



The Unique Challenges of Military Families

Center for Deployment Psychology
Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences



Disclaimer

The views expressed are those of the presenters and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.



Agenda

- Demographics of Military Families
- Military Family Life
- The Deployment Cycle
- Military Marriages
- Military BRATs
- Risk & Resiliency
- Resources



Demographics of Military Families

*"When one person joins the military
the whole family serves."*

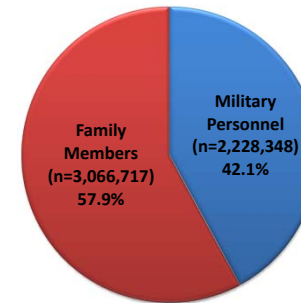


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Family Demographics

Total Force Personnel & Family Members



2012 Demographics Profile



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Military Families

- Dependents
 - Spouse
 - Children
 - Stepchildren
 - Same-Sex Spouses*
- Non-Dependents
 - Parents
 - Siblings
 - Extended family
 - Adult children



U.S. Marine Corps photo by
LCPL Jacob Barber



U.S. Army photo by SSG Ben Navratil



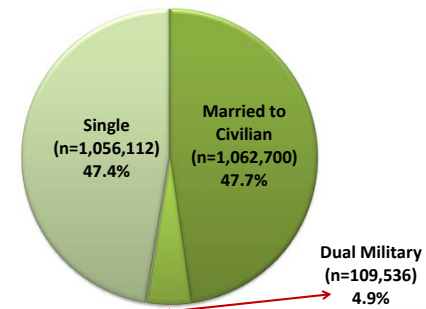
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Photos: <http://www.defense.gov>; <http://www.defenseimagery.mil>



Marital Status

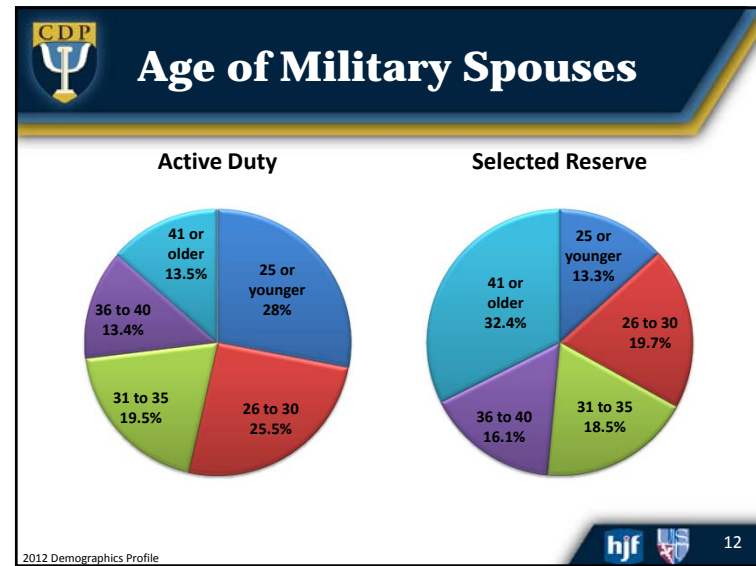
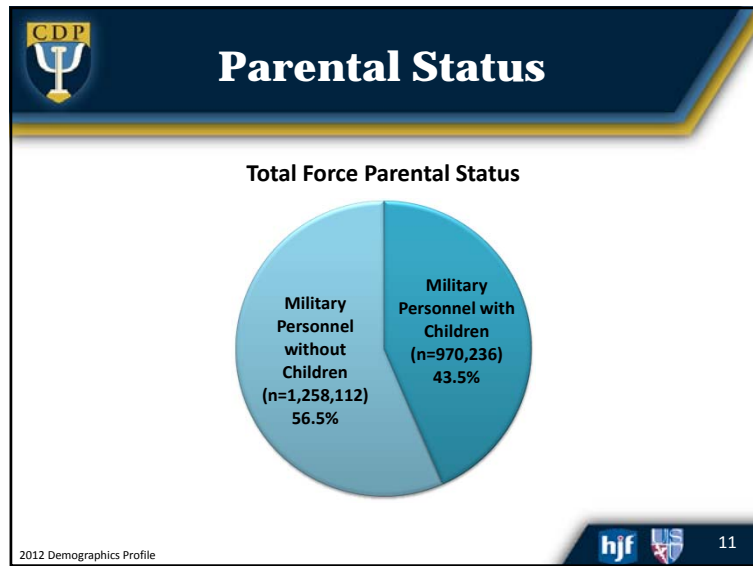
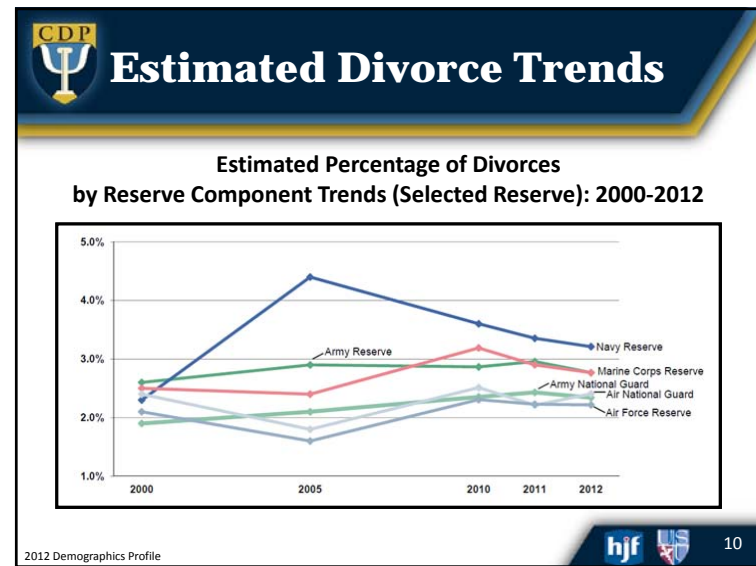
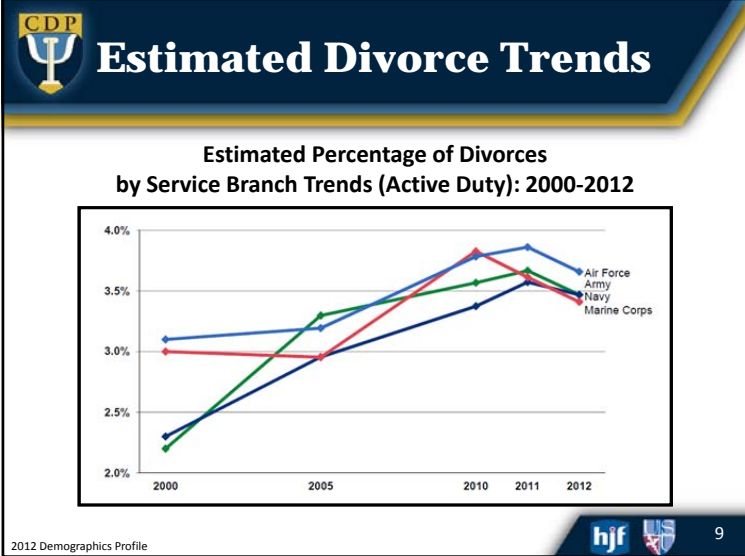
Total Force Marital Status



2012 Demographics Profile

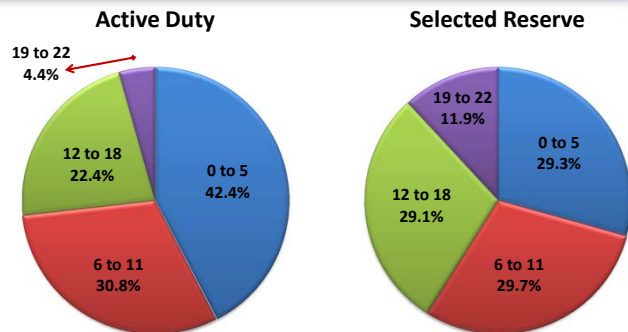


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Age of Military Children



2012 Demographics Profile



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Military Marriages

"If the Navy wanted you to have a wife, they would have issued you one."



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Military Marriages

Unique attributes of military marriages:

- When the military calls, the Service Member must go
- Separation is standard
- Reunification is also a normal occurrence
- Separation from family/friends is common

Devries et al. (2012)



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Marriage and Divorce in the Military



- Marriage/divorce rates
- Young marriages
- Marital quality
- Infidelity

Adler-Baeder et al. (2005); Hogan & Seifert (2010); Karney & Crown (2007); Karney et al. (2012); Negrusa et al. (2014); Riviere et al. (2012); Schumm et al. (2012); Snyder et al. (2012); Photo by AzureCitizen: http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Saber_arch



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The Good and Bad of Long Distance Relationships

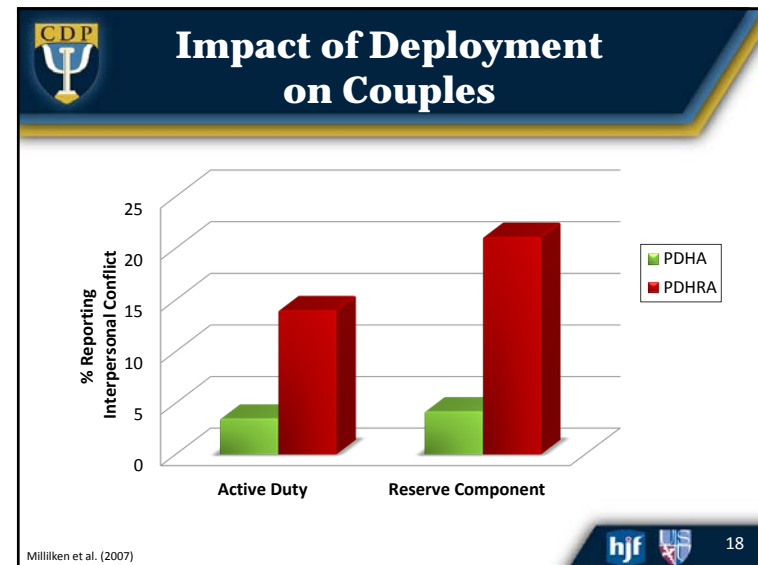
Good

- Equivalent relationship satisfaction
- No greater risk of infidelity
- Often successful despite difficulties and distance
- Increased resilience and sense of self-efficacy

Bad

- Mild depression common
- Tendency to isolate
- Difficult to communicate
- Difficult to maintain connection

Guldner (2003) hjf 17



Evidence-Based Couples Counseling in the DoD/VA

- Gottman Method Couples Therapy
 - <http://www.gottman.com>
 - <http://csf.army.mil>
- Emotionally Focused Therapy for Couples (EFT)
 - <http://www.iceft.com>
 - <http://www.strongbonds.org>
- Integrative Behavioral Couples Therapy (IBCT)
 - <http://www.ibct.psych.ucla.edu>
 - <http://drandrewchristensen.com>

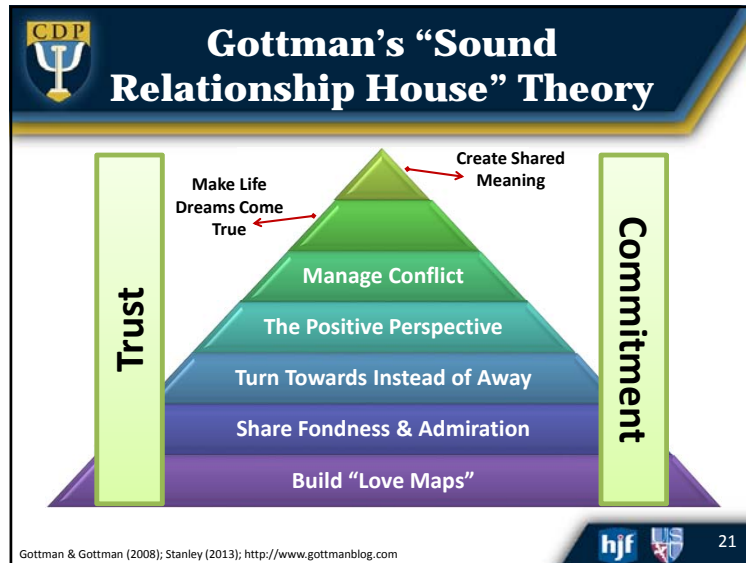
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Gottman's Basic Tenets

Happy Marriages

- Based on deep friendship
- Use of repair attempts
- Shared sense of deep meaning
- Most marital arguments cannot be resolved

Gottman & Silver (1999) hjf 20



Military Family Life


"Military families are families with unique challenges."

hjf US 23

- ## Impact of Military Culture
- Following Orders
 - Leadership
 - Communication Style
 - "Mission First"
-
- Devries et al. (2012)
- hjf US 24

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“Greedy Institutions”



Both the military and families demand:

- Commitment
- Loyalty
- Time
- Energy

Blaisure et al. (2012); Segal (1986)

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Family Stressors

- Normative**
 - Occur for most families
 - Expected
- Normative Military**
 - Occur for most **military** families
 - Expected
- Catastrophic**
 - Do not occur to most families
 - Unexpected


Blaisure et al. (2012)

hjf  26


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Normative Stressors of Military Family Life

- Frequent relocations (PCS)
- Spouse employment opportunities
- Separations
- Deployments
- Risk of injury or death




Blaisure et al. (2012); Lim & Schulker (2010)

hjf  27

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If you knew you had to move your entire household every 2-3 years, how would you live your life differently than you do now?

Blaisure et al. (2012), p. 57

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The Deployment Cycle

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Emotional Cycle of Deployment

Pincus et al. (2001)

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MilSpouse Cycle of Deployment

Patricia Santiago (2010)

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Parenting Cycle of Deployment

Pre-Deployment	Deployment	Post-Deployment
Looking Ahead	Parenting (War Zone / Home Front)	Facing Reality
Saying Goodbye	Surviving the Home Stretch	Moving Forward

DeVoe & Ross (2012)

hjf 32



Pre-Deployment Stage

"A holding pattern during which life cannot yet begin."

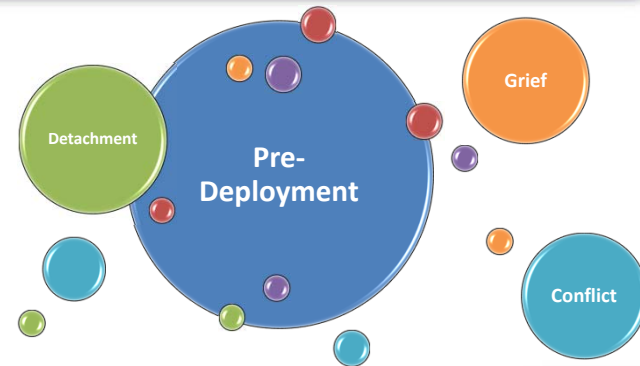
DeVoe & Ross (2012)



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Emotional Reactions



DeVoe & Ross (2012)



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Parenting

- Looking Ahead
 - How/when to communicate with children about impending departure
 - Handling feelings & responding to children
- Saying Goodbye
 - Importance of saying goodbye face-to-face

Pre-Deployment

DeVoe & Ross (2012)



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Helping Families

- Facilitate communication
 - Sharing of feelings
 - Discussion of expectations
- Foster connection
- Teach positive coping skills
- Emphasize the importance of support
- Help couples address practical issues
- Discuss parenting issues

Pre-Deployment

Pavlicin (2003); Pincus et al. (2001)



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Themes for Therapy

- Affective Education
- Exploring Roles
- Exploring Unresolved Conflicts
- Expectations of Fidelity



Pre-Deployment



Deployment Stage

“Repeat after me ... I can do this.”



Emotional Reactions

- Deployment
 - Disorientation, mixed emotions
 - Relief that anticipation is over
- Sustainment
 - Self-growth, independence
 - Less angry, but lonelier
- Re-Deployment (Anticipation of Return)
 - Excitement, apprehension

Deployment



Parenting

- Parenting from the Home Front
 - Increased responsibilities = increased stress
- Parenting from a War Zone
 - Relinquishment of daily involvement
 - Adaptation of new strategies
- Surviving the Home Stretch
 - How will children respond to reunion?

Deployment



Impact of Deployment on Children

- Emotional / Behavioral Difficulties
- Cumulative Months of Deployment
- Child Maltreatment



U.S. Army photo

Deployment

Cederbaum et al. (2013); Chandra et al. (2011); Flake et al. (2009); Gibbs et al. (2007); Lester et al. (2010); Rentz et al. (2007); Photo: <http://www.defense.gov>



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Signs of Distress in Children

Age	Behaviors	Moods
Infants	Change in eating/sleeping	Listlessness
Toddlers	Crying, tantrums	Irritability, sadness
Pre-Schoolers	Clinginess, potty accidents	Irritability, sadness
School Age Children	Body aches, whining, problems at school	Irritability, sadness
Adolescents	Isolation, drug use	Anger, apathy

Deployment

Military OneSource (2012); Pincus, et al. (2001)



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Helping Families

- Facilitate setting personal goals
- Encourage creation of a support network
- Teach stress management techniques
- Highlight the importance of self-care



Deployment

Pavlicin (2003)



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Themes for Therapy

- Deployment:
Stress Reduction
- Sustainment:
Resilience & Growth
- Re-Deployment:
Expectation Management



Deployment

Laser & Stephens (2012)



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Post-Deployment Stage

*“Hello, Stranger.
Let’s cohabit and raise these kids.”*

Sanderlin (2012)

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Emotional Reactions

Reunion → Reintegration

- Elation
- Relief
- Frustration

- Tension
- Resentment
- Comfort

Post- Deployment

Logan (1987); Pincus, et al. (2001)

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Parenting

- Facing Reality
 - Reconnect & rebuild parent-child relationships
 - Role negotiation / co-parenting challenges
- Moving Forward
 - Re-establish equilibrium
 - Develop new routines
 - Incorporate legacy of deployment

Post- Deployment

DeVoe & Ross (2012)

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Reintegration Challenges

Families

- New routines / responsibilities
- Loss of independence
- “Walking on eggshells”
- Things are not perfect

Service Members

- Make meaning of deployment
- Grieve loss of friends
- Acclimate to civilian life
- Re-adjust to being a spouse/parent

- SM will seem different
- Family will seem different
- Feelings of resentment
- Role/boundary re-negotiation

Post- Deployment

Morris (2008); Pavlicin (2003); Pincus, et al. (2001)

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Facilitating Successful Reunions

Service Member's Expectations	Partner's Expectations	Therapist's Role (how to help)
Isolate vs. great sex 24/7	Fairy-tale reunion	Set realistic expectations
Immediate return to "old ways"	New routines	Remind that adjustment takes time
Separated from family	Earned a break	Stress that both made sacrifices
No one understands	Drill with questions	Teach communication skills

Military OneSource (2012); Pavlicin (2003)



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Themes for Therapy

- Revisiting Family Roles
- Opening Communication
- Creating Opportunities for Appreciation and Caring



Post-Deployment

Laser & Stephens (2012)



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Military BRATs

Brave, Resilient, Adaptable, Trustworthy



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Normative Military Stressors for Children

- Relocation
- Child Care
- Education
- Deployments



Blaisure et al. (2012)



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Resiliency in Military Children

- Sense of belonging/community
- Adaptable
- Tolerant of diversity
- Responsible/independent
- Respect for authority



Easterbrooks et al. (2013); Hall (2012); Park (2011)



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Helping Children: Pre-Deployment

- Encourage quality time with each child
- Emphasize honesty
- Help parents provide reassurance
- Foster connection
- Create communication plan
- Facilitate conversations with schools/teachers



U.S. Navy photo
by PO2 Stephanie Tigner

Pre-Deployment

Military OneSource (2012); Pavlicin (2003); Photo: <http://www.defense.gov>



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Helping Children: Deployment

- Encourage consistency & routine
- Highlight the importance of support from other adults
- Help parents model self-care
- Facilitate good communication
- Emphasize the importance of fun
- Remind parents to let kids be kids

Deployment

Hall (2008); Pavlicin (2003)



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Successful Reunions with Children

Things to remember:

- Children react differently to homecoming depending on their age & relationship with deployed parent
- Children are often loyal to the parent that stays behind
- Children may feel anxious about the Service Member leaving again
- Children will wonder if rules at home will change

Post-Deployment

Pavlicin (2003); Pincus et al. (2001)



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Infant/Toddler Development

- A time of rapid growth and development
 - Physical
 - Cognitive (language skills)
- Attachment is a major milestone



Derenne (2008); Photo: <http://www.morguefile.com>



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Reunion & Reintegration: Infants/Toddlers



Homecoming Reactions

- “Stranger Reaction”
- Increased sensitivity
- Crying, clinginess, disrupted schedule
- Delayed milestones
- Temper tantrums
- Nightmares
- Regression in skills



Fostering Reintegration

- Realistic expectations
- Direct contact
- Consistency
- Opportunities for connection
- Take things slowly
- Expect regression

Barnett et al. (2012); Photos: <http://flickr.com/photos/thenationalguard>, <http://www.beaufort.marines.mil>



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Pre-Schooler Development

- Growth/development continue at a rapid pace
- The child’s perception is that everything revolves around him/her
- Magical thinking predominates



Derenne (2008); Photo: <http://www.morguefile.com>



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Reunion & Reintegration: Pre-Schoolers



Homecoming Reactions

- Personalize stress
- Regression in skills
- Acting out
- Time to warm up



Fostering Reintegration

- Ignore regressive behaviors
- Listen & answer questions
- Opportunities for connection
- Take things slowly

Barnett et al. (2012); Photos: <http://flickr.com/photos/thenationalguard>, <http://www.beaufort.marines.mil>



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School Age Child Development

- Physical development slows
- The child begins to find his/her place in the world
 - Mastery in academics, athletics, art
 - Negotiation of status in the peer group
- Increased organization, responsibility, cognitive and moral development
 - Logical thinking, empathy, respect for rules



Derenne (2008)



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Reunion & Reintegration: School Age Children



Homecoming Reactions

- Whiny, aggressive, irritable
- Need time to talk
- Need physical attention
- Rapid mood shifts
- Excitement
- Fear



Fostering Reintegration

- Slowly transition roles/responsibilities
- Include Service Member in routines
- One-on-one time
- Connect to school/community resources

Barnett et al. (2012); Photos: <http://flickr.com/photos/thenationalguard>, <http://www.beaufort.marines.mil>



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Adolescent Development

- Puberty
- Increased reliance on peer group to determine norms
 - Separation/individuation
- Capable of abstract thinking
- Common to have parent/child tension



Derenne (2008); Photo: <http://www.morguefile.com>



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Reunion & Reintegration: Adolescents



Homecoming Reactions

- Emotionally guarded
- Acting out
- Lower grades
- Relief
- Concern about roles/responsibilities
- Sensitivity



Fostering Reintegration

- Open communication
- Consistency
- Transition roles/responsibilities
- One-on-one time
- Respect privacy

Barnett et al. (2012); Photos: <http://flickr.com/photos/thenationalguard>, <http://www.beaufort.marines.mil>



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Risk & Resiliency

"Semper Gumby"



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Deployment Risk Factors

- Rigid coping style
- History of family dysfunction/ behavioral health problems
- Families experiencing first military separation
- New to duty location
- Young families
- Pregnant spouses
- Single parent families
- Dual military families
- Families with foreign spouses
- Blended families
- Selected Reserve

Blount et al. (1992); Darwin (2012); Hall (2008) Huffman & Payne (2006); Kelley (2006); Weins & Boss (2006); Wolpert et al. (2000)



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Blended Families

- Children of different developmental ages and stages
- Higher risk of emotional / behavioral problems
- Torn between biological parents
- Two households
- Issues of isolation



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Adler-Baeder et al. (2005); Hall (2008)



Selected Reserve Families

- Exist primarily within civilian community
- Isolated from traditional military culture, support, and resources
- Possible financial challenges
- Employment concerns
- Changes in health care
- Yellow Ribbon Program



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Darwin (2012)



LGB Families

- 20 September 2011 = Repeal of DADT
- 26 June 2013 = Repeal of Section 3 of DOMA



Photo Credit: Ms. Britney L. Walker, Army Medicine

- Prejudice/ Discrimination
- Identity Concealment
- Relocation Issues
- Social Support

Ender et al. (2012); Herek (2009); Oswald & Sternberg (2014); Photo: <http://www.army.mil>



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The Impact of Mental Health Issues

- Depression, PTSD
- Caregiver Burden
- “As goes the parent, so goes the child”



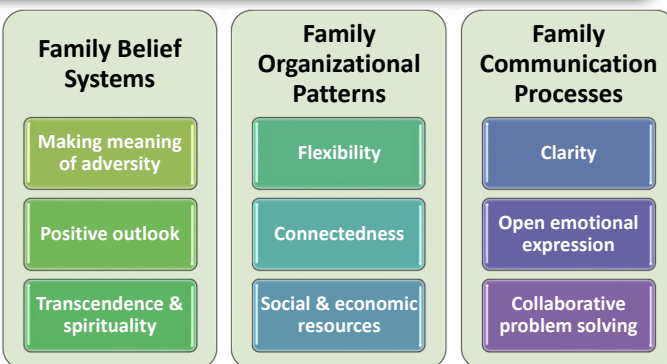
Blaisure et al. (2012); Blow et al. (2013); Flake et al. (2009); Goff et al. (2007); Lester et al. (2010); Sayers et al. (2009); Tanielian et al. (2013); Photo: <http://www.madison.va.gov>



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Keys to Family Resilience



Walsh (2006)



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Family Belief Systems

- Viewing crises as a shared challenges
- Normalize/contextualize distress
- Hope, optimism
- Affirmation of strengths
- Making the best of available options
- Connection with cultural/ religions traditions

Walsh (2006)



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Family Organizational Patterns

Family Organizational Patterns

Flexibility

Connectedness

Social & economic resources

- Adaptive change
- Stability through disruptions
- Authoritative leadership
- Support/collaboration
- Respect for individual needs
- Connection to kin/social networks
- Financial security

Walsh (2006) 73

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Family Communication Processes

Family Communication Processes

Clarity

Open emotional expression

Collaborative problem solving

- Clear, consistent messages
- Sharing of information
- Open communication
- Mutual trust, empathy, and tolerance
- Creative brainstorming
- Shared decision-making/ conflict resolution
- Preparing for future challenges

Walsh (2006) 74

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Deployment Resiliency Factors

- Family readiness
- Active coping styles
- “Making meaning” of the deployment
- Strong community of social support
- Acceptance of military lifestyle
- Optimism
- Self-reliance
- Ability to adopt flexible gender roles

Hammer et al. (2006); Patterson & McCubbin (1984); Rosen et al. (1993); Walsh (2006); Weins & Boss (2006) 75

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Resiliency Skills

Mind-Body Skills

Cognitive Skills

Communication Skills

Bowles et al. (2012) 76



Mind-Body Skills

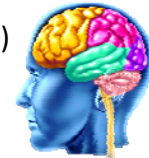
Strengthen the ability to manage stress and intense emotions

- Breathing Exercises
- Yoga
- Mindfulness
- Meditation
- Guided Imagery



Cognitive Skills

- Identification of faulty/unhelpful ways of thinking (*cognitive distortions*)
 - Mind reading
 - “Should” statements
 - Labeling
- Development of alternative, more realistic thoughts (*cognitive reframing*)
- Changes in thoughts can lead to changes in behaviors and in emotion.



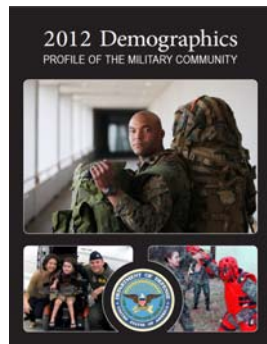
Communication Skills

Help resolve problems and maintain connection

- Speaker-Listener Technique
- Gentle Startups
- Avoid the “Four Horsemen”
- Use of Repair Attempts
- Give compliments
- Foster friendship



Resources



Department of Defense 2012 Demographics Profile of the Military Community

<http://www.militaryonesource.mil/>
Search for "Reports"



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Resources

- After Deployment: <http://www.afterdeployment.org/>
- Families Overcoming Under Stress (FOCUS): <http://www.focusproject.org/>
- Military Child Education Coalition: <http://www.militarychild.org/>
- Military Family Research Institute: <https://www.mfri.purdue.edu/>
- Military Kids Connect: <https://militarykidsconnect.org/>
- Military One Source: <http://www.militaryonesource.mil/>
- Military Partners & Families Coalition: <http://www.milpfc.org/>
- Military Youth Deployment Support Resources & Videos: <http://bit.ly/1bveHEh>
- Real Warriors: <http://www.realwarriors.net/>
- Talk, Listen, Connect: <http://www.sesamestreet.org/parents/topicsandactivities/toolkits/tlc>
- Yellow Ribbon Program: <http://www.yellowribbon.mil/>
- Zero to Three: <http://www.zerotothree.org/>



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Military OneSource

- Confidential services available via telephone & online
- Comprehensive information on every aspect of military life:
 - Deployment
 - Reunion
 - Relationships
 - Grief
 - Spouse employment & education
 - Parenting & childhood



<http://www.militaryonesource.mil>



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FOUCS: Families Overcoming Under Stress

- Training in core resilience skills
 - Emotion regulation
 - Communication
 - Problem solving
 - Goal-setting
 - Managing deployment reminders
- FOCUS World (online resiliency training)
- FOCUS On the Go! (mobile app)



Image courtesy of: <http://www.dodlive.mil/index.php/2010/12/medical-monday-project-focus/>

<http://www.focusproject.org>



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FOCUS World

F-O-C-U-S Home How It Works Program Benefits About Us Resources Contact **FOCUS World** Blog

FOCUS World (www.focusworld.org) is an interactive, online educational tool that helps military families become stronger in the face of challenges by providing both parents and kids a fun place to learn and practice important skills, such as:

<http://www.focusworld.org>

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Military Kids Connect

- Online community for military children (ages 6-17)
- Access to age-appropriate resources to support children dealing with the challenges of military life
- Additional resources for parents & teachers

<http://www.militarykidsconnect.dcoe.mil>

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Military Kids Connect

<http://www.militarykidsconnect.dcoe.mil>

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Sesame Street Toolkit: Talk, Listen, Connect

- DVDs: Deployment, Homecomings, Grieving
- Website: Military Families Near & Far
- Mobile Apps:
 - Sesame Street for Military Families
 - The Big Moving Adventure

<http://www.sesamestreet.org/parents/topicsandactivities/toolkits/tlc>

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CDP Website: Deploymentpsych.org

Features include:

- Descriptions and schedules of upcoming training events
- Blog updated daily with a range of relevant content
- Articles by subject matter experts related to deployment psychology, including PTSD, mTBI, depression, and insomnia
- Other resources and information for behavioral health providers
- Links to CDP's Facebook page and Twitter feed



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Online Learning

The following online courses are located on the CDP website at:
<http://www.deploymentpsych.org/content/online-courses>

NOTE: All of these courses can be taken for free or for CE Credits for a fee

- Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) for PTSD in Veterans and Military Personnel (1.25 CE Credits)
- Prolonged Exposure Therapy for PTSD in Veterans and Military Personnel (1.25 CE Credits)
- Epidemiology of PTSD in Veterans: Working with Service Members and Veterans with PTSD (1.5 CE Credits)
- Provider Resiliency and Self-Care: An Ethical Issue (1 CE Credit)
- Military Cultural Competence (1.25 CE Credits)
- The Impact of Deployment and Combat Stress on Families and Children, Part 1 (2.25 CE Credits)
- The Impact of Deployment and Combat Stress on Families and Children, Part 2 (1.75 CE Credits)
- The Fundamentals of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) (1.5 CE Credits)
- Identification, Prevention, & Treatment of Suicidal Behavior in Service Members & Veterans (2.25 CE Credits)
- Depression in Service Members and Veterans (1.25 CE Credits)

All of these courses and several others are contained in the Serving Our Veterans Behavioral Health Certificate program, which also includes 20+ hours of Continuing Education Credits for \$350.

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Provider Support

CDP's "Provider Portal" is exclusively for individuals trained by the CDP in evidence-based psychotherapies (e.g., CPT, PE, and CBT-I)


Features include:

- Consultation message boards
- Hosted consultation calls
- Printable fact sheets, manuals, handouts, and other materials
- FAQs and one-on-one interaction with answers from SMEs
- Videos, webinars, and other multimedia training aids

Participants in CDP's evidence-based training will automatically receive an email instructing them how to activate their user name and access the "Provider Portal" section at Deploymentpsych.org.




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How to Contact Us

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Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/DeploymentPsych>
Twitter: @DeploymentPsych

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