

Department of the Army Support for Families



HEARTS APART





DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
FAMILY AND MORALE, WELFARE AND RECREATION COMMAND
US ARMY INSTALLATION MANAGEMENT COMMAND
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Family Programs

Dear Army Family Member:

Army Families often find everyday life challenging when the needs of the mission require Soldiers to be separated from their Families. Deployment, to either stateside or overseas operations, provides additional challenges. It is essential for Families to have the resources to cope while their Soldier is away and for Soldiers to know their Families are being cared for at home.

This booklet, introducing *Hearts Apart*, provides a source of information for all Families and offers ways to obtain additional information your Family might need or want through other Army resources and relevant websites. *Hearts Apart* is here to support all Army Families – Active Army, Army Reserve and National Guard spouses, children, parents, grandparents, and relatives. *Hearts Apart* activities take place on Army installations, in National Guard armories, and in military support organizations in home towns in all states and territories.

At *Hearts Apart* meetings, spouses have the opportunity to informally meet others in the same situation, share information and fun activities with each other, learn from experts on a wide range of topics how to more easily manage the time apart and cope with stress.

May *Hearts Apart* activities brighten your days and help sustain your Family during difficult times.

Sincerely,

Belinda Pinckney
Brigadier General, U.S. Army
Commanding

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Waiting Families Are Meeting Challenges

HEARTS APART offers support for waiting Families by linking Family members and children with other Families who are left behind due to the sponsor's mission requirements. Army Community Service/ Family Programs provide a supportive group setting for activities, opportunities to learn about available resources, and to network with each other during the absence of their sponsors.

The ongoing contact of a supportive group and/or a friendly gathering seems to offer the greatest comfort to those separated from their loved ones. The Hearts Apart (Waiting Families Program) at Army Community Service/Family Programs and at other locations, offers opportunities for connecting with old and new friends, and provides information and quality support to waiting Family members of military and Department of Defense civilian personnel.

Guard and Reserve Command realize that Family well-being can affect a Soldier's ability to focus on their mission. Hearts Apart helps to ensure that the Family is supported while the Soldier is away. Through informal programs, Hearts Apart can provide supportive fellowship, education, referral, and assistance. Hearts Apart encourages Families to maintain contact with their command and Unit Family Group. Families that live too far from either the unit or from other military Families can stay connected through the resources available on-line and in their community.

How Does Hearts Apart Work?

Hearts Apart is designed to assist Family members make separations more bearable



during prolonged separations. Whenever a Soldier is leaving on a deployment or an unaccompanied tour of duty, the ACS staff works with command to obtain accurate contact information for the Family. Once the Family is identified, ACS makes every effort to reach the Family to assess the need for services and information, provide answers to questions with ongoing information updates and act as liaison with military and civilian organizations.

ACS invites Spouses to participate in Hearts Apart meetings or groups with fun-filled activities such as monthly birthday celebrations, holiday events, arts and crafts such as scrap-booking, powder puff mechanics, self-defense and much more. Hearts Apart activities will differ to meet the needs and special interest of the individuals involved, i.e., groups with many small children may tend to be child focused with emphasis on play groups while groups with more male Spouses and older children might focus on sports events and fishing. Ongoing support from ACS, as well as from old and new friends at the Hearts Apart meetings, make separations easier to handle.

How Is Hearts Apart Structured?

Hearts Apart is not formally structured; instead you are invited to meetings and events focusing on sharing some ideas about things to do. It's both a fun-filled, relaxing and informative time to meet with other Spouses and Families in similar life situations.

The operation of Hearts Apart events may differ slightly at individual installations. Typically, Hearts Apart meets monthly for activities such as bowling, skating, pizza and movie nights, book clubs, card games, parties for children or making arts and crafts or special holiday gifts for the absent Family member now living abroad or away in the states for specialized training, etc. During the winter months, there is a tendency for many groups to meet more often as the holidays approach, as many Families experience difficulties fighting loneliness during this season.

Many Spouses elect to depart the installation area for other locations in order to be near their families and/or friends when the Soldier is away. All efforts are made to inform the Family of the services available in the new location. With the Soldier's consent, ACS sends a letter to the Family with a copy to the gaining Family Center, advising of the Family's arrival in the new community.

Is Hearts Apart the Family Readiness Group (FRG)?

No. Hearts Apart is a supportive ACS outreach service assisting FRGs in their goal of maintaining military connectivity for identified waiting Families.

What is a FRG?

The Family Readiness Group is an official Army organization sponsored by command to be a conduit of information with mutual reporting of concerns. FRG membership is comprised of Soldiers, civilians assigned to the unit and their immediate extended Family members. Its purpose is to provide social and emotional support and keep unit Families informed via a structured communication network between command and Families. The FRG offers many projects, each important for a designated purpose, such as communications, newsletters, hospitality and social functions. Please refer to the OPREADY Handbook for more information on FRGs.

What is a Virtual Family Readiness Group (vFRG)?

The vFRG offers all of the functionality of a traditional FRG in an on-line setting to meet the needs of geographically dispersed units and Families across all components of the Army. Through the vFRG, Families have immediate access to unit and FRG information on the internet. The vFRG can reach into areas where Army installations aren't easily accessible, making important connections easier to sustain. For more information, please go to www.armyfrg.org.

Websites

MyArmyLifeToo

MyArmyLifeToo.com

This portal is the primary "gateway" to resources, information and services for all military Family members. The site currently contains links to many resources that include managing money matters, schools and education, employment, and Family Services.

Army Virtual Family Readiness Group (vFRG)

<http://www.armyfrg.org>

The vFRG links the deployed Soldier, their Family, the FRG leader, the unit Commander, the rear detachment, and other Family Readiness Personnel on their own controlled access web system to facilitate the exchange of information and provide a sense of community. This resource is available to all battalions, brigades, groups, divisions, and corps for the Army, including the Army National Guard and U.S. Army Reserve.

Military One Source

MilitaryOneSource.com

This DoD portal is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. It offers confidential assistance by Masters level consultants at no cost to you. A toll free number (1-800-342-9647) is also available for those without Internet access.

Military HOMEFRONT

MilitaryHOMEFRONT.com

This DoD portal is the official Department of Defense web site for accurate, up-to-date, reliable Quality of Life information designed to help troops and their Families, leaders and service providers.

Introduction



What Are The Effects of Separation on Families?

Although military Families generally possess a great deal of resiliency when it comes to dealing with changes in their daily lives, adjusting to separation requires many adaptive responses. Some Families may experience additional stress. Support for the Spouse and Family remaining at home becomes more important as daily routines change.

Anyone in the Family can become irritable, difficult to live with or depressed as they adjust to the Soldier's absence. Maintaining a balance between Family activities, work and recreation can be a challenge. Coordinating childcare, children's activities and parental work schedules can be frustrating. Fortunately, as the Family works together towards achieving a new equilibrium, these "rough spots" in its structure and fabric are usually resolved.

Friends and family are often relied upon to help out with routine needs. Social agencies offer programs and resources to meet special needs and new challenges. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness. It shows that you care about yourself and your Family and are willing to take action to resolve any problems.

What Are The Stages Of Separation?

1. Getting ready for the separation: Preparing yourself and your Family ahead of time will ease much of the stress that can occur.

What are some things I can do?

- *Talk about your feelings – “I’ll miss you.”* Reassuring each other of your love and commitment is important.
- *Plan special Family activities before leaving that you can all talk about when your Spouse is away.* Positive memories help keep love and attachments alive.
- *Set personal goals for the time that you are separated.* Separation can be a time for growth and personal development. New skills, supportive friends and interesting activities can also be a source for shared involvement when your Soldier returns.
- *Decide how you will keep in touch while you are apart.* Planning ahead will make communication more reliable and rewarding.
- *Create a calendar with the dates filled in for when birthdays, car maintenance, insurance premiums are due, dates for filing taxes, etc.* Practical matters are extra important during changing times. Being secure about routine events eases stress.
- *Be sure that powers of attorney are completed, child care is set and all important documents and information are accessible.*
- *Discuss plans for emergencies.* Older children and adolescents need to know the Family “safety plan”. It’s reassuring to them and helps them feel more confident.

2. Separation: Families who talk about Family issues and work together to resolve them do the best during separations. Sometimes Family members may feel sadness, fatigue and guilt about not saying or doing more positive things before the Soldier left. Accepting these feelings and acknowledging that not everything can be done is a first step. Most military Families overcome these challenges and grow closer with renewed family confidence as they learn how to cope effectively during the separation.

What are some things I can do?

- *Discuss the inevitable changes with everyone involved.* The inevitable changes in Family routines should be discussed with everyone involved – even young children at an appropriate level for each child’s age and developmental stage.
- *Be positive and reassuring, as well as honest.* Sometimes the remaining parent may not know the answer. Children and teens react according to their own personality and style. Some children

appear to have no reaction; others may become moody and unpredictable. Some children are open about their true feelings; others cover them up.

- *Listen carefully to both children and adolescents.* Adolescents, even those who experience intense emotions, may hide their feelings in an attempt to make life easier for the at-home parent. If they are able to talk about their concerns and worries, family life usually improves.
- *Be aware of your own feelings and behavior.* Children take their cues from their parents. If parents are handling the separation well, children usually do well, despite all the changes in family routines and tasks.
- *Let older children and adolescents help, but be careful not to overburden them.* For example, adolescents may willingly take on more responsibilities at home, and some may become caretakers for younger siblings. They can acquire new life skills in areas such as helping with laundry, cooking, budgeting, car maintenance, and lawn care. These new skills will last a lifetime and increase their sense of competence and control.
- *Be sensitive to personal as well as Family crises.* Members of the Family will have varying abilities to deal with crises, and what will appear to be a larger-than-life crisis to one may be insignificant to another. Support groups can help waiting Spouses keep a realistic perspective while they work to resolve these situations.
- *Limit children's access to newscasts about military conflicts.* Younger children may erroneously believe that their parent is involved and become unnecessarily concerned or anxious. If children are present when adults discuss these topics, care will need to be taken not to alarm or upset them.
- *Locate or create special interest groups for men.* Male Spouses and Family members can solve problems together and offer each other practical suggestions and support. Sharing activities and building friendships help develop a person's confidence in performing tasks that may be unfamiliar.

3. Reintegration: Reintegration is a time for readjustment. It can be both stressful and joyful in different ways for each Family member. Children may have a difficult time sharing their at-home parent with the returning Soldier. Soldiers may question how the children were handled during their absence. Newly established Family routines may have to be adapted again.

What are some things I can do?

- *Be realistic about your expectations.* Everyone in your Family has changed and grown. Everything won't be exactly the same.
- *Allow time to adjust.* Everyone will need time to adapt to your Soldier's return – Spouse, children, friends and family.
- *Get everyone in the Family involved in preparing for the reunion.* Welcoming your Soldier home is part of the reunion process – everyone will want to be included!
- *Plan extra Family time to get reacquainted.* Having a Family evening or a Family day just for you helps restore family bonds.
- *Expect surprises – some will be good ones!* New abilities, new accomplishments will bring joy and pride.
- *Discuss any criticisms calmly.* This is a time for reason and calmness. Try to make discussing issues a “win-win” situation.
- *Avoid tight schedules and over-scheduling reunion events.* Take extra time for things, move more slowly if you can. Give yourself some space.
- *If possible, avoid things that can cause additional stress, such as going shopping to make a major purchase like a car, or inviting relatives to an extended visit as a surprise to the Soldier.*

Recovering Soldiers

The thought that your Soldier may arrive home recovering from battle wounds or with a disability is in the mind of every Family member. Initially, dealing with injury or serious illness may seem like a lot to deal with and may be frightening. It is important to understand that it is normal to have many questions, worries and concerns. Just to be able to welcome your Soldier home, and know that you will be getting your Family “back on track together” can be a great relief. Another important step that Families can take is to be willing for everyone in the Family to seek support if the returning Soldier needs assistance. This will “normalize” the process, reduce the likelihood of creating additional stressful reactions, and make your Soldier's reintegration with your Family easier.

Soldiers and their Families will need support in “reframing” the trauma in order to move forward. Meaningful family communication will be important, especially about such sensitive topics. Recovering Soldiers are more likely to be more vulnerable to stress, and supportive help for everyone may be needed, at least in the beginning.

Families need to be sensitive to behaviors such as risk-taking, substance abuse and suicidal ideation and seek help as soon as

possible if these are present. Getting help quickly prevents problems from becoming entrenched, results in a faster recovery, and prevents Family members from also becoming traumatized.

It is also important to remember that a certain amount of stress is normal and does not mean that mental health issues are present. Many returning Soldiers will experience combat stress but will recover. Sometimes however symptoms persist and the intensity of normal stress reactions does not diminish over time. When this happens, it is usually called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). However, PTSD may not be obvious immediately and monitoring is important to identify and deal with this common disorder. Signs of PTSD normally appear within 3 to 6 months, and are easily identifiable by an experienced counselor.

Extensive help for both Soldiers and their Families is available through Army Community Service, Military One Source, Army Chaplains, and the Military Family Life Consultants Program.

Websites

MyArmyLifeToo

MyArmyLifeToo.com

This portal is the primary "gateway" to resources, information and services for all military Family members. The site currently contains links to many resources that include managing money matters, schools and education, employment, and Family Services.

Military One Source

<http://www.militaryonesource.com/>

The section on stress management contains many resources to help your Family. A toll free telephone number and web site where Soldiers and Families can self-refer for confidential counseling at any time; counseling is available by either speaking to or emailing a masters level consultant.

National Center For Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

<http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/ncmain/index.jsp>

This site is provided by the United States Department of Veteran Affairs as an educational resource on PTSD and traumatic stress for veterans, mental health care providers, researchers, and the general public.

National Military Family Association

<http://www.nmfa.org>

This organization educates military Families regarding the issues that affect their lives and promotes and protects the interests of military Families. Select Deployment and You or another topic of interest. This site contains helpful guidelines about coping with deployments and separations, including helping children cope, reunions and advancing the health of the Family left behind.

Military HOMEFRONT

<http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil>

Select: Parenting

This site provides troops and Families with helpful information on various parenting programs and techniques, including the Healthy Parenting Initiative, the New Parent Support Program and information about a non-DoD website with great information for military Families with young children.

American Psychological Association

www.apahelpcenter.org

This website has many articles on building resilience in children and families, separation and homecoming issues.

**Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences
Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress**

<http://www.centerforthestudyoftraumaticstress.org/education.joiningforces.shtml>

The online Joining Forces and Courage to Care publications provide fact sheets and other detailed information on deployment and family health issues.

How Do I Talk to My Children About Their Absent Parent?

PARENTS WHO SHARE what the absent parent will be doing and where they will be living will help their children and adolescents adjust more effectively. What and how much is disclosed should be guided by the child's age and maturity.

"I just didn't know how long they would be gone and when they would come back, because plans change a lot. And we just didn't know like how long we would have to go without our parent." (age 15)

*"Well, see I'm sad because I didn't want him to go but he had to, so I am kind of mad. But then he's done this a lot – so it doesn't really matter."
(age 8)*

What Do Parents Need To Know?

Discussing parental absence and changes in Family life needs to be deliberate and developmentally appropriate.

- Use words the children understand
- Talk about feelings – yours and theirs
- Talk about what will stay the same and what will change because of the separation

Children are children, not mini-adults, and their ability to understand is limited. You know your child best and what they are

able to handle without becoming upset. Keeping their routines stable is important during this time. Although many children will need to help out more at home, all children need to play and spend time with their friends, especially those who are in the same situation.

Children's responses may vary with each stage of the absence cycle.

- Some children may test the limits of rules
- Some children may regress to younger behavior
- Some children may want to cling to the at-home parent
- Some children may find reunion the most difficult time

What Do Parents Need To Do?

- Help the children keep in touch with the absent parent
- Maintain Family routines as much as possible
- Maintain Family rituals – or create new ones – to support Family continuity
- Model self-care and ways to reduce stress
- Maintain developmentally appropriate expectations about child and adolescent behaviors and their reactions to stressful situations
- Disclose Family issues with the child's age, understanding and emotional development in mind
- Maintain consistent expectations about school work and social behavior



Concerns of Spouses

WHETHER A FAMILY LIVES ON THE INSTALLATION or in their home community, a Spouse will be making similar adjustments to the absence of their partner.

Becoming “suddenly single” is different for everyone, but it always brings surprises and changes in routines. For some Spouses, it may provide an opportunity for personal growth and development; for others it may bring anxiety and concerns, especially if there are children to be cared for, or if a Family has special needs. There may have to be changes in work schedules or social and school involvement. Child care may be needed for the Spouse to be able to continue working. There may be no one available to talk with about loneliness, children, budget, car, or vacation – the long list of topics that Spouses talk about together. While it is important to talk about feelings with children and teens, it is also important not to overwhelm them with adult concerns.

Family meetings help resolve differences and solve problems. When everyone shares their view of a situation, or suggests ways to meet Family goals, the needs of everyone are more likely to be met.

Utilizing support opportunities is important – and it can be fun! Making new friends and connecting with other Spouses who are also awaiting a Soldier’s return gives a Spouse an opportunity to gain encouragement and support for their personal challenges, as well as helping them locate practical help in meeting Family needs.



Hearts Apart is one of many Family Services that can help. Participating in healthy, fun activities with children and friends helps the adjustment to a Soldier's absence. Sharing enjoyable activities is a good way to build family rapport, ease tensions and keep communication lines open. Talking is easier when everyone is engaged in an activity.

Resources for coping with new challenges may not be readily available for Spouses who ordinarily live in a small community or even those who return to their hometowns. Schools may not be sensitive to the needs of military children; well-meaning adults may ask your children inappropriate questions or questions that upset them.

What can help? The vFRG will be an important resource for information and support, especially for Families who live a distance from an Army installation. Websites offer information about, for example, how to talk to school personnel about your child's situation and provide suggestions regarding community organizations that are often able to help out when you need them.

What Does a Spouse Need To Know?

- How to keep in touch with the Soldier
- Where to get the resources needed for their Family
- Who can support the Family if there are challenges

For Spouses who live on or near an Army installation, Army Community Service resources are readily available such as:

- New Parent Support Program (NPSP): The New Parent Support Program (NPSP) is a professional team of social workers and nurses who provide free supportive and caring services military Families with young children or those who are expecting a baby.

The NPSP can help Families:

- become more confident as parents
- understand the ages and stages of your child's development
- learn to cope with stress
- make parenting fun
- be better parents to their children
- feel more at home in the military community

The NPSP supports Spouses by providing

- Infant care classes
- Parenting classes
- Referrals to supportive services
- Play mornings

- Home visits with a professional in the privacy of your home
- Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP): The Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) is a mandatory enrollment program that works with other military and civilian agencies to provide comprehensive and coordinated community support, housing, educational, medical, and personnel services to Families with special needs.
Soldiers with Exceptional Family Members must enroll in the program:
 - Active Army
 - U.S. Army Reserve (USAR) Soldiers in the USAR-Active Guard Reserve (AGR) program and other USAR Soldiers on active duty exceeding 30 days
 - Army National Guard (AGR) personnel serving under authority of title 10, United States Code
- Relocation Readiness: Relocation Readiness assists Soldiers and their Families with information about transitioning to a new location; living on base, leasing or renting off-base, selecting schools for children and other important topics.
- Financial Readiness Program: The Financial Readiness Program offers a wide range of services to assist Soldiers and their Families with their financial affairs. Emphasis is placed upon the training portion of the program designed to educate Soldiers and Spouses in money management, proper use of credit, financial planning, deployment, transition and relocation, insurance, and check writing principles.
Skilled counselors are available to help Soldiers and their Spouses:
 - Establish budgets
 - Work with creditors
 - Provide tax, investment and consumer information
 - File consumer complaints
 - Gather information on local consumer laws
- Employment Readiness Program: The ACS Employment Readiness assists Families with the challenges associated with the job search, particularly as they are impacted by a mobile lifestyle. ACS helps Soldiers and DA civilians, and their Family members throughout the entire Military Life Cycle, recruitment through retirement. Employment Readiness believes that every Army Spouse should have a choice and be afforded the opportunity to develop a career and /or become employed. Employment Readiness won't do everything for you, but they will provide you with valuable information and critical job search skills.

What Does a Spouse Need To Do?

- Take care of yourself
- Attend Hearts Apart activities
- Learn to manage stress
- Exercise
- Maintain a good diet
- Balance recreation, work, social activities and self-development
- Enjoy a hobby
- Get involved with others
- Keep in touch with your Soldier
 - Share the good things that happen
 - Express affection and love in your messages
 - Express yourself clearly
 - Explain how you are handling any challenges
 - Accept practical suggestions
 - Answer all the questions that may arise
- Be appreciative of your Soldier's efforts to stay in touch
- Learn to be self-reliant
- Take advantage of classes and workshops such as
 - Minor home repairs
 - Powder-puff mechanics
 - Financial management and skills
 - Self-improvement and exercise classes

Suddenly Single — What Does It Mean?

Although many Soldiers and their Families have adapted to separations due to mission requirements, each time brings different challenges. The first separation will be different from later ones; frequent separations may increase already high stress levels. Coping skills will be unique to each individual, as will resources available for the waiting Family.

Spouses may be affected by rumors or fears. Is my Spouse faithful? Is my Spouse able to cope without me? Are the children doing well? It is important to deal with facts and not listen to rumors, or indulge in fantasies.

A mature approach is essential for family and couple success during this time. Although recreation is important, Spouses will want to avoid activities that are likely to be a source of embarrassment to their Soldier, like spending time at bars, going out to dinner with

a person of the opposite sex – no matter how innocent the activity might be. The social activities that are provided by Hearts Apart groups can provide relaxing activities that are useful, fun and avoid these potential pitfalls.

Suddenly Single Spouses may need to learn new skills. Negotiating work commitments – and children’s school conferences and activities – as well as coping with cooking and laundry, car maintenance, and household repairs can be challenging. Both male and female Spouses may have limited experience in some of these fields, and the steep learning curve may be intimidating. Hearts Apart groups will offer resources to help you during this time.

Suddenly Single men may want to find other males for positive support and advice. Men sometimes find it difficult to ask a woman for assistance – and a male Spouse will also want to avoid any suggestion of improper behavior. An older (or more experienced) man who can mentor and provide guidance for a man during this time will be invaluable for practical advice, support and for sharing “guy” activities, such as attending or participating in sporting events. Some Army installations may offer Hearts Apart groups that are specifically oriented towards men’s interests.

Special Issues for International Spouses

Education in the details of everyday American living will become more important to multicultural, multiethnic, and international Spouses when their Soldier is away.

Important information about immigration, acquiring American citizenship, obtaining a resident alien card (green card), driver’s license, job interviewing, writing a resume, banking, finding a job or house/apartment and raising bi-lingual children is available. Taking classes in English as a Second Language may become essential and opportunities to practice to speaking English such as Hearts Apart meetings and events will help in social and job relationships.

Informal gatherings are a good way to share information and socialize with others who share your challenges. Courses on military life, Western cooking, American holidays, customs and traditions make adjusting to American life easier and more rewarding.

What Can International Spouses Do?

- Take good care of yourself
- Stay involved in your American community
- Improve your “American skills” – English, work-related, driving, cooking, or other areas of interest
- Expand your social relationships
- Regularly meet with other Spouses from your region of the world for fun and sharing experiences

Websites

My Army Life Too

www.MyArmyLifeToo.com

This site currently contains links to a skills database and resources that include money matters, schools and education, employment, and Family Services.

Military One Source

www.militaryonesource.com

A toll free telephone number and web site where Soldiers and Families can self-refer for confidential counseling at any time; counseling is available by either speaking to or emailing a masters level consultant.

National Guard Family Program

www.guardfamily.org

This website is a “one-stop shop” to find information on programs, benefits, resources within the National Guard Bureau Family Program, including Family Readiness, youth programs, community outreach, EFMP, Relocation Assistance Program and other helpful services.

Army Reserve Family Programs

www.armyreserve.army.mil/arweb/forfamilies/

The Army Reserve Family Program is dedicated to education, training, awareness, outreach, information, referral, and follow-up. The ARFP website is your one-stop shop to get connected with Army Reserve Family support information and resources.

Operation Military Kids

www.operationmilitarykids.org

Army CYS has partnerships with youth serving organizations in targeted states with high deployment rates to set up local support networks that connect and support the geographically dispersed youth of mobilized National Guard and Reserve service members. Through these school and community support networks, military youth receive a wide range of recreational, social and educational programs in communities where they live.

Operation Uplink

www.operationuplink

Operation Uplink is a VFW program that keeps military personnel and hospitalized veterans in touch with their Families and loved ones by providing them with a free phone card.

Army New Parent Support Program (NPSP)

For general program information:

<http://www.MyArmyLifeToo.com>

To access your installation's NPSP, contact the Family Advocacy Program.

The NPSP provides professional support to military Families who are expecting a child or have a child birth to six years of age. It provides supportive home visits, parenting classes and support groups that help participants learn to cope with stress, isolation, and the everyday demands of parenthood.

Concerns About Young Children

YOUNG CHILDREN often become confused about the absence of a parent. They have little sense of time and may believe that their parent “will be back in the morning” or will never return. Often they have difficulty understanding why the parent has to leave and may become angry or even blame themselves for the Soldier’s departure.

Children may regress; toilet-trained children may wet the bed, or have “accidents”; and some may eat more or eat less. Some may have trouble sleeping and want to sleep with the remaining parent. Some may become afraid to separate from the at-home parent or caretaker. With understanding, patience and a willingness to reassure them that all will be well, problems may be quickly resolved.

Hearts Apart groups can offer information and support if you are dealing with these situations.

What Do Young Children Need To Know?

- Their absent parent loves them
- Their at-home parent loves them
- Life can be busy, fun and happy

What Do Parents of Young Children Need To Know?

- Keep a child’s routines stable as much as possible
- Understanding and patience will help resolve most difficulties



- Many children will test previously learned limits
- Regression is common; however, if the Family stress level rises too high for comfort, it's a good idea to request professional help

An important source of support for Army Families is the Army's New Parent Support Program (NPSP). This voluntary program targets new or first time military parents who are expecting a child or those who have a child birth through six years of age. It is staffed by professional teams of social workers and nurses who provide supportive and caring services to military Families with young children. This program is designed to strengthen parental knowledge and skills so that parents can provide an environment where their children can thrive. The program also seeks to reduce stressors that can increase the risk of child abuse and neglect by offering parents services such as educational programs, home visits, information, and referrals to other programs. Specific information about your installation's New Parent Support Program is available directly through your installation's Family Advocacy site.

Websites

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<http://www.armymwr.com/>

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magazine and poster. This was created through the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) and partners, and is also available for download to your personal computer through streaming video made available by the Department of Defense Quality of Life Information Technology Center. Additional videos supporting Families, are also available on this site.

Zero to Three

<http://zerotothree.org/military>

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Concerns About School Aged Children

IT IS ESSENTIAL for a child to feel safe and secure at home, and, developmentally, this age group may experience the largest number of difficulties during the absence of a parent.

Emerging is their growing independence, yet their need to “be like” their peers may have them involved in group behaviors unacceptable to the parent.

School-age children may try on behaviors like lying, cheating and stealing in learning how to negotiate the expectations and rules placed on them by Family, friends, school, and society. Such behaviors challenge parents to deal with the misdeed privately (avoiding peer ridicule), applying a punishment that is meaningfully related to the behavior, and modeling reparation and forgiveness.

It is important for the child to deal with failure or frustration without decreasing self-esteem or developing a sense of inferiority. The at-home parent needs to role model calmness and control.

School aged children may internalize situations and believe that they are responsible for events and situations over which they have no control. Eating disorders can emerge. Also, they may unconsciously mimic the household climate, and often take this into the school setting with challenging behaviors. Encourage children to express themselves openly and talk about concerns without fear of reprisal.

Peer acceptance becomes important during school-age years but peer support may not be as forthcoming as it will be later from older children. Friendships at this age are primarily with members of the same sex.



What Do School Aged Children Need To Know?

- Other children feel sadness, loneliness, anger, loss, fear and happiness and these feelings are normal (universalize)
- Their Family is here to help
- Contact with the separated parent is essential and will be arranged by their parent

What Do Parents of School Aged Children Need To Do?

- It is important to encourage the child to express their feelings and acknowledge these feelings through talk, drawings, play
- The concept of time is developmentally influenced and to help, use tools to assist such as paper chains, calendars, holidays, seasons and mark the parent's return time
- To keep the away parent informed of events and learn of changes that happened while they were away use photos, or create scrapbooks

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Operation Military Kids

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The military programs include:

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The Military Child in Transition and Deployment

<http://www.militarystudent.dod.mil/>

A section of this website contains information for military kids ages 6-12. Military kids have a lot of special experiences, and sometimes have to face hard times like having their Mom or Dad deployed, or moving to another new place. This site helps kids learn new ways to handle these experiences and to have the opportunity to chat with other military kids their own age.

Concerns About Teen Age Youth

RESEARCH ON ADJUSTMENT among adolescents in military Families, when a parent is separated, shows adolescents to be more resilient and better able to make adaptive responses to changes in their lives when they felt genuinely supported by others, were kept informed about the other parent, and when they willingly took on more developmentally appropriate responsibilities at home (but did not take on a parental role).

What Do Teen Age Youth Need To Know?

- Daily routines may change and they may experience a loss of free time, transportation and encounter financial constraints
- Feeling responsible for their parent and siblings while the other parent is away is normal
- Connectedness matters

What Do Parents Of Teen Age Youth Need To Know?

- Developmentally appropriate and intentional approaches to discussing separation, changes and concerns at home
- How to deal with the changing nature of adolescent behavior and emotions
- How to develop better communication strategies



- Ways to draw out concerns and fears from adolescents who isolate themselves and remain quiet about changes and stress in their lives
- The importance of adolescent involvement in social support networks and how to provide opportunities for youth involvement
- How to recognize signs and symptoms of depression and where to go for help

What Do Parents Of Teen Age Youth Need To Do?

- Remain supportive and not combative when faced by the roller coaster of emotions
- Encourage teenagers how to express feelings in a healthy manner
- Maintain Family rituals and create new ones to support Family identity and integrity

Websites

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A section of this website contains information for military teens. Most people agree that being a teenager is hard enough without having to handle things that are somewhat unique to the military teen's life, like a deployed parent or frequently moving to a new place. This website contains tips and information on how to manage many of the issues that teens face, both good and bad. This site contains an abundance of information, tools and resources to help meet a teen's unique needs.

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Resources**



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Waiting Families Are Meeting Challenges



MyArmyLifeToo

MyArmyLifeToo.com

This portal is the primary "gateway" to resources, information and services for all military Family members. The site currently contains links to many resources that include managing money matters, schools and education, employment, and Family Services.

Army Virtual Family Readiness Group (vFRG)

<http://www.armyfrg.org/>

The vFRG links the deployed Soldier, their Family, the FRG leader, the unit Commander, the rear detachment, and other Family Readiness Personnel on their own controlled access web system to facilitate the exchange of information and provide a sense of community. This resource is available to all battalions, brigades, groups, divisions, and corps for the Army, including the Army National Guard and U.S. Army Reserve.

Military One Source

MilitaryOneSource.com

This DoD portal is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. It offers confidential assistance by Masters level consultants at no cost to you. A toll free number (1-800-342-9647) is also available for those without Internet access.

Military HOMEFRONT

MilitaryHOMEFRONT.com

This DoD portal is the official Department of Defense web site for accurate, up-to-date, reliable Quality of Life information designed to help troops and their Families, leaders and service providers.

Introduction



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Military One Source

<http://www.militaryonesource.com/>

The section on stress management contains many resources to help your Family. A toll free telephone number and web site where Soldiers and Families can self-refer for confidential counseling at any time; counseling is available by either speaking to or emailing a masters level consultant.

National Center For Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

<http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/ncmain/index.jsp>

This site is provided by the United States Department of Veteran Affairs as an educational resource on PTSD and traumatic stress for veterans, mental health care providers, researchers, and the general public.

National Military Family Association

<http://www.nmfa.org>

This organization educates military Families regarding the issues that affect their lives and promotes and protects the interests of military Families. Select Deployment and You or another topic of interest. This site contains helpful guidelines about coping with deployments and separations, including helping children cope, reunions and advancing the health of the Family left behind.

Military HOMEFRONT

<http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil>

Select: Parenting

This site provides troops and Families with helpful information on various parenting programs and techniques, including the Healthy Parenting Initiative, the New Parent Support Program and information about a non-DoD website with great information for military Families with young children.

American Psychological Association

www.apahelpcenter.org

This website has many articles on building resilience in children and Families, separation and homecoming issues.

**Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences
Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress**

<http://www.centerforthestudyoftraumaticstress.org/education.joiningforces.shtml>

The online Joining Forces and Courage to Care publications provide fact sheets and other detailed information on deployment and family health issues.

Concerns of Spouses



My Army Life Too

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This site currently contains links to a skills database and resources that include money matters, schools and education, employment, and Family Services.

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National Guard Family Program

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This website is a "one-stop shop" to find information on programs, benefits, resources within the National Guard Bureau Family Program, including Family Readiness, youth programs, community outreach, EFMP, Relocation Assistance Program and other helpful services.

Army Reserve Family Programs

www.armyreserve.army.mil/arweb/forfamilies/

The Army Reserve Family Program is dedicated to education, training, awareness, outreach, information, referral, and follow-up. The ARFP website is your one-stop shop to get connected with Army Reserve Family Support Information and Resources.

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Operation Uplink

www.operationuplink

Operation Uplink is a VFW program that keeps military personnel and hospitalized veterans in touch with their Families and loved ones by providing them with a free phone card.

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To access your installation's NPSP, contact the Family Advocacy Program. The NPSP provides professional support to military Families who are expecting a child or have a child birth to six years of age. It provides supportive home visits, parenting classes and support groups that help participants learn to cope with stress, isolation, and the everyday demands of parenthood.

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