Mothering Alone, Episode 55

In this episode April Perry talks to Kristine Schellhaas, the founder of USMC Life, about making life easier for single parents and military families, as well as ways to develop a mothering community.

Kristine met her marine husband and envisioned a fabulous lifestyle with fancy ball gowns, but instead found herself living in the desert, often alone, with little kids. She had black widows in her garage and coyotes in her yard. A year late she talked with some other moms and found out that there was a swimming pool with a shallow area just fifteen minutes away from her house. She wondered, “Why didn’t I know about this a year ago?” This news prompted her to start writing and connecting with others.

Kristine began USMC Life to inspire, connect, and educate Marine families. It started as a base guide for issues relevant to a base community, such as school districts and living near or on base. It often recognizes Marines, current and veteran, on the website and shows how family life was then and now.

Sometimes parenting can fall to one person whether a parent is in the military, has a busy work schedule, or an unavailable spouse. If both parents are in the military it can be very difficult. The military tries to keep bases nearby, but that’s not always the case. You can be deployed after a baby is a year old. It offers a very demanding and difficult schedule. When a military spouse is home it doesn’t always mean he’s present. Sometimes there are training exercises which produce a hectic schedule and make it difficult to establish a routine with that spouse.

We want our kids to know that mom has got this. Sometimes we feel like ducks on water, calm and collected above water but furiously paddling beneath.

Sometimes women feel alone regardless of their circumstances. To establish that sense of community, consider joining a group or network. Kristine joined MOPS (Moms of Preschoolers).

How mothers can take their talents and make things better for themselves and for the people around them? What are some tips for making connections?

- Building on the social network allows avenues of communication to open. Join or create a Facebook page for your neighborhood or street. This is a connection to start the conversation and set a time for a playdate or park date.
- Printed flyers can be distributed around the neighborhood. Tape a flyer to the park slide or go door to door. These groups are not only for connections but also for safety, like neighborhood watch.
- If it's difficult, create a calendar with swim days, reading times, date nights, field trips: distribute around and if you find a moment or an interest join up with those people.
- Trade babysitting. Your spouse stays with your own kids and you go over to watch other kids (while they sleep). Trade monthly, giving parents the opportunity to have that time together. Work it out during the day too.
- You can also try a home preschool group which swaps once a week for a few hours.
- Start with your street. You can unconnect if you don't like it. (Social predators are a threat but you can look them up online) and be careful about having a safe meeting place.
- If someone just had a new baby or surgery or was sick and needs a meal, sign up on a digital calendar, and bring them a meal. A lot of people are willing to help and would love the opportunity to help if given the chance.

- Try something once a month for six months and put it on the calendar and hold yourself accountable. There is nothing wrong with something and deciding it's not for you. Date your dreams. If you don't like them, then dump them.

April and Kristine talked about the night a dog was lost and neighbors got involved. Fortunately, it ended well. A son proclaimed it was the best night of his life. There's something special that can happen when people have open doors and feel that sense of community.

Most of us live in communities, so finding some way to reach out and connect is vital and easier than we think. Open up the dialogue, get people talking and sharing because there are too many mothers sitting at home stressed and depressed.

Mission Sleep is an organization that began to help mothers (and fathers) who are new parents and have a spouse deployed. Fully trained and certified support comes so single parents can get a night of sleep or a nap.

We have our friends and have connections but need to open up opportunities to make new ones. Mothers need to get together face to face sometimes.

Ask yourself: What can I do today to reach outside my comfort zone and make a new friend? There are a lot of groups (meetup.com) to find connections. Get out there and just do it. Acknowledge the little edge of scary and know that there are so many women who would love to meet up.

What can I do to help military (or single parent) families?

- Understand that there are needs out there. Social media can create an image of everything looking fine when sometimes it isn't.
- Sometimes we get discouraged by not knowing where to start. Try different avenues and don't give up. Look at your life creatively and see who around you might need help. Use your talents and skills.
- If you live near a base, check with local churches or put up fliers offering to put up Christmas lights or mow the lawn, shovel snow, any help at all. Also, you could go to local VA hospital and make friends.

You are not alone. Don’t give up. It can be a little scary to create your support networks at first, but you will find relief.