep records of unit families calling to tell you their location and status. Pass this on to the command when possible.
- After the disaster send out information on relief efforts and assess unit families' status and needs. Pass on this information to the command center to notify the command.

If the disaster occurs with your unit in port or at a land based unit, you may still be called upon to help with the needs of the unit families. Unit members will be assigned parts in the disaster plan. Ombudsmen may have specific roles in the Command disaster preparedness plan.

The Ombudsman is often called upon to provide information to command families during a command crisis. Regardless of the event, the Ombudsman is never to act independently or without explicit guidance from the Command. The Ombudsman should be thoroughly aware of the CO/OINC's policies and expectations in a crisis or natural disaster occurring where the command families live.

Additionally Ombudsmen may help families to prepare for potential disasters by:

- Helping families new to the area become familiar with the types of disasters most likely to occur and how to best prepare for each type of disaster
- Suggesting families develop an emergency communications and care plan
- Providing lists of items to include in a disaster supply kit
- Publicizing evacuation routes, emergency public shelters, caring for animals and information specific to people with disabilities before a disaster occurs or is imminent

## ***Critical Incident Stress Management***

### What is a critical incident?

A critical incident is an event during which the sights, sounds, and smells are so vivid as to cause any person to feel a significant increase in stress and stress reactions. Among the most common are:

- An accumulation of stressful incidents within a short period of time or multiple incidents at the same time.
- Loss of a patient following an unusual or extremely prolonged expenditure of emotional and physical energy by the personnel (i.e., during or after a medevac).
- An unusual incident which produces an intense level of immediate or delayed emotional response (i.e., close call on-duty injury or line-of-duty-death).
- Particularly unusual or gruesome injury or death of a child.
- An incident outside the range of normal experience.
- What is traumatic for one person may not be traumatic to another. But, stress can happen to anyone. Stress from a critical incident cannot be prevented. It is the result of exposure to trauma in this profession. Stress can be managed.

### The goal of the Critical Incident Response Team

- Lessen the impact on personnel exposed to critical incidents.
- Accelerate recovery from events before harmful stress reactions have a chance to damage performance, careers, health and families. Before it starts and confine it before it spreads.
- Provide information about critical incident stress and stress reactions that personnel can use to help themselves and their fellow workers identify when extra help may be warranted.
- Provide an atmosphere of concern and caring within your setting.
- Offer your personnel options for dealing with stress:
  - Pre-incident education
  - On-scene support
  - Defusing / Debriefing
  - Significant other support

## Signs of Critical Incident Stress

Individuals react to stress in their own way. Some of the common reactions you may experience or observe are:

- Re-experiencing the event, or flashbacks
- Nightmares
- Difficulty sleeping
- Substance abuse
- Feelings of guilt
- Family or marital problems
- Depression
- Irritability / Anger
- Numbing and Withdrawal
- Decline in job performance
- Memory loss / confusion
- Loss of appetite / nausea

## Nine ways to deal with stress

- Strenuous physical exercise alternating with relaxation will alleviate some physical reactions to stress.
- Structure your time and keep busy. Do things that feel good to you. Reach out to others. Talk to people, they do care! Talking can be the most healing medicine.
- Remind yourself that you are experiencing expected reactions to a stressful incident. Don't label yourself as "crazy".
- Keep your life as routine as possible. Don't make big life changes.
- Avoid alcohol and drug use. Don't complicate your feelings with a substance abuse problem.
- Help your co-workers by sharing your feelings and seeing how they are doing.
- Give yourself permission to react; don't try to hide your feelings.

- Watch your diet, avoid sugar and caffeine. Eat regularly and don't skip meals.
- Remember your spiritual side.

The Critical Incident Stress Management teams are trained individuals who have experience dealing with critical incidents including natural disasters. In some cases members have received specialized training to allow them to work with the children and families following a critical incident or natural disaster. The decision to invite the team to the unit always resides with the Command.

## Chapter Ten – Family Issues

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### ***Marital Problems***

Married couples may face problems in their marriages from time to time. Each person brings their own problem solving skills to a marriage. Sometimes this is enough to solve the issue. But when the process breaks down and the couple becomes dysfunctional, you may be called on for resource help. The first call should be to the Work Life EAPC. Another resource is the Chaplain. Additionally the couple may contact the 800 EAP line (1-800-222-0364). Remember not to take sides. This is a good time for rumor control.

### ***Parenting Problems***

Children don't come with owners' manuals. Parenting skills aren't genetic, they are learned. Parents often rely on memories of their own childhood to get them through. So each parent has their own set of expectations of their children's behavior and their parenting roles. Too often these expectations aren't communicated between parents and conflicts arise. When children get out of control and parents seem to be at a loss about what to do next, it is time to get help. The EAPC at Work Life can help with guidance and referrals. The EAP program is another good resource. The EAP program can be reached at 1-800-222-0364. Local organizations and our sister services often give age specific parenting classes and offer support groups. First time expecting parents should be urged to take a baby basics course. This gets them use to attending parenting courses and taking advice from professionals outside of their family and friends. You must be aware that different cultures have different views on what appropriate parenting skills are. Additional information can also be found at WorkLife4You.

You may also log on to [www.worklife4you.com](http://www.worklife4you.com) and look for the "Registered Users" box! Do not click on the "New User" link. Simply enter Screen Name: uscg and Password: uscg (both are case sensitive).

### ***Special Needs***

Active duty members and reservists with family members who have special physical, emotional, educational or mental needs may reach out to you for assistance. Refer them first to the Family Resource Specialist (FRS) at the Work Life Office. Depending on the need, there may be non-profit organizations in the community that offer services. Search your local phone book, Combined Federal Campaign donor's book, or do an online search. All special needs families are required to enroll in the Coast Guard Special Needs Program. Remember if you do a referral to the FRS you may let them know a referral has been made however, due to HIPPA regulations, you may not use names or give specific information.

## ***Financial Problems***

Individuals and families often experience financial problems for a variety of reasons; most often it is due to poor planning and budgeting. Financial training for single personnel and couples would eliminate most financial emergencies. First check to see if the unit has a Command Financial Specialist (CFS). If not, the Work-Life office usually has someone on staff trained to assist in budgets and good credit practices. If you are located at a distance from the Work-Life Office, try the Mutual Assistance Officer, Navy/Marine Corps Relief Society, or a non-profit financial counseling service.

Members of the Coast Guard are expected to be financially responsible. If debts go unpaid, the command might be brought into the situation. Bad checks, credit card debt, unpaid child support, etc. may bring about action by a civil court. A court ordered garnishment of military pay may become grounds for disciplinary action or administrative discharge. Reservists called to active duty may incur a decrease in their income causing financial problems. Financial irresponsibility could also jeopardize the member's security clearance, advancement, duty assignment, or reenlistment.

The commercial world is full of high-pressure salesmen, too good to be true offers, easy terms, low payments, and advertisements aimed at selling products. Younger members often fall prey to these selling tactics. Every opportunity should be taken (newsletter) to caution against impulse buying and frequent use of credit. You may need to explain the monthly payment multiplied by the number of payments is the real total price, not the bargain that was advertised. There is also the fine print factor that often hides penalty clauses. Encourage large expenditures and monthly payment deals be taken to the Legal Assistance Office before deciding to buy.

Savings is usually the last thing financially challenged people think about. All families should start some sort of savings account for all of life's emergencies. They need to learn to pay themselves first. This can be easily accomplished by a payroll deduction before they ever see their pay deposit. There are several credit unions organized for Coast Guard personnel that offer advantages over standard banks.

**Bankruptcy is not the easy way out.** Before a decision is made to file bankruptcy, legal advice and financial counseling should be attempted. There are many new changes to the bankruptcy laws and the member and family should understand all of the consequences before making a decision. Ruining their credit rating will do more harm than they realize. Again, encourage financial counseling!

## ***Medical***

Medical care is a major benefit promised to all military members and their families. TRICARE was established to handle these health care needs. This program is constantly changing procedures, coverage plans, co-payments, eligibility, and contract providers. The contractor responsible for your region has enrollment and care plan information. If you are located away from a medical treatment facility, the contractor will have a list of health care providers for your area. You may share this list with your families. TRICARE

and the contractors have web sites ([www.tricare.osd.mil](http://www.tricare.osd.mil)) designed for ease of information access. It would be wise to get on any mailing list for their program updates. This information is crucial medically and financially to your unit families.

TRICARE requires enrollment in DEERS (Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System). This ensures only verified individuals receive care by military medical facilities. Active duty and retired members are automatically enrolled in DEERS. Family members must request enrollment for newborns with 60 days of birth. The enrollment procedure requires birth certificates, or marriage certificates be presented to the ID card issuing office.

If the individual is 10 years or older, TRICARE also requires a **valid military identification card**. The card will be required before receiving treatment. The new military ID cards have computer strips, when scanned give basic information about the card holder. It is important that all ID card holders have up to date cards. **An expired card may mean a lapse in medical coverage**. All deploying units are urged to check family member ID cards for expiration dates to ensure no lapses while the member is absent from home. This is usually stressed at pre-deployment briefings.

### *Dental*

All active duty members are provided with dental services. Family members enrolled in DEERS may be covered by the purchase of dental insurance. The small premiums are automatically deducted from the members' pay. The current insurance provider for TRICARE Family Dental is United Concordia. Each region has a list of approved dental care providers. You may give this list to your families. Family members must use one of the approved providers. The insurance coverage and co-pays change occasionally. If there are questions contact the Health Benefits Advisor, call the United Concordia 800 number for your area, or visit the web site ([www.ucci.com](http://www.ucci.com)).

### *Housing*

Housing **eligibility and availability** will vary by location. Check with your local Housing Officer for the regulations for your area. You should be familiar with who to refer families to with specific housing questions as well as where to find the information on the following housing regulations/guidelines:

- Eligibility
- Mandatory occupancy requirements
- Designation by pay grade/job title
- Application process
- Check- in procedure
- Termination of privileges
- Quarters inspection
- Maintenance/repair services
- Regulations

- Parking/vehicles
- Expenses of living in Coast Guard housing vs civilian housing
- BAH (Basic Allowance for Housing)
- Leased housing
- Privatized Military Housing
- Rental Programs in the area
- Average rental/purchase cost for civilian housing

Housing decisions directly impact the family. Individuals and families are bound by budget/pay limits on the housing they can afford. Families living in housing they feel is unsatisfactory or located in unsafe neighborhoods feel they have a poor quality of life. Their focus is on their problems and not on their jobs.

### ***Legal Issues***

As an Ombudsman, you may be asked all sorts of legal questions. Some of the questions are easily answered from materials provided by the Legal Assistance Office. The rest should be referred to a legal source, hopefully in your area. Be prepared to provide a listing of Coast Guard legal offices and other military services.

#### **Military legal assistance may be available to assist in the following situations:**

- Wills
- Powers of Attorney
- Motor vehicle registration/licensing/insurance
- Separation/Divorce
- Residency – domicile
- Income taxes
- Consumer issues
- Landlord/tenant
- Adoptions
- Small claims court

#### **Military legal advice may not be provided in the following situations:**

- Military administration/personnel matters
- Military criminal matters
- Private income producing matters
- Claims against the United States government
- Complex estate planning
- Fee generation cases
- Court representation

## ***Voting***

The Constitution guarantees the right to vote. Military members, their spouses, and dependent children (18 and older) have the right to vote. The decision must be made on where to vote, locally or absentee at the home of record. Once the location is decided the **Voting Assistance Officer** can help with the paperwork. The local Voter Registration Office or the League of Women Voters can supply voting information. This registration and ballot need the utmost attention. Delays, errors, and omissions can make the ballot invalid. Be sure to make the submission deadline, use legible handwriting, and sign the form(s). Encourage your unit families to exercise their right to vote!

## ***Education***

Families with school-aged children are concerned about the local school systems. If they are going to live in housing, they will need information on the schools for all age levels. Families living on the economy will probably ask for a recommendation on schools and shop for a rental/purchase in that area. Not all units have Ombudsmen so providing families with the resources to research schools helps the family to become self sufficient with future relocations. (Families should be encouraged to call the local school district and request the test scores listing for all their schools.) Given the number of times families will relocate during a career, attempting to keep the children on a good educational basis is difficult and families should be aware of the resources available to them.

All services have seen a dramatic rise in the number of military children schooled “at home”. This is giving rise to “at home” organizations supporting group activities and equipment loans. Most of these organizations have networks and communicate through a website.

Spouses and older dependent children may be seeking occupational training or higher education facilities. The financial aspects are important in the decision to enroll in any course work. It is important to have information on how members and their families can obtain information on the local occupational schools, community colleges, and four-year colleges including tuition rates and military clauses (i.e. in-state tuition rates for military stationed in the state). The **Education Services Officer** (ESO) may offer some assistance on attending local schools and colleges, and financial aid through Mutual Assistance programs.

## ***Relocation***

Our families are constantly relocating. Some families do very well relocating, while others have many problems. To help families during this time encourage them to attend a relocation briefing if one is available in their area. These briefings are designed to assist families before, during, and after the move. Specific information helps them prepare their families and household goods. Gaining commands can assign a sponsor to the new family. The sponsor can learn this task by attending a Sponsorship Training workshop (if available in your AOR) given by the Transition and Relocation Manager at the Work-

Life Office. If sponsors are unable to attend the workshop, there may be printed materials available. While not mandatory, Commands are encouraged to assign a sponsor with similar family composition, pay grade, and at least 6 to 12 months left before reassignment.

Ombudsman can greet new arrivals with a quick visit or phone call. This is an opportunity to introduce yourself and give your program and contact information. Most new families will have a few questions during this initial contact. This is where you start building your credibility and trusting relationship as an Ombudsman. Offering sources within the Coast Guard community to network and fellowship can help the new family have feelings of belonging. The Coast Guard is a small service and most people will serve again with others they know, and it's certain to share mutual friends and acquaintances.

### ***Recreation***

One question you will hear over and over is, "What's there to do for fun around here?" Start with your unit **Morale, Welfare and Recreation Program**. There are usually social and recreational activities specifically planned for families and single personnel. The Local Chamber of Commerce usually has information on all Parks and Recreation Programs, not to mention the shopping, theaters, tourist attractions, and restaurants. As Ombudsman you can give out the Chamber of Commerce or Parks and Recreation pamphlets, but you may not recommend specific stores, theaters, tourist attractions, or restaurants. You may give general information such as, "There are lots of great little shops in the old town area. Several give military discounts. Be sure to ask before you buy anything."

### ***Miscellaneous Problems***

These areas may have special meaning depending on your geographic location. Make sure you have resources for these issues:

- **Local Customs**
- **Language/s spoken**
- **Climate/severe weather conditions**
- **Public transportation**
- **Commercial and military travel connections**
- **Native plants**
- **Native animals and insects**
- **Local health concerns**

## Chapter Eleven – Deployment and Mobilization

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Many of the missions of the Coast Guard require that members go to sea, face other deployments and be mobilized. There are few other occupations where someone is away from home for extended periods of time, has duty nights, has sudden and unplanned deployments and war.

### ***Deployment***

Before a planned extended deployment, most Commands host events to prepare the families. A lawyer is usually brought to the Command to prepare wills and powers of attorney. Families are invited to attend pre-deployment briefs hosted by the Command.

Families often go through the “Spiral of Deployment” so the following information is presented to give the Ombudsman a good tool for understanding the emotional ups and downs the families may experience during the entire continuum of deployment. Families never come back to the same place they started.

#### ***Stage 1: Anticipation of Departure***

This stage typically occurs four to six weeks before a planned deployment. IT is a time of tension and confusing emotions.

#### **Emotions/Behavior**

- **Couples:** partners may alternately feel denial and anticipation of loss. They also may be angry and resentful about the increased hours the member spends preparing for the deployment. As reality sinks in, tempers may flare as couples attempt to take care of all the items on the deployment checklist while striving to make time for each other. Members often feel guilty about leaving their families. Arguments and bickering are common. Although irritating, it can be a useful way for a couple to distance themselves emotionally in preparation for the separation.
- **Children:** Parents must be sure to tell their child(ren) about the upcoming deployment and reassure the child(ren) that they will be loved and cared for while the deploying parent is gone.
- **Single members:** May eagerly anticipate the opportunity to put their training to use. They may also be concerned about the unknown aspects of the deployment.

#### **Ombudsmen Role**

- Assist family members in understanding the spiral of deployment
- Provide information on deployment and helping them to understand the feelings they are experiencing are normal

- Be aware of your own personal feelings regarding the deployment

### Stage 2: Detachment and Withdrawal

This stage normally is the final days leading up to deployment, in many ways this can be the most difficult stage.

#### **Emotions/Behavior**

- **Couples:** Members become more psychologically prepared for deployment, focusing on the mission and the Command. Sadness and anger occur as couples attempt to protect themselves from the hurt of separation. Both partners stop sharing their thoughts and feelings with each other. This is a natural response, as separation is imminent. Although physically together, they have separated emotionally. This can be especially difficult if it is seen as rejection rather than a reaction to trying circumstances.
- **Children:** Children may be confused and upset with the deploying parent. Younger children may feel their behavior or something they did caused their parent to leave.
- **Single members:** Members are often working hard to get their affairs in order prior to deploying. Often poor choices are made as to who will handle their affairs while they are gone.

#### **Ombudsmen Role**

- Help families by encouraging the completion of preparations
- Provide referrals to resources that can assist such as legal, the EAP program and Work Life

### Stage 3: Emotional Disorganization

This stage varies in length from the actual time of deployment up to six weeks after departure.

#### **Emotions/Behavior**

- **Couples:** The non-deploying partner may feel an initial sense of relief followed by guilt. Many feel disorganized, depressed or restless. Old routines have been disrupted and new ones are not yet established. They often feel overwhelmed as they face total responsibility for family affairs. They may feel angry and feel stuck dealing with everyday life while thinking the deployed member is off having a good time. Some are stuck in this stage, which can cause problems throughout the remainder of the deployment and beyond.

- Children: Children may show signs of emotional upset. Schoolwork may suffer. Behavior may regress.

### **Ombudsman role**

- Ombudsmen can suggest that family members at home become involved in various activities, such as community support groups, volunteer organizations, sports activities or enrolling in college classes.

### Stage 4: Recovery and Stabilization

At some point during the deployment and after Stage 3, new routines are established for much of the deployment.

### **Emotions/behaviors**

- Couples: Those at home have begun to feel more comfortable with the reorganization of roles and responsibilities. New sources of support and a new sense of independence and freedom are developed. They may also develop increased confidence and a more positive outlook.
- Children: With time, settle into comfortable and adaptive behavior

### **Ombudsmen role**

- Ombudsmen can suggest family members set personal goals to accomplish during deployment.
- Encourage family members throughout the remainder of deployment to reach the goals they have set

### Stage 5: Anticipation of Homecoming

Homecoming preparation begins at different times for those at home and those on deployment. Typically, it is about four to six weeks before the command is due to return home.

### **Emotions/behaviors**

- Couples: Spouses and partners who remained at home realize they have not finished everything they wanted to do during the separation. There is a feeling of joy and excitement in anticipation of being together again. Feelings of apprehension surface as well at the prospect that the member may not like some of the changes and decisions made during their absence. Members in relationships are excited and anxious too, wondering whether they will be accepted and needed by the family and if their children will remember them.

- Children: Younger children take their cues from their caretaker. Older children may have similar feelings to their parents. They will be excited, joyous and may feel anxious if they believe they did not live up to the deployed parent's expectations.

### **Ombudsmen role**

- Help normalize the feelings the families are experiencing by providing information on return and reunions or homecoming
- Encourage realistic expectations of what will happen on the return of their loved one

### Stage 6: Return Adjustment and Renegotiation

Renegotiation of relationships occurs at homecoming and a few days after arrival.

### **Emotions/behavior**

- Couples: It takes time together, with shared feelings and experiences, to really become a couple again. Many spouses feel a loss of freedom and independence and resent the partner making decisions that should be made together. Members often feel like strangers in their own homes. During this stage, the couple has to make major adjustments in roles and responsibilities; the marriage cannot and will not be exactly as it was before the deployment. Each partner has had varied experiences and has grown in different ways, and these changes must be acknowledged and accommodated. Being aware of each other's needs is crucial at this point. There is, however, an opportunity offered which is the opportunity to evaluate what changes have occurred within themselves or determine the direction they want their growth to take, and to meld all this into a renewed relationship.
- Children: Just as parents need time to re-establish relationships, so do children. It is best for the returning parent initially not to make drastic changes to the children's routines, rules, and responsibilities. Children will likely go to the parent who has remained at home with them for permission, questions and assistance.

### **Ombudsmen role**

- Refer callers to EAP, the chaplain and other appropriate resources
- Set aside time to deal with your own feelings and emotions
- If necessary seek out another Ombudsman to step in for you for a period of time

### Stage 7: Reintegration and Stabilization

Can take up to six months as the couple and family stabilize their new relationships.

#### **Emotions/behavior**

- **Couples:** Spouses feel more relaxed and comfortable with each other. There is a renewed sense of being a couple and a family. They are back on the same track emotionally and can enjoy the warmth and closeness of being a couple again.
- **Children:** Young children may worry their parent will leave again. Duty nights can be challenging. Older children are often delighted that their family is reunited again even though they may, at times, resent the discipline enforced by having two parents at home again.

#### **Ombudsmen role**

- Help families recognize their success in surviving a deployment
- Highlight lessons learned and emphasize coping strategies that worked well and can be used for future deployments

## Chapter Twelve – Self Care

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### ***Preventing Burnout***

Helping others sometimes comes with a price. It is easy to focus on the needs of others and overlook your own needs. Having empathy for others doesn't mean their problems become yours. Being burned out is not only harmful to you, it has effects on your own family, and on the families you serve. Once you've hit this stage, you just go through the motions resenting the people calling for help. It's usually not long afterwards that you decide to resign. It is your responsibility to recognize and tend to the stress before it gets to the burn out stage. You need to be able to pull back and meet your own needs, including those of your family, in order to stay an effective Ombudsman.

If you are unable to stop the stress, look for stress management courses to learn ways to help. These courses are often given by the Work-Life staff and at other Dept. of Defense family service centers. You may also contact the Health Promotions Manager at the Work Life Office with specific questions or requests for resources.

*\*\*During a busy day take time to treat yourself to a low cal snack and some exercise. Later, think about taking a soak in the tub or a time out to for pleasure reading.*

### ***Limitations***

Now is the time to realize you are not all things to all people. It's all right to tell a caller, "I don't know." You are not expected to have total recall for all problems or referrals. Your credibility and confidentiality will not suffer if you say, "I'll have to get back to you on that." What will hurt is giving wrong answers instead of taking the time to research the answer.

### ***Finding Support***

When you need to talk to someone just to vent the stress and frustration, you need someone that will just listen and not try to fix the situation for you.

- A close friend outside your area and command
- Another Ombudsman
- Ombudsman Program Coordinator
- Chaplain

***Take care of yourself so you can take care of others!***

## Appendix

## Ombudsman Initial Command Briefing Checklist

- \_\_\_\_\_ Ombudsman application
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Interview date: \_\_\_\_\_;
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Complete part I & II of DD Form 2793, Volunteer agreement (replaced SF-50 Personnel Action Request);
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Appointment letter from the command provide original to ombudsman, copy in administrative file, copy to ombudsman program supervisor;
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Brief on local command structure and overview of missions of local command;
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Provide command point of contact names and contact numbers;
  - \_\_\_\_\_ COMDTINST 1750.4D Ombudsman Program – provide a copy of this instruction;
  - \_\_\_\_\_ COMDTINST 1750.7 Family Advocacy Program – provide a copy of this instruction
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Local reporting requirements for abuse issues, emergencies, etc. – name and contact information for family advocacy specialist; ombudsman are mandatory reporters; other emergency command numbers; when to notify the CO
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Confidentiality – the protection of the command roster; and guidance of this instruction discussed;
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Provide command roster - CO decides information on the roster, remove social security numbers, if necessary, replace with another confidential identifier such as employee ID numbers, if possible;
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Administrative support – POC for ombudsman admin support, supplies; procedures to obtain supplies, work space and other support;
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Expense reimbursements procedures – advance approval of reimbursable expenses
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Ombudsman Coordinator and program supervisor – name and contact information
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Annual ombudsman training is required; refer to ombudsman coordinator for date and time;
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Order a name tag from the local uniform distribution center – blue military name tag with Ombudsman name on first list, and command name followed by the word ombudsman on the second line.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Ombudsman service hours and reporting data – ombudsman shall complete and forward to commanding officer monthly.
- Other topics: \_\_\_\_\_

Ombudsman Printed Name	
Ombudsman Signature	Date:
Command Representative Printed Name	
Command Representative Signature	Date:

Ombudsman shall complete an initial command brief before the performance of official ombudsman duties. This briefing shall be completed by the time of or in conjunction with the appointment of the ombudsman. The Ombudsman shall initial each topic area after discussion. The Commanding officer and the ombudsman shall sign and date this checklist and forward a copy of this completed checklist, along with a copy of the appointment letter to the servicing ISC ombudsman coordinator.





# Ombudsman Monthly/Quarterly Report Worksheet

Command: \_\_\_\_\_

Ombudsman Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Command type (air, shore, cutter, other): \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact by:**

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Spouse: \_\_\_\_\_ Work Life: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Parent/Family Mbr: \_\_\_\_\_ Chaplain: \_\_\_\_\_  
 In-person: \_\_\_\_\_ Legal guardian: \_\_\_\_\_ Command: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Regular Mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Service Mbr: \_\_\_\_\_ OC: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Fiancee/SO: \_\_\_\_\_

Types of Contacts	Total Contacts	Time Spent
Childbirth		
Child care		
Deployment		
Education		
Emergency		
Employment		
Financial		
Housing		
Information & Referral		
Legal Issues		
MWR		
Relocation/Sponsor		
Reportables		
SPO		
Spouse Assoc		
Transportation Issues		
TRICARE/dental		
Other		
Pay		
Newsletter		

Other:  
 Number of meetings attended: \_\_\_\_\_ Hours: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Number of presentations given: \_\_\_\_\_ Hours: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Number of trainings attended: \_\_\_\_\_ Hours: \_\_\_\_\_

## OMBUDSMAN INDIVIDUAL CONTACT FORM

Date:

Caller's Name:

Telephone Number:

E-Mail:

Situation:

Referrals provided:

Follow up necessary?



## DISASTER CHECKLIST

### SELF CARE

- Alert your family and your spouse's family about the incident
- Arrange your child care.
- Contact your support system and ask them to assist you, if needed

### CRISIS REPOSE

- Begin a notebook or log to note all information gathered and disseminated
- Contact your established point of contact (POC)
- Activate the emergency phone tree
- Update Careline
- Get Command Roster & any emergency data forms you have
- Keep your cell phone charger nearby
- Identify a command or senior spouse, or other Ombudsman to act as a volunteer coordinator. Work with the volunteer coordinator to determine the needs of the families and identify resources

### AFTER CARE

- Make notes of lessons learned
- Remember self care

## SPIRAL OF DEPLOYMENT

	Time	Emotions	Behavior	Ombudsman Roles
<b>Stage 1</b> Anticipation of Loss		Tension Fear Anger Sadness	Denial Arguing Honey do list	Normalize  Provide information
<b>Stage 2</b> Detachment and Withdrawal	Final days before deploying	Focused Sadness Anger Numb	Stop sharing thoughts/feelings Withdrawal Packing	Encourage preparation Provide checklist and resources
<b>Stage 3</b> Emotional Disorganization	“D” day to 6 weeks after departure		Discouraged Cry Ignore routine Get Busy Move “back home”	Suggest involvement
<b>Stage 4</b> Recovery and Stabilization	2 to 8 weeks into the deployment	Pride Confident Lonely Sad		Encourage goal setting
<b>Stage 5</b> Anticipation of Homecoming		Excitement Joy Apprehension Anxious	Goal accomplishment Shopping Cleaning Fantasizing	Normalize Encourage realistic expectations Provide information and resources
<b>Stage 6</b> Return Adjustment and Renegotiation	Few days after arrival	Awkward Happy Excitement Joy	Negotiating Honeymooning Face to face communications	
<b>Stage 7</b> Reintegration and Stabilization	2 to 6 weeks after deployment (can go up to six months)		Routines re-established	Recognize success, lessons learned, coping strategies

# DEPLOYMENT CHECK LIST

## LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Do you have a will?
- Is your Record of Emergency Data (page 2) current?
- Do you need to leave powers of attorney with anyone?
- Do you need to leave a medical authorization with the person who is caring for your dependent children?
- Are all ID cards and DEERS enrollment current?

## FINANCIAL PLANNING

- Do you have a written monthly spending plan?
- Does your spending plan include amounts for:
  - Port calls
  - Phone calls
  - Gift/souvenir purchases
  - Utility bills
  - Savings
- Does your spending plan include amounts for:
  - Sea pay
  - Family Separation Allowance
- Are you enrolled in the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP)?
- If married, do you both understand and agree to how finances will be handled during the deployment?

## TAXES

- If you plan to do your taxes while deployed, do you have all the records you will need?
- Do you have a specific power of attorney if someone else will be doing your taxes?

## BANKING DECISIONS

- If your pay set up the way you want it?
- Any allotments or automatic savings drafts?
- If married, have you considered establishing separate checking accounts?
- Have you considered joining a credit union?

## BILLS

- How will you be making your payment to creditors?
- Do all your creditors have the correct address?
- How will you be paying your mortgage/rent/utilities?
- Are there any annual expenses due while you are deployed?
  - How will they be paid?

- If married, have you decided who will be using which credit cards during the deployment?
- Is your renter's/homeowner's insurance current?

#### VEHICLES

- If single, do you have a safe place to store your vehicle?
- Is someone else taking care of your vehicle for you?
- Are vehicle insurance, tags, registration/title and base/inspection stickers current?
- Is all routine maintenance current?
- Have you left the name of a trusted mechanic/repair garage with your family?

#### EMERGENCY PLANS

- Do you have at least one month's pay saved in case of a financial emergency?
- If married, do you have a power of attorney for CG mutual assistance?
- Does your family know your complete mailing address, command name and your Social Security number?
- Does your family know how to use the American Red Cross in case of an emergency?
- Does your family have the name and contact information for the Command Ombudsman?
- Does your family have a disaster preparedness plan and a place to meet/call?