

Military Families

What You Can Do

What's Happening

Military families live in almost every community. Some parents in the military may be on active duty and wear a uniform every day. Other parents may be in the National Guard or Army Reserves and only wear a uniform when they are called to active duty for periods of time.

These families face unique stresses. The military parent must deal with periodic absences and the stresses associated with transitions such as preparing for duty or re-entering civilian life. Children in military families experience challenges related to a parent's service:

- The parent may be absent from the family and, in some cases, in harm's way due to deployment
- Children must adjust to the parent's return and reintegration back into the family
- Many military children must deal with a number of transitions such as frequent moves, changing schools, and adjusting to new caretakers

What You Might Be Seeing

A spouse, partner, or extended family member may face new and increased responsibilities while a military parent is away. All of this can add stress to the family unit and make the already hard job of parenting even harder.

- A parent in uniform in your neighborhood, school, place of worship, or other community setting
- A civilian mother or father parenting solo for extended periods of time
- A grandparent, aunt, uncle, or other extended family member caring for a child with a deployed military parent
- A change in a child's behavior, either acting out or withdrawing, when a military parent is absent

Parental Resilience

Seize opportunities to acknowledge and express appreciation for the family's service to our country. Invite parents and children to share their experiences of military life.

Social Connections

Reach out and get to know your military neighbors, particularly if they serve in the National Guard or Reserves. Include them in neighborhood and community opportunities for recreation, participation, and growth. Become a friend and lend a hand. Don't wait for your neighbor to ask for help—offer to mow the grass, share a meal, help with small household repairs, or provide some respite by offering to care for the children for a few hours.

Concrete Supports in Times of Need

Share information about community resources, especially those that provide support in times of need. Ask military parents what resources would help them when they move to active duty status or are facing a military-related separation, and help them to connect with these supports early.

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

Military parents and the other caregivers in their family may need extra support in understanding how transitions, separation, and anxiety can affect their child's behavior. Understanding that behavior changes and acting out or withdrawing are normal and can be expected can make these challenges easier to deal with.

Children's Social Emotional Development

If you have military children in your program or neighborhood, invite them to share their thoughts and feelings about the separations and transitions they may be experiencing. If you plan activities for children in your community, remember to create a way a child with a faraway parent can participate.

This tip sheet was created with information from experts in national organizations that work to protect children and strengthen families. To download this tip sheet or for more parenting tips, go to www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/promoting/parenting or call 800.394.3366.