



COMMUNITIES SUPPORT MILITARY FAMILIES

Facilitator Guide

INTRODUCTION

Message to the Facilitator

Whether you are a family service agency professional or a community resident stepping forward to take leadership of this program, you are doing something hugely important in reaching out to military families in your midst. Recent research studies tell us that the partnerships formed by local helping agencies and caring residents create a force for family support that is stronger than any of us can do on our own. We know that agencies do their part in forming friendly networks, providing resources and guidance, and checking to find out the progress in reaching out. However, the most powerful help of all for strengthening family resiliency (that ability to bounce back from bad situations) is the actual bond of friendship, followed up with action. Caring actions that neighbors do for each other let people know they are valued, not forgotten. Sometimes, those actions help service members or family members regain their mental health. When many friendly networks operate in a community, they not only strengthen the people in them, but they also work to form a stronger, healthier community. Healthy communities with caring people are the foundation for a vibrant nation.



This facilitator guide describes the situation faced by many of our neighbors who are military families with service members in the National Guard or Reserve. We'll learn about the structure and culture of the U.S. Armed Forces, the seven stages of the emotional cycle of deployment, and ways to reach out in friendly ways to military families.

Description and Purpose

Active duty military service members usually live on or near their bases. They and their families can find support services there. In contrast, National Guard or Reserve members and their families live in all of our communities. They are our neighbors, and in most respects they are just like us. They work in regular jobs, and their children attend community schools or are home schooled. However, during declared states of emergency and natural disasters the governor can activate the National Guard, and during times of national crisis, National Guard and Reserve members can be called to federal active duty by the president as commander-in-chief. In military terms, their status is changed from reserve to active duty to lend assistance to the full-time active duty force. The announcement of the deployment may be sudden or expected. In each family, the deployed member's departure leaves a large hole in the heart and in the family's

daily habits, tasks, and activities. Neighbors may not realize that their friends have gone to serve in the military. The families left behind often feel like nobody around them knows or cares what they are going through.

Children of deployed members may have a hard time getting used to their father or mother being gone. They must cope with the absence as best they can. They usually feel a sense of loss. They may also feel sad, depressed, or angry. The remaining spouse or other family may wonder how they are going to manage the family's finances or get children to their sports practices or music lessons. They may not know how to repair something that breaks. They may not be able to help kids with homework. Dad or mom, who is now deployed, always did those things. Research shows that families usually adapt emotionally to the absence of the family member as time goes on. Their need for specific help continues, however. Not all deployments are combat related. However, if deployed family members have been exposed to combat, other problems affecting family well-being may appear when they return. They very often have nightmares. They may overreact to sudden noises or family conflicts. They may have serious physical injuries. Many military families need ongoing support to help them get back to normal, peaceful living.

Caring neighbors and community groups can make a huge, positive difference in the lives of families of deployed and returned service members. First, we must become aware of such families in our midst. Second, we can find out what their needs and strengths are. Third, we can decide how we can take action separately and together with our community connections, to fill the gaps in their lives while their loved ones are gone or recovering from the wounds of war.

Program Components

Communities Support Military Families includes the following:

- Eight-page publication containing the essential content for the program. It also includes two activities that group members may implement individually or as a group. The first activity guides participants in defining elements of their own culture and comparing them to the military culture. The second activity is “My Action Plan to Support Military Families,” a chart in which individuals or community groups can write the specific activities they implemented, the time frame of the activities, military family members involved each time, and the outcomes.
- Facilitator guide including a teaching outline, instructions for the two activities listed in the publication plus two more suggested activities to be implemented in a group setting, an evaluation tool, and a PowerPoint® presentation with extensive facilitator notes.
- Additional resources listed under the heading “Recommended Materials for Participants.”

TEACHING OUTLINE

Program Goal

The goal of this program is to encourage community members to be good neighbors in support of the military families in their midst.

Learning Objectives

- Build participants’ knowledge of the structure and mission of the branches of the military
- Become aware of the presence and needs of military families in participants’ communities
- Reach out with empathy to meet specific needs of military families known to participants
- Assist the community to meet the needs of military families in practical and appropriate ways

Audiences

This program is planned for delivery to community groups. It is intended for one session of about 30 minutes to one hour or more in length, depending upon the interest levels of the participants.

Preparing for the Program

- Read through *Communities Support Military Families* publication and facilitator guide.
- Read and be familiar with the PowerPoint® presentation, including the teaching notes.
- Read as many of the accompanying resources as possible in order to gain knowledge and understanding of the topic.
- Decide on a meeting room and secure it with a reservation if necessary.
- Make copies of the publication and handouts for all participants (refer to list of participants’ materials below).

- If desired, use the Appendix as an example for creating a page on your state’s current military statistics to hand out as you discuss the national statistics using the PowerPoint presentation.
- Assemble teaching props (refer to list of facilitator supplies and equipment below).
- Set up the room where the program will be presented.
- Purchase door prizes (optional).

Recommended Supplies and Equipment for the Facilitator

- *Communities Support Military Families* publication
- PowerPoint® presentation with teaching notes
- Projection unit, laptop computer, and projection screen, available from the county Extension office or public library. Locate a heavy-duty extension cord if needed.
- Sign-in sheet
- Copies of handouts listed below in the recommended supplies for participants, enough for everyone
- Flip pad mounted on an easel and felt tip markers, if applicable to local clubs meeting in homes

Recommended Materials for Participants

- “Communities Support Military Families” publication, one for each participant
- Pencils or pens, one for each participant
- PowerPoint presentation printed out as a handout, six to a page, double-sided (optional)

- Your state's current military statistics
- Activity handout "What the Kids Say...", one for each participant
- Activity handout "The Myth of the Perfect Homecoming," one for each participant
- Tough Topics two-page handout "Military Kids, Homecoming and Reunion" (yellow), one for each participant
- Tough Topics two-page handout "Helping Kids Cope with Stress" (green), one for each participant
- Handout "Ways to Support Military Families," one for each participant
- Handout "Community Connections for Military Families," one for each participant
- Hero Pack brochure, one for each participant, printed in color, if possible
- Activity handout "My Action Plan to Support Military Families" chart, one for each participant (optional)
- End-of-Session evaluation, one for each participant

Teaching the Program

This outline is designed to be a general guide. Feel free to use any or all of the handouts and implement any or all of the activities for your particular situation.

1. Introduce yourself and have participants introduce themselves.
2. **Begin the PowerPoint® presentation.** Follow teaching notes included with the presentation. On slides where discussion is invited, encourage participants to come up with their own ideas first. Bring out the suggestions in the notes and readings if participants do not mention them. Compliment the participants on their useful ideas that add to the presentation.
3. **Handout:** Hand out the page of your state's military statistics during the section on the U.S. Armed Forces, if desired, and compare them to the national ones.
4. **Activity: Compare your culture (no handout).** On slides 41 through 45 relating to military culture compared to civilian culture, encourage group members' thoughtful consideration of differences and similarities. Such discussion will likely help them empathize with military family members' attitudes and feelings. Perhaps some of them have experience with the military culture of past generations, such as World War II, the Korean or Vietnam Wars, or the Gulf War. It may be worthwhile to compare the current wartime culture with those of the past, without belaboring the issue.
5. **Activity: What the Kids Say...** While showing slide 47, give group the handout "What the Kids Say..." Hand out pencil or pens. Suggest that while "reading between the lines" of the children's comments, participants write on the sheet under "your comments" the feelings and needs they think the youth are expressing and brainstorm how they themselves or their community could support the youngsters and their families. Then continue with the slides that follow, for continued insights.
6. **Activity: The Myth of the Perfect Homecoming.** While showing slide 59, give the group members the True-False Quiz "The Myth of the Perfect Homecoming." Encourage them to complete the quiz. Emphasize that there are no scores tabulated or judgments handed down; this quiz is just to gain insight. Then discuss participants' responses with slide 60.
7. **Handout: "Military Kids, Homecoming and Reunion."** While showing slide 60, hand out the yellow Tough Topics sheet "Military Kids, Homecoming and Reunion." Briefly list the characteristics of the stages. Discuss if participants wish to do so.
8. **Handout: "Helping Kids Cope with Stress."** While showing slide 64, hand out the green Tough Topics sheet "Helping Kids Cope with Stress." Read the list of behaviors out loud or ask another group member to do so. Use the notes below the slide to discuss kids' stress responses and how adults such as parents, grandparents, teachers, or child caregivers can meet children and teens where they are, rather than viewing their behaviors judgmentally.
9. **Handout: "Ways to Support Military Families."** After completing the PowerPoint presentation, focus on ways that your group and individual members might be able to support military families with specific activities. Refer to the publication, "Communities Support Military Families," pages 4 and 5. Discuss the ways listed there to be of assistance. Emphasize that families do not want to be singled out and stigmatized as if they were charity cases, so efforts should be implemented in a respectful, neighborly, easy-going fashion. This is the time to pass out the handout "Ways to Support Military Families." It contains additional suggestions.

10. **Handout: “Community Connections for Military Families.”** Explain that military families may be unfamiliar with resources in the communities they live in, due to a recent move there. They may have lived there for a while, but now that they are without the deployed family member, they find themselves in need of assistance and unaware of community resources. Participants may want to put this page in the hands of military families, or give it to community agencies to hand out to families who could use it.
11. **Handout: OMK Hero Pack Brochure.** The group might like to implement an Operation: Military Kids Hero Pack project. Hero Packs serve as a tangible expression of support for military families from their communities and OMK partners. Hand out the Hero Pack brochure. If your group is interested in implementing a Hero Pack project, check with the program coordinator at your state’s OMK office. If your group does not want to assemble the packs, they could perhaps organize a drive to collect toys to give to the OMK office to put into the packs. Information on implementing the Hero Pack project is online at <http://www.4hmilitarypartnerships.org/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabid=130>.
12. **Activity: My Action Plan to Support Military Families.** Suggest that members write down ideas for supporting military families on their own Action Plan. The group might like to take on a project also. The group or individual members may use the separate handout chart or the one in the publication.
13. **Handout: End-of-Session Evaluation.** When everyone has had a chance to think about actions they might take, ask participants to complete the End-of-Session Evaluation. Collect the evaluation sheets when participants have completed them. Tally the scores or give the completed sheets to the designated state Extension specialist. If desired, follow up on or two months later to find out the results of participants’ intentions to implement their plans.
14. **Wrap up the session and thank everyone for coming.** Give away door prizes (optional).

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What the Kids Say...

Instructions: “Read between the lines.” Write in the comment spaces the feelings and needs you think the youth are expressing, and then ways you or your community could help support youth and their families in response to the youngsters’ thoughts.

1. “I didn’t think that...I just kind of blew it [the deployment] off and didn’t really know it was going to be that long. And then when it started happening, started sinking in, it was hard.”

Your comment:

2. “...I know my dad understands how I feel because before he left, like I don’t know, a couple of days before it, he sat down with us and talked with us, you know.... just, you know, he loves us and he’ll try and get back as soon as he can...”

Your comment:

3. “I was angry at everybody. I’m like a big daddy’s girl, so I was really sad he was going away. And I was scared something bad might happen to him.

Your comment:



4. "The worst time is when the phone rings because you don't know who is calling. They could be calling, telling you that he got shot or something."

Your comment:

5. "You don't get everything you want when they are gone. When your dad's not home you don't get to go fishing, go paintballing, go skiing, waterskiing, water tubing, playing sharks and stuff."

Your comment:



6. "Because it's hard on the parent that is left and gives them lots of stress because they know their husband isn't home with them and they have to take care of their kids without any help."

Your comment:

7. "I wasn't really scared when he left but, like a month ago he said he was in a four-hour shooting thing, and that he ended up killing the other guys and stuff. And it really messed with him. He's upset and stuff. And that really got me kind of scared and thinking."

Your comment:



8. "...when my dad's not there, I'm not, you know, the child any more. I have to like kind of almost fill in for the other parent because the only thing my mom really cares about is that I'm ready to babysit."

Your comment:

9. "He knows everything else [about home repairs], like I'm going to pick out this wrench and fix this window, or you know, we have to fix the TV or whatever. And so, you know, we don't know what to do. We have to call in experts, you know, business, whatever and you kind of get sad because he's gone."

Your comment:

10. "At first when my dad first got deployed, there was a lot of support as in like people calling, people giving us, you know, food and stuff. But then as time went on, it just kind of died down and nobody really cared that he was deployed."

Your comment:



11. "Well I made new friends. I've met new friends talking about the soldiers and stuff because at our school we have a military kids club."

Your comment:

12. "My neighbor, he and my dad are real close and sometimes my neighbor will come and help me mow the lawn."

Your comment:

13. "One or two people from the church took us out and we went out like last time and saw a movie. And mom got to go do stuff by herself."

Your comment:

14. "I don't want to talk about it 24/7. I want to go out, have fun, get together, eat, you know? I don't want to just talk about it, you know, deployment and stuff because there's other things happening in our lives, you know."

Your comment:

15. "I think it would be good if you were talking to someone that's gone through the same thing and they know how it feels. And so you can basically let out what you feel, but they person will understand what you're talking about because they already know how it feels."

Your comment:

16. "More activities... just something... I'm going to have to say a bus that would come around and get me to go some places because if my mom's at work, I don't have anything to do..."

Your comment:

17. "Like when my dad got back, it was kind of hard because he had been away from the family for so long and we were all able just to depend on mom so it was kind of hard letting him back into the family. And then also the experiences he got over there were all like fighting and stuff. Sometimes you would hear him shouting in his sleep."

Your comment:



18. "And that's like it was a lot harder for us too, you know, to get into the routine of having it back than it was for him to leave...Because there were responsibilities taken up by each of us and then when dad came home, we didn't have to have those responsibilities anymore but we were used to them and so that caused a change also. And so it's just like of like, okay, what do we do now? We can't go back to being who we were because we're not that anymore. We have to move forward, but it's also something you have to do as a whole family. "

Your comment:

Adapted from Huebner, A. & Mancini, J. (2005). *Adjustments among adolescents in military families when a parent is deployed*. West Lafayette, IN: Military Family Research Institute, Purdue University.

<http://www.cfs.purdue.edu/mfri/public/publications/reports.aspx>



COMMUNITIES SUPPORT MILITARY FAMILIES

True or False The Myth of the Perfect Homecoming

Mark your answer to each statement by putting a check in the true or false column.

True	False	Statement
		If you love one another, reunions are easy.
		Angry feelings should never accompany reunions.
		The first few days following homecoming are often a mix of relief, happiness, and anxiety.
		It's perfectly natural for communication to be strained at first.
		Children may not feel automatically comfortable with the returning parent.
		It may take some time for the returning service member to adjust.
		If spouses or significant others really do love each other, they will not change during absence.
		Reestablished intimacy will flourish if given time to grow.
		Service members never feel let down or lonely following deployment.
		There is no such thing as a perfect homecoming.



Tough Topics Series Learning and Teaching Support

WELCOME HOME

Military Kids, Homecoming & Reunion

Homecomings and reunions are the last stage in the deployment process and is a time of celebration as well as change. Military family members, particularly kids, experience a wide variety of feelings before, during, and after being reunited. All of these feelings are perfectly healthy and normal given the fact they have been separated for several months and have adapted to life without one another. In fact, there are three stages military families experience as a result of the reunion experience and these are as follows: anticipation, readjustment, and stabilization.

Anticipation:

The weeks and days before homecoming and reunion are filled with excitement, nervousness, tension, and relief. During deployment family members have learned to adjust to the absence of the service member one in day-to-day activities. Reuniting again simultaneously brings both joy and anxiety because daily life as a military family is about to change again.

Readjustment:

As anticipation of the homecoming and reunion fades, and the family is reunited once again, daily roles, responsibilities, and rules are renegotiated. Experts have identified two time periods specific to this sometimes challenging stage:

Honeymoon (Usually until the first serious disagreement)

- ◆ Feelings of euphoria, relief
- ◆ Blur of excitement
- ◆ Catching up and sharing experiences
- ◆ Beginning to readjust to intimacy

Readjustment (Approximately 6-8 weeks)

- ◆ Pressures of daily life intensify
- ◆ Sensitivity to service member ones presence
- ◆ Increased tension as daily relationships confront reality

Stabilization:

The amount of time it takes families to stabilize during homecoming and reunion varies. Many of them encounter only minor difficulties in adjusting to new routines. For others, however, readjustment may be a longer process that requires additional support. Seeking assistance, if needed, is critical to helping all families navigate homecoming and reunion in a healthy and positive manner.

Kids Reactions to Service Member's Return

Ages	Reactions	Techniques to reconnect
Birth to 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cries • Fusses • Pulls away • Clings to other spouse/caregiver • Has problems with elimination • Changes sleeping and eating habits • Does not recognize service member 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold the baby; hug him/her a lot • Bathe and change baby • Feed and play with him/her • Relax and be patient • He/she will warm up in a while
1 to 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shyness • Clinging • Does not recognize service member • Cries • Has temper tantrums • Regresses – no longer toilet trained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't force holding, hugging, kissing • Give them space • Give them time to warm up • Be gentle and fun • Sit, play, and interact at their level
4 to 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates anger • Acts out to get attention; needs proof you're real • Is demanding • Feels guilty for making service member go away • Talks a lot to bring service member up to date 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to them • Accept their feelings • Play with them • Reinforce that they are loved • Find out the new things in their lives (books, TV, preschool) • He/she will warm up in a while
6 to 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feels he/she isn't good enough • Dreads return because of discipline • Boasts about military parent/loved one 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review pictures, schoolwork activities, scrap books • Praise what they have accomplished during absence • Try not to criticize • Get involved in their education
13 to 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is excited • Feels guilty because they don't live up to standards • In concerned about rules and responsibilities • Feels too old or is unwilling to change plans to accommodate parent • Is rebellious 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share what has happened during absence • Listen with undivided attention • Don't be judgmental • Respect privacy and friends • Don't tease about their interests including fashion, music, etc. • Get involved in their education

Tips for Educators

Focus on students and the classroom learning environment – Retain routines and emphasis on the importance of learning while always leaving room to tend to individual student needs.

Provide structure – Maintain predictable schedule with clear behavioral guidelines and consequences to maintain safe and caring classroom. If student is distressed about the family homecoming, find appropriate time for them to share feelings, needs, fears, hopes, and wishes.

Maintain objectivity – Respond in a calm and caring manner to student inquiries and answer questions in simple, direct terms. Regardless of political beliefs, refrain from expressing personal opinions.

Be patient and reduce student workload as needed – Expect temporary slow downs or disruptions in learning when a homecoming and reunion occurs.

Listen – Be approachable, attentive, and sensitive to the unique needs of students coping with homecoming and reunion. Let kids know they can speak individually with you or a school counselor, nurse, psychologist or social worker about their questions and concerns. Take time to acknowledge the circumstances and answer student questions as needed in a factual manner.

Be sensitive to language and cultural needs – Be aware of, knowledgeable about, and sensitive to the language, values, and beliefs of other cultures in order to assist students and their families appropriately. Inquire about school, community, and military resources available to assist kids and their families in coping in healthy ways.

Acknowledge and validate feelings – Help students develop a realistic understanding of homecoming and reunion. Provide reassurance that their feelings of excitement, joy, nervousness, tension, and relief are normal responses and all individuals and their families adjust to the changes involved with reunion at a different pace.

For more information: <http://www.k12.wa.us/OperationMilitaryKids/>

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Information for this article adapted from Deployment and Reunion Guides for Ages 3-6, 7 to 12, and "Army Brat Pack" for Teens by USARPAC Child and Youth Services and Working with Military Children, A Primer for School Personnel by Virginia Joint Military Family Services Board



Tough Topics Series Learning and Teaching Support

Helping Kids Cope with Stress

While some stress in life is normal and even healthy, kids today seem to be confronted with a myriad of experiences that can create tension and make coping with life a challenge. Common examples of these stressors include: lack of basic needs (food, clothing, and shelter), divorce, death, illness, incarceration, foster care placement, family substance abuse, domestic violence, extended separation from a parent or loved one, or physical, sexual, emotional abuse.



- ▶ At the ordinary end of the spectrum are events which occur to most children in our society and for which there are fairly well-defined coping patterns.
- ▶ A short distance along the spectrum are the stresses which occur when children have only one parent in the home or when they live in multiple-parent, multiple dwelling households.
- ▶ Toward the severe end of the spectrum are stresses caused by extended separation of children from their parents or siblings.
- ▶ At the severe end of the spectrum are those stresses that are long lasting and require kids to make major behavioral, emotional, and/or personality adaptations in order to survive.

Signs of Stress

	Behaviors	Reactions	Communications	Interaction
Infants to 5 years	Fussiness; uncharacteristic crying; neediness; generalized fear; heightened arousal and confusion	Helplessness; passivity; avoidance of stress related reminders; exaggerated startle response; regressive symptoms; somatic symptoms; sleep disturbances; nightmares	Cognitive confusion; difficulty talking about stressors; lack of verbalization; trouble identifying feelings; unable to understand events; anxieties about change/loss	Clinging; separation fears; grief related to abandonment by caregivers
6-11 Years	Spacey; distracted; changes in behavior, moody, personality; regressive behavior; aggressive behavior; angry outbursts	Reminders trigger disturbing feelings; responsibility; guilt; safety concerns; preoccupation; obvious anxiety; general fearfulness; somatic symptoms; sleep disturbances; nightmares	Confusion and inadequate understanding of events; magical explanations to fill in gaps of understanding; withdrawn; quiet	Worry and concern for others; separation anxiety; repetitious traumatic play and retelling of events; loss of ability to concentrate; school avoidance; loss of interest in activities
12-18 Years	Self conscious; sadness; depression; stress driven risk-taking and acting out; recklessness; substance use/abuse	Efforts to distance from feelings; wish for revenge and action-oriented responses; life threatening re-enactment; decline in school performance; sleep and eating disturbances	Increased self-focus; social withdrawal; avoidance	Flight into driven activity/involvement with others OR retreat in order to manage inner turmoil; rebellion at home and school; abrupt shift in relationships

Age Specific Strategies to Help Kids Cope with Stress

Infant to 2 ½ Years

Maintain calm atmosphere; keep familiar routines; avoid unnecessary separations; minimize exposure to reminders of stress; expect temporary behavior regression; help give simple names to big feelings; talk briefly and openly about stressful event; provide soothing activities.

2 ½ to 5 Years

Maintain familiar routines; do not introduce new and challenging experiences; avoid nonessential separations; tolerate retelling of stressful events; help name strong feelings during brief conversations; respect fears; expect regressive behavior; protect from re-exposure to stressful events; provide opportunities and props for play; if nightmares, explain they aren't real to help subside.

6-11 Years

Listen and tolerate re-telling of events; respect fears; give time to cope; increase awareness and monitor play; set and enforce limits; permit to try new ideas to deal with fears and feel safe; reassure that all feelings are normal after stressful events.

12-18 Years

Encourage discussions with peers and trusted adults; reassure that strong feelings (guilt, shame, embarrassment, desire for revenge) are normal; provide healthy outlets for emotions; encourage spending time with supportive friends/peers; help find activities that offer opportunities to experience mastery, control, and self-esteem.

Tips for Educators

Educators are often faced with the challenge of supporting kids who are coping with stressful life circumstances. The guidance provided by an educator can make the difference in whether or not kids feel completely overwhelmed by their stressors or are able to develop healthy emotional behavioral and psychological coping skills. The following are helpful strategies to assist educators in supporting kids coping with stress:

Be a role model – Set an example and keep in mind that kids learn from watching the adults in their lives.

Connect with kids – Pay attention to their fears; respect their wish to not talk until ready; help them keep stressors in perspective.

Foster open communication – Speak in terms that are easy to understand; reassure and provide opportunities for them to express their thoughts and concerns in safe ways; answer questions as openly and honestly as possible.

Maintain consistency – Expect and respond to changes in behavior; maintain consistent academic and behavioral expectations.

Foster resilience – Help kids interpret what has happened and make sense of it; help them explore positive ways of coping with fears and anxieties.

Be alert to special needs – Spend extra time with kids if necessary; make referral to school or community counseling for additional support if needed.

Open lines of communication with parents and caregivers – Coordinate information between school and home; provide parents with helpful suggestions and information about available school and community resources.

For more information: <http://www.k12.wa.us/OperationMilitaryKids/>

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Information for this article adapted from *Helping Children Cope with Stress* by Avis Brenner;
Operation: Military Kids Ready, Set, Go! Training Manual, 4-H Army Youth Development Project; and
SAMSHA National Mental Health Center, www.mentalhealth.samsha.gov



COMMUNITIES SUPPORT MILITARY FAMILIES

Ways to Support Military Families

Neighborhoodly attitudes and supportive gestures

Perhaps the most basic and meaningful support for families with members in the military is simply befriending a family in which a member is deployed or soon to be deployed. If you decide to get involved as a friend, be prepared to keep up your friendship during the entire deployment cycle and beyond. Be aware that deployments may last several months to a year or more.

- Try to put yourself in their situation. Do not offer judgment or solutions to their problems.
- Be sensitive about discussing your views on war or the military. The family may want to talk over their issues or they may only want to feel your caring and warmth.
- Send the children birthday and holiday cards as well as giving small gifts, if appropriate.
- Call them to check in now and then.
- Take baked items or other treats to the house.
- Suggest taking the whole family or perhaps just the children on an outing to a place of interest or fun.

- Gift the family with tickets to a performance that they might not otherwise be able to afford.
- Make a point of attending and cheering on the children at sports events, musical performances, appearances in school plays, or dance recitals.

Specific activities that lend a hand

Suggest specific ways that you could support the family once the service member leaves. These suggestions will likely ease the anxiety of the soon-to-be deployed family member, as well as the parent staying home. If the children will be cared for by another relative, you could make your offers of assistance to the caregiver as well as to the parents.

- Offer to assist with routine household and family tasks. You might offer to watch the children once a month, clean the house, bring meals in on certain days, mow the lawn, rake leaves, remove snow, or change the oil on the family's vehicle.

- Send a care package or letter to the deployed military member. The children in the family might like to help in this activity.
- Offer to go on a school field trip in place of the parent, or to go along to be an extra set of hands for the children on an outing such as a trip to the zoo or a visit to a nearby park. Remember that single parents or caregivers need time without kids.

Support when the deployed member returns

When the deployed family member returns, let the military member and family know you appreciate the service and sacrifice they have made.

- Allow the family time to be alone.



- Make sure returning service members are comfortable with any celebration plans.
- As the family readjusts to the returned family member, continue to make regular contact as you feel appropriate.
- Be sensitive to family members' ongoing needs and interests.
- Perhaps the family could benefit from Cooperative Extension resources available at your county office.
- Create personal care packets or care packages for deployed service members or veterans in hospitals and nursing homes.
- Collaborate with Operation Military Kids in your area to make sure all families of military personnel have the opportunity to attend OMK summer camps and receive other services.
- Plan a Military Recognition Day at your county Fair.
- Support the schools that the children of military families attend. The schools may need extra community support and funds to properly work with the children and the families. Family resource and youth services centers may be in need of volunteers to watch for instances of bullying of children whose family members are deployed and move to protect such children and notify administrators.

Additional action suggestions for military family support by community groups and individuals

- Visit your local public library or check online to learn more about the U. S. Military Services.
- Volunteer at a Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) center.
- Invite a speaker to your group meeting who works with a nearby branch of the military services.
- Work with the local family resource center or youth services center to recognize and celebrate children whose family members are deployed (if individual children seem receptive to such recognition).
- Military kids are everyday "Home Front Heroes." Work with OMK to provide items to put in Hero Packs or photo pillowcases for children of deployed National Guard, Reserve, or active duty members in your community. Check with your county Extension agent for family and consumer sciences to find out more about participating in these projects.
- Volunteer with a military family support organization such as American Red Cross or USO, or connect with Veteran Service Organizations within your community.
- You may want to organize family fun nights with a special speaker for the adults. In any case, check in with the families on a regular basis to see what they may need.
- Work to connect school age children with 4-H Clubs, Boy and Girl Scouts, or Boys' & Girls' Clubs, where they may find friends and caring adults.
- Form a community support network to find help for military families with members with disabilities who may need legal assistance but cannot afford it. Some families trying to keep a small business afloat may need practical advice from experienced business owners.

The ideas above and those listed in the publication are merely springboards for other activities you may think of to support military families. Remember that strong families mean strong communities. Each of us can do our part to nurture families and children, not only those associated with the military but all those who need kind neighbors.



COMMUNITIES SUPPORT MILITARY FAMILIES

Community Connections for Military Families

Are you part of a family with a member deployed in the National Guard or Reserves? Are you feeling a bit lonesome or in need of assistance? Getting connected to the community you live in is important for your family's well-being. Community connections provide a circle of support to meet needs, find resources and friends, and stretch your budget dollars. Many of these connections provide volunteer opportunities to make a difference in your community and a positive impact in the lives of others. Here are examples of agencies, organizations, and resources that would welcome your contact:

- **Alanon**—support group for family members of alcoholics
- **Alcoholics Anonymous**—support group for recovery alcoholics
- **American Red Cross**
- **Big Brothers/Big Sisters**
- **Center for Women and Families**—crisis intervention and counseling for violence victims
- **Civic clubs**, such as Kiwanis, Lions, Optimists, Rotary, Ruritans
- **Chamber of Commerce**—often provide welcome packets
- **Communities of faith**, such as churches, synagogues, or mosques
- **Consignment, thrift, or second hand shops**—provide clothing, toys and furniture bargains
- **Cooperative Extension Service**—Programs and resources including 4-H clubs, Extension Homemakers' groups, community educational workshops
- **Employment agencies**
- **Food pantries and food distribution sites**—helps stretch the food dollar
- **Goodwill**—provides clothing, toys and furniture bargains
- **Goodwill**—job readiness skill building
- **Local or District Public Health Department**
- **Hospice**—grief counseling and care for terminally ill patients and their families
- **Housing Authority**
- **Humane Society and/or animal shelter**—good way to find a pet to adopt
- **Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS)**—parent education and support
- **Multi-purpose community action agency**—provide food and heating assistance
- **Neighbors**
- **Parent information and resource centers in public schools**—educational resources, support
- **Physical fitness centers**—stay in strong physical shape; some have child care provided.
- **Pregnancy resource center**
- **Public library**—story hour, books, and movies
- **Public parks**—enjoy a family outing
- **Salvation Army**
- **Social service agencies**
- **Tourism department**
- **YMCA**

How can you locate these and other community connections? Look in your local newspaper. Contact your public library, chamber of commerce, tourism office, or cooperative extension service. Consult the local telephone book. Talk to people in your community. You might even decide to form your own community connection group!



COMMUNITIES SUPPORT MILITARY FAMILIES



OPERATION: MILITARY KIDS

Hero Pack Guidelines

Hero Pack Project

Thank you for your interest in participating in a Hero Pack project. Hero Packs are a great way to give military kids a tangible expression of support.

The Hero Pack project is a chance for youth and adults to work together and become involved in a valuable community service effort. You are helping build awareness and fostering community support for military kids throughout Kentucky. Consider inviting other groups and businesses to join you in this effort.

These guidelines are meant to outline the basic requirements for Hero Pack contents, and examples are meant only as suggestions...be creative!

Unless otherwise stated, you must purchase the contents or get donations. The contents in all Hero Packs do not need to be exactly the same, as long as each pack includes the minimum required contents as outlined on the next page. The minimum required content categories include: handwritten appreciation letters, fun items, connection/communication tools, and OMK information for parents (Parent Packet).

If you have any questions about completing your Hero Pack project, contact the Kentucky OMK office:

Tyrone Atkinson, KY OMK Coordinator
Tcatki2@uky.edu
115 Huguelet Drive
Room 243 Scovell Hall
Lexington, KY 40546-0064

(859) 257-3019



HERO PACK MINIMUM REQUIRED CONTENTS

Backpack - Supplied by OMK as available

Handwritten Appreciation Letters

The packs must include *handwritten appreciation letters* written to military children and youth thanking them for their service and sacrifices to our country. The OMK State Office will provide letters for you whenever we have them available. If you do not have non-military youth/adults working with your group to fill and give out the packs, please contact the OMK office for assistance.

Fun Items —OMK will provide some items when/if available

The pack must include at least 5 fun items. Examples include:

- Craft kits/supplies, art supplies, or puzzles
- Games to play with siblings or parents or travel games
- Frisbees, jump ropes, kick sacks, other physical activity items
- Children's books* or activity books
- Movie coupons or day passes to a local zoo or museum
- Free passes to places like the local Boys & Girls Club, YMCA
- Stickers, temporary tattoos, beaded necklaces
- Stuffed animals or puppets
- Patriotic items (flags, balls, pinwheels, yo-yos, gliders, etc.)



*Suggested Children's Book Titles:

- Deployment Journal for Kids by Rachel Robertson
- Daddy, You're My Hero; Mommy, You're My Hero by Michelle Ferguson-Cohen
- Daddy Got His Orders by Kathy Mitchell

Additional suggested book selections at www.nmfa.org or www.militaryfamilybooks.com



Connection/Communication Tools

The pack must include at least 4 connection/communication tools. Examples include:

- International calling cards and stamps
- Disposable camera, photo frames
- Photo album/scrapbook
- Journal or diary
- Pens/pencils/erasers
- Stationary/envelopes
- Pillowcase and t-shirt transfers for photo pillowcases
- Worry dolls
- OMK lanyards or dog tag necklaces (when available)
- Gift card to the Post Exchange



Information for Parents (Parent Packet)

The following information will be provided by OMK:

- OMK information card or other literature, OMK bracelet
- Local resources for children/youth (Extension offices, 4-H clubs, Boys & Girls Club, YMCA, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, etc.)
- Military OneSource and Military Child Care resources
- Deployment and reunion resources (when available)

PLEASE DO NOT INCLUDE FOOD OR CLOTHING ITEMS



COMMUNITIES SUPPORT MILITARY FAMILIES

Action Plan

Activity	Time Frame	Participants	Results



COMMUNITIES SUPPORT MILITARY FAMILIES

End-of-Session Evaluation

Please complete this short evaluation to help us know how the lesson has been helpful to you in supporting military families in your community.

Think about what you knew before the program. Then consider what you have learned from the program. Make a check in the box (nothing, a little bit, quite a bit, a great deal) that best describes your understanding of each item before and after the program. Write your comments and intentions to be supportive of military families in the spaces provided below.

Before the program

Knowledge	Nothing	A little	Quite a bit	A Great deal
Structure of military branches				
Culture of the military as a whole				
National Guard and Reserves functions				
Emotional cycle of deployment stages				
Families' feelings about deployment				
Needs of families before, during, and after deployment				
Families I know who face deployment				
Community agencies and groups serving military families				

After the program

Knowledge	Nothing	A little	Quite a bit	A Great deal
Structure of military branches				
Culture of the military as a whole				
National Guard and Reserves functions				
Emotional cycle of deployment stages				
Families' feelings about deployment				
Needs of families before, during, and after deployment				
Families I know who face deployment				
Community agencies and groups serving military families				

Please use the back of this page to list specific support of military families before and after the program.



Before the program

List specific ways that my community or myself supported military families.

After the program

List specific ways that my community or myself can support military families.

Thank you for completing this evaluation.

The Military in Kentucky

Below you will find specific information on the various branches of the military in Kentucky. (Data for Kentucky counties in which military families reside comes from Operation Military Homefront, provided by the Defense Manpower Data Center.)

- The Air Force has no active duty base in Kentucky. The Air National Guard is organized by states. The 123rd Airlift Wing of the Air National Guard is located in Louisville. The Kentucky Air National Guard Headquarters is in Frankfort. There are 61 counties with at least one Kentucky Air National Guard family. There are no Air Force Reserve units in Kentucky, but there are 46 counties where at least one Air Force Reserve family lives.
- The U.S. Army has two major installations in Kentucky: Fort Knox and Fort Campbell. The Bluegrass Army Depot in Richmond is a third installation. There are Kentucky Army National Guard Units in all but a handful of counties, and Reserve members live in most counties.
- The U.S. Coast Guard, Sector Ohio Valley (8th Coast Guard District), is located in Louisville. Sector Ohio Valley (SOHV) provides command, control communications, and support to six cutters that service 5,500 aids to navigation on over 2,900 miles of navigable rivers in a ten-state area. The waterways include the Ohio, Tennessee, and Cumberland rivers as well as a portion of the Mississippi. The U.S. Coast Guard Reserve and Coast Guard Auxiliary are assigned to SOHV for operations in Kentucky.
- The U.S. Marine Corps has no installations in Kentucky. However, the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve has units at Fort Knox and Lexington. Marine Corps Reserve families live in 23 Kentucky counties.
- The U.S. Navy has one installation in Kentucky, the Navy Operational Support Center in Louisville, Kentucky. There are over 70 counties with active duty Navy members and 57 counties with at least one Navy Reserve family.