

# WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH MILITARY FAMILIES

## ★ 10 KEY CONCEPTS ALL PROVIDERS SHOULD KNOW ★

### ★ MILITARY FAMILIES ARE RESILIENT ★



Resilience is defined as the ability to overcome challenges with flexibility, inner strength, and a positive outlook. For military families, life's challenges may come in the form of deployment or redeployment of the service member, frequent moves to another state or country, the return of a warrior with physical or mental wounds, and other stressful events unique to military culture. Most military families find resilience through a strong sense of purpose and deep loyalty to their loved ones, the military, and country. Many service members are so selfless that they will put the needs of others before their own. Whether the service member is active duty, reserves, or National Guard, excellent support systems for families are available within and surrounding military communities. Even outside these systems, mental health

providers should be ready to support the resilience of military families and help them understand the importance of physical and emotional self-care in sustaining it. Learn more about military families and resilience at

[www.realwarriors.net](http://www.realwarriors.net) ...a campaign to encourage help-seeking behavior for “invisible” wounds

[www.cfs.purdue.edu/mfri](http://www.cfs.purdue.edu/mfri) ...Military Family Research Institute, offering resources on psychological resilience

### ★ MILITARY FAMILY SEPARATIONS ARE DIFFICULT AND COMPLICATED ★

More than 2 million American service members have been deployed worldwide since 9/11/2001. More than 793,000 members have been deployed more than once. Knowledge about military deployments – the average length of a tour or mission, supports available for family members who “serve from home,” and the challenges present before, during, and after a deployment – will help providers appreciate the impact of separations on the service member, family, and community. Learn more about deployments and reintegration at

[www.pdhealth.mil](http://www.pdhealth.mil)

...information on deployment health and health care

[www.afterdeployment.org](http://www.afterdeployment.org)

...resources for post-deployment services and self-care



## ★ MOST MILITARY PARENTS WERE NOT MILITARY CHILDREN ★



The typical child of an active-duty service member moves six to nine times between kindergarten and high-school graduation. Many children have to say good-bye to a deployed parent more than once. Yet, most military parents – and most providers – did not grow up in the military themselves, and they may have a hard time relating to the experiences and feelings of “military brats.” Beyond active-duty service members, the military’s heavy reliance on reservists and guard members for recent deployment and combat activities has introduced a new population of children to the stresses of military life. What is that life really like for them? Learn more about growing up in a military family at

**[www.militarykidsconnect.org](http://www.militarykidsconnect.org)**

...resources for military children ages 6 to 17

**[www.militarybratlife.com](http://www.militarybratlife.com)**

...a magazine celebrating the uniqueness of military families

**[www.operationmilitarykids.org](http://www.operationmilitarykids.org)**

...connecting military youth with resources during deployment

## ★ CHANGE IS CONSTANT ★

Frequent changes in schools, physicians, and mental-health support systems are the rule rather than the exception for military families. Because they are so often uprooted and in transition, these families have to be adaptable, flexible, and up for challenges throughout the service member’s duty or career. That said, one of the most significant changes comes when the service member returns to civilian life – a transition that calls for special attention to discharge planning and support from military-informed providers. Learn more about change and transitions in military life at

**[www.militarychild.org](http://www.militarychild.org)** ...Military Child Education Coalition, focused on separation and change

**[www.militaryfamily.org](http://www.militaryfamily.org)** ...National Military Family Association, advocates for family services

## ★ STIGMA ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH CARE IS STRONG IN THE MILITARY ★

Mental health stigma is still entrenched in military culture, and providers should take care to avoid reinforcing it. For example, providers should stay away from clinical terms and labels that reduce the warrior’s experience to “symptoms” and “illness.” They should not overlook the inherent toughness and skills of service members and their families. Providers should understand and explain the rules of patient-provider confidentiality and the types of information (eg, criminal actions) that would have to be disclosed to a commander, and could potentially affect the service member’s career and security clearance. Learn more about stigma in the military at



**[www.realwarriors.net/active/treatment/ptsdmyths.php](http://www.realwarriors.net/active/treatment/ptsdmyths.php)**

...dispelling myths about PTSD

**<http://afterdeployment.t2.health.mil/sites/default/files/pdfs/client-handouts/stigma-military.pdf>**

...myths, facts and resources on stigma in the military, from afterdeployment.org

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## ★ PEERS CAN PAVE THE WAY FOR SERVICE MEMBERS ★



Part of mental health-care stigma comes from service members not wanting to be apart from their fellow members. Providers can draw on the presence and support of professional and non-professional peers of military members who are working toward change. Peer Specialists are certified professionals with military and mental health experiences similar to the service member's own history. These veterans form a relationship with the service member based on inherent trust between peers and a mutual respect for service. They bring a unique and unspoken understanding of the impact of service and transitioning to civilian life, and they help the service member navigate in locating resources and benefits. Other types of peers – spouses, reservists, guard members, or youth peers – can form similarly supportive bonds with military families. Learn more about peer support at

[www.vacareers.va.gov/peer-to-peer/faqs.asp](http://www.vacareers.va.gov/peer-to-peer/faqs.asp) ...Peer Specialist FAQs and source materials

[www.militarychild.org/parents-and-students/programs/student-2-student](http://www.militarychild.org/parents-and-students/programs/student-2-student) ...Military Child Education Coalition

[www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org) ...Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors

## ★ MILITARY LINGO: IT MATTERS ★

AMCIT. TRICARE. Bravo Zulu. Got your 6. Not familiar with these terms? Military life is often fast-paced; the faster the communication, the sooner the job gets done. A prodigious alphabet of acronyms and abbreviations keeps things moving. Along with popular slang phrases, these become ingrained in military family life and communication. Non-military providers can remove a barrier to military families and culture by learning the relevant lingo from reliable sources, including military friends and clients...and then using a term only if they are sure of its meaning. Learn more about military terminology at

[www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new\\_pubs/jpr\\_02.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jpr_02.pdf)

...Department of Defense dictionary

[www.militaryacronyms.net](http://www.militaryacronyms.net)

...compilation of acronyms and abbreviations

## ★ ENVIRONMENT MATTERS, TOO ★

Family service agencies can use visual messages, brochures, and Web sites to convey understanding, respect, and welcome toward military families. They can, as examples, display posters and yellow ribbons; gear information pamphlets and brochures toward service members and veterans; and include a specific military-oriented section on their Web site, with listings of local and national resources. Among staff members, sensitivity to the needs of military families and expressions of thanks for their service will help reassure these families that they are in a safe and welcoming environment. Learn more about military-informed environments at

[www.ourmilitary.mil/our-military-families](http://www.ourmilitary.mil/our-military-families)

...Joining Forces, in support of military families

[www.VetFriendlyToolkit.org](http://www.VetFriendlyToolkit.org)

...toolkit for veteran friendly institutions



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★ NOT EVERYONE IN UNIFORM HAS ACCESS TO THE SAME PROGRAMS ★

There are differences in the support services available for active duty service members and reserve members. What are they... and what are other key differences among the military branches, such as deployment patterns? It takes time and effort to learn the various branches and components of the armed forces, but this goal is critical for providers working with military families and needing specific knowledge of their eligibility for services and benefits. Learn more about the armed forces and branch-specific programs at

**[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)**

...Department of Veterans Affairs, health care services and benefits

**[www.militaryonesource.com](http://www.militaryonesource.com)**

...Department of Defense, information on military life

**[www.nrd.gov/](http://www.nrd.gov/)**

...National Resource Directory



★ CIVILIAN PROVIDERS PLAY A DIRECT ROLE ★



More and more, community-based organizations and providers are being called on to provide direct services to military families and children. The civilian mental-health community is providing support and interventions for military families experiencing the stress of deployment, psychological or physical injury, or grief and loss. Civilian providers also play an important role in supporting the psychological well-being of military children, specifically addressing such issues as anxiety, depression, somatic complaints, sleep difficulties, and academic issues. Learn more about meeting the needs of service members and their families at

**[www.mentalhealth.gov/get-help/veterans/index.html#Active%20Duty](http://www.mentalhealth.gov/get-help/veterans/index.html#Active%20Duty)**

...one-stop access for information and guidance on government mental health services

**[www.whitehouse.gov/joiningforces](http://www.whitehouse.gov/joiningforces)**

...national initiative to unite all sectors of society in supporting service members and families

**WANT TO LEARN EVEN MORE ABOUT SERVING MILITARY FAMILIES?**

Visit NCTSN at **[www.nctsn.org/resources/topics/military-children-and-families](http://www.nctsn.org/resources/topics/military-children-and-families)**