

STRENGTHENING MILITARY FAMILIES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING

Children grow and thrive in loving and safe homes. The challenges military families face while serving the nation can interfere with parents' ability to provide for the changing and complex needs of their children. The frequent moves of military families can disrupt the families' support and child care networks. Frequent moves also make it challenging for spouses of service members to maintain stable employment, which may impact their ability to pay for their children's care and needs. Family separations associated with deployments place a burden on the non-deployed parent to provide adequate child supervision and

to meet children's physical needs. When service members experience injury or illness, military families can be vulnerable to additional family stressors, such as financial instability or parental conflict. In particular, children's exposure to parental conflict or aggression can impact children's sense of safety, their learning capacity, and their physical and mental health.

In recognition of April as the *Month of the Military Child*, our goal is to raise awareness among community service providers of military programs that strengthen military families.

Community Resources and Provider Recommendations to Strengthen Military Families

Helping Parents Meet the Needs of Children

- Recommend military families to utilize Family Advocacy Program (FAP) prevention services, such as family financial planning and parenting skills classes.
- Encourage military spouses to utilize installation employment readiness specialists and/or online resources as part of DoD's Spouse Education and Career Opportunities (SECO) program (<https://myseco.militaryonesource.mil/portal/>).
- Help parents in need of mental health treatment to access available care.
- Advise families with spouses and children needing specialized care they may be eligible for the Exceptional Family Member Program, which stations military families near medical facilities capable of meeting their treatment needs.
- Assist families that may be overwhelmed by stressors in securing child care and/or respite care available at most installations.

Ensuring Adequate Supervision of Children

- On-base child care can be obtained through Military OneSource (militaryonesource.mil or 800-342-9647) and Military Child Care (MilitaryChildCare.com or 855-696-2934).

- Off-base child care can be obtained through Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood (MCCYN).
- Encourage parents to participate in formal and informal social events (e.g., family readiness group events, child-care/school events, recreational sports, and unit dining out).

Reducing Conflict at Home

- Encourage families to utilize unit and installation chaplains for marriage enrichment and counseling services (e.g., Family Life Chaplain counseling services and marriage enrichment retreats).
- Provide couples information on Military OneSource (militaryonesource.mil) for confidential non-medical marital counseling.
- Refer high-risk families to FAP-sponsored parent counseling to help parents address harmful behaviors, manage anger, and improve conflict resolution skills.
- Refer families with suspected incidents of family violence to FAP providers who specialize in victim services and batterer treatment.
- Identify and address concerns regarding stigma and other barriers that prevent at-risk families from seeking counseling.
- Encourage couples undergoing divorce to utilize programs designed to reduce conflict and promote co-parenting.
- Refer service members with reported or suspected combat-related symptoms (e.g., PTSD, TBI, depression, or substance misuse) to mental health providers.