

MILITARY FAMILIES

Impact On Children And Families' Mental Health

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Agenda/Objectives



- Discuss and explore the impact of war on children's and families' mental health.
- Provide participants with the prevention brief on military families.
- Provide participants with a set of resources that further support effective strategies to address school mental health issues related to this topic.
- Share two SSHS project directors' experiences.

War Today

- “The numbers, as of October 2009, show that more than 2 million men and women have shouldered those deployments, with 793,000 of them deploying more than once.”¹
- Sharp increase in the amount of American troops deployed during Iraq and Afghanistan wars.
- Redeployed military members and families have little time to readjust before another deployment.

¹ Tan, Michelle. “2 million troops have deployed since 9/11.” *Marine Corps Times* 18 December 2009: n. pag. Web. 4 March 2010.
<http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/2009/12/military_deployments_121809w/>

Three Phases of Deployment



- Pre-deployment – often characterized by fear, anxiety, and denial prior to the service member's departure.
- Deployment – families learn to survive and adapt to their new lives while service member is gone.
- Post-deployment – soldiers reintegrate into society and families readjust.

Children's Behaviors: Pre-deployment



- ❑ Inconsolable crying, clinging to parent.
- ❑ Unresolved fears, nightmares, sleep disturbance.
- ❑ Uncharacteristic tantrums.
- ❑ Behavioral changes to personality.
- ❑ Anxiety reactions.

Effective Strategies

- Topic of military deployment should be considered by administrators, principals, student support services, faculty groups, PTA/PTO's and the community at large.
- Topic should be reviewed periodically as part of the district's emergency planning process.
- Map potential resources within your community.
- Schedule professional development for teachers and school counselors.
- Create physical space for mental health support and academic support.

Effective Strategies

- Stress the importance of creating action plans.
- Create family support groups and on-line network supports.
- Talk to children about the meaning/impact of war in terms that they can understand.
- Normalize idea of war by having kids write about it in journals or openly discussing it.
- Make web sites and other information available to families.
- For children with parents in the military reserves, acknowledge the floating anxiety that they may feel when there is talk of deployments.

Children's Behaviors: Deployment

- ❑ Unexplained crying or tearfulness.
- ❑ Resistance to role changes.
- ❑ Anger toward at-home parent.
- ❑ Increased acts of violence toward people or things.
- ❑ Sleep difficulties or disturbances (waking, bad dreams).
- ❑ Eating difficulties or change in eating patterns.

Effective Strategies

- ❑ Provide space for youth to speak about their feelings.
- ❑ Encourage enrichment activities such as sports and chess.
- ❑ Create virtual forums for parents to share stories, swap children's clothing, etc.
- ❑ Create support groups for children and parents.
- ❑ Provide mental health resources for children and families.
- ❑ Recognize students with family members who have been deployed, as an honor, a recognition and not a disability
- ❑ Create a check-in space to ask youth how they are doing.

Effective Strategies

- Provide respite places for parents and children to relax.
- Encourage youth to write to the deployed soldier.
- Encourage youth's participation in social engagements such as cell phones for troops.
- Pay extra attention to youth during holidays.
- Be aware that kids may be taking on more stressful roles and responsibilities at home.
- Introduce any families with military reservists to one another. They may be able to better relate to each other.

Children's Behaviors: Post-deployment

- Feelings of guilt.
- Increased need of attention.
- Frequent disruptive behavior in the classroom.
- Fear of the returning parent(s).

Children's Behaviors: Post-deployment

- Adjustment issues with role reversal again.
- May become less responsive and depressed.
- Keep returning parent at a distance.
- Regression in eating/sleeping patterns.

Comments



Picture by Cpl. Enrique Saenz, United States Marines.

Effective Strategies



- ❑ Create systemic support system with social workers, mental health personnel, welfare organizations, teachers, and family members.
- ❑ Continue to track a child's progress.
- ❑ Understand the mental health of students affected by war.
- ❑ Communicate your plan for support.
- ❑ Create outreach and support programs, connect families to existing community resources.

Effective Strategies

- Explore available military and faith-based supports.
- Exchange resources among educators.
- Provide space for quality activities.
- Address/create support systems for grieving families.
- Returning service members may have long-term physical and emotional injuries (including substance abuse issues) that may lead to long-term physical and emotional adjustments for families.
- Identify children who are isolating themselves.

Homecoming for Troops

- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Physical Injuries
- Alcoholism
- Aggressive Behaviors
- Difficulties adjusting to:
 - ▣ Society
 - ▣ Job
 - ▣ New family

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- Services Provided
- School Counselor and Therapist provide deployment groups and individual counseling to students.
- Community Liaison for Base Schools was in the navy.
- Liaison, Counselor and Therapist work cooperatively with school personnel and Base to address needs.

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- New Position
- Student Transition Specialist - Military only
- Families leaving for another Base
- New families arriving
- Parent(s) deploying
- Student adjustment, referrals, counseling

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- Working with the Base
- Fleet and Family Services
- Video feeds of school events/performances to the ship
- Month of the Military Child
- Family Advocacy Meetings
- Muffins with Moms/Doughnuts with Dads

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- Online Resources
- Military Impacted Schools Association
www.militaryimpactedschoolsassociation.org
- Military OneSource
www.militaryonesource.com
- Military Pathways
www.militarymentalhealth.org
- Student Online Achievement Resources
www.militarystudent.org

Q&A



Resources

www.promoteprevent.org

□ Pre-Deployment:

- [Talking to Children About Going to War](#)
- [Helping Your Child Prepare for a Parent's Deployment](#)

□ Deployment:

- [Deployment: Your Children and Separation](#)
- [“So Far” Guide for Helping Children and Youth Cope with the Deployment of a Parent in the Military Reserves](#)

□ Post-Deployment:

- [NASP Dialogues: Military Families and the Reintegration Process](#)
- [Returning from the War Zone: A Guide for Families of Military Members](#)

□ Military Reserves:

- [Army Reserve Child and Youth Services \(CYS\)](#)
- [Air Force Family Member Programs](#)
- [National Guard Family Program](#)

Resources

- Injury and Death:
 - [Traumatic Grief in Military Children](#)
 - [Caring for Kids after Trauma and Death: A Guide for Parents and Professionals](#)
- Educators and Parents:
 - [Suggestions for Educators](#)
 - [Educator's Guide to the Military Child During Deployment](#)
 - [Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators](#)
- MH Specialists/Psychologists/Social Workers/Guidance Counselors:
 - [Good Behavior Game](#)
 - [Same Sky Sharing](#)
 - [Trauma-Informed Care: A New Framework for Healing and Recovery](#)
- School Personnel and Communities:
 - [School Connectedness – Extending Connections to Military Children](#)
 - [Working with Military Children – A Primer for School Personnel](#)