



Military Child Education Coalition®

Back to School TOOLKIT

Planning for a new school year can feel overwhelming, especially for military families managing multiple children, new schools, or a recent Permanent Change of Station (PCS) move. This toolkit is built around four pillars to help every military-connected child start the school year strong and stay supported all year long.

01

Educational Stability

Tools and guidance that create continuity through school transitions.

02

Community & Connection

Helping military families feel supported, connected, and understood.

03

Advocacy & Empowerment

Equipping families with resources to support student success.

04

Practical Support

Actionable, easy-to-use resources families can apply right away.



10 Back to School Tips

EDUCATIONAL STABILITY

1 Re-Establish Routines Quickly

Reset sleep and wake times at least a week before school starts. Predictable routines support self-regulation and performance, especially during times of change (Selman & Dilworth-Bart, 2024).

2 Understand the School's Technology Policies

Research shows schools with clear phone policies report better student wellbeing and fewer disruptions (Goodyear et al., 2025; Common Sense Media, 2024). Ask about your school's technology policies at the start of the year. Knowing them helps you start the conversation at home.

3 Know the Interstate Compact

All 50 states have signed the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. The Compact addresses enrollment, placement & attendance, eligibility and graduation. Contact your [School Liaison](#) at the nearest military installation if there are Compact issues or if you want to learn more about your rights. Learn them at mic3.net.

COMMUNITY & CONNECTION

4 Connect With the School Early

Reach out to your child's teacher and counselor in the first week. Share your military background and ask what resources exist for transitioning students. Early connection changes the whole experience (Berkowitz et al., 2014).

5 Use Open-Ended Questions

Ask your child what the best part of their day was, who they sat with at lunch, or what their teacher said that stuck with them. Strong parent-child communication is one of the most consistent protective factors (Mmari et al., 2010).

6 Help Your Child Build a Community

Encourage your child to join a club, sport, or activity as soon as possible, even before they feel fully settled. Friendships form through shared experiences (Mmari et al., 2010). Organization like the Armed Services YMCA ([ASYMCA](#)), Boys & Girl Club of America ([BGCA](#)), or local programs offer opportunities for children to build community.



Berkowitz et al. (2014) | Bradshaw et al. (2010) | Common Sense Media (2024) | Goodyear et al. (2025) | Mmari et al. (2010) | Selman & Dilworth-Bart (2024)

10 Back to School Tips (continued)

ADVOCACY & EMPOWERMENT

7 Teach Self-Advocacy From Day One

Help your child practice asking for help, introducing themselves to a new teacher, and explaining how they learn best. Self-advocacy skills are directly linked to better outcomes and smoother transitions (Roberts et al., 2016).

8 Know Your Child's Rights

If your child has an IEP or 504 plan, services cannot be discontinued because your family moved. Bring documentation to every enrollment meeting. For specialized support visit thepromiseact.org (Roberts et al., 2016; Ruff & Keim, 2014).

PRACTICAL SUPPORT

9 Build a Homework System That Travels

A consistent time dedicated for homework, a simple supply kit, and a way to track assignments are all your child needs. Consistent homework habits positively affect achievement especially in grades 7-12 (Cooper et al., 2006). Free tutoring at military.tutor.com.

10 Use AI as a Learning Tool, Not a Shortcut

AI tools can help your child fill curriculum gaps after a transition or work through a confusing concept. Set one expectation: use AI to understand, not just to complete. Ask your child to explain what they learned (Lee & Kwon, 2024).

PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR YOUR HOME

BEFORE THE SCHOOL YEAR

- ✓ Reset sleep and wake schedules at least one week before the first day
- ✓ Create a family calendar in a central place everyone can see
- ✓ Assemble a homework kit with consistent supplies
- ✓ Gather all school records into one physical folder and one digital backup

DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR

- ✓ Keep a simple planner or tracking system visible at home
- ✓ Hold a weekly ten-minute check-in with your child
- ✓ Keep important school contacts visible and easy to grab (i.e., refrigerator, family bulletin board, or phone's notes app)
- ✓ Set a consistent daily homework time that fits your child's energy

AFTER A PCS MOVE

- ✓ Reach out to the new school before your child's first day to introduce your family and get ahead of any questions
- ✓ Visit the school building with your child before classes begin
- ✓ Help your child identify one activity to join within two weeks
- ✓ Re-establish the homework routine within the first week

Cooper et al. (2006) | Lee & Kwon (2024) | Roberts et al. (2016) | Ruff & Keim (2014)



Educational Stability

Military children change schools, on average, six to nine times between kindergarten and graduation. The families who navigate those transitions most successfully arrive prepared; they know what to ask for, and they know who to call when the process stalls.

Get Ahead of the Paperwork

Before your PCS, gather your child's academic records, IEP or 504 plan, immunization documents, and recent test scores. Carry physical and digital copies. Enrollment delays most often happen when records arrive late. Your School Liaison is your first call. Find yours through militaryonesource.mil.



Know What the Interstate Compact Protects

All 50 states have signed the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. The Compact addresses enrollment, placement & attendance, eligibility and graduation. Contact your **School Liaison** at the nearest military installation if there are Compact issues or if you want to learn more about your rights. Learn them at mic3.net.

When You Need Someone in Your Corner

MCEC's Military Student Consultants are education professionals available to any military-connected family, anywhere in the world, at no cost. They respond personally to every inquiry and can help you work through enrollment barriers, curriculum gaps, IEP transitions, and the social-emotional challenges of starting over. Contact MilitaryChild.org or msc@militarychild.org.



Bradshaw et al. (2010) | Ruff & Keim (2014) | Selman & Dilworth-Bart (2024)



Community & Connection

Every military family knows the particular toll of starting over. Connection after a PCS move does not happen automatically, and it does not always happen quickly. But it does happen, and there are real things you can do to help it along for your child and for yourself.

When Your Child Does Not Want to Try Again

Some military children, especially those who have moved several times, reach a point where they stop investing in new friendships. If you see your child withdrawing, focus on one shared activity, one team, one class where they might meet someone who shares similar interests or experiences. Friendships that grow out of doing something together tend to stick (Mmari et al., 2010).



Peer Support Built for Military Kids

MCEC's Student 2 Student® (S2S™) is a peer-to-peer, student-led program that pairs new students with trained peer leaders who help ease the transition into a new school community. Being welcomed by another student carries a different weight especially with peers who truly understand. Visit [MilitaryChild.org](https://militarychild.org) to learn more about S2S.

Your Family Needs Community Too

Parents and caregivers carry a lot during a PCS move, often while managing the transition for everyone else at the same time. Finding your own community is not a luxury. Check local programs or services on the installation. For more tips, tools, and resources, check MCEC's free parent webinar series at [MilitaryChild.org](https://militarychild.org).



Berkowitz et al. (2014) | Mmari et al. (2010)



Advocacy & Empowerment

Advocating for your child in a new school system can feel intimidating, especially when you are new to the community. But you know your child better than anyone. Being confidently informed aims to make every conversation at school collaborative and focused on the needs of your child.

When the New School Wants to Start Over on Services

If your child has an IEP or 504 plan and the new school says it needs to conduct its own evaluation, the receiving school must still provide comparable services while that evaluation is underway. Bring your child's most recent IEP or 504 plan and documentation of prior services. Ask on your first visit what services will be in place from day one. Visit thepromiseact.org for a Special Education Bill of Rights for military families.



Teaching Your Child to Speak Up for Themselves

Self-advocacy grows over time and the earlier you build it the stronger it becomes. For young children, advocacy can start with learning to ask for help. For middle schoolers, it means describing their learning needs. For high school students, it means attending their own IEP meetings. Students who develop these skills have better academic outcomes and more successful transitions (Roberts et al., 2016).

When Your Child Is Carrying More Than Academics

Sometimes what looks like a struggle with schoolwork is really a child carrying the weight of military life. Relocation stress, worry about a deployed parent, and grief over friendships left behind all affect a child's ability to learn and engage. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) offers free resources specifically for military and veteran families. Find them at nctsn.org.



Roberts et al. (2016) | Ruff & Keim (2014)

Practical Support

Military families are resourceful by necessity. The goal of this toolkit is to give you practical strategies and resources to better support your child, so that learning stays strong no matter what the next school year brings.

When Your Child Experiences Gaps After a Move

Curriculum gaps are common when families move between school systems. Mathematics is the most frequently reported gap, particularly in the lead-up to algebra (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Ruff & Keim, 2014). Ask the new teacher in the first two weeks whether there are foundational areas to address. [Tutor.com](https://www.tutor.com/military) for Military Families offers free live online tutoring 24/7 for eligible families across all six branches and National Guard and Reserve families.



If Homework Has Become a Battle

If homework time has become a battle, a new homework routine may be the answer. Research shows homework is most effective when children complete it when their energy is high and the environment is calm and consistent (Cooper et al., 2006). After a move, try rebuilding the routine together with your child. Ask them when they feel most ready to focus and where they feel most comfortable working.

Supporting the Whole Child, Not Just Grades

Academic performance and emotional wellbeing are deeply connected for military-connected children. A child who feels unsettled or disconnected after a move cannot fully engage with learning no matter how strong the homework routine is. MCEC's Military Child Well-being Toolkit offers practical, evidence-informed resources on social connection, emotional intelligence, resilience, and mental health. Find it at [MilitaryChild.org](https://militarychild.org).



Bradshaw et al. (2010) | Cooper et al. (2006) | Lee & Kwon (2024) | Ruff & Keim (2014)

What the Research Tells Us

“Military children who have strong connections to their family, their peers, and their community consistently make better adjustments to the challenges of military life.”

Mmari, Bradshaw, Sudhinaraset & Blum (2010). Child & Youth Care Forum, 39(5), 351–366.

Why We Built This Toolkit

Military Child Education Coalition has spent more than 25 years studying what military-connected children need to thrive in school. This toolkit was built on that research and on the voices of the families and educators who live this reality every day. We believe that when families are informed, connected, and supported, children flourish.

How to Use This Toolkit

You do not have to read this front to back. Find the pillar that matters most to your family right now and start there. Come back to other sections as your child’s needs change. Share it with your child’s teacher, counselor, or School Liaison. The resources here were chosen to be useful in real conversations with real schools.

How MCEC Can Support Your Family

Military Student Consultants

Free, personal education support for any military-connected family, anywhere in the world. msc@militarychild.org

Student 2 Student Program

Peer-to-peer transition support in schools across the country, helping new students connect and find belonging from day one. [MilitaryChild.org](https://militarychild.org)

Military Child Well-being Toolkit

Evidence-informed resources on social connection, emotional intelligence, resilience, and mental health for military-connected families. [MilitaryChild.org](https://militarychild.org)

Parent Webinars & Resources

Free webinars covering school transitions, advocacy, wellbeing, and more. Available anytime, from anywhere. [MilitaryChild.org](https://militarychild.org)

You are not navigating this alone.

MCEC is here every step of the way. Reach out anytime at Info@MilitaryChild.org or visit [MilitaryChild.org](https://militarychild.org) to explore all of our programs, resources, and tools.



Resource Library

Educational Stability

Providing tools and guidance that create continuity through school transitions.

1. [MIC3](#)

The Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children addresses key issues encountered by military families: eligibility, enrollment, placement, and graduation.

2. [School Liaison Program](#)

School liaisons assist with transition support and education-related matters pre-K through 12th grade.

3. [Tutor.com](#)

Free online tutoring and homework help 24/7 for eligible U.S. military and their families.

4. [Khan Academy](#)

Explore lessons for all grade levels in a variety of subjects, including practice problems.

Community & Connection

Helping military families feel supported, connected and understood.

1. [Purple Star Schools](#)

Purple Star Schools are spreading across the country as a signal of welcoming schools for military families. Families can use the Purple Star designation to identify schools that are committed to supporting military-connected students.

2. [The Military Child Well-Being Toolkit](#)

Provides a variety of resources for families and professionals to support the military child's well-being.

3. [4-H Military Partnerships](#)

Offers opportunities to connect and provides support to military-connected youth whether you live on or near an installation, in a civilian community, or overseas.

4. [FOCUS: Resilience Training for Military Families](#)

FOCUS (Families OverComing Under Stress) helps military couples and families thrive.

Resource Library

Advocacy & Empowerment

Equipping families and educators with resources to support student success.

1. [Military OneSource](#)

Offers a wide variety of resources for military families and professionals.

2. [Military Student Consultants](#)

Provide individual professional services to education professionals, parents and students to address challenges associated with the military lifestyle. To contact a Military Student Consultant, email MSC@MilitaryChild.org

3. [Understood](#)

Offers free resources for families with learning and thinking differences, including how to advocate for your child.

4. [Bloom: Empowering the Military Teen](#)

Created by and for military teens to highlight their experiences through content creation and community building.

Practical Support

Delivering actionable, easy-to-use resources families can immediately apply.

1. [Parent Support Webinars](#)

MCEC Parent Support workshops are available via webinar to share practical support strategies parents can use wherever they are located. We have webinars on a wide range of topics including Resilience & Facing Challenges, Children with Exceptional Needs, School & Academic Success, and more. Visit our [YouTube Channel](#) and browse our full library.

2. [Be A Learning Hero](#)

Free tools and resources including a Readiness Check and a personalized letter to introduce your child to their new teachers.

3. [Milestones](#)

Access a free online collection of videos to understand grade-level expectations in grades K-12.

4. [Common Sense Media](#)

Helps families check ratings, reviews, and guidance on a variety of media to make informed decisions about their children's media and technology use.