

Joining the Military: WHAT TO EXPECT

For many young people, joining the Military means being away from home for the very first time. For others, adjusting to the “military way of life” is a complete 180-degree turn from the life they are currently used to.

That’s why it’s important for you and your child to understand the general processes and conventions that are maintained throughout the Services — from enlistment through Basic Training.

And while recruiters can offer specific information regarding each of the branches, we encourage you to take a look at the information below and then share it with your child.

ENLISTMENT

How the Enlistment Process Works

Candidates officially complete the process of joining the Military once they have met all of the requirements at the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS), or comparable facility, and have been administered the oath of enlistment. This process may take more than a day to complete.

Potential recruits typically do the following at MEPS:

- Take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test
- Pass the physical and medical examinations
- Meet with a counselor and select a career path
- Take the Oath of Enlistment (swearing in)

What Happens After MEPS

After finishing at MEPS, candidates follow one of two paths:

- Direct Ship — This means candidates report to Basic Training in a matter of days versus months after finishing their MEPS requirements.
- Delayed Entry Program (DEP) — This means that a recruit is committing to Basic Training at a time in the future, generally within one year. Candidates entering the DEP will be given further instruction, to be carried out at a later time.

It’s important to note that the time period between being “sworn in” and entering Basic Training could be as short as two days or as long as two years. It varies based on job assignment and branch of Service.

BASIC TRAINING

How Your Child Can Prepare for Boot Camp

Preparation is the foundation for successful Basic Training. Your child should do everything he or she can to make the transition from civilian life to military life as seamless as possible. Here are ways in which you can help:

Encourage your child to get into physical shape by incorporating cardio workouts, weight training, sit-ups and push-ups into daily routines. Jog or ride bikes as a family, or sign up for a fitness class together.

Help your child get his or her personal matters in order prior to leaving. Figure out who will handle day-to-day issues such as paying bills, minding your child's mail and dealing with his or her bank accounts.

Teach your child to be punctual. In the Services, men and women are expected to be where they're supposed to be at least five minutes early.

Prepare your child for greater discipline. During initial training, every aspect of a recruit's life is regimented. There is no activity during any given day that does not have a specific amount of time allocated — from getting up in the morning to going to bed at night. Help your child get accustomed by establishing a regular schedule.

Take some time to learn about the Military together. Military life is quite different from civilian life. For example, in the Services people use a lot of acronyms, salute higher-ranking members and get promoted via a rank structure. The more your child learns now, the easier the transition will be. As an added benefit, it will be easier to understand what your child is talking about in letters home!

Helping Your Child Pack for Basic Training

There are strict rules covering what can and cannot be brought to Basic Training. If you want to help your child pack, this list is a good starting point. Since requirements vary by Service, you should talk to your child's recruiter to make sure you're including the right items. Any items that do not meet the requirements of your child's Service will be taken away upon arrival. This can be embarrassing for new recruits so it is important to work closely with the recruiter to make sure only proper items are included.

Do Not Bring:

- Family
- Pets
- Expensive personal items — cameras, MP3 players, radios, laptop, jewelry, etc.
- Nonprescription drugs or drug paraphernalia
- Weapons of any type, including pocketknives
- Obscene or pornographic material
- Alcoholic beverages
- Playing cards/dice/dominos
- Cigarettes/tobacco products

What Happens During Basic Training

This can be a very emotional time for parents since you will have limited contact with your child. During the first few days of Basic Training, your child may be allowed a brief phone call to let you know he or she has arrived safely, or your child may send a postcard. After that, phone calls are restricted, and you will have to rely on postal mail.

The first few days at Basic Training are known as orientation (also referred to as Processing Week or Reception). This is where new recruits get acquainted with their fellow recruits, adjust to their new lives and learn the dos and don'ts of their respective branches. Also during orientation, new recruits might:

- Turn in enlistment packages (paperwork from MEPS)
- Receive dental and medical exams
- Get immunizations

- Receive uniforms and training gear (shorts/sweats, t-shirts, etc.)
- Receive required haircuts (women may be able to keep their hair long provided it can be worn within regulation)
- Create direct-deposit accounts for military paychecks

Basic Training Overview

View the chart below for details on Basic Training within each of the individual Services.

Service Branch	Location(s)	Length	Subsequent Basic Training Opportunities
Army	Fort Jackson COLUMBIA, S.C. Fort Knox LOUISVILLE, Ky. Fort Leonard Wood WAYNESVILLE, Mo. Fort Sill LAWTON, Okla. Fort Benning FORT BENNING, Ga.	10 weeks	Advanced Individual Training
Marine Corps	Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island PARRIS ISLAND, S.C. Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego SAN DIEGO, Calif.	12 weeks	Infantry or Combat Training Military Occupation Specialty (MOS) Training*
Navy	Recruit Training Command GREAT LAKES, Ill.	7–9 weeks	“A” School
Air Force	Lackland Air Force Base SAN ANTONIO, Texas	8.5 weeks	Technical Training School
Coast Guard	Training Center Cape May CAPE MAY, N.J.	8 weeks	Basic Training Class A School*

***This type of training is only available to those in specific career fields.**

Keeping in Touch

Recruits are generally not allowed to make phone calls or use email during Basic Training. They can, however, send and receive postal mail. Parents and other family members are encouraged to write frequently, but shouldn't send care packages during this time. Once your child has completed Basic Training, you will be able to communicate by phone, email or instant message, as well as send gifts from home.

What Happens After Basic Training

When recruits successfully complete Basic Training, they are no longer referred to as recruits; they become full-fledged members of the U.S. Military. As military personnel, they will go on to receive additional training — such as Advanced Individual Training — to develop the skills they will need to do their specific jobs. Once finished, they transfer to their first duty station. This is where members of the Services finally put all their training to use, carrying out their assignments, performing their jobs and serving their country.