

Mindsets to support military-connected children & families

It is likely that early educators, at some point, will care for a military connected child as there are an estimated 2 million children who have one or both parents in the military. Approximately 40% of today's service members have children in the ranges of 0-5 years of age. (Sherman and Marshal, 2011) Young children from military families, like all children, benefit from quality early childhood programs that foster social, emotional, physical, and cognitive skills. Military connected children also need caregivers who are aware of military lifestyle and culture. Supporting military connected children and families is a journey of getting to know one another and building supportive relationships.

Military culture has its own language, traditions, history, and values. Because military life and culture is unique, it is helpful to be familiar with and responsive to the strengths, needs, and individuality of each military child and family in your program.

The military experience, whether Active Duty, National Guard, or Reserve, may be similar or completely different for each family. Active Duty families typically live near or on military installations and have access to military programming. National Guard and Reserve families may not live near military installations or programs.

For many, military life is a positive experience which provides a cohesive community and benefits to healthy family living. Along with positive attributes, there are significant challenges military life can bring. Difficult and challenging circumstances can disrupt healthy development in children.

For children, change can be the challenge of military lifestyle:

- Change in location (due to relocation or having to stay with other caregivers because of deployment or long separations from parents)



- Change in family dynamics due to absent parent (or parents)
- Change in school or child care programs
- Change in friends, caregivers and teachers
- Change in emotions (both their own and the adults around them)
- Change in parental health due to stress or injury - both visible injury, such as an amputation, and invisible injury, such as PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury), or even death.

Military-connected children face these challenges in addition to typically developing behaviors and obstacles. Supporting military-connected children takes a broad, unified approach where the teachers, school/program, parents, and community all are positively impacting the child's growth and development. The first step to helping military-connected children is to remember that they are children first.

3 Mindsets that support military families & children in child care

Build capacity

Prepare for the journey of working with military connected children and families by locating and reading information that enhances the understanding of military culture, lifestyle and its impact. [The Military Child Care Education Coalition](#), [Penn State Better Kid Care](#), and [Child Care Aware of America](#) offer resources and professional development. The National Zero to Three program has resources and professional development under [Coming Together Around Military Families](#).

A good place to locate resources is often in your own community - look to your director, principal, counselors, Cooperative Extension, parents, local government and social services to inquire about military and early childhood support resources. Many have resources on topics such as deployment, reintegration, homecoming, loss, separation, education, child care, and family connections.

A child's parents and family are their best teachers and greatest source of well-being. The stronger the family unit, the stronger the child's support environment will be. Share your knowledge regarding positive care and development with families. Help families recognize their strengths and build new strengths.



Be intentional with your families

A family that feels welcomed, valued, and understood will be receptive to building relationships. Be sure to plan strategies to communicate with parents, especially parents who cannot make physical visits due to deployment or absence. Discover what their dreams, wishes, concerns, and expectations are for their child. Be non-judgmental, respectful and have an open mindset. Ask what information the family has shared with the child regarding the military and what they want you to communicate with the child. Take time to discuss plans for their child's growth and development; highlight ways to support their child's interests and strengths.

Focus on strong foundations in emotional and social development

Children thrive by participating in loving, nurturing, and responsive relationships with adults in their lives. Allow plenty of time every day to foster interactions and conversations that support positive relationships. Help children learn to express and identify emotion and reflect on the perspective of others - all skills needed to be resilient throughout life. Teach children ways to work on self-regulation (play stop and go games) and self-care (offer children jobs that are developmentally appropriate, such as hanging up coats, serving snack, etc.), provide opportunities to be successful and involved in meaningful play. Keep routines predictable and minimize change. Children find comfort and feelings of safety in knowing what to expect. Recognize when more help is needed, such as when children continually exhibit troubling behaviors or distressed emotions. [Military OneSource](#) is available for resources (800-342-9647).

Resources to build capacity

- AASA (American Association of School Administrators) Toolkit: Supporting the Military Child
- Better Kid Care, Penn State University, CYTTAP (Childcare Youth & Training Technical Assistance Program)
- Deployment: Strategies for Working with Kids in Military Families, by Karen Petty (Redleaf Press, 2009)
- Military Child Care Education Coalition
- Military Homefront
- Mission Home Front, Center for Safe Schools
- Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission, 859-244-8000
- Military K-12 Partners, 703-588-3272
- Child Care Aware of America
- NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children): Resources for Children, Teachers, and Families Affected by Military Deployment
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network
- National Military Family Association
- Our Military Kids
- Real Warriors
- Sesame Street Talk Listen and Connect
- The Educator's Guide to the Military Child During Deployment
- University of Southern California: Building Capacity in Military Connected Schools
- Zero to Three, Coming Together Around Military Families

The digital version of this PDF has clickable links to the resources. If you have this PDF in printed form, you can search the terms online to find the resources.

Find this PDF online at: http://bkc-od-media.vhost.psu.edu/documents/HO_MIL_GI_Mindset.pdf



References:

Sherman, Michelle and Glenn Marshal. "Opportunities for School Psychologists Working With Children of Military Families."

NASP (National Association of School Psychologists) Communique' Vol.39 #5 (January/February 2011). <http://www.nasponline.org/publications/periodicals/communique/issues/>

volume-39-issue-5/research-based-practice-working-with-children-of-military-families

NACCRRRA (National Association for Child Care Resource and Referral Agency), Community-Based Child Care for Military Families: A Booklet for Civilian Child Care Providers.

Zero To Three. "Honoring Our Babies and Toddlers: Supporting young children affected by a military parent's deployment, injury or death." Coming Together Around Military Families. <http://www.zerotothree.org/military>