



Military Lifestyle

- All military families are affected by the surrounding military culture, context and demands, although with substantial variability in degree.
- Lifestyle includes frequent moves, transitions, and separations.
- Change, saying goodbye, and being the new kid again are all aspects of the military lifestyle.
- Children change schools, on average, from 6 to 9 times by the time they graduate high school.
- Living the military lifestyle can be a small world. You might get to see the same family again that you had not seen in a decade.
- Service members come and go all the time because of training, deployments, or other missions.
- “Gone is gone,” in the mind of a child, regardless of why a parent had to go.

Helpful Links

2020 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community. Department of Defense.

<https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2020-demographics-report.pdf>

National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments. Dept of Defense: Educator’s Guide to the Military Child During Deployment.

<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/resources/educators-guide-military-child-during-deployment>

Challenges of a Military Lifestyle

Deployments and Separations pose an increased risk of:

- Mental health diagnosis of acute stress, mood, and behavior disorders
- Poor academic achievement
- Younger children may display stress as clinginess, tantrums, defiance, changes in appetite, nightmares.
- School-age children: Experience an increase in fears/worries; difficulty concentrating
- Teens: May have to give up extra-curricular activities due to the changes in the family dynamic.

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References:

Military OneSource (2021). Supporting Children and Youth During Deployment.

<https://planmydeployment.militaryonesource.mil/deployment/family-members/supporting-kids-during-deployment/>

Sullivan, K. et al. (2021). Mental Health Outcomes Associated with Risk and Resilience among Military-Connected Youth. *Fam Process*. 60 (2).

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7997811/>

Parental Health: Some families experience the effects of combat related injuries long after the service member returns home.

Exposure to conflict/war can cause:

- Visible wounds: amputations; burns
- Invisible wounds: Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI); Post Traumatic Stress (PTSD), Anxiety; Depression
- Loss of life: combat-related, suicide, training accident, illness; has a profound effect on a child.

Long term effects of service-related injuries on children include:

- Emotional distress
- Feelings of loss or grief
- Misinterpreting a parent's TBI-related symptoms as indicators that the parent no longer loves them.
- Anger or resentment about new care giving responsibilities or changes in the family dynamic.

References:

PTSD: National Center for PTSD. Effects of PTSD on Family.

https://www.ptsd.va.gov/family/effect_families.asp

Impact of TBI on Military Families and Children CSTS.

<https://www.cstsonline.org/resources/resource-master-list/resources-for-recovery-understanding-the-impact-of-tbi-on-military-families-and-children>

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PTSD: [National Center for PTSD Home \(va.gov\)](https://www.nationalcenterforptsd.org/)

Transitions: Military families move frequently. Some effects of frequent transition include:

- Being the new kid again
- Trying to fit in
- Worry, fear, uncertainty
- Sadness of leaving friends, familiar surroundings
- Learning gaps or overlaps
- Different tests, curricula, schedules
- Lack of connection/relationships to teachers, peers

Benefits of a Military Lifestyle

Economics: Military children have access to a steady income, residential stability, child development centers, comprehensive health care and some educational benefits/assistance.

Social/Emotional: While all families are unique, in general military-connected families are:

- Close knit-families are a source of central support
- Bonds strengthened by separation
- Web of support-extended family, friends, caregivers, teachers, coaches
- Support of the military community
- Shared values and traditions

References:

“Building Resilience in Children and Teens” by Dr. Ken Ginsburg

<http://www.fosteringresilience.com/about.php>

Mancini, J. et al. (2020). Toward a Framework for Military Family Life Education: Culture, Context, Content, and Practice. *Family Relations* 69 (1).

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339074850_Toward_a_Framework_for_Military_Family_Life_Education_Culture_Context_Content_and_Practice

MacDermid, Wadsworth, S. et al. (2016). Accumulation of Risk and Promotive Factors Among Young Children in US Military Families. *Am J Community Psychol.* 57.

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/ajcp.12025>

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Third Culture Kids: Someone who has grown up in a different culture from their parents' culture and has experienced frequent transitions.

- Challenging lifestyle due to frequent transitions.
- Difficulty fitting in or feeling a sense of belonging.
- Experiences "reverse cultural shock" returning to the U.S. after living overseas.
- Exposed to a variety of cultural experiences.
- Adept at making quick connections, especially to other military-connected children.

Helpful links:

Third Culture Kids: Growing Up Among Worlds by Pollock, D., Van Reken, R., and Pollock, M. Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 3rd edition.

Arrivals, Departures and the Adventures In-Between by O'Shaughnessy, C. Summertime Publishing.

Useem, R., Cottrell, A. (1996). Adult Third Culture Kids. In book: Strangers at Home (pp.22-35) by Smith, C. Aletheia Publications.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319289838_Adult_Third_Culture_Kids

Protective Factors: The experiences of military-connected children give them the opportunity to develop the necessary skills to effectively meet the challenges of the 21st Century.

These skills include:

- Experience with change: Military children understand that life is always changing and can change quickly!
- Ability to blend in: Living a highly mobile lifestyle, children learn to be flexible and adjust to new people and situations.
- Adaptability: As difficult as moving can be, children quickly learn the nuances of their new surroundings and can adapt to fit in.
- Learn positive coping strategies: Military-connected children learn positive coping strategies through experiences, like transitions or deployments, not often experienced by their peers.
- Develop social awareness skills: Military-connected children meet many other children from different backgrounds, schools, and places they have an opportunity to build this crucial emotional intelligence skill.

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- Expanded worldview: Opportunities to experience different languages and cultures.
- Develop confidence: Learning to navigate new situations and adjust to different surrounds and people helps to build confidence in military-children.
- Dedication to service: Military children experience the commitment, strong values, and sacrifice that is part of the military culture. This often leads to them wanted to continue this tradition of service by planning on a military career of their own.

References:

The Military Teen Experience: A Snapshot of America's Military Teenagers and Future Force. National Military Family Association. 2021. <https://c2t8v9t5.rocketcdn.me/wp-content/uploads/The-Military-Teen-Experience-Report-2021.pdf>

Ginsburg, K. (2018) Supporting Military Families. Center for Parent & Teen Communication. <https://parentandteen.com/supporting-military-families/>

Military Support Services: Institutions, services and organizations that support military families.

Installation support

- MFLC (Military Family Life Counselor)
- Morale Welfare and Recreation (MWR) services for children and youth. This is where military children can meet and connect with other military children, outside of school.
- MWR offers a service where military youth can have a youth sponsor, meaning connecting with another youth at the prospective duty station before the move.
- MWR can also offer special family recreation events, like a family fishing night or family barbeque day. Usually, these events are free.
- Military and Family Support Centers with free access to services such as Family Advocacy Program or Emergency Relief Services
- Exceptional Family Member Program support
- School Liaison Program

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Helpful links

MFCL: <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/confidential-help/non-medical-counseling/military-and-family-life-counseling/>

Youth Sponsorship Program: <https://installations.militaryonesource.mil/military-installation/pentagon-air-force/base-essentials/sponsorship>

School Liaison: <https://installations.militaryonesource.mil/search?program-service=12/view-by=ALL>

Exceptional Family Member Program: <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/family-relationships/special-needs/exceptional-family-member/>

Military Child Education Coalition

- Recognizes the unique challenges of the mil lifestyle at the local, state, and national level.
- Was founded more than 20 years ago to help the military child thrive in the face of transition and separation.
- Dedicated to ensuring inclusive, quality educational experiences for all military-connected children who are affected by being highly mobile, by transitions, and by being separated from parents and loved ones.
- Vision: every military-connected child is college-, work-, and life-ready.

MCEC Programs and Initiatives

Purple Star Schools: <https://www.militarychild.org/purplestarschools>

Student 2 Student[®] (S2S[™]): <https://www.militarychild.org/audience/students>

SchoolQuest[™]: <https://schoolquest.militarychild.org/>

Military Student Consultants: msc@militarychild.org

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National and International Support Organizations

Military OneSource: 1-800-342-9647 or live chat 24/7: <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/>

Military Family Life Counselors (MFLC)

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/confidential-help/non-medical-counseling/military-and-family-life-counseling>

Military Kids Connect: <https://militarykidsconnect.health.mil/>

Sesame Street for Military Families: <https://www.sesamestreetformilitaryfamilies.org>

Teen Line: Teens Helping Teens <https://teenlineonline.org> text TEEN to 839863, or 1-800-852-8336. Your children can also get involved as a volunteer with this organization.

BLOOM: Empowering the Military Teen: This website features stories written by military teens, articles about military life, and spotlights on military kids throughout the world doing extraordinary things: <https://www.bloommilitaryteens.org/>

FOCUS (Families OverComing Under Stress) provides resilience training to military children, families, and couples. It teaches practical skills to help families overcome common challenges related to a military life. <https://focusproject.org/>

Operation Purple[®] Camp offers military kids a free week of camp where they connect with other children. Children, from all uniformed services, including National Guard, Reserve, Space Force, the Commissioned Corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and United States Public Health Service may apply.

<https://www.militaryfamily.org/programs/operation-purple/operation-purple-camp/>

Blue Star Families: Their mission is to strengthen military families by connecting them to the communities in which they serve. <https://bluestarfam.org/>

National Military Family Association: Offers information, tools, and resources to support and enhance the quality of life for every military family through advocacy, programming and responsive problem-solving. <https://www.militaryfamily.org/>

Hidden Heroes: Resources and support for military caregivers. <https://hiddenheroes.org/>

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Videos

How PTSD Affects the People You Love: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifmI2w7kJVA>

The Life of a Brat: <https://youtu.be/4PV1vMIGAPQ>

Things Only Military Brats Understand: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiCLPQ48i7I>

No Place Like Home-A Short Film on Third Culture Kids: <https://youtu.be/neRp-LsGsK8>

What it's like being a military child: <https://youtu.be/oz2TvU-lk60>

MCEC[®] Resources

- [SchoolQuest[™]](https://schoolquest.militarychild.org) is an interactive tool, specially designed to support highly mobile military-connected parents & students:
<https://schoolquest.militarychild.org>
- Global Support System for Students, Parents and School Professionals: The Military Student Consultant initiative provides regional one-on-one support for advocacy and problem-solving resources to assist military-connected students, parents and professionals who serve them. To contact a Military Student Consultant, email msc@militarychild.org or call (254) 953-1923 ext. 1146.
- Professional Development: Enhancing the current capabilities, competency and awareness of professionals who serve and support military-connected children and youth. Find current offerings and more details at <https://www.militarychild.org/audience/professionals>
- Student Achievement: Provides support to military-connected students through peer-to-peer mentoring programs, the *Frances Hesselbein Student Leadership Program[™]*, student-focused webinars, and our Student Advisory Council. Find more details at <https://www.militarychild.org/audience/students>
- The MCEC[®] podcast series covers an array of informative and important topics with guests from all walks of life. Visit [Podbean](#) or [iTunes](#)
- Find other MCEC[®] Parent Support [webinars](#) related to this topic on our official website <https://www.militarychild.org/webinars>
- If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to msc@militarychild.org

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