



This lesson is a guide for community leaders and professionals helping military family members through deployment and reintegration; it is a resource for cultivating healthy communities. This guide can be used for an hour-long group presentation, or can be distributed for individual reading and use. When reviewing this guide, you will:

- Understand the unique help asking behaviors of military families.
- Understand how to best offer help or refer military families to help that will effectively support military families.
- Identify ways to foster resilience and build from military family strengths.
- Utilize one resource to recognize, support, or help military families in your community.

After hearing about the unique issues and struggles for military families, you want to put your newfound awareness into action. The first step to helping someone is to understand where they are coming from — their culture and context. We are greatly influenced by our culture. In order to be a helper, we have to think about the culture of a community. What is your understanding of military culture?



ACTIVITY: Military Character and Culture

(approx. 5 minutes)

Think of a soldier. Think of a soldier's family. Perhaps someone you know or military members in general. How would you describe the soldier or their family? Write down characteristics, traits, and values that you associate with military service members.

Possible answers...

- "Pull yourself up by your boot straps"
- Tough it out
- Strong, no signs of weakness
- Independent
- Brave, courageous

Participant reflection...

- Do any of the traits, phrases, and values you wrote down encourage military members to seek help? If they do, circle them.
- Do any of the traits, characteristics, and values you wrote down hinder help-seeking? If they do, put a star by them.
- How does seeking help or accepting help interfere with military culture or how military family members may view themselves?

(Record some responses on a newsprint chart, both ones that encourage and those that hinder helping.)

It might be difficult for military family members to seek help from civilian networks and services. Whether the family is a long-term member of the community or a new resident, a common belief among civilians is that military-connected families are self-sufficient, resilient and strong. Most civilians are not aware of the unique stress, uncertainties and transitions that contemporary military families experience.

MILITARY FAMILIES BENEFIT FROM HELPFUL COMMUNITIES

We've heard people say, "Just call me if I can help with anything," and then we knew that there would be no call made and no help given. Military families in our communities deserve more than a quick, off-hand cliché – they need understanding and active support

Understanding the Military Culture and Context

In order to effectively help, civilians need to understand the military culture and context. That culture is comprised of the experiences, tradition, values, ideals, skills and symbols passed on from more experienced members of the culture to new members. Army service members are expected to uphold the Army's cultural values of:

- **Loyalty:** Bear true faith and allegiance to the U.S. Constitution, the Army, and other Soldiers.
- **Duty:** Fulfill your obligations.
- **Respect:** Treat people as they should be treated.
- **Selfless Service:** Put the welfare of the nation, and of others before your own.
- **Honor:** Live up to all the Army values.
- **Integrity:** Do what is right, legally and morally.
- **Personal Courage:** Face fear, danger, or adversity, both physical and moral courage.

Military Culture: In addition to preserving values, ideals and traditions, the military has a culture of activity and work-related demands.

Deployment and Its Impact

■ The Operational Cycle

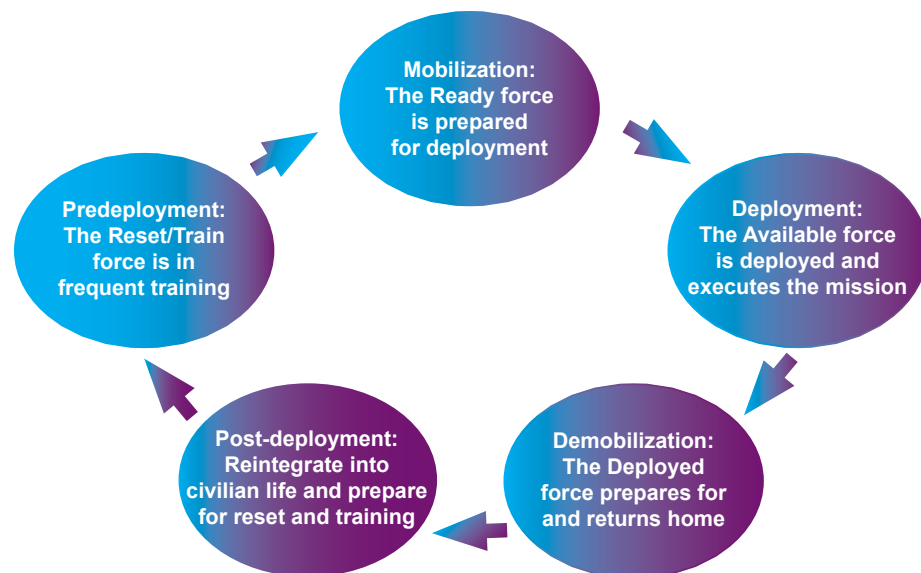
The current operational tempo pace of the military is high. Service members are not only busy and often away from their families during deployment, they also have training and other obligations before and after deployment. The Army Force Generation operational cycle (ARFORGEN; McNeil, 2005), has improved the efficiency of the deployment cycle, reducing some of the stressors of the high operational tempo pace. This operational cycle is an efficient system of short deployments and training. However, the three-phase deployment cycle — pre-deployment, deployment, and post-deployment — is taxing for the service member and family.

■ The Emotional Cycle

The entire deployment cycle, including the pre-deployment and post-deployment phases, is a time of great strain and stress, often leaving the family feeling like they are on an emotional roller-coaster. "Each of these stages is characterized by a different set of challenges to the individual and family system, such as the need for emotional detachment, changes in family roles and routines, emotional destabilization, and reintegration of the returning parent" (Lincoln, Swift, & Shorteno-Fraser, 2008, p.985).

"Service members and their families pride themselves on their strength and ability to successfully confront challenge. The notion of asking for help or support often carries with it the stigma of weakness".

(Huebner, 2012, p. F4)



Deployment is not simply a temporary long distance relationship for families; it is a complex reorganization of a family's physical and emotional life (Blaisure et al., 2012). The post-deployment phase, including renegotiation and reintegration, is the most emotionally difficult time for many military families (Department of Defense, 2006). The notion that at pre-deployment the service member is psychologically present but physically absent, and then at post-deployment the service member is physically present but psychologically absent, can be emotionally taxing for the family (Boss, 2004).

- **Reintegration and Reunion Issues with Post-Deployment**
The reunion of military men and women with their families after deployment is often depicted as a euphoric honeymoon. However, the reality of reintegration is best compared to the first years of marriage which require great renegotiation and adjustment for all family members. Reintegration is often the most difficult phase of the deployment cycle (Marek et al., 2012), and requires flexibility, communication and re-connection of all family members (Faber et al., 2008; Macdermid et al., 2008, Olsen & Gorall, 2003). Service members, partners and family members may never truly go back to the way things were pre-deployment — this does not mean that family cannot be as strong as it previously was — it simply means that family life will be different. The greatest task of the family during reunion and reintegration is negotiating family roles. An additional stressor for Reserve and National Guard service members is that they are often thrown back into a completely civilian life and begin to work at a civilian job, and live in a civilian community creating feelings of “culture shock” (DeVoe & Ross, 2012).
- **Impact of Multiple Stressors; A (stress) + B (resources) + C (perspective) = X (coping)**
An understanding of the impact of multiple stressors can help us know what the military family is experiencing during deployment and reintegration. Specifically, the stressor (A) can be a mixture of stressors which compound one another. The family's available resources (B) vary and greatly determine that family's ability to cope with the compounded stressor. The most valuable resources available to family are strong community, extended family support,

as well as material resources (e.g., jobs, homes). The family's perspective (C) of the stressor will greatly affect the family's ability to cope (X) with the stressor. The pile-up of stressors and overlapping demands during the deployment cycle leaves families tapped and vulnerable (Hill, 2002; Blaisure et al., 2012).

Though useful to recruiting and sustaining a committed military force, these values and cultural factors can inhibit help-seeking and receiving. Receiving help often contradicts the self-sufficient mindset common in military culture (Greene-Shortridge et al., 2007). Soldiers and families may feel embarrassed or less competent if they “need” or receive help.

WHEN MILITARY FAMILIES DO NOT SEEK HELP

Sometimes, the military lifestyle can put the military service member and family at risk for emotional distress, relationship strain and family conflict. Not seeking help or not receiving timely and effective help can result in:

- Psychological health issues such as depression, PTSD, or traumatic brain injuries (Clark-Hitt et al., 2012). It is estimated that 14 percent of service members have PTSD or depression upon return from the most recent mid-eastern wars and that only half of these seek help (Clark-Hitt et al., 2012).
- Reserve and National Guard service members, which comprise 41 percent of the United States military force, report more mental health issues than does the active component (Britt et al., 2011). Accessing appropriate mental health services is especially difficult for reserve and guard members due to their geographical isolation. Since most members and families are not easily identified because they are embedded in civilian communities their needs are often not known nor addressed.
- Female service members are more likely to seek help than are male service members. In one study of active duty soldiers at a base, 26 percent of females sought help after deployment compared to 10 percent of males (Visco, 2009).
- Single active duty personnel report problems with PTSD most frequently while married personnel report problems with interpersonal conflict most frequently (Visco, 2009).
- Decreases in family cohesiveness and increases in family conflict (DeBurgh et al., 2012; Doyle & Peterson, 2005). Impaired family communication and inflexibility with family roles (Marek et al., 2012), and increases in marital discord and impaired parenting practices (Huebner, 2012).
- Poorer academic performance in military-connected children (Lincoln et al., 2008)
- Though military spouses are more likely to seek help than service members (68 percent compared to 40 percent), 1/3 of those spouses in a research study reported fear of seeking help because it may harm their spouse's military career (Burgh et al., 2011)

“[Military service members] may also be reluctant to admit that they need help for fear that they will be viewed as inferior, inadequate, and unable to complete their mission by their leaders, since this information is not kept confidential from their superiors.”

(Blaisure et al., 2012, p.131)

These negative outcomes can have lasting impact on future military service members and their families since 20 percent of military children grow up to serve in the military themselves (Faber et al., 2008).

What Prevents Families from Seeking Help?

The stigma associated with seeking help and doubt that civilians can be of help are major barriers. In recent studies, half of soldiers reported believing that seeking help would negatively affect their career (Lunasco et al., 2010), and military family members feel that they should have control over their own problems and blame themselves for not managing them better (Greene-Shortridge et al., 2007; Hoge et al., 2004; Wright et al., 2012). When it comes to using civilian services and networks, service members may doubt civilians’ abilities to assist them due to civilian inability to relate to deployment experiences (Visco, 2009). So the clash between military and civilian culture can lead to misunderstanding (Lunasco et al., 2010). Understanding the stigmas prevalent among military families is important so that those barriers can be overcome.



ACTIVITY: Barriers to Seeking Help

(approx. 3 minutes)

Think about the times a colleague, loved one or you have sought help from a professional or third-party about a personal or serious matter. What were some of the barriers that had to be overcome before help was accepted?

Possible answers...

- Lack of trust
- Embarrassment about seeking help
- Belief that one can handle “it” on their own; not wanting to make a big deal out of issues
- Not wanting to talk about the problem or remember what led to it (e.g. combat experiences)
- Believing that there was no solution to the problem or thinking that the problem was so great that no one could help
- Fear of being seen as weak or cowardly
- Belief that one should “Pull yourself up by your boot straps”
- Unawareness of resources available

(Blaisure et al., 2012; Britt et al., 2011; Clark-Hitt et al., 2012; Huebner, 2012; Visco 2009)

Participant Reflection...

These are real barriers for anyone who seeks help for a problem that is personal or difficult to share such as reintegrating to work, family and community after a lengthy deployment. What are some of the issues – personal as well as non-personal - for which military service members and their families might seek our help?

EFFECTIVE HELPSEEKING: SERVICE MEMBERS AND FAMILIES

Given these potential barriers to effectively seeking help, it’s important to know that effective help seeking is influenced by several factors.

Some of these factors include:

- Perception of distress
- Ability to cope with distress

- Belief in self-efficacy, self-reliance, competency
- Belief that a solution to the distress exists
- Attitude toward self-disclosure, openness, vulnerability (Hinson & Swanson, 1993; Lee, 1996; Vogel, 2003; Vogel et al., 2006)

The **Social Behavior Model** (Wacker & Roberto, 2008) demonstrates how these factors influence help seeking process.



“John” Seeks Help...

Consider how “John”, an Army veteran might move through the social behavior model when deciding whether to seek help for depression. John is a 65 year old male from a German family who has been a blue collar worker his whole life and lives in a very rural area in the deep South. His family was very quiet, and emphasized a stoic mindset where one suffers in silence. All of these cultural influences would predispose John to be less likely to seek help. John’s general practitioner is probably who John would turn to first for help with depression, but he lives so far from VA services, the city and from his doctor’s office. His limited access and financial resources would limit his ability to seek help. Finally, John knows his depression as a problem. He knows it interferes with his life, and he has paid attention to advertisements and articles about medicine to treat depression. The “need factor”, including John’s perception of the distress and solution lead him to seek help for a problem that he feels should be addressed and is treatable. The first two steps of the social behavior model would hinder John from seeking help due to his characteristics and attitudes to resist help and a lack of available resources. The third step, the need factor, holds sway over John’s cultural influences and lack of resources.

Similar to the barriers for service members, help seeking of military family members is complicated by their attitudes, culture, perceptions and resources.

“Sally” Seeks Help...

Consider how “Sally”, a National Guard wife and mother of three facing her husband’s return from deployment, might move through the social behavior model when seeking help about family conflict. She and her husband are having many arguments, disagreements on parenting practices, and her children seem to be suffering more than anyone. She and her husband live in a civilian town, and do not know any other military families. When looking at the cultural influences, the military culture would certainly affect Sally’s predisposition to seek help. The values of self-sufficiency and courage in the military might hinder Sally’s help seeking. Since Sally’s husband is in the National Guard, she is limited in her access to military resources and is probably isolated from networks or programs to help. She may be

The Social Behavioral Model incorporates elements of...

■ **Attribution Theory** — suggests that individuals formulate attributions to understand and control their environment. A person is more likely to receive help if they attribute the helper’s motivation to genuine concern or fulfilling a role rather than ulterior motives. A person is less likely to seek help if they attribute the distress to an internal problem (something wrong with them) than to an external problem (something wrong with their environment) (Wacker & Roberto, 2008).

■ **Threat to Self Esteem Model** — explains that perception of the help influences whether or not a person will receive help. A person is more likely to receive help offered if they see it as supporting their “self” rather than as a threat to their self-esteem (Wacker & Roberto, 2008).

■ **Brehm’s Reactance Theory** — suggests that people value freedom and autonomy. When distress is present, individual values of freedom, choice, and autonomy may feel threatened. If these values feel further threatened by aid or assistance, help-seeking behaviors are hindered (Wacker & Roberto, 2008).

■ **Equity Theory** — the concept that people seek equality in relationships. A person is less likely to receive assistance or seek it when they feel they cannot reciprocate the help, meaning the relationship is inequitable (Wacker & Roberto, 2008).

“Resiliency does not involve ‘springing back’ to a pre-existing ‘normal’ life that existed before the deployment but rather ‘springing forward’ and creating a new sense of ‘normal’ by adjusting interactions to fit new conditions.”

(Wilson et al., 2011, p.226)

unaware of resources that could help with her distress. Finally, Sally may see her distress as a problem with her and not the situation, blaming herself and believing that there is not a solution. All three factors in the social behavior model in this scenario hinder Sally from seeking help in regards to the family conflict that she is facing.

In “Sally’s” situation, an offer of help from a civilian friend, acquaintance or community helper would be useful. Offering to help would reduce Sally’s isolation, concern with stigma and increases her pool of resources.

EFFECTIVELY OFFERING HELP: CIVILIAN HELPERS

Research indicates military members will seek help if they have positive perceptions of social support and are encouraged to seek help (Clark-Hitt et al., 2012). Consequently, it’s important that civilians encourage military members and families to accept help and that offers of help are positive ones. Now that you understand more about help seeking amongst military families, it is time to learn about effectively offering help and support to these families in your community.

To effectively offer help to military members and families, one must:

- Focus on the strengths of families, not their deficits.
- Believe that ‘natural’ civilian helpers can be effective.
- Understand that some problems are not due to military experiences or lifestyle, problems can be very complex and require experts.
- Be respectful and know that families will utilize help tailored to their needs, but it might be on their own schedule – it takes time.
- Realize that, for some problems there are no solutions, but “seek them lovingly” (Socrates).

To improve how help is offered and received:

- Frame military-related issues as short-term stressors and not long-term, chronic problems. A situational approach leads military families to be more receptive to help. It makes the stressor seem more manageable, and puts focus on the issue - not that there is something “wrong” with the family (Blaisure et al., 2012).
- Gain support or credibility with high ranking service members, peers, service organizations (e.g., American Legion, VFW, school liaison officers)
- Build rapport and respect with military members and families. Learn about their experiences, study the military culture, ask service members to share their experiences. Military members have more respect for professionals who also share hardships they have experienced (Clark-Hitt et al., 2012; Wright et al., 2012)
- Build trust by listening intentionally and without judgment. This is called active listening, or listening with the “third ear”.



ACTIVITY: Active Listening

(approx. 5 minutes)

Three tasks for effective, intentional active listening are...

- **Showing empathy.** Taking in the whole message (which also may be demonstrated nonverbally through body-language, tone of voice, etc.) and determining the emotion the speaker is portraying. Acknowledging the emotion they are feeling in a sentence.
- **Asking for clarification.** Trying to understand what the speaker is conveying without inserting your own opinions. In order to create or frame a question, you will need to base it on what they are saying. Asking for a specific example is a useful question.
- **Providing non-evaluative feedback.** Prevent miscommunication by allowing the speaker to know if s(he) got the message across. Paraphrasing what the speaker is saying in your own words, and asking if that is the message s(he) wanted you to get. (Gerhart & Bodie, 2011)

Your turn...

Listen carefully to the scenario, because you will need to write three statements for how you would respond to the speaker. One statement should show empathy, one should ask for clarification, and one should provide non-evaluative feedback.

Tanya, an Army wife stops by to talk to you. Her body language shows exhaustion and stress. She slumps over, puts her hand to her head, and says, “It has been so difficult since my husband returned from deployment. Don’t get me wrong, it is great to have him home, but it is hard. I feel guilty for even saying that. He’s just different. I don’t feel close at all to him right now. We managed alright without him, you know. I’m kind of proud of how well I did. The kids think he is different too. They don’t listen to him as well as before he left. I guess maybe they are angry he’s been gone. I feel like I have to continue making all the decisions, doing the disciplining, and handling the responsibilities. How am I supposed to know what I should continue doing and what he can do now? I wish things could go back to the way they were. I’m just so confused.”

Develop three statements that respond to Tanya...

- Showing empathy
- Seeking clarification
- Providing non-evaluative feedback

As much as we want to help, we may not always be equipped or prepared to offer the type of help someone needs. Sometimes the best way we can help is to refer someone to a professional expert. Sometime, helping is best provided through a supportive team of people. The civilian helper is an important member on that team, but is sometimes not equipped to be “the only player on the field”.

Here are some referral tips:

- Evaluate the resources you have to help with the situation. If you are not equipped to help alone, seek out additional information, resources or professionals. This is particularly pertinent if families are dealing with psychological health issues such as PTSD, traumatic brain injuries, or depression.
- Seek out local community professionals to help in areas of physical health, psychological health, education, counseling, etc. If the family is comfortable, you can help refer them to these community professionals.

“First and foremost, we listen. The biggest thing that we do is to help normalize a lot of the feelings that people have and to help put them in perspective.”

(Dr. Reich in Kubetin, 2008, p.22)

“...Resilience is nurtured by caring relationships — with our loved ones and with our communities.”
(Blaisure et al., 2012, p.81)

- For a list of national resources, programs, and professionals, examine Military One Source (www.militaryonesource.com) or Military Home Front (www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil).
- For a list of programs and resources for military children, consider examine Operation: Military Kids (www.operationmilitarykids.org) or the Military Child Education Coalition (www.militarychild.org).

GROWING MILITARY FAMILY RESILIENCE

Resilience is an important aspect of military culture. It is an attribute which is included in service member training and support networks for families. Though resilience can be defined in many ways, the attributes of all strong and resilient families include flexibility, connection and communication (Olson, DeFrain, & Skogrand, 2012). Coping with the multiple demands and stressors associated with military life has been found to strain a family's ability to be flexible (Olson & Gorall, 2003). A family that is willing and able to balance stability with change demonstrates their ability to be flexible in roles, rules, and boundaries. A family that has healthy cohesion (i.e., connection) or emotional bond successfully balances separateness when they are not together. Additionally, a family that has effective communication is able to positively and openly discuss stressors and issues. Consequently, an important “help” that someone can offer are opportunities to strengthen the military family. Families that have opportunities to practice positive communication skills learn to adopt flexibility and strengthen cohesion to meet demands and stressors.

Family resilience is strengthened through supportive relationships in positive environments (Macdermid et al., 2008; Palmer, 2008).

So to support military family resilience, civilian communities can:

- Promote opportunities for family communication, flexibility and connection for each phase of deployment and reintegration
- Educate others about military contexts, culture and attributes
- Reduce stigma associated with seeking help by normalizing problems
- Have and help set realistic expectations
- Promote contact with others who are experiencing similar problems
- Model positive coping skills
- Maintain contact during good and bad times
- Celebrate and recognize strength in a way that military members and families would appreciate

(Blaisure et al., 2012; Gerwitz et al., 2011, Greene-Shortridge et al., 2007; Marek et al., 2012)

Resilience, Renewal and Resources

Having offered and provided help, civilian communities can also recognize the strength and resilience of military service members

and families in a number of appropriate ways. From establishing “Welcome Home” gardens, in much the same way the Victory Gardens of World War II came to symbolize shared undertakings and resources, to planting groves of trees for memorials, communities can effectively recognize the sacrifices, and contributions of military families. Resources for recognitions and for civilian helping include:

Military HOMEFRONT: www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil

Excellent source for service providers and civilians working with military families and is the official website for the Military Community and Family Policy (MC&FP) information.

National Military Family Association: <http://www.militaryfamily.org>

Advocates for benefits and programs that support military families, also teaches military family members how to be self-advocates.

Additional Resources

Friends In-Deed <http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/library/famlf2/mf806.pdf>
Kansas State Research and Extension's course in helping by Charles A. Smith, Ph.D. Publication number: MF 806.

Gardening with Military Family Members <http://blogs.cornell.edu/garden/get-activities/signature-projects/military-extension-partnership/>
A great way to support and help military families, Cornell University.

Kansas State University's Institute for the Health and Security of Military Families <http://militaryfamilies.k-state.edu/>; An institute that addresses the healthy and resiliency of military families.

Military Child Education Coalition www.militarychild.org An organization that works to ensure quality education for military children.

Military Family Research Institute (MFRI) <https://www.mfri.purdue.edu> An organization at Purdue University that is continuously and currently running research studies and programs to assist military families.

Military One Source www.militaryonesource.com Helps military service members and families locate the resources available to them, including counseling and referral services provided through MOS.

Operation Healthy Reunions <http://www.operationhealthyreunions.org/> This agency sponsored by Mental Health America provides free and confidential mental health services to service members and their families.

Operation: Military Kids www.operationmilitarykids.org The Army's collaborative program with communities to support children and youth impacted by deployment.

SOFAR (Strategic Outreach to Families of All Reservists) <http://www.sofarusa.org> A special program to reach the often underserved Reservist and National Guard families.

The Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program <http://www.yellowribbon.mil/> This program was specifically designed to provide assistance and support to National Guard and Reserve military families.

Veterans Farmers Project http://www.cfra.org/veteran_farmers

“Only through broad collaboration, can maximal benefit to the soldier, family members, and society be realized” (Doyle & Peterson, 2005, p.369).

project A way to help veterans find new profession.

Veteran's Grove and tree planting on or near National Arbor Day <http://www.arborday.org/> A way to recognize and honor military members and families.

Victory Gardens (archived national film from World War II) http://archive.org/details/victory_garden A beautiful example of communities helping and standing behind the military.

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