

# 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 (i.e. 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- feeling sad or withdrawn for more than 2 weeks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/>

For information on child sexual abuse, effects of community violence on youth, PTSD in youth, young trauma survivors and more visit the Department of Veterans Affairs Family and Friends website.

<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/family/index.asp>

An online resource supporting common post-deployment concerns. The site provides an assessment on your parenting confidence, along with videos and workshops on helping kids dealing with deployment.

<http://afterdeployment.dcoe.mil/topics-families-kids>

*Military Kids Connect* (MKC) is an online community of military children (ages 6-17 yr 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/>

Whether you are a parent looking for information on child care or child development, or a preteen or teen looking for tips on saving money or getting involved in your community, *Military One Source* several resources available.

<http://www.militaryonesource.mil/cyt>

*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  
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Missouri Department of Mental  
Health,  
Division of  
Behavioral Health  
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