

5 Things You Should Know about Military-Connected Youth

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The experiences of military-connected youth are distinct in many ways from children in civilian families. Many challenges are faced by military-connected youth and yet there is also access to opportunities unavailable to other children.

Learn more about ways in which the experiences of youth with parents in the military are unique:



MORE THAN FOUR IN EVERY TEN ACTIVE DUTY AND SELECTED RESERVE MEMBERS HAVE CHILDREN UNDER AGE 18. Across the United States, 41.1 percent of active duty members in the military and 41.5 percent of Selected Reserve members have children under age 18.¹ Of all military personnel, 6.3 percent are single with children and 34.9 percent are married with children (of which 32.7 percent married to a civilian, 2.2 percent in a dual-military marriage).²



MILITARY-CONNECTED YOUTH ARE RESILIENT. Military families report a strong sense of community,³ which may help families hold positive identities and cope with challenges through a network of support. A large survey of military-connected youth found that these children are “healthy, have good peer relationships, are engaged in school and community, do well at school, are satisfied with life.” Another survey found that, compared to civilian youth, children in military families have demonstrated “greater respect for authority and are more tolerant, resourceful, adaptable, responsible, and welcoming of challenges.”⁴ Although military-connected youth may face additional challenges as compared to their civilian peers, these children are often well equipped to handle them and succeed in the face of adversity.



FREQUENT MOVES PRESENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH. A child growing up in a military family is likely to experience multiple moves as he or she grows up – as often as every two or three years – much more frequently than their civilian counterparts.⁵ Moving is difficult on children because it can upset family routines, disrupt schoolwork, cause discontinuities in health care, and “isolate children from family and close friends,” which may be even more difficult for adolescents at a stage where peers are especially important.⁶ Although frequent moves can present challenges to military-connected youth, these moves also may act as positive opportunities. For example, children who move have the opportunities to meet new people, build self-confidence, explore new activities, build new skills, and even experience different cultures both within and beyond the U.S.⁷



DEPLOYMENTS AND SEPARATIONS PLACE STRAIN ON YOUTH AND THEIR FAMILIES.

Many military members who are deployed leave families at home. More than 2 million children in the U.S. have had a parent deploy to Iraq or Afghanistan.⁸ Deployment is associated with increased behavioral problems, especially among boys; mental health problems; increased internalizing and externalizing behavior problems (e.g., anxiety, depression, and aggression); increased risk for child maltreatment; and difficulties in school for children and youth.⁹ Older children (e.g., teenagers, school-aged children) exposed to cumulative deployments also have increased risk-taking behaviors and increased levels of anxiety.¹⁰



TEXAS HAS THE THIRD LARGEST ACTIVE DUTY MILITARY POPULATION IN THE U.S.

Texas is an important part of the U.S. military community. With the third largest active duty military population in the U.S. (nearly 117,000 personnel), Texas represents over 10 percent of active duty forces in the U.S.¹¹ Additionally, Texas has the second largest population in the U.S. of both veterans at nearly 1.7 million and Selected Reserve members at 53,000.^{12,13,14} Given that more than four in every ten military members have children under age 18, how is Texas serving its large population of military-connected youth? Find out in news post, [How Does Texas Support Youth in Military Families?](#)

For more about CFRP's work on military families, go to childandfamilyresearch.org/publications/military-and-veterans.

¹ U.S. Department of Defense (n.d.). 2015 Demographics profile: Active duty families. Washington, DC. Retrieved from http://www.militaryonesource.mil/footer?content_id=296150; U.S. Department of Defense (n.d.). 2015 Demographics profile: Selected reserve families. Washington, DC. Retrieved from http://www.militaryonesource.mil/footer?content_id=296152

² U.S. Department of Defense (n.d.). 2015 Demographics: Profile of the military community. Washington, DC. Retrieved from http://www.militaryonesource.mil/footer?content_id=279104

³ Easterbrooks, M. A., Ginsburg, K., & Lerner, R. M. (2013). Resilience among military youth. *The Future of Children*, 23(2). Retrieved from <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/572341>

⁴ Park, N. (2011). Military children and families: Strengths and challenges during peace and war. *American Psychologist*, 66(1).

⁵ Masten, A. S. (2013). Afterward: What we can learn from military children and families. *The Future of Children*, 23(2). Retrieved from <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/572346>; Park, N. (2011). Military children and families: Strengths and challenges during peace and war. *American Psychologist*, 66(1).

⁶ Chandra, A. (2016). Parenting school-age children and adolescents through military deployments. In A. H. Gerwitz, & A. M. Youseff (Eds.), *Parenting and Children's Resilience in Military Families* (pp. 27-45). Switzerland: Springer International Publishing; Easterbrooks, M. A., Ginsburg, K., & Lerner, R. M. (2013). Resilience among military youth. *The Future of Children*, 23(2). Retrieved from <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/572341>; Masten, A. S. (2013). Afterward: What we can learn from military children and families. *The Future of Children*, 23(2). Retrieved from <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/572346>

⁷ Easterbrooks, M. A., Ginsburg, K., & Lerner, R. M. (2013). Resilience among military youth. *The Future of Children*, 23(2). Retrieved from <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/572341>

⁸ Sagomonyan, F., & Cooper, J. L. (2010). Trauma faced by children of military families: What every policymaker should know. *National Center for Children in Poverty*.

⁹ Chandra, A. (2016). Parenting school-age children and adolescents through military deployments. In A. H. Gerwitz, & A. M. Youseff (Eds.), *Parenting and Children's Resilience in Military Families* (pp. 27-45). Switzerland: Springer International Publishing. See also: Trautmann, J., Alhusen, J., & Gross, D. (2015). Impact of deployment on military families with young children: A systematic review. *Nursing Outlook*, 1-24; Lester, P. (2014). Military service, war, and families: Translating research into practices. In Ursano, R. J., Gabbay, F. H., & Fullerton, C. S. (Eds.), *Military families in transition: Stress, resilience, and well-being* (pp. 29-34). Bethesda, MD: Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, Department of Psychiatry, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences.

¹⁰ Lester, P. (2014). Military service, war, and families: Translating research into practices. In Ursano, R. J., Gabbay, F. H., & Fullerton, C. S. (Eds.), *Military families in transition: Stress, resilience, and well-being* (pp. 29-34). Bethesda, MD: Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, Department of Psychiatry, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Defense (n.d.). 2015 Demographics: Profile of the military community. Washington, DC. Retrieved from http://www.militaryonesource.mil/footer?content_id=279104

¹² U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (2015). State summary: Texas. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://www.va.gov/vetdata/stateSummaries.asp>

¹³ U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (n.d.). Profile of Veterans (2015): Data from the American Community Survey. Retrieved from https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/Profile_of_Veterans_2015.pdf

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Defense (n.d.). 2015 Demographics: Profile of the military community. Washington, DC. Retrieved from http://www.militaryonesource.mil/footer?content_id=279104