Military Youth:
A School Perspective

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Significance of Military Involvement for Youth

- Since September 11, 2001 well over *1 million U.S. troops* have been deployed for increasingly longer tours of duty
- Approximately *1.2 million school-aged children* whose parents are in the active duty military
  - More in the Reserves, National Guard, where deployment rates have greatly increased over the past few years
- Children are impacted by the *absence of a parent*
- Children are impacted by *moves* in academic and behavioral areas

Impact of Military Related Stress on Children and the Family

- Family Stress Theory
  - Each family member's *perceptions and reactions* of and to life stressors affect the entire family's ability to adapt to crisis or transitions (Hill, 1949)
- School-age children at increased risk due to *normal developmental stressors* <u>and</u> *stress induced by military life* (e.g., relocation, friendship loss, concern over military parent's well-being, and assuming some parental responsibilities).
- Transitions may be especially difficult for *middle school students*
  - They tend to be the most susceptible to stress and report varying coping strategies based on changing developmental needs (Eccles & Midgely, 1989; Roser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2000)

Military Family Syndrome

- Early clinical observations and qualitative studies characterized children and adolescents as *experiencing distress* as a result of parental military service

- *Military family syndrome*: pattern of maladjustment and psychopathology (Lagrone, 1978)

- Quantitative studies from 1980s and early 1990s *did not find evidence* of military family syndrome among youth (Morrison, 1981; Jenson et al., 1992; Ryan-Wenger, 2001)
  - Rather, many found that military students do not differ from their civilian counterparts, or may be more adaptive than their peers

- *Little contemporary research* on youth during wartime or deployment into war zones

American Families On The Move

- Approximately *20% of American families* annually relocate
  - Most research indicates that frequent civilian moves have a negative effect on family members and induce or exacerbate personal and family stressors (e.g., financial instability, job instability, unstable social network).
- Highly mobile (civilian) children frequently experience *adjustment problems*
  - Drug use, academic failure, delinquent behaviors, lower academic performance, health risk behaviors, and/or somatic complaints
  - Challenges creating and maintaining lasting peer relationships
  - Highly mobile students report having fewer close friends and tend to be more in the fringes of existing peer social settings
- *Civilian vs. military* mobility
  - Mobile civilian families are often moving in the search for work or due to unstable finances or housing
  - Military families are assured of work and some relocation resources
  - Military families move more frequently, and greater distances away from familial and social networks

(Bradshaw et al., 2010)

Military Families On The Move

- Military families move approximately *4 times* as frequently as civilian families
    - Typical military family moves every 2-3 years
    - Involve greater distances, further away from family
- 2005 Base Realignment and Closure *(BRAC)*
    - Resulted in over 100,000 additional family members being relocated from overseas to bases in the U.S.
    - This is in addition to the typical annual rotations
    - 32,000 school-aged children

(Bradshaw et al., 2010)

Projected Military Student Growth by State by 2010/2011 (DOD)

- Mobile children are not equally distributed across schools/communities
  - Ft. Meade (Army): +2157 students
  - Ft. Detrick (Frederick, MD; Army): +1731 students
  - Aberdeen Proving Ground (Army): +1812 students
  - Andrews AFB: +450 students
  - Patuxent River Naval Air Station: +97 students

Percentage Of Military Students By Grade And Age (DOD)

Grade	Age	Percentage
K-1	5-6	20%
2-3	7-8	17%
4-5	9-10	15%
6-7	11-12	13%
8-9	13-14	12%
10-11	15-16	10%
12	17-18	7%

52%

Recent Findings from Johns Hopkins Military Child Initiative Studies

- Bradshaw, C.P., Sudhinaraset, M., Mmari, K., & Blum, R.W. (2010). School transitions among military adolescents: A qualitative study of stress appraisal and coping. *School Psychology Review, 39*(1), 84-105.

- Mmari, K., Bradshaw, C. P., Sudhinaraset, M., & Blum, R. W. (2010). Exploring the role of social connectedness among military youth: Perceptions from youth, parents, and school personnel. *Child and Youth Care Forum, 39,* 351-366.

- Mmari, K., Roche, K., Sudhinaraset, M., & Blum, R. W. (2009). When a parent goes off to war: Exploring the issues faced by adolescents and their families. *Youth & Society, 40*(4), 455-475.

Stressors For Students Of Military Families: Tensions at Home

- Unpredictable/frequent moves are *problematic* for all family members
- Relocations produce *tension* in the family
  - *Anger* toward parents and the military
  - Often reported "*protesting*" announcements of impending moves (numerous reports of students running away from home due to news of an upcoming move)
- *Deployments* create stressors for military member and family
  - Occur *before* deployment (roles are transferred, renegotiated or put on hold and the reverse takes place upon return)
  - At time of *deployment*
  - At the time of return and *reintegration*

Stressors For Students Of Military Families: Strains On Peer Relationships

- Difficulty initiating and maintaining *close friendships*, difficult to leave old friends behind (or to be the friend left behind)
  - Students often report feeling friends act different or *pull away* from the friendship to prepare for an upcoming move
- Students feel others view them (particularly non-military students) as *different* and are hesitant to extend friendships
- Adapting to new social settings can be increasingly difficult as youth progress through school, social groups can already be formed and *difficult to break into*
- Military students who attended *schools on base* tended to experience fewer stressors than students that attended schools in areas with a lower military student population.
  - The *sense of "community"* while living or attending school on base can be lost if transferring to an off base location

Stressors For Students Of Military Families: Adapting to New School Environments

- Learning new school *policies, procedures, and logistical* issues (how to get to school, how to navigate school when there)
  - Worse when transferring in mid year
- Pros and cons of being a *"military brats"*
  - *Special considerations* from parents or school officials
  - High *expectations* generally
  - Expected to easily *assimilate* to their new environments
- New relationships and expectations with *teachers* have to be formed
- Missed opportunities for *extracurricular activities*
  - Difficult to get into sports, band and student government, activities that frequently require long-term participation at that school.
  - Students that move later in the school year also may miss team tryouts
  - Availability of extracurricular activities varies widely between schools in differing locales and especially in overseas schools (DOD schools)

Stressors For Students Of Military Families: Academic Problems

- Difficulty transferring *official records/documents*, inconsistent policies regarding requirements and procedures
  - Issues related to school credits and academic *requirements* (different states have differing requirements)
    - E.g., state histories, repeating relatively similar courses, some classes do not transfer from location to location (all of which can delay graduation)
  - *Recent Interstate Compact*: states have common agreements regarding requirements
- Missing critical *lessons or skills* due to move
- For students with *special needs* (e.g., special education, gifted and talented) process can be long, redundant, non-existent
- Concerns about seeking *mental health or counseling services*
  - There may be a tendency to underreport issues due to the negative effect such information would have on a military person's career.
  - Fear of negative career impact can greatly reduce the likelihood of utilizing mental health and social services for many families (Orthner, Bowen, & Beare, 1990)

Positives of Being a Military Youth

- Military students perceived as being better at *handling transitions* than their civilian counterparts
  - May be maladaptive in the long-run (denial of feelings, generally quicker at making friends but more difficulty in making deeper friendships and maintaining those relationships, accelerated maturation, parentification)
  - May be more self-sufficient or *resilient* to new environments (Rutter, 1993; Weber & Weber 2005)
- Moves sometimes presented a chance to *"reinvent"* themselves and try new aspects of their personalities
- The *acculturation* process experienced by military students, though taxing, appears to also have resulted in higher levels of tolerance and appreciation for diversity
  - Has given many the opportunity to experience being outside the majority culture

1. Increase Communication Between Schools and Families

- May help avoid some of the *academic and logistical issues* due to differing requirements and school policies
- *Prior* to student leaving school have old school contact the new school and transfer records uniformly (varying record transfer requirements contribute to transfer issues)
- Make students/families aware of the *"student liaison officer" (SLO)* and what services they provide (assist in records transfer etc.)
- *Parental involvement* on the front end

2. Foster Connections Among Students

- Distribute school *information* (e.g., class schedules, school rules, school map) prior to first day of class.

- Utilize *peer liaisons* who can help new students navigate the first few days in the new school
  - Though may be considered "contrived" relationship, they can help a student through the first few days

- Use *pen-pals* prior to relocating (particularly helpful if pen-pal is another military student)

- Hold *"new arrivals"* events to help initiate connects between old/new students and schools and families

3. Provide Training For Teachers And Staff For Techniques On Connecting With Military Students

- *Variation* in students' interest in *disclosure* and *integration*
  - Some students prefer to integrate more of their military lifestyle into schoolwork, but others may not
- *One caring adult* (or student) who can listen to their concerns and be emotionally present for them
- *Additional training* for coaches and staff in charge of extracurricular activities
- Understand military related issues unique to *Reserve and National Guard* families
  - Reserve and National Guard troops generally lack base-related supports and sense of connectedness within base communities

4. Alter School Policies And Procedures To Support Military Students

- Examine school *policies, practices, & procedures* to find areas where they may unintentionally create unnecessary hardships for military students/families

- *Graduation requirements* and promotion requirements
    - E.g., community service requirements, language requirements, state history requirements are all areas where focus groups reported experiencing difficulty

- *Special education* and gifted and talented programs were also reported to often require "over-complicated" processes

Recent Interstate Compact

Easing school transfers including:

- Provide a complete set of unofficial education records to parents, with uniform information. Schools then will enroll and place students based on the information in the unofficial records, pending validation by official records.

- Allow 30 days from the date of enrollment, for students to get required immunizations.

- Allow students in K and grade 1 to continue their enrollment at same grade level in a new school, regardless of age.

- Allow initial placement in courses based on a student's enrollment in previous school (e.g. honors, advanced placement or vocational).

- Provide initially comparable services to a student with disabilities based on their current IEP, make reasonable changes/accommodations to address the needs of incoming students with disabilities.

- Give local officials flexibility to waive prerequisites or conditions for placement in courses and programs.

- Provide additional excused absences, for a child to visit with a parent or legal guardian who has immediately returned from deployment, or is on leave from, a combat zone or combat-support posting.

- Give transitioning military children opportunities to take part in extracurricular activities, even if they arrive at their new school after application deadlines.

- Offer waivers for specific courses required for graduation if similar course work has been satisfactorily completed in another jurisdiction.

- Accept exit or end-of-course exams required for graduation from the previous state.

- Do everything possible to facilitate graduation for students transferring during their senior year — to include getting a diploma from a previous school district if a student meets requirements.

- AZ, CO, CT, FL, KS, KY, MI, MO, and OK have already agreed

Additional Information

- Military Child Education Coalition
  - http://www.militarychild.org/
- Military Student.org
  - http://www.militarystudent.dod.mil/
- SchoolQuest
  - https://schoolquest.org/
- Military Child Initiative
  - Training for MCI
    - http://www.jhsph.edu/mci

Military Child Initiative

The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the Johns Hopkins Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships

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About MCI

Needs Assessment/Evaluation

Technical Assistance

Best Practices Library

MCI Resources

"Building Resilient Kids" Web Course

Military Child Education in Hawaii

Contact the MCI

JOHNS HOPKINS
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SCHOOL of PUBLIC HEALTH

Best Practices Library

School Connect-edness & Academic Engagement

Resilience & Social Emotional Learning

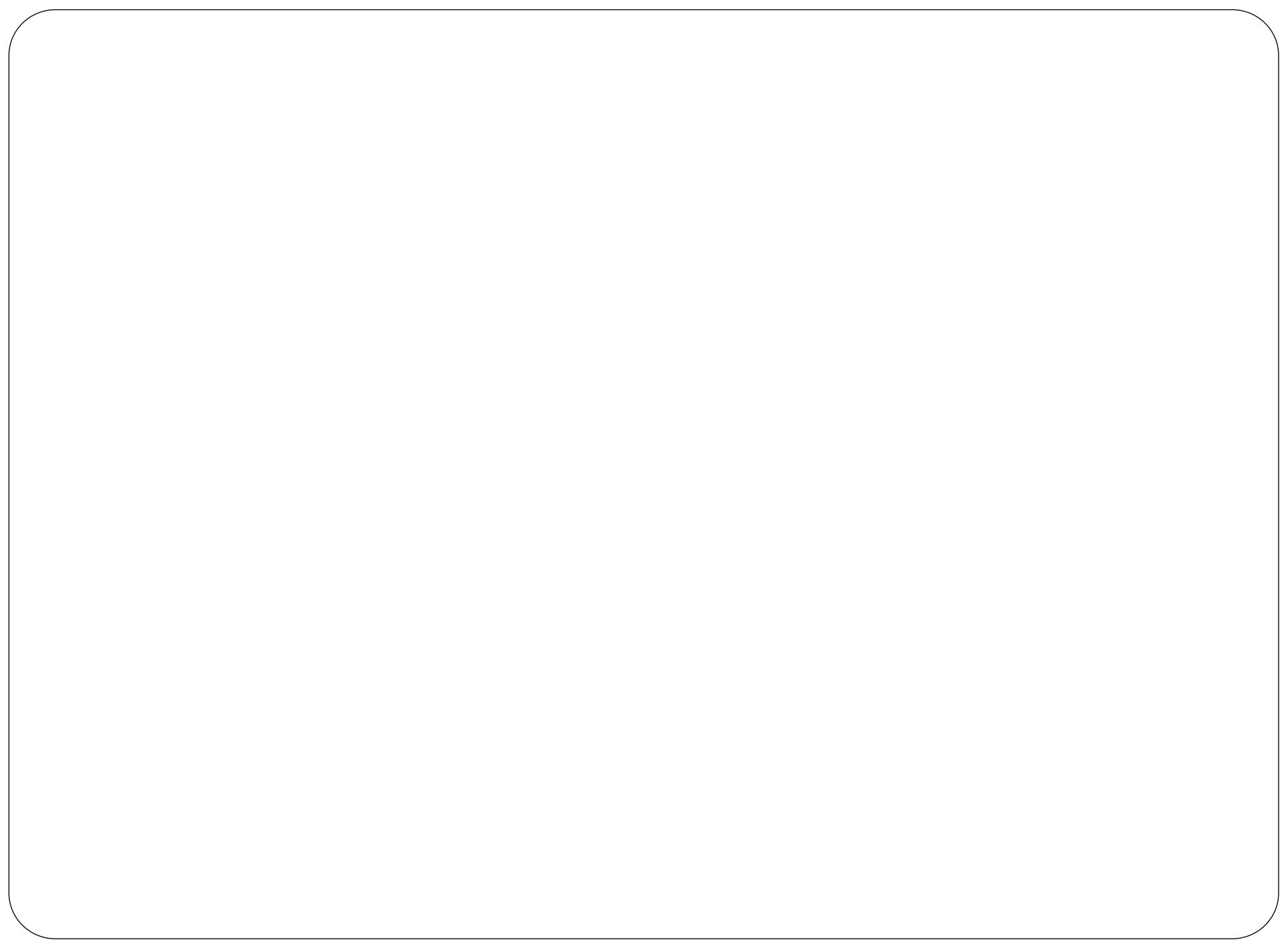School-Family-Community Partnerships

School-Based Health Promotion

Military Life

Deployment

Mobility and Transition

Students in Emotional Crisis

http://www.jhsph.edu/mci

Training Module Topics

1. Getting to Know Your Military Student
2. Mobility—Social and Emotional Challenges
3. Mobility—Academic and Logistical Challenges
4. Challenges of Deployment
5. Helping Students Cope with Deployment
6. Helping Students in Crisis
7. Building Student Resilience
8. Building Resilience—Social and Emotional Learning
9. Building Resilience—Problem Solving
10. School Connectedness—Creating a Caring Environment
11. School Connectedness—Building Academic Engagement
12. School-Parent Partnerships
13. School-Community Partnerships
14. Interventions—Planning, Implementation and Evaluation

http://www.jhsph.edu/mci/training_course/

Selected References

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