

## Encouraging Participation

A common source of frustration and disappointment for a FRG leader is the lack of participation by family members. If this becomes a problem for you, consider these questions:

Does the event offer something inviting?

- Did they know about the event in time?
- Did they have transportation?
- Do they know someone to come with?
- Will they know someone when they get there?
- Are they made to feel welcome when they arrive?
- Are the functions being held too often? Often enough?
- Does the activity planned reflect their interests and needs?
- Is 'getting together' more important than the style in which it is done?
- Have you let them know they are missed when they don't attend?
- Do you involve spouses in all aspects of the group?

Reasons for non-participation defy simple explanation with many factors contributing to it. Many spouses are employed outside the home and do not have much time to spend away from home and family. In some cases, young spouses do not have the experience or sense of responsibility that usually motivates a more experienced spouse to get involved. Some Soldiers do not encourage their spouse's involvement in activities. Many spouses will tell you they had a bad experience with their last FRG.

Personal, thank you notes (not e-mail) are a wonderful way to say thank you. An E-mail thank you is better than nothing. At least it is feedback. But the short, very specific thank you note says volumes. At the California State Railroad Museum each paid supervisor has 200 thank you cards at the beginning of the year and they must have used them all (thanking volunteers) by the end of the year. No wonder they have waiting lists for volunteers.

Solutions to the problem of non-participation are equally difficult to determine, but do not be discouraged. Take a positive approach and remember the following:

- As the FRG Leader, you can only encourage, you cannot require participation.
- Keep the lines of communication open and the hand of friendship extended.
- Offer practical activities.
- All you can do is open the door and offer opportunities. As long as opportunities to participate are available, you have not failed.
- Concentrate your energy on the spouses willing to get involved.
- Present a positive image and encourage participation.
- Realistically define "success" for your group.
- Survey family members to determine needs, interest, and frequency of meeting
- Make meetings brief and enjoyable.
- Communicate with newcomers soon after their arrival to the unit. Offer transportation to the first meeting.
- Whenever possible, incorporate the group's ideas to make changes. When the ideas are theirs, success is more probable.
- Provide childcare and / or kids activities when possible.
- Do not feed rumors. Although not possible to eliminate rumors, they can be curtailed.
- Ensure you provide timely and accurate information.