MFLC GENERAL GUIDANCE FOR IC’S

Updated 4/7/2015
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Military & Family Life Counselor Program

The MFLC General Guidance Module for IC’s is designed to provide information on:

1. Contract Deliverables
2. History of the MFLC Program
3. The Military Environment
4. MFLC Program under MFLC Contract II
5. Important Policies & Procedures
6. The Scope of the MFLC Program
7. Program Parameters
8. Knowledge Check

Section 1: MFLC Contract Deliverables:

Contracted MFLC counselors have a number of Guidance Modules available to them to clarify legal requirements and the scope of their contractual services. Here is the initial list of Modules along with the frequency of scheduled updates:

- MFLC General Overview Module (Every 12 months)
- Military Culture sensitization (MCS) Guidelines (prior to first assignment)
- Activity Form Guidelines (Every 12 months or when changes are made)
- Duty to Warn Guidelines (Every 12 months)
- Personal Identifiable Information (PII)
- Cyber Awareness Challenge

Overview Before Your First Assignment

If you are preparing to go on your first assignment, the Military Culture Sensitization Guidelines should be reviewed prior to the assignment.

If you are about to go on assignment and have NOT completed the recommended reviews, contact the Professional Relations Department immediately.
Branch Specific Culture Guidelines
Please note that the DoD requires you to review the Branch Specific Culture Guidelines.

Prior to your FIRST rotation within a branch of service, we recommend that you review the resources on MHNGS website for the corresponding Branch Specific Culture Guidelines for all branches Army, Air Force, Marines, & Navy.

Access to Guidance Modules & Program Updates
Please be aware that as the program continues to grow and develop, any important program updates and/or changes will be communicated to you by your MFLC Liaison.

Section 2: History of the MFLC Program
How did the MFLC Program start?
The MFLC program started as a pilot program in 2004 due to an increased need for Service Member and military family support services created by the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. This recognized need resulted in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) requesting MHNGS to send 20 Military Family Life Counselors to Germany.

The Department of Defense (DoD) made this an established program in 2007. Essentially, with military members deploying more frequently, our support was and still is needed. Since the pilot program, the MFLC program has continued to grow and expand. Currently, we have MFLCs deployed to numerous military installations throughout the United States and around the world.

What is the MFLC Program all about?
The program augments existing military support services to help meet the emerging needs of Active Duty Service Members, Guardsmen, Reservists, and their families – across all branches of the military.

This non-medical counseling program is designed to address issues that occur across the military lifestyle and help Service Members and their families cope with the normal reactions to stressful situations created by multiple deployments and reintegration.
### History of the MFLC Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MFLC</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Regions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Army - Clinical Services Marines - Clinical Services Air Force - Clinical Services Navy - Clinical Services (CONUS ONLY)</td>
<td>Services designed to augment existing Military Counseling and Behavioral Health services: Non-Medical Counseling to families through outreach, Individual, couple, group, and family intervention, Soldier Counseling and Outreach</td>
<td>CONUS, OCONUS USAFE, PACAF, Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Demand</td>
<td>Deployment and Reintegration Counseling/ Special Event Outreach / Psycho-educational briefings / Educations</td>
<td>CONUS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DODEA /Purple Camps/ Guard &amp; Reserve</td>
<td>Children’s Summer Programs (May – Aug)</td>
<td>CONUS/ OCONUS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Youth Services (CYS) Army, Air Force, and Navy</td>
<td>Program supports military children and parents/caregivers.</td>
<td>CONUS, AK, HI, Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Programs</td>
<td>Personal Financial Counseling (PFC) includes individualized financial planning and consultation services, including assistance with money management, credit and debt liquidation, analysis of assets and liabilities, and establishing and building savings plans. TurboTap Briefings</td>
<td>CONUS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Section 3: The Military Environment**

Examples...

The Air Force Airman and Family Readiness Flight (AFRF) agency is the community oversight agency for the Air Force. The AFRF Flight Chief or their designee is the point of contact at Air Force bases.

The Army community oversight agency is the Morale, Welfare & Recreation (MWR) department. The ACS director or their designee is the Point of Contact at Army installations.

For additional information about the behavioral health structure of a specific branch, speak with your MFLC Liaison or refer to the Branch Specific Culture Guidelines available on the MHNGS Website.
Common Issues in the Military Environment

Service Members and their families face many issues and unique challenges across deployment cycles. The issues reviewed here provide a snapshot of the common things you will see, but this list is by no means exhaustive. Note that Service Members and their families typically experience several issues at one time.

Communication Issues
For example, a Service Member and spouse may have trouble communicating with each other due to financial strains or other family stressors.

Inexperience with money management
For example, combat pay increases a Service Member’s pay check which may cause a Service Member to overspend or not be able to manage finances after combat pay ends.
Changing Roles
For example, a Reservist or Guardsman returning from deployment may have trouble being productive and integrating back into his or her civilian role.

Job Stress
It can become stressful for a Service Member working long hours in the pre-deployment cycle, splitting time between family and deployment demands.

Grief and Loss
Dealing with death of a Service Member, survivor guilt, or loss of time and experiences associated with children growing up.

Marital and Family Dynamics
For example, Service Members returning home from deployment may experience problems engaging with their spouses or children and integrating themselves back into their family structure.
Section 4: MFLC Roles & Responsibilities

Program Scope
Your role is to provide education and counseling to Service Members and their families. Your decisions are not isolated but affect the program and those that follow you. Your decisions could potentially have adverse effects on the program at the installation.

Therefore, it is important to never go outside of the scope of services. Program scope will be discussed in more depth later in this education. Be sure to review any questions about it with your MFLC Liaison.

Hours and Locations

Work Hours: Try and keep to a 40-hour work week. Keep in mind you may be required to support some evening or weekend activities. Talk to your MFLC Liaison about flexing time during the week to keep within 40 hours. Remember you are required to take calls from 8am - 8pm, Monday through Friday.

Work Locations: In terms of work locations you can provide consults anywhere but at someone's residence or at the Military Medical Treatment Facility. However, if there is an event at the residence, such as a Key Spouse Meeting or FRG meeting, this is acceptable as you are not providing individual support in a private residence.

Accidents or Injuries: Be careful and safe during rotations. If you do have an accident or injury, inform your MFLC Liaison immediately.

The Point of Contact (POC): Take direction from the POC and do not act as the expert. Keep in mind the scope and limitations of services. When you are approached by the POC with program requests or concerns, those issues need to be directed back to your MFLC Liaison. Remember you are not bigger than the program. This is an OSD program, not an MHNGS program. You augment existing services and prioritize needs with the POC for your assignment location.
Section 5: Policies, Procedures & Program Scope of Work

All Materials Must Be Reviewed by DoD for Approval:
We welcome and encourage you to create new presentations for your use as an MFLC. When you create a new presentation, please send it to your MFLC Liaison. OSD has the option to not approve based on content, scope of services or if they feel that there are existing presentations that may already meet the need.

DoD Prohibits Gifts:
Offering of gifts to government employees is forbidden under law and DoD policy.

DoD Contractors Avoid Politics:
It is common custom and practice among DoD contractors to avoid involvement in any base politics or other political discussions so that professional distance and demeanor may be maintained.

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It is common custom and practice among DoD contractors to avoid involvement in any base politics or other political discussions so that professional distance and demeanor may be maintained.

Press Contacts by DoD Only:
DoD contractual provisions prohibit publicity of any kind related to the MFLC services and program to protect the safety of the military and its service members and their families. This prohibition includes the military press on base, as well.

Base Clearance for Counselor Family Members Not Available:
As a rule, base entry clearance is not available for contractor family members unless expressly permitted and approved by the installation POC. Family members should not be attending any work related events that the MFLC is tasked to support

Additional Important Guidelines and Procedure Information:
For your convenience, existing presentations are available for you to use at your discretion or POC request through the MHNGS website. You have discretion in determining how to present these presentations, the content to use in the presentations, and the sequence of the presentations based on the make-up of the audience and the particular questions posed by the audience.

- Under DoD security protocols, personal thumb drives and photography is not allowed on installations
- Base-specific traffic regulations may be in force
- Base-specific rules and regulations apply to contractors as well as military personnel.
- These guidelines and procedures, as well as others, can be found in the general guidelines and procedures section of the Provider Guidelines.

Contract and protocols prohibit keeping written records other than Activity Forms and Transition Reports
Transition Reports:
Transition Reports provide a snapshot of what took place during your rotation and should include vignettes of experiences on how you made an impact. These stories are important to share and are often used to show DoD examples of the program's impact.

The transition report includes:

- contact information
- upcoming events
- important information about your rotation that will assist new counselors going to the installation
- At the end of each rotation, you will be asked to provide a transition report to your MFLC Liaison.
  **These reports should not go to the POC.**
- You will need to provide the transition report at least 3 to 4 days before the end of your rotation.
- A template will be provided to you by your MFLC Liaison.

Conduct and Professionalism:
The MFLC IC Contract requires that certain policies of the Prime Contractor be adhered to, primarily related to workplace conduct under laws that prohibit hostile work environments and harassment. This module describes certain of these policies.

Unwelcomed Conduct or Hostile Work Environment:
Among the types of unwelcomed conduct prohibited by this policy are epithets, slurs, negative stereotyping, intimidating acts, and the circulation or posting of written or graphic materials that show hostility toward individuals because of their protected status. This policy forbids harassment based on protected characteristics regardless of whether it rises to the level of legal violation. Even where the conduct is not sufficiently severe or pervasive to constitute actionable harassment, the Company will not tolerate such conduct in the workplace.

Sexual Harassment:
"Sexual Harassment" is a problem that deserves special mention. Harassing conduct based on gender often is sexual in nature but sometimes is not. This policy forbids harassment based on gender regardless of whether the offensive conduct is sexual in nature. Any hostile conduct based on gender is also forbidden by this policy regardless of whether the individual engaged in harassment and the individual being harassed are of the same or are of different genders.

Reporting Misconduct:
If you feel that another individual is not conducting him/herself in a professional manner or is stepping "out of scope," please report this to your MFLC Liaison and let him/her address this.
In Scope and Out of Scope: As an MFLC, it is important that you perform services only within the scope of work as defined by the DoD contract.

What is “In Scope”? 

- Adjustment to situational stressor(s) - for instance, a Service Member adjusting to a spouse after being gone on deployment
- Uncomplicated relationship problems - like a couple having poor communication issues.
- Skills training - this can include values clarification, decision making, or assistance determining priorities
- Work related issues - such as a Service Member having trouble with a coworker and needing help on how to solve the problem
- Uncomplicated grief - like normal periods of sadness after a loss
- Stress management skills - for example exercising, eating right, or even working out how to express opinions with people in a healthy way
- Training for parents - for example, help with how to verbalize feelings appropriately, for both parents and children

What is Out of Scope? 

As an MFLC, you help address and support V-code issues. Axis I and II issues fall outside of the scope of this program. One of the reasons you were hired is because you have the expertise to recognize situations which fall outside of the program's scope of service. Whenever an issue is out of scope, there is often another appropriate resource. In fact, within the military community, there are many resources available, and often, MFLCs can facilitate a warm handoff to one of these resources as appropriate.

Out of Scope Examples:

- Long-term mental health issues
- PTSD or other severe trauma symptoms
- Personality disorders or long standing adjustment problems
- Repeated use of dysfunctional coping mechanisms
- Multiple issues or family therapy in which the number of individuals & problems appear inappropriate for short-term work
- Treatment for mental health or substance abuse issues

What is a Warm Handoff?

A Warm Handoff occurs when an MFLC facilitates a referral for a client. This helps the client by NOT making them repeat the story or event, thus easing the request for assistance.

In Warm Handoff situation, you would:

- Offer assistance in coordinating an appointment with a referral resource or
- Make a telephonic or face-to-face introduction to a referral resource.
Note: Warm handoffs can be completed to other MFLC resources when clients' issues still fall within the scope of the program.

What does "In the System" mean?
Program protocol prohibits you from providing services to those who are defined as being "In the System."

Clients who are "In the System" are defined as individuals who are actively engaged in services from military programs. These clients are considered "off-limits", and are ineligible for MFLC services. You must direct these individuals to seek services from the military agency in which they are involved.

Additionally, if the client is involved with a mental health or legal agency outside of the military system, contact your MFLC Liaison to determine whether or not you should continue to see the individual.

What Military/Civilian Agencies are "In the System?"
- Social Work Services
- Behavioral Health Clinic
- Mental Health Clinic
- Family Advocacy Program
- Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC)
- Chaplain
- Military Police (MP)
- Judge Advocate General (JAG) or the Command

Key Points to Remember about Individuals "In the System"
There are several situations that may cause an individual to be considered "In the System." It is for this reason that potential clients be advised of the program parameters prior to any session.

1. If a person has an appointment with a Military Agency, you can see the individual until the first appointment takes place. Once the appointment takes place, the individual is "In the System" and off-limits. You must also note that in order to see the individual, you must stay within the scope of work and not provide any services that are not within the program parameters.
2. "In the System" would also include having a therapeutic relationship with a community resource, not just military agencies.
3. Furthermore, if a client is involved in any investigation being conducted by the Military Police (MPs), Judge Advocate General (JAG) or the Command, this individual is also "In the System" and off-limits.
4. Lastly, individuals are considered "In the System" when they are actively seeking assistance from the Chaplain. However, you may see these individuals if they are referred by the Chaplain and they are not being seen for long term or mental health issues.
Section 6: Program Parameters under MFLC II contract

The MFLC program is an “off the record” program. No administrative or clinical records are kept. MFLC services are private and kept confidential to encourage participation.

However, certain situations may arise when the client’s privacy is no longer protected. For this reason, getting informed consent is crucial. Informed consent makes the client aware of the program’s parameters and the program’s limits to confidentiality. Obtaining informed consent in every case is both a legal and a contractual requirement under the MFLC program. It also has the practical effect of informing the client of the limits of confidentiality and the scope of services.

Confidentiality and Informed Consent:
The DoD’s informed consent script reviews the program's parameters and limits to confidentiality - DTW, individuals “in the system,” and restricted reporting.

As Part of confidentiality laws, a counselor cannot confirm or deny whether a client kept or made an appointment. This is confidential information, even to the command and the POC.

Limits of Confidentiality Statement:
At the end of each session that meets the age requirements and time in minutes, it will be necessary for you to read the OSD approved “Limits of Confidentiality Statement” (LOC).

Think of the LOC as bookends. Informed consent is in the beginning of the session and the LOC at the close of the session.

OSD Approved Limits of Confidentiality Statement:
Information you provide to me or other counselors will be kept confidential, except to meet legal obligations or to prevent harm to self or others. Legal obligations include requirements of law and DoD or military regulations. Harm to self or others includes suicidal thought or intent, a desire to harm oneself, domestic violence, child abuse or neglect, violence against any person, and any present or future illegal activity.

You will read the LOC Statement when a session is with:

1. A child 13-18 years of age and the session is longer than 20 minutes.
2. An adult 19 years of age or older and the session is longer than 30 minutes

Confidentiality and Duty to Warn (DTW)
Confidentiality is of the utmost importance within the MFLC Program. However, there are certain issues which fall outside of program parameters and require actions be taken due to the mandates of laws or military regulations. Therefore, the law and the DoD contract require that, prior to providing services, clients are clearly advised of program parameters. This is done by reviewing the informed consent disclosure with potential clients.
What is Duty to Warn?
The law and the DoD contract require that, in situations where an MFLC determines in his/her professional judgment (in accord with applicable laws and military protocols) that a client poses a threat to himself/herself or to another individual, an MFLC counselor has a “Duty to Warn” (i.e. to inform) Third Parties or Authorities.

Duty to Warn Situations
The DoD has implemented protocols surrounding DTW which are pivotal to supporting at-risk clients within the MFLC program.

Per these protocols, MFLC scope of services under the DoD contract do not permit counseling or continued MFLC services for clients who are at-risk for self-harm, danger to others, violence against another person or where there is any indication of any present or future illegal activity, child abuse, or domestic violence.

Duty to Warn incidents must be reported in all programs
If you have any questions about the application of the Duty to Warn protocols, check with your MFLC Liaison.

Who Must Be Notified?
Per DoD DTW protocols, all DTW situations must be reported to your MFLC Liaison immediately.

An Important Note About DTW Criteria
Each branch of service has different criteria for duty to warn reporting and MFLC’s must adhere to those guidelines when at an installation. Consequently, it is important to confirm DTW protocol with the POC at each assignment location.

DTW Resource
The Duty to Warn Guidance is available via the MHNGS website. The guide provides you with detailed information on DTW protocol. Additionally, there is a DTW Guidance Module on the LMS.

If you are unclear on DTW procedures, speak with your MFLC Liaison.

Restricted Reporting
Restricted reporting allows an eligible victim of sexual assault or domestic violence to confidentially disclose the details of the assault and receive medical treatment and counseling, without triggering a military investigation or command notification.

Essentially, a victim has the option of:

1. Reporting an incident of domestic violence without initiating the investigative process (making a restricted report).
2. Notification to the victim’s or alleged offender’s commander (not making restricted report).
Your Role in Restricted Reporting

**Restricted Reporting and Informed Consent:**

As an MFLC, you are NOT a restricted reporter and clients must be informed of this through gaining informed consent. In order for the client to fall under the military's restricted reporting policy, it is essential and required for you to read the information provided in informed consent scripts before the client discloses any protected or privileged information. Once you have referred the individual to the appropriate Restricted Reporter, you cannot have any further discussion or contact with the individual regarding the issue.

**Use of Restricted Reporting:**

For a report to be restricted, the client can only report the incident to a Restricted Reporter. If domestic violence and/or sexual assault is disclosed to other individuals than those noted, it may result in command notification and a law enforcement investigation.

A Service Member, adult family member, intimate partner or adult dependent children can use Restricted Reporting for domestic violence or sexual assault.

Make sure all clients understand you are not a restricted reporter.

**Restricted Reporters are:**

- **Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARC)**
- **Victim Advocates (VA)**
- **Family Advocacy Program Offices**
- **Medical Professionals**

**Quality Oversight of Adverse Incidents**

Counselors are required to immediately notify their Liaison of any adverse incident. Adverse incidents include a range of events and situations that may cause harm or injury to a participant or reflect negatively on the MFLC Program through media attention, these include but are not limited to the following:

- Suicide of a service member or their family
- Homicide by a service member or their family
- Serious harm or injury to a service member or their family
- Any other event or situation that may reflect negatively on the MFLC Program

MFLC Program management is required to notify the MFLC Program office within 24 hours of any adverse incident where an MFLC counselor provided services to the participant, so please notify your Liaison immediately if you become aware of such an incident. A quality review of the services provided is then completed by our quality office.

**Working with Children**

**The Line of Sight Rule**
When an MFLC counselor is working with children or adolescents, DoD’s “Line of Sight Rule” applies.

This means MFLC counselors are never to meet alone with a child or group of children without being in the line of sight of the child's parent(s), the military or agency POC, or the POC’s designee.

**Tips for Working with Children and Schools**

To avoid violating the line of sight rule, never work alone with a child or group of children, and always make sure a military or agency POC or their designee is present.

- Note that, non-DoDEA MFLCs do not work with children in school settings. Non-DoDEA MFLCs may meet children offsite at CYS programs, or at the MFLC office. Line of Sight rules apply in this situation as well.
- There should always be a military or agency POC or their designee present with children and in charge.

The MFLC Liaison Guidelines provide detailed information regarding working with children. If you have any questions contact your MFLC Liaison.

**Section 7: Program Administration**

**The Importance of Activity Forms:**

Forms are located on MHNGS.com website. Please create a username and password on the site in order to submit your forms.

There are guidelines defined by OSD. Please check with your MFLC Liaison to find out OSD guidelines for form submissions based on the program for which you are currently performing services.
Keep in mind, if you attend an event in the evening and enter the forms the following day, please reflect the actual date the event took place. Activity Forms are not intended to be used to record or report upon the substance of the confidential services provided or recommendations made to clients. Activity Forms are also not intended to be used to track your performance or control the manner in which you provide your services.

Please refer to the Activity Form Guidance for more information on using Activity Forms. Should you have any questions regarding Activity Forms, please feel free to contact your MFLC Liaison.

For information on invoicing for the services you deliver under your MFLC contract, consult the Invoicing Guidance Module

Program Administration:
For information on invoicing for the services you deliver under your MFLC contract, consult the Invoicing Guidance Module
Section 8 Knowledge Check:

1. Because the work is guided by the OSD requirements for the MFLC II contract, the way that OSD ensures that we are current on the protocols is to have everyone review this information every 12 months.

   a) True
   
   b) False

   The correct response is: True

   OSD requires that contractors under the MFLC II Contract review this information annually. OSD intends that you keep up to date with any requirements, protocols or policy changes in a consistent manner at least once a year.

2. Because the MFLC program is designed to be a confidential independent service to help service members and their families, the MFLC program is designed to replace other military systems as they are not inter-related.

   a) True
   
   b) False

   The correct response is: False

   OSD does not want the MFLC program to be seen as a replacement service for any of the other military resources and systems to assist the service members and their families. It is truly meant as an adjunct to existing services and to assist with military life-style concerns that are short-term, non-medical issues that can be handled by solution-focused techniques. The MFLC program is not meant to replace any system but to work hand in hand to provide the best support to all service members and their families.

3. It is okay under the contract to offer gifts to government employee.

   a) True
   
   b) False

   The correct response is: False

   OSD Ethic rules restrict the types of gifts, if any, that can be offered to government employees or others on the installation. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to talk to your MFLC Liaison.
4. As an adjunct to military resources, it is okay to support someone that is considered “in-the-system.”

a) True
b) False

The correct response is: False

The government contract is very clear that MFLCs are not contracted to support an individual that is currently “in-the-system”. This is to prevent any confusion with an individual guided by the military support systems. If you find out that someone is in the system (JAG, BH, FAP, Chaplain, SARC or under Command investigation) please refer them back to that support system. The OSD expects that you help them with a warm hand-off back to that system if they have concerns, but not to continue to support someone that is already in an identified military system.

5. You can cover the approved DoD informed consent anytime during the session, however, it is usually done at the end of the session.

a) True
b) False

The correct response is: False

DoD designed the informed consent script to be covered with all individuals prior to any lengthy discussion. This will assist the individual to understand the scope of the program and what can and cannot be discussed under the DoD rules of confidentiality. It is important for individuals to understand their rights regarding restricted reporting or what an MFLC is obligated under DoD regulations to report under a Duty to Warn situation. Much like acknowledging the HIPPA statement each time someone seeks medical care, an individual has the right to understand how privacy will be respected at the point of service.

6. You are credentialed as an Independent Contractor because you have the expertise to recognize issues that would classify under the Axis I and II DSMV-IV codes.

a) True
b) False

The correct response is: True

The reason you were contracted and credentialed is because with your professional background and training, you have the expertise to recognize issues that would classify under the Axis I and Axis II DSMV-IV codes. Because those concerns fall outside of the scope of work under the MFLC II Contract (which covers only life issues falling under DSM V codes), OSD wanted professionals that could recognize things that fall within and outside the purview of the program.