

## **A Community Pediatrician's Guide to Supporting Military Children During Wartime**

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In today's fast paced military environment and the era of multiple deployments, there is an entire generation of military children affected by the absence of one or both parents. Recognizing that a military member's deployment has a variety of impacts on his or her family, the military is making an effort to reach out to children and provide them with the tools to cope with this unique military family stressor.

Many parents notice behavioral changes in their children before, during or after parental deployments. This is not unusual and is most appropriately addressed through meaningful discussion. Parents may hesitate to talk about their children's behavioral changes or other family challenges, feeling that they need to maintain a strong front in support of the deployed family member. In actuality, discussing the emotions, stressors and changes in the family dynamic can be helpful for all family members.

### **Military Youth Deployment Support Video Program**

Military pediatricians, in conjunction with the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), created an animated feature for elementary-aged children to give them something they can relate to and use as a starting point for discussion. "Mr. Poe and Friends Discuss Reunion after Deployment" is a dynamic cartoon, which provides young children with interesting characters and stories to relate to as they think about their own feelings in relation to deployment. It covers maternal and paternal deployment as well as single parent deployment. The cartoon also highlights some of the unique challenges that reunion after deployment poses and helps normalize many of the emotions that a child can wrestle with during these challenging times. (Video available at [www.aap.org/sections/unifserv/deployment/index.html](http://www.aap.org/sections/unifserv/deployment/index.html))

Also included in this uniquely targeted video support program, is "Military Youth Coping with Separation: When Family Members Deploy." Created by a military adolescent medicine specialist, military pediatricians and the AAP, this video is specifically made for older children and adolescents. It features interviews with real teens going through Family member deployments and it touches on a broad range of emotions and fears that an older child or teen may face. Adolescence can be challenging enough without the additional stress of a parent's deployment. It is a time where many older children and teens do not feel comfortable sharing their emotions or they may feel that their emotions are wrong or abnormal. This video strives to show that any emotion is normal and acceptable and that there are other kids going through the same thing at the same time. A great supplement to this video is the accompanying Interactive Military Youth Stress

Management Plan, an interactive tool developed to walk teens through the process of identifying their specific stressors and developing effective methods to cope with them effectively. The stress management plan was developed in conjunction with Dr. Ken Ginsberg who is an adolescent medicine specialist and a pioneer in child and adolescent resilience concepts into usable formats. (Video and Stress Management Plan available at [www.aap.org/sections/unifserv/deployment/index.html](http://www.aap.org/sections/unifserv/deployment/index.html))

All of the videos mentioned above are available free of charge and can be ordered or watched online. It is recommended that a caregiver (parent, teacher, grandparent) watch the selected video with the child/adolescent and spend time afterward discussing the feelings experienced during the video. This is an excellent way to open up lines of communication regarding potentially uncomfortable feelings. Watching the videos with other children experiencing parental deployment can also be helpful. The intent is that each child will gain a better understanding of their own emotional reactions to deployment while learning positive ways to cope with these reactions.

In addition to video media as a form of support, there are other excellent military child and youth resources available to parents and youth serving professionals (see table).

There are many resources and supportive organizations available for families and military youth during this time of lengthy and recurrent deployments. Please become familiar with these resources and provide information and support to military children and youth when they visit your practice.

<b>Military Child and Adolescent Support Web Sites</b>	
AAP Deployment Support Website	<a href="http://www.aap.org/sections/unifserv/deployment/index.html">www.aap.org/sections/unifserv/deployment/index.html</a>
Zero to Three – CTAMF	<a href="http://www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=key_military">www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=key_military</a>
Sesame Street – Talk, Listen, Connect	<a href="http://www.sesameworkshop.org/tlc/">www.sesameworkshop.org/tlc/</a>
Military One Source	<a href="http://www.militaryonesouce.com">www.militaryonesouce.com</a> 1 800 342-9647
Army Behavioral Health	<a href="http://www.behavioralhealth.army.mil/families/index.html">www.behavioralhealth.army.mil/families/index.html</a>
Army Reserve Child and Youth Services	<a href="http://www.arfp.org/skins/cys/cys_home.aspx">www.arfp.org/skins/cys/cys_home.aspx</a>
Operation Military Kids	<a href="http://www.operationmilitarykids.org/public/home.aspx">www.operationmilitarykids.org/public/home.aspx</a>
Our Military Kids –Activity tuition assistance for children of deployed Reserve/NG members	<a href="http://www.ourmilitarykids.org/">www.ourmilitarykids.org/</a>