



CHILDREN OF MILITARY PARENTS

The stressors of military-connected children.

Childhood is usually thought of as a happy, carefree time in life, but children of military families face additional stressors. The cumulative lengths of deployments are associated with more emotional difficulties among military children and children of deployed military personnel have more school-, family-, and peer-related emotional difficulties, compared with national samples.

The mental health effects span all ages. In a recent report from the American Academy of Pediatrics, children and adolescents between ages 5 and 17 were at a higher risk for emotional and behavioral problems, with emotional issues being linked to longer parental deployments. Preschool-aged kids meanwhile showed high levels of emotional reactivity, anxiety and withdrawal compared to kids of parents who have not been deployed.

Some examples of stressors experienced by children of military parents include: constant moving (out of state or overseas), loss of social networks, the absence of one or both parents for extended periods of time due to deployments, living with a parent experiencing mental health issues (e.g. PTSD), having a parent return from deployment who has sustained injuries and even loss of a parent, to name a few.

Warning signs.

Parents and educators are most likely detect a mental illness or emotional disturbance because of their constant contact with a child. Some of the warning signs are:

- feeling sad or withdrawn for more than 2 weeks
- a drop in school performance
- an excessive, overwhelming fear for no reason that gets in the way of daily activities
- aggression towards others
- changes in sleeping and eating habits
- severe mood swings that cause problems with relationships
- repeated use of drugs or alcohol

What to do if you are concerned.

The first step is to determine what is causing the child's unusual behavior. Talk to your child's doctor or health care provider about the behavior or symptoms that worry you. If in school ask teachers if your child has been showing worrisome changes in behavior and share this with your doctor or healthcare provider.

If the cause is determined to be a mental illness or disorder, treatment may range from counseling to medication. In most cases, treatment can be done on an out-patient basis in the child's own community. In rare cases, hospitalization may be necessary. Treatment may also include counseling for parents and family.

Fortunately, treatment from both private providers and the state's behavioral health system are available. Consult a family physician for a referral to a mental health provider or contact the Missouri Department of Mental Health's Division of Behavioral Health Division at (800) 575-7480.

For your convenience in finding behavioral health resources, the Missouri Department of Mental Health (DMH), in partnership with the Missouri Behavioral Health Alliance (MOBHA), has compiled this list. These links will take you out of the DMH website. DMH and MOBHA do not endorse or take responsibility for the content of other organization's websites.

Children respond differently to a parent's deployment depending on their age and maturity level. Negotiate the stages of deployment with tips on helping children cope while Mom or Dad is deployed. Organize pre-deployment family meetings and review age-leveled activities, books and videos.

<http://realwarriors.net/family/children/>

PTSD includes a range of symptoms that can effect family members. This website provides information about the effects of PTSD and trauma on families, children, and relationships.

www.ptsd.va.gov/PTSD/family/index.asp

Military Kids Connect (MKC) is an online community of military children (ages 6-17 year old) that provides access to age-appropriate resources to support children from pre-deployment, through a parent's or caregiver's return. MKC offers informative activities, fun games, helpful videos, and interesting user surveys that can build and reinforce understanding, resilience, and coping skills in military children and their peers.

<http://militarykidsconnect.dcoe.mil/>

Wouldn't it be great if children came with instructions? As a military parent, you have the next best thing to parenting instructions – a wealth of parenting resources, benefits and programs. Military OneSource is by your side through the journey of parenthood – through the early years and tricky teen years. Whether it's finding quality child care, learning about adoption, helping your kids excel in school or connecting to resources, *Military OneSource* is here for you.

www.militaryonesource.mil/family-relationships/parenting-and-children

Our Military Kids, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization created to provide support and recognition to military children. This may include children ages 3 years through the 12th grade of deployed National Guard and Reserve service members, along with children of Wounded and Fallen Warriors from all branches of service. Many Guard and Reserve families are financially stretched and cannot afford the fees for sports, fine arts, or tutoring programs so crucial to a child's sense of well-being. Additionally, because these families are Guard and Reserve, they are geographically dispersed throughout the country and often live too far from military bases and installations to access the available support services. Our Military Kids fills these gaps to eligible families with a simple grant program that pays for children's activities.

<http://ourmilitarykids.org/>

For more information, contact the nearest community mental health center or the Missouri Department of Mental Health's Division of Behavioral Health (800) 575-7480 or visit www.dmh.mo.gov