



Family Resilience Begins With You

A Military Parent Resource Guide

DID YOU KNOW?

Resilience is the ability to cope with stress and adversity. It is an essential part of healthy development that builds self-esteem in children and helps protect them against life challenges. Nurture resilience by focusing on each family member's strengths and skills. Let your children know you are there for support – your encouragement will help empower them.

RESILIENCE DEFINED

noun

1. the ability to adjust easily to change
2. the power to bounce back after being bent, compressed or stretched
3. the capacity to recover quickly from misfortune, difficulty, illness, depression or other adversity

synonyms: strength, flexibility, pliancy

Parenting is a demanding job, no matter how many children you have. Each stage of their development summons a whole host of new responsibilities. Add the unique challenges of military life (frequent moves, deployments, etc.), and the difficulty level increases exponentially.

Military families by nature and necessity are resilient. This guide offers resources to help you boost that resilience, especially when stress and emotions are running high. It offers information for helping yourself, supporting your children, and strengthening the parent-child relationship.



Managing Stress and Emotions as a Parent

It's difficult to help your child manage rough times if you're struggling yourself. Stress reduction strategies can help you take care of yourself and be more present for your family.

Take Care of Yourself

Make stress management a priority. The healthier you are (in body and spirit), the better parent you are. Make a commitment to identify a few simple ways you can relax or decrease your stress. You won't just recharge your batteries; you'll model the importance of taking care of yourself for your child.

Recognize When You Need a Break

Learn to recognize your body's stress signals. An eye twitch, headache, upset stomach, forgetfulness or a short fuse can all be signs that you need a break. Recognizing these signals early on will help you take that break – BEFORE you blow your top.

Switch Gears Between Work and Home

Bringing work stress home makes it harder to deal with home stress. Here are a few ways to switch gears:

- Start decompressing the last few minutes of your workday
- Don't bring work home; turn off your work phone if you can
- And if you need it, figure out a way to have 15-30 minutes of alone time when you first get home

Practice Relaxation Exercises

Whether you choose deep breathing, yoga or just closing your eyes, practice makes better. Commit to doing your preferred relaxation exercise every day, even if it's just for a few minutes. You'll feel less stressed and more relaxed, plus you'll have more energy and patience with your children.



Fostering a Smooth Move into a New School

Frequent moves is one of the unique stressors of military life. Starting all over at a new school can lead to feelings of isolation and even depression. Remember to talk with your child and keep close tabs on how they're feeling before, during and after each move. Below are some common concerns parents have and some suggestions for supporting your child's transition to a new school.

My kids are nervous about meeting new friends and fitting in at the local public school they will attend.

Check with the youth director at your current installation for help finding the person in charge of the Youth Sponsorship Program at your new installation. Your child will be paired with another kid their age who attends the new school.

I'm not sure how comfortable I am telling my children's teachers that we are a military family.

Teachers are in an ideal position to support military children, because young people spend more than 30 hours each week in school. Only parents have more impact on young people than supportive teachers and coaches do. If your child's teacher is not familiar with military culture, tell him or her about the resources available for educators on the Military Kids Connect website at militarykidsconnect.dcoe.mil/educators.

I'm worried that our family's move will impact my children's success in school. How can I be sure they will have the same course placement, programs, sports and activities?

The "Interstate Compact on Education Opportunity for Military Children" is a set of guidelines adopted by all 50 states that addresses key educational transition issues encountered by military families, including enrollment, course placement (AP, IB, honors, vocational, technical, career pathways, etc.), programs (special education, gifted, etc.), attendance, eligibility for sports and activities, and graduation. The guidelines provide consistent policy for schools to follow so that military kids are treated fairly and uniformly, no matter where they move. To learn more about the compact, visit mic3.net. If you believe your child's school is not following the compact's guidelines, contact your school liaison officer. You can find yours at dodea.edu/Partnership/SchoolLiaisonOfficers.cfm.

My family is PCSing mid-school year. How can I help make the transition easier?

You can call ahead to your new school and find out what the students are studying, what projects they've done and what sports and clubs they offer. This will help you and your child prepare for any catching up that is necessary. All the guidelines established under the interstate compact apply whether you move over the summer or mid-year, so your children should be able to join the sports/activities they enjoy.

Finally, let your child know that the Military Kids Connect YouTube channel features several Military Moves playlists with videos of other military tweens and teens talking about moving, as well as two animated stories on the topic. They can watch at youtube.com/user/MilitaryKidsConnect.

Military Kids Face Unique Challenges

The award-winning Military Kids Connect website and online community were designed to create a safe and comfortable space where military kids from around the globe can support one another, learn coping skills, and build resilience. The website contains custom-developed, age-appropriate content for kids (ages 6-8), tweens (ages 9-12) and teens (ages 13-17), including:

- Videos and animated graphic novels featuring military-connected youth sharing their experiences with the unique challenges of military life
- A monitored online message board where teens and tweens participate in discussions with their peers
- Tools and creative activities to improve coping and stress management skills
- For older children, "Tough Topics" videos address posttraumatic stress disorder, mild traumatic brain injury and other difficult topics
- Online games like "Stress Blaster", "Operation Care Package", and "What's Different?"

The Military Kids Connect website also contains resources to help parents and educators support military-connected youth, including expert interviews, articles, resource guides and downloadable lesson plans.

Introduce your children to Military Kids Connect today! Find us online at MilitaryKidsConnect.dcoe.mil and on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#).



**TOGETHER,
EVERYWHERE.**

Is Your Child Being Bullied?

Children who are bullied may not tell their parents because they are embarrassed or frightened.

***Stopbullying.gov* has a lot of great resources and information to help parents. This resource offers the following advice to help your child open up about what they, or someone they know, may be experiencing and what to do about it.**

- **Spending 15 minutes a day talking** can reassure kids that they can talk to their parents if they have a problem. Start conversations about daily life and feelings with questions like these:
 - What was one good thing that happened today? Any bad things?
 - What is lunch time like at your school? Who do you sit with? What do you talk about?
 - What is it like to ride the school bus?
 - What are you good at? What do you like best about yourself?
- **Talking about bullying directly** is an important step in understanding how the issue might affect kids. Start conversations about bullying with questions like these:

- What does “bullying” mean to you?
- Describe what kids who bully are like. Why do you think people bully?
- Who are the adults you trust most to talk to about things like bullying?
- Have you ever felt scared to go to school because you were afraid of bullying? What ways have you tried to change it?
- What do you think parents can do to help stop bullying?
- What do you usually do when you see bullying going on?

- **Talking about strategies for staying safe** will help kids know how to act when bullying occurs:
 - Talk about how to stand up to kids who bully, and what to do if your actions don’t work, such as walking away.
 - Encourage your child to report bullying when it happens, even when it is happening to another child.
 - Talk about ways to avoid situations where bullying may occur.

Bullying is a complex topic. For more advice, visit stopbullying.gov.



Stop Bullying In Its Tracks

If you witness a bullying incident that involves your child or others, the stopbullying.gov website advises immediate action. Here are their dos and don'ts for stopping bullying on the spot:

DO

- Intervene immediately (It is OK to get another adult to help)
- Separate the kids involved
- Make sure everyone is safe
- Meet any immediate medical or mental health needs
- Stay calm and reassure the kids involved, including bystanders
- Model respectful behavior when you intervene
- Get police help or medical attention if:
 - A weapon is involved
 - There are threats of serious physical injury
 - There are threats of hate-motivated violence, such as racism or homophobia
 - There is serious bodily harm
 - There is sexual abuse
 - Anyone is accused of an illegal act, such as robbery

DON'T

- Ignore it (Don't think kids can work it out without adult help)
- Immediately try to sort out the facts
- Force other kids to say publicly what they saw

Staying Safe in Cyberspace

Today, 95 percent of kids ages 12-17 are online. Cyberbullying, exposure to inappropriate content, and online predators are very real, everyday threats to your children. Learn what sites they visit online, let them know you may review their texts and posts, encourage them to tell you immediately if they are being cyberbullied, and, finally, ask them to review and agree to these online safety rules:

I WILL THINK BEFORE I POST.

I agree not to post information or images that could put me at risk, embarrass me, or damage my future, such as:

- ✓ Cell or home phone numbers
- ✓ Home address
- ✓ Sexual messages
- ✓ Inappropriate pictures or videos

I WILL RESPECT OTHER PEOPLE ONLINE.

I will not:

- ✓ Post anything rude, offensive or threatening
- ✓ Send/forward images or information that might embarrass, hurt or harass someone
- ✓ Take anyone's personal information and use it to damage his or her reputation

I WILL PROTECT MYSELF ONLINE.

If someone makes me feel uncomfortable or if someone is rude or offensive, I will:

- ✓ Not respond
- ✓ Save the evidence
- ✓ Tell my parent, guardian or another trusted adult

Is Your Child Depressed?

Signs of depression in children are easily confused with the ordinary struggles of growing up. Your role as a parent is to watch for warning signs and seek help if necessary. Don't try to diagnose the problem yourself. If you're concerned, seek the guidance of a professional at your child's school or call your doctor. Left untreated, depression can lead to other serious problems, including drug and alcohol use, relationship problems, academic troubles, self-injury, and even suicide. If you believe your child is in immediate crisis, whether or not he or she is talking about harming him- or herself, please call the **Military Crisis Line** at **1-800-273-8255** and **press 1**.

Signs and Symptoms of Depression

- Depressed or irritable mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in most activities
- Change in weight or appetite
- Change in sleeping patterns
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Poor concentration or difficulty making decisions
- Thoughts of death, suicide or wishes to be dead



If you are concerned about your child, yourself, your spouse or other loved one, you can call the Military Crisis Line. Their crisis workers have access to local resources.



STRENGTHENING YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Working Through Difficult Emotions and Behaviors Together

Each stage of child development brings new challenges for parents. Whether you have toddlers, teenagers or both, consider these tips for tackling difficult emotions and behaviors together.

Control your own feelings

When your child does something wrong, don't respond immediately (unless there is danger). Take time to get control of your feelings first.

Consider the reasons for their actions

Ask yourself, "Why is my child acting this way?" Respond to your child's feelings, not just their behaviors.

Show them how to manage emotions

You are your kids' best teacher, so demonstrating how you handle tough situations will help them learn.

Be their safety net

Handling deployments and frequent moves can be tough on kids. Spend quality time with them discussing their worries and fears.

Talk with them about their feelings

First, acknowledge how they feel, then listen and ask questions. If possible, explain how you once handled a similar situation.

Strategies for Positive Communication

Every day, you have a new opportunity to deepen your relationship with your children. Try these tips for staying connected:

Practice active listening skills

- Give eye contact (put down phone and turn off TV)
- Don't interrupt when they are talking
- Try to ask open-ended questions (rather than yes/no)
- Validate their feelings
- Admit it when you don't know the answer

Express your love

- Say "I love you," and give hugs often
- Do things together (playing games, cooking)
- Ask their opinions about things that matter
- Ask them about their day

Notice the positives

- Say "thank you" and give compliments when they finish a task or acquire a new skill
- Give them more positive comments than criticism

Support your children through setbacks

- Offer help when they need it
- Express confidence that they can solve the problem
- Help them consider other perspectives
- Help them view mistakes as learning opportunities

MORE RESOURCES ONLINE

FOR MILITARY PARENTS

The National Center for Telehealth & Technology, a component of the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury, developed multiple websites, mobile apps, social media communities, and other online tools to help military families with parenting.

Find us online:

militarykidsconnect.dcoe.mil/parents
afterdeployment.dcoe.mil
militaryparenting.dcoe.mil
t2health.dcoe.mil/apps/Parenting2Go



Search "AfterDeployment," "Parenting for Veterans and Service Members" and "Military Kids Connect"

