

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR MILITARY FAMILY READINESS

The Impact of Service on Military Children and Programs to Promote Family Well-being Rapid Literature Review

Clearinghouse Technical Assistance Team

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Executive Summary

This report, conducted in response to a request from The Barry Robinson Center, addresses research related to the impact of service on military families, including implications for blended military families and attachment in military children. However, because of a lack of robust research data and evidence collected on blended military families, the report also includes research informed by efforts in civilian populations.

Service members and their families face unique challenges and opportunities associated with military life. Repeated parental absence and risk of a parent's injury or death are central challenges in military families and can create chronic disruptions in parent-child relationships (Culler & Saathoff-Wells, 2018). Recent research suggests the most critical protective factors for military children's well-being and resilience are sensitive and responsive parenting, maternal psychological well-being, and a supportive family or other social networks among adults (e.g. (Finkel, Kelley, & Ashby, 2003; Riggs & Riggs, 2011; Posada et al., 2017). Professionals can best serve this population by increasing their awareness and understanding of these common issues and the potential impact on families (Blaisure, Saathoff-Wells, Pereira, MacDermid-Wadsworth, & Dombro, 2012). Further, improving social support and helping individuals access and use resources may help foster overall military family well-being (Institute of Medicine, 2014).

This report provides:

- a description of the literature review process on the topic,
- a brief summary of the current demographic profile of the military force and their families,
- an outline of specific challenges and opportunities experienced by military families,
- a list of Department of Defense resources and programs available to families,
- recommendations for providers to learn more about military families,
- a description of blended military families and recommendations for service providers,
- a description of attachment and reactive attachment disorder (RAD) in military children and recommendations for providers, and
- suggestions for evidence-based programs to support military family well-being in the areas of parenting, blended families, and attachment.

Please note that this rapid review provides a preliminary examination of the research on military service impact on families, blended military families, and attachment in military children; however, it is not intended to serve as a comprehensive review of the literature.

Introduction

The Technical Assistance team at the Clearinghouse for Military Readiness at Penn State (Clearinghouse) conducted a brief, rapid review of the literature on the topic of the impact of service on military families with a secondary focus on blended military families and attachment. Research examining these topics were identified by searching peer reviewed journal articles limited to publications between 2000 and 2019. Search terms included: *family well-being, risk and protective factors, challenges and opportunities, blended families, attachment, reactive attachment disorder (RAD), and military children, military families, military spouses, service members, and veterans.*

Demographics of Military Families

The military community consists of a diverse group of service members and families that generally reflects the racial makeup of the United States. There are considerably more men serving than women with one female service member for every five male service members (United States Department of Defense, 2017). Military families take many forms, such as traditional, single-parent, blended, multigenerational, and co-habiting. They can also consist of dual military parents- families in which both parents are service members. The Army is the largest service branch, followed by the Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps. The majority of service members are enlisted (82%).

The Department of Defense 2017 Profile of the Military Community reports the following up-to-date demographic information about service members and their families:

- Across the active duty and selected reserve population, there are 2,103,415 military personnel and 2,667,909 family members, including spouses, children, and adult dependents.
- Overall, the average age of a married active duty service member is 32.
- Of a total of 612,127 Active Duty spouses, half (50.0%) are 30 years of age or younger, while the other half (50.0%) are over 30 years of age.
- About half (49%) of military personnel are married, 6.6% are dual military marriages, and most dual military marriages are among enlisted service members.
- Of all military personnel, 34% are married with children, and 6% are single with children.
- Of the 1,678,778 total military children in 2017, the largest percentage are between birth and 5 years of age (38%), followed by 6 to 11 years of age (32%), and 12 to 18 years of age (27%).
- The divorce rate among service members has remained stable since 2010 at 3.5% for enlisted service members and 1.7% for officers.

Military Service Impact on Families: Challenges and Opportunities

Service members and their families face unique challenges and opportunities associated with military life, such as frequent relocations, deployments, reintegration, and an eventual transition from the military to the civilian sector. A supportive family environment serves as a buffer to the adversity faced by children in military families (Lucier-Greier et al., 2015).

Relocation

Active duty service members move, on average, every two to three years (Clever & Segal, 2013). Due to the service member's rank or specialty, the moves may occur more or less frequently. In most circumstances, families relocate with their service member, and each member of the military family experiences the added stress of adapting to a new community (Masten, 2013b).

Challenges:

- Relocation is related to a decrease in military life satisfaction, commitment, and retention intentions for service members (Meadows et al., 2016).
- A civilian spouse job loss, moving costs, and home equity loss may have a negative financial impact on the family (Masten, 2013a; Defense Manpower Data Center, 2015).
- A move is associated with a loss of the established support networks for all family members. This network may include friends, coworkers, medical services, schools, and social and recreational clubs and activities.

Opportunities:

- Career advancement for the service member, leading to professional growth, job stability, and the potential for future promotions.
- Opportunity for the family to experience a new community and possibly a new culture if moving overseas.
- Potential for a fresh start in many aspects of each family member's life (e.g., work, school, habits, relationships).
- Meeting new people, thus expanding the family's social network.
- May increase family coping and closeness (Morris & Age, 2009) as the family relies on one another to adjust to change.

Deployment

A deployment is defined as *the rotation of forces into and out of an operational area* (Department of Defense Dictionary of Military Terms, 2010). Deployment locations may be stateside or overseas training sites or peacekeeping or combat operations abroad. Family members do not accompany the service member on deployments. The duration of a deployment varies by mission and service branch, but most range from three months up to a year or more (Hosek & Martorell, 2009).

Multiple and prolonged deployments generally have worse effects on families than fewer and shorter deployments (Masten, 2013a). However, the majority of veterans and their families demonstrate positive adaptation during and after deployment (Riggs & Riggs, 2011). Families already struggling with emotional, relationship, or financial problems are more affected by deployments than those families that function well before deployment (Masten, 2013a). Positive coping for the at-home family may include having a positive attitude, using the deployment as a time for personal development, channeling anxiety into other activities, and developing a routine (Davis, Ward, & Storm, 2011). Support with regulating emotions and talking with a caring adult or parent about concerns may help to alleviate stress in children (Morris & Age, 2009). Communication can benefit every member of the family during a deployment particularly if expectations about communication frequency are realistic (Greene, Buckman, Dandeker, & Greenberg, 2010; Lester et al., 2016).

Challenges:

- The service member may encounter life threatening situations and is at greater risk for injury, both mentally and physically (Delahaj, 2016).
- Families live separate from one another and communication may be infrequent or inconsistent making it difficult to stay connected (Greene et al., 2010).
- The service member may be absent for family events and milestones, such as births, birthdays, holidays, and graduations.
- National Guard and Reserve service members may experience a decline in income during deployment, thus negatively impacting a family's financial well-being (Hoshmond & Hoshmond, 2007).
- All members of the family may experience adjustment challenges and there is an increased likelihood of marital instability (Davis, Ward, & Storm, 2011; Lester et al., 2016; Marek & D'Aniello, 2014;).
- Stress levels increase for all family members (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2015).
- Heightened depressive and anxiety symptoms arise in the at-home parent and in children (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2015). These symptoms can prompt behavior problems in children (Morris & Age, 2009).
- The at-home parent often becomes a solo-parent and may have to take on additional household responsibilities (Chandra et al., 2011).
- Foreign-born and younger spouses may be at an increased risk for poor coping (Johnson et al., 2007).
- The primary caregiver's mental health and coping can directly influence the child's ability to cope (Russo & Fallon, 2015). If the at-home parent is suffering, the children are more likely to be adversely affected.

Opportunities:

- Active duty service members may experience tax reliefs and an increase in pay due to special deployment-related allowances (Hosek & MacDermid-Wadsworth, 2013).

- Families living near other military families also experiencing a deployment may strengthen their support network and cope better with the challenges of the deployment (Carter et al., 2015).
- Taking on additional responsibilities during the deployment can build a sense of self-efficacy and personal development in the at-home parent and in children (Masten, 2013a).

Reintegration

Huebner & Mancini (2005) state that time after the service member returns from a deployment, known as reintegration, also presents the family with unique challenges and opportunities. While reunion with families is typically a happy time, it can also be very stressful. Family members may have grown comfortable with their new roles and responsibilities and may hesitate to give them up. Similarly, the service member parent may be unclear about their role in the family upon return (Huebner & Mancini, 2005).

Challenges:

- Active duty service members may experience a decrease in pay due to the end of tax breaks and special deployment-related allowances (Hosek & MacDermid-Wadsworth, 2013).
- Communicating with the family about the deployment may be difficult (Knoblock, Basinger, Wehrman, Ebata, & McGlaughlin, 2016).
- The service member may experience a feeling of not being needed at home (Knoblock & Theiss, 2012) or may feel unfamiliar with changes and unsure about new routines and ways of doing things within the home and family (Knoblock & Theiss, 2012; Knoblock et al., 2016).
- The service member may have difficulty readjusting to a non-deployment environment.
- The family may struggle to readjust to the service member being home. Specifically, the at-home spouse or children may have to give up established responsibilities to now include the service member (Knoblock et al., 2016).
- The family may have difficulty with helping their service member deal with the physical and/or mental wounds from deployment (Culler & Saathoff-Wells, 2018).
- The at-home spouse may feel a loss of independence upon service member's return (Pincus, House, Christenson, & Adler, 2001).
- Parents may have disagreements on how things were handled during the service member's absence (e.g., finances, childcare) (Knoblock & Theiss, 2012).
- Children may feel the effects from parental re-adjustments (e.g., arguments) (Knoblock et al., 2016).
- Children may have trouble reestablishing their relationship with the service member parent due to length of time separated or lack of communication during the deployment (Huebner & Mancini, 2005).
- The service member may not recognize the growth in children and struggle with the changes that occurred while deployed (Huebner & Mancini, 2005).

Opportunities:

- All members of the family may value their relationships with one another more (Knoblock & Theiss, 2012) and these relationships may become stronger (Knoblock et al., 2016). The family can reconnect and have a fresh start.
- The service member may be pleasantly surprised with the growth of family members (Knoblock, Basinger, Wehrman, Ebata, & McGlaughlin, 2016).
- Spouse may have the opportunity to explore more self-interests and goals now that the service member has returned.
- Children may experience a sense of pride in showing the service member how much they have grown in multiple areas of their lives (e.g., physically, academically, and in maturity) (Knoblock et al., 2016).

Transition Out of the Military (i.e. Separation or Retirement)

Active duty service for military members averages about six years for enlisted members and eleven years for officers (Pew Research Center, 2011). Most service members transition from the military before retirement eligibility (Asch, Hosek, & Mattock, 2014). Early transition planning can help alleviate potential difficulties and allow service members and their families to create realistic expectations for life in the civilian community (Morrison, Shultz, & Taylor, 2003). Each service branch offers free transition counseling for service members and spouses are encouraged to participate. Timely access to transition-related programs and services may improve chances of positive health, economic, and social outcomes for the entire family (Asch, Hosek, & Mattock, 2014).

Challenges:

- The family may experience another move resulting in similar losses realized during a military relocation. This may include readjustment difficulties and added stress related to finances, employment, relationships, substance abuse, and homelessness (Elnitsky, Fisher, & Blevins, 2017).
- The transitioning service member may have little to no previous civilian work experience due to enlisting or commissioning soon after high school or college graduation, making it difficult to find employment after transition (Clemens & Milsom, 2008). Unemployment rates are highest for 18- to 24-year-old Veterans (United States Department of Labor, 2011).
- Service-related mental and physical health issues may impact reintegration to civilian life (Elnitsky, Fisher, & Blevins, 2017; Sayer et al., 2010).
- Transition may be unexpected and may not be voluntary requiring the family to leave military service much sooner than anticipated or preferred.

Opportunities:

- Combat veterans are generally eligible to receive five years of free health care through the Veterans Administration (VA).
- The family may be eligible for benefits from the VA, such as reduced home and education loans (Johnson et al., 2007).

- There is a lesser likelihood of relocations and family separations after transition.
- Transition from the military may create more employment opportunities for the civilian spouse and continuity of activities and sports for children due to fewer relocations and household demands.
- Retirees and their families receive monthly pension income, continued health insurance benefits, and access to commissaries and installation amenities (Johnson et al., 2007).

Department of Defense Established Support Programs for Families

The Department of Defense recognizes the demands placed on service members and their families, especially the challenges that occur with deployments and frequent relocations. Programs and services provide a network of support and are intended to improve the quality of life for this all-volunteer force (Office of Management and Budget, 2019). They are also designed to ease the demands of military life. Families who access military support services report fewer child psychological problems than those who do not seek services (Institute of Medicine, 2014). Helping individuals access and use resources may help to build overall military family well-being.

For quick-reference, a list of free and accessible programs and services that provide support or assistance to service members and their families is provided below. More information can be found by visiting the program or resource website. In addition, assistance for military families may be offered from local, non-DoD support agencies in communities throughout the United States, especially in areas with a high military population.

Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP)

- The Exceptional Family Member Program provides support to military family members with special needs to include those with physical, emotional, developmental, or intellectual disorder that requires special treatment, therapy, education, training, or counseling. EFMP takes an all-inclusive approach to coordinate military and civilian community, educational, medical, housing, and personnel services. Families in need of support from EMFP are required to register for EFMP, meet the eligibility criteria, and keep enrollment information current.
- To locate an installation EFMP office, visit: <https://installations.militaryonesource.mil/>
 - Select “Program or Service” from the drop down menu. Next, input “Exceptional Family Member Program” in the text field. Then, enter the desired installation or zip code.

Family Advocacy Program (FAP)

- FAP aims to help strengthen military families, enhance resiliency and relationship skills, and improve quality of life. The program also focuses on prevention, education, prompt reporting, investigation, intervention, and treatment related to domestic abuse, child abuse, and neglect. Services include seminars, workshops, counseling, and intervention.

- To locate the installation FAP office, visit:
<https://installations.militaryonesource.mil/>
 - Select “Program or Service” from the drop down menu. Next, input “Family Advocacy Program” in the text field. Then, enter the desired installation or zip code.

Military and Family Life Counseling

- Trained counselors deliver face-to-face non-medical counseling services, briefings, and presentations on and off the installation to any interested service member or family member at no cost. Counselors can provide confidential support to address issues such as improving relationships at home and work, stress management, adjustment difficulties, parenting, and grief or loss.
- <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/confidential-help/non-medical-counseling/military-and-family-life-counseling>

Military and Family Support Centers

- Military and Family Support Centers are part of the DoD Family Readiness System. This system is made up of many organizations delivering a vast array of services offered on military installations. Programs may include deployment assistance, personal financial management, career services, family life education, emergency family assistance, domestic and abuse prevention and response services, exceptional family member support, and transition assistance.
 - Army: Army Community Services
 - Marine Corps: Marine Corps Community Services
 - Navy: Fleet and Family Support Program
 - Air Force: Airmen and Family Readiness Center
- To locate a Military and Family Support Center, visit:
<https://installations.militaryonesource.mil/>
 - Select “Program or Service” from the drop down menu. Next, input “Family Support Center” in the text field. Then, enter the desired installation or zip code.

Military OneSource (MOS)

- Military OneSource is available 24/7 to provide free and confidential information, answers, and support to assist military families in all aspects of military life, such as deployment, relocation, and family relationships. Consultants are available to provide personalized assistance via phone or live chat.
- <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/>
- Phone: 800-342-9647

School Support Services

- School support offices provide a wide range of programming, including tutoring services and assistance with entering a new school. Families may work with a School Liaison Officers (SLO) to support their children’s learning. SLOs are

professionals who work directly with families, educators, administrators and military units to smooth transitions and deliver resources to military students.

- To locate an installation SLO, visit: <https://installations.militaryonesource.mil/>
 - Select “Program or Service” from the drop down menu. Next, input “School Liaison Office” in the text field. Then, enter the desired installation or zip code.

Transition Assistance Program (TAP)

- TAP provides information, tools, and training to prepare service members to separate or retire from the military. Training consists of mandatory and optional classes and workshops focused on translating military skills, financial planning, and veterans’ benefits information. Additional seminars provide information to service members interested in furthering their education, finding a job in the public or private sector, or starting their own business.
- To locate an installation TAP office, visit: <https://installations.militaryonesource.mil/>
 - Select “Program or Service” from the drop down menu. Next, input “Transition Assistance Program” in the text field. Then, enter the desired installation or zip code.

Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP)

- YRRP connects National Guard and Reserve service members and their families with resources throughout the deployment cycle through in-person events and online training. Topics covered include co-parenting and financial preparation for deployment. In-person events provide information about how service members and their families can access information on healthcare, education and training opportunities and financial and legal benefits.
- <https://www.yellowribbon.mil/>

Evidence-Based Programs to Foster Parenting Skills and Build Family Relationships

Positive relationships with parents and better overall family adjustment are associated with the psychosocial well-being of military children (Finkel, Kelley, & Ashby, 2003). A list of Clearinghouse vetted, evidence-based parenting programs that have been used in a military setting is in the table below. Programs are listed in descending placement levels, from Promising to Unclear Ø. To gather more information, please click on the program name and you will be directed to the Clearinghouse-developed fact sheet. Each downloadable fact sheet is designed to provide a snap shot of the program and includes information on target audience, evidence, components, previous use, training requirements, cost, estimated implementation time, and program contact information.

For more information on the placement levels and the placement process, please visit: <https://militaryfamilies.psu.edu/programs-review/understanding-the-continuum-of-evidence/>

Promising	Program (click on name for link)	Topic	Program Summary
	1-2-3 Magic	Behavioral Problems, Communication, Depression, Emotional Competency, Life Stress, Parenting	1-2-3 Magic, a community-based program, is designed to provide easy-to-learn parenting techniques and positive discipline strategies, which are intended to strengthen the parent-child relationship.
	After Deployment: Adaptive Parenting Tools (ADAPT)	Communication, Deployment, Emotional Competency, Parenting, Relationships	After Deployment: Adaptive Parenting Tools (ADAPT), an extension of the Parent Management Training-Oregon Model (PMTO) program, is a community-based program that is designed to address specific needs of military families who are experiencing reintegration after deployment.
	Early Risers "Skills for Success" (Early Risers)	Academic Performance, Antisocial Behavior, Case Management, Emotional Competency, Life Stress, Parenting, Relationships, Social Competency	Early Risers "Skills for Success" (Early Risers) is a multi-sector, school-, and community-based program that is designed to prevent or diminish conduct problems among children who could be at high risk for developing antisocial behavior.
	Family Foundations (FF)	Academic Performance, Anxiety, Behavioral Problems, Communication, Depression, Life Stress, Parenting, Relationships	Family Foundations (FF), a universal prevention program, is designed to prepare couples for the various challenges of parenthood by strengthening the couple's co-parenting relationship and improving their parenting skills.
	Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)	Alcohol/Drugs/Tobacco, Bullying, Child Abuse, Communication, Emotional Competency, Life Stress, Parenting, PTSD	Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT), a community-based program, is designed to treat youth who have experienced traumatic events, such as sexual abuse or household violence. Children and parents learn skills to help them process thoughts and feelings related to the trauma.

Unclear +	<u>Common Sense Parenting (CSP)</u>	Communication, Parenting, Relationships, Social Competency	Common Sense Parenting (CSP), a community-based program, is designed to provide parents with information concerning child development issues and teach parents various communication techniques, pertinent discipline practices, and child-parent relationship-building skills.
	<u>Strong Families Strong Forces (Strong Families)</u>	Deployment, Parenting	Strong Families Strong Forces (Strong Families), a community-based program, is designed to help Soldiers, who have returned from Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom and have young children, reintegrate into their families and strengthen their parenting skills.
Unclear Ø	<u>24/7 Dad</u>	Communication, Life Stress, Parenting, Relationships	The 24/7 Dad program, a community-based program, is designed to encourage fathers to become responsible, caring, and interested parents. This program is part of the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI).
	<u>Active Parenting 4th Edition</u>	Academic Performance, Alcohol/Drugs/Tobacco, Behavioral Problems, Communication, Parenting	Active Parenting 4th Edition, a community-based program, is a revision of the Active Parenting Now program and is designed to develop and strengthen parenting skills and improve parent-child relationships and child functioning.
	<u>Everyday Parenting</u>	Anger, Behavioral Problems, Communication, Parenting	Everyday Parenting, a community-based, online program, is designed to provide guidance and support to parents and help minimize problem behaviors, such as tantrums, anger, and aggression in children and adolescents.
	<u>Families and Schools Together (FAST) - Middle School level</u>	Academic Performance, Alcohol/Drugs/Tobacco, Communication, Parenting, Relationships	Families and Schools Together (FAST®) - Middle School level is a community-based program that is designed to encourage youth to make positive life choices as they transition from elementary school to middle school.

	<p><u>Family Wellness: Survival Skills for Healthy Families</u></p>	<p>Alcohol/Drugs/Tobacco, Child Abuse, Communication, Intimate Partner Violence, Parenting, Relationships</p>	<p>The Family Wellness: Survival Skills for Healthy Families program is designed to foster healthy family communication and interactions; improve parenting skills; prevent domestic violence and drug, alcohol, and child abuse; and strengthen couple's relationships.</p>
	<p><u>Love and Logic</u></p>	<p>Behavioral Problems, Communication, Emotional Competency, Parenting, Social Competency</p>	<p>Love and Logic®, a school- and community-based program, is designed to provide parents and teachers with techniques and strategies that can be used to help establish healthy relationships with youth and avoid negative interactions, such as neglect or abuse.</p>
	<p><u>Nurturing Parenting Programs (NPP): Community Based Education for Military Families</u></p>	<p>Deployment, Parenting, PTSD, Relationships</p>	<p>Nurturing Parenting Programs® (NPP): Community Based Education for Military Families is designed to address topics, such as parenting, co-parenting, and marital relationships with a focus on exploring these issues during the deployment cycle.</p>
	<p><u>Nurturing Parenting Programs (NPP): Nurturing America's Military Families</u></p>	<p>Communication, Deployment, Emotional Competency, Parenting, PTSD</p>	<p>Nurturing Parenting Programs® (NPP): Nurturing America's Military Families, a family- and community-based parenting program, is designed to help parents learn new nurturing skills and parenting patterns, improve general parenting skills, and develop non-abusive discipline strategies.</p>
	<p><u>Raising Adults</u></p>	<p>Parenting</p>	<p>Raising Adults, a family and community-based program, is web-based and designed to improve parenting skills. The program focuses on issues of discipline and teaching responsibility and is designed to modify parent behavior and, consequently, change child behavior.</p>

	<u>ScreamFree Parenting</u>	Communication, Emotional Competency, Parenting, Relationships	ScreamFree Parenting, a community-based program, is designed to help parents and caregivers learn how to respond rather than react to children's behaviors and, consequently, create peaceful, healthy relationships.
	<u>The 5 Love Languages</u>	Communication, Parenting, Relationships	The 5 Love Languages® series, a faith- and community-based program, is a Christian scripture-based approach to marriage education and counseling and parenting. This approach seeks to improve marital quality and parenting techniques through communication strategies.

Blended Military Families

Blended families, also referred to as step families, come in many forms. Common examples include: married couples in which one or both spouses have children from a previous relationship, families with children who are in a subsequent marriage that have children from a previous relationship, and families with children whose spouses have children from a previous relationship (Zelevnikov & Zelevnikov, 2015). Many factors may lead to blended family formation including divorce/separation of parents, death of a parent, remarriage, and possible entrance of new children to the family (Komal, 2017).

Notable statistics:

- Recent statistics indicate that 15% of American children live with a stepparent and parent (Ganong & Coleman, 2017).
- 40% of U.S. marriages represented a remarriage for one or both partners (Lewis & Kreider, 2015)
- Most divorced parents remarry or re-partner within three years after divorce (Ganong & Coleman, 2017).

Blended families are becoming much more common in today's society; however, the number of blended military families is currently not documented in DoD demographic reports. The divorce rate among service members is roughly estimated by determining the change in an individual's marital status from year to year but does not calculate the individuals who were also parents. This estimation may also exclude service members who divorced and remarried between reporting and service members who entered military service in a second marriage. Additionally, the report does not indicate children as being biological or step-children, nor is it determined whether or not the child physically resides with the service member. The data available estimates that the

divorce rate among service members in 2016 was 3.5% for enlisted service members and 1.7% for officers (United States Department of Defense, 2017).

Second marriages are known to be more fragile than first marriages and the presence of stepchildren is a prime factor leading to the dissolution of second marriages (Bumpass & Raley, 2007). Positive relationships with parents and better overall family adjustment are associated with the well-being of military children (Finkel, Kelley, & Ashby, 2003). Knowing the types of issues military families face can help professionals in working with blended military families (Jowers, 2018). For example, deployments and relocations can shift family dynamics to be more similar to that of single-parent household situations. Extended family members may serve as additional or primary caregivers for the duration of a deployment. Combat injuries can lead to a caregiving situation that may bring extended family members into the home.

Recommendations for Service Providers

- Implement family and couples counseling that looks at each family system as being unique but share similarities with other blended families (Komal, 2017).
- Help families to define roles and expectations, as well as establish boundaries (Komal, 2017).
- Encourage parents in a blended family to reach agreement on how they will discipline children in the blended family (Zeleznikov & Zeleznikov, 2015).
- Ask parents to keep discussions with ex-partners civil, respectful, and business-like, and restricted to practical issues about their children (Zeleznikov & Zeleznikov, 2015).
- Foster communication with all family members to include each member's viewpoints and feelings (Jowers, 2018; Komal, 2017; Zeleznikov & Zeleznikov, 2015).

Learn more about blended families and keep up-to-date about research supporting blended families by visiting the resource below.

The National Stepfamily Support Center (NSRC)

- The National Stepfamily Resource Center is a division of Auburn University's Center for Children, Youth, and Families. The NSRC serves as a clearinghouse of information, linking family science research on stepfamilies and best practices in work with couples and children in stepfamilies.
- <http://www.stepfamilies.info/about.php>

Evidence-Based Programs to Support Blended Military Families

A list of Clearinghouse vetted, evidence-based programs supporting blended families is in the table below. To gather more information, please click on the program name and you will be directed to the Clearinghouse-developed fact sheet. Programs are listed in descending placement levels, from Promising to Unclear Ø. Each downloadable fact sheet is designed to provide a snap shot of the program and includes information on

target audience, evidence, components, previous use, training requirements, cost, estimated implementation time, and program contact information.

For more information on the placement levels and the placement process, please visit: <https://militaryfamilies.psu.edu/programs-review/understanding-the-continuum-of-evidence/>

	Program (click on name for link)	Topic	Program Summary
Promising	Dads for Life (DFL)	Behavioral Problems, Communication, Divorce, Parenting, Relationships	Dads for Life (DFL), a family- and community-based program, is designed to improve the father-child relationship, mother-father relationship, and the general experience for children that is created in divorce situations by enhancing parenting skills, co-parenting and conflict management skills, and paternal commitment.
	Marriage and Parenting in Stepfamilies	Communication, Parenting, Relationships	Marriage and Parenting in Stepfamilies (MAPS), a community-based, parent-education program based on the Parenting Through Change* curriculum, is designed to cultivate healthy adjustment in children by enhancing couples' relationships and parenting practices. MAPS intends to prevent or reduce common difficulties and issues faced by members of new stepfamilies. *A separate Fact Sheet is available this program.
Unclear +	Smart Steps: Embrace the Journey (Smart Steps)	Couples, Families	Smart Steps: Embrace the Journey (Smart Steps), community-based program for stepfamilies, is designed to teach relationship building skills to enhance couple, parent-child, and stepparent-child relationships.

Unclear Ø	<u>CROSSROADS of Parenting and Divorce</u>	Communication, Divorce, Parenting, Relationships	CROSSROADS of Parenting and Divorce, a video-based program, is designed to help participants learn to handle conflict, form positive co-parenting relationships, and focus on their children's needs.
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Attachment in Military Families

Secure attachment is a relationship between caregiver and child in which the child feels connected, secure and protected (Gray, 2017). Early family experiences can affect the development of secure and healthy attachment relationships and secure attachment is important for parent-child relationships and children's development (Beijersbergen, Juffer, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & van IJzendoorn, 2012). Posada et al. (2015) found that service member fathers who were more involved and had less combat exposure and children whose mothers had less depressive symptoms and better quality of care were more securely attached.

Repeated parental absence and risk of a parent's injury or death are central challenges in military families and can disrupt parent-child relationships (Culler & Saathoff-Wells, 2018). According to Riggs & Riggs (2011), individual differences in children's responses to deployment separation will be related to developmental level, their attachment bonds with both parents, and the overall psychological and behavioral functioning of the at-home parent. If children feel securely bonded to the at-home parent who copes effectively and maintains relatively stable parenting practices, the negative impact of the deploying parent's departure can be reduced (Riggs & Riggs, 2011).

Reactive Attachment Disorder

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 5th Edition (DSM-5) classifies reactive attachment disorder (RAD) as a trauma- and stressor-related condition of early childhood caused by social neglect and maltreatment. RAD is a severe social functioning disorder in which a child has difficulty forming a bond with parents or caregivers (Pritchett, Pritchett, Marshall, Davidson, & Minnis, 2013). Only 1.4% of the population is diagnosed with RAD (Pritchett, Pritchett, Marshall, Davidson, & Minnis, 2013). Due to the lack of research and data for the prevalence and of RAD in military children and the unique implications, information related to RAD among the general population is shared.

Ellis & Saadabadi (2019) describe affected children as displaying the following behaviors:

- Difficulty forming emotional attachments to others
- Decreased ability to experience positive emotion
- Difficulty seeking or accepting physical or emotional closeness
- May react violently when held, cuddled, or comforted

- Behaving unpredictably
- Demonstrating erratic fluctuating moods and being challenging to console
- Showing a strong desire to control their environment and make their own decisions

Changes in routine, attempts to control the child, or uninvited actions to comfort a child diagnosed with RAD may cause rage, violence, or self-injurious behavior (Ellis & Saadabadi, 2019). Pritchett, Pritchett, Marshall, Davidson, & Minnis (2013) contend that children with RAD are more likely to have multiple comorbidities with other disorders, lower IQs, more disorganized attachment, more problem behaviors, and poorer social skills than would be found in the general population.

Additionally, Pritchett, Pritchett, Marshall, Davidson, & Minnis (2013) have found that the risk of developing RAD is higher than average in babies and children who have a mother with postpartum depression, live in orphanages and other institutions, live in multiple foster-care situations, are separated from parents for an extended period, or have neglectful parents or caregivers. Adopted children may be more likely diagnosed as having RAD than children raised by a biological parent (Hall & Geher, 2003).

Recommendations for Service Providers to Support Healthy Attachment in Military Families

- Educate military parents on the benefits of secure attachment how to give their children sensitive support to foster secure attachment (Gray, 2017).
- Educate military families about ways in which parent mental health problems can impact child development, and provide parents with mental health resources (Posada et al., 2015).
- Promote parent-child attachment by facilitating bonding experiences to increase attachment and resilience in family members (Posada et al., 2015).
- Provide parent education classes for all military families, especially during the deployment cycle.

Reactive Attachment Disorder-Specific Recommendations:

- Encourage the child's development by being nurturing, responsive and caring.
- Provide consistent caregivers to encourage a stable attachment for the child.
- Encourage participation in individual and family counseling.
- Educate parents and caregivers about the condition.
- Facilitate or refer parents to parenting skills classes (Zeanah & Gleason, 2015).
- Ensure children are being provided with appropriate educational assistance. This may support cognitive development (Pritchett, Pritchett, Marshall, Davidson, & Minnis, 2013).
- Provide young children diagnosed with RAD an emotionally available attachment figure (Ellis & Saadabadi, 2019).
- Utilize a multidisciplinary approach to care for children with RAD including school personnel, behavioral healthcare workers (i.e., social workers, clinical psychologists, etc.) and parents and caregivers (Ellis & Saadabadi, 2019).

Deployment/Reintegration-Specific Support Recommendations:

- Educate parents on developmentally appropriate ways to prepare their children for deployment.
- Help parents understand children’s normative versus problematic responses to deployment and strategies to address deployment-related distress (Barker & Berry, 2009).
- Encourage military families separated by deployment to maintain contact and communication for the duration of the deployment (Riggs & Riggs, 2011).
- Help the family develop or strengthen positive coping strategies and encourage flexibility regarding established roles and responsibilities during the deployment and upon reintegration (Riggs & Riggs, 2011).
- Encourage family members to seek and strengthen community and social support (Riggs & Riggs, 2011).
- Support service members during reintegration by offering resources to help reduce parental stress during the adjustment period.

Evidence-Based Programs to Strengthen Attachment in Children and Families

A list of Clearinghouse vetted, evidence-based programs supporting attachment in children and families is in the table below. Programs with an asterisk (*) next to the program name have been used in a military setting. To gather more information, please click on the program name and you will be directed to the Clearinghouse-developed fact sheet. Programs are listed in descending placement levels, from Promising to Unclear Ø. Each downloadable fact sheet is designed to provide a snap shot of the program and includes information on target audience, evidence, components, previous use, training requirements, cost, estimated implementation time, and program contact information.

For more information on the placement levels and the placement process, please visit: <https://militaryfamilies.psu.edu/programs-review/understanding-the-continuum-of-evidence/>

	Program (click on name for link)	Topic	Program Summary
Promising	<u>Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-Up (ABC) Intervention</u>	Anger, Behavioral Problems, Emotional Competency, Parenting, Relationships	Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-Up (ABC) Intervention, a community-based and home-visiting intervention, is designed to enhance children’s self-regulatory abilities by teaching caregivers how to provide responsive, sensitive, and nurturing care.

	<u>Family Centered Treatment (FCT)</u>	Emotional Competency, Foster Care, Relationships	Family Centered Treatment® (FCT), a community-based program, is designed to enhance the stability of families who are at risk of disruption by providing support and solutions to existing challenges in family functioning.
Unclear +	<u>Circle of Security - Home Visiting 4 (COS-HV4)</u>	Parenting	Circle of Security - Home Visiting 4 (COS-HV4), a community-based program that is a version of the Circle of Security program, is designed to help parents/caregivers recognize and respond to child's signals, create a strong sense of attachment between child and parents/caregivers, and develop positive caregiving attitudes and behaviors.
	<u>Pathways Triple P (Level 5)</u>	Anger, Emotional Competency, Parenting	Pathways Triple P (Level 5), an intervention program that uses active skills training, is designed to help parents learn about behavior management strategies, such as how to identify and control their own behaviors and emotions. This program is implemented with the Group or Standard Triple P program.
	<u>Real Life Heroes (RLH)</u>	Anxiety, Child Abuse, Depression, Emotional Competency, PTSD	Real Life Heroes (RLH) is a relationship-based intervention designed to reduce child trauma symptoms, increase child security, and enhance positive caregiver-child bonding. This program uses an interactive developmentally oriented workbook and art activities to help children develop new coping skills and create a coherent narrative of their experiences.

	<u>Sensory Motor Arousal Regulation Treatment (SMART)</u>	Anxiety, Depression, Emotional Competency, PTSD	Sensory Motor Arousal Regulation Treatment (SMART), a community-based program, is designed to address and correct the functional impairments that youth experience as a result of trauma through the use of movement-based somatic regulation therapy.
	<u>Steps Toward Effective Enjoyable Parenting (STEEP)</u>	Emotional Competency, Parenting, Relationships, Social Competency	Steps Toward Effective Enjoyable Parenting™ (STEEP™), a community-based prevention program, is designed to improve parenting skills, foster healthy parent-child relationships, and prevent future social and emotional problems in youth.
	<u>Strong Families Strong Forces (Strong Families)*</u>	Deployment, Parenting	Strong Families Strong Forces (Strong Families), a community-based program, is designed to help Soldiers, who have returned from Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom and have young children, reintegrate into their families and strengthen their parenting skills.
Unclear Ø	<u>Nurturing Parenting Programs (NPP): Nurturing America's Military Families*</u>	Communication, Deployment, Emotional Competency, Parenting, PTSD	Nurturing Parenting Programs® (NPP): Nurturing America's Military Families, a family- and community-based parenting program, is designed to help parents learn new nurturing skills and parenting patterns, improve general parenting skills, and develop non-abusive discipline strategies.
	<u>Partners in Parenting Education (P.I.P.E)</u>	Communication, Emotional Competency, Parenting, Relationships	Partners in Parenting Education (P.I.P.E.), an early intervention parenting education program, is designed to encourage positive child development by helping parents strengthen their parent-child relationship and expand their emotional readiness.

Unclear -	<u>Legacy for Children (Legacy)</u>	Behavioral Problems, Emotional Competency, Parenting, Relationships, School Readiness, Social Competency	Legacy for Children™ (Legacy), a family-based, parenting intervention, is designed to optimize young children's behavioral, socio-emotional, cognitive, and language outcomes.
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Additional Resources for Service Providers

Professionals who provide support to military families can best serve this population by increasing their awareness and understanding of common issues and the potential impact military service places on these individuals (Blaisure, Saathoff-Wells, Pereira, MacDermid-Wadsworth, & Dombro, 2012). Additionally, becoming knowledgeable about the many programs and resources available to support military families may help expand their community of support, foster their overall well-being, and promote the military family's ability to adapt and thrive throughout military life.

Military Family Learning Network (MFLN)

- The MFLN works to encourage and enhance the professional impact military family service providers and Cooperative Extension educators have on military service members and their families.
- <https://militaryfamilieslearningnetwork.org>

The Military REACH Project

- Military REACH aims to bridge the gap between research and practice for military families, direct service helping professionals, and those who work on behalf of military families. A primary component is the development of two-page TRIP (Translating Research into Practice) reports that summarize the key findings and implications from current research articles related to military families.
- <https://militaryreach.auburn.edu>

Military Family Research Institute at Purdue University (MFRI)

- Shares a collection of military family and veteran related presentations, reports, and studies developed by MFRI.
- [Risk and Resilience in Military and Veteran Families](#) is a book series developed by MFRI that focuses on military and veteran families, and the challenges and opportunities they face in relation to military service, particularly during and after war.
- <https://www.mfri.purdue.edu>

Serving Military Families in the 21st Century

- This text introduces individuals to military families, their resilience, and the challenges of military life. A review of the latest research, theories, policies, and programs prepares individuals for working with military families.
- Blaisure, K. R., Saathoff-Wells, T., Pereira, A., MacDermid-Wadsworth, S., & Dombro, A. L. (2015). *Serving military families: Theories, research, and application*. New York: Routledge.

Additional Assistance

The technical assistance specialists at the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State are happy to assist you. We provide support to professionals in making informed decisions about which programs fit specific situations and are worth the investment. Whether it's connecting you with the resources and tools to conduct a needs assessment in your community, suggesting the best evidence-based program or practice for your situation, or developing an evaluation plan, our team of experts is simply a call or email away.

Please visit our website at www.militaryfamilies.psu.edu or call 1-877-382-9185 to speak with a TA specialist.

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