

Promoting Psychological Well-Being in Military Children and Adolescents During Family Deployment: A Critical Role for the Primary Care and Behavioral Health Professional

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Introduction/ Background

- When warriors (active duty, NG, and Reserves) are assured that their family is being monitored and cared for by the community they are fighting to protect, they are able to more clearly focus on the critical missions they are performing far from home.
- Military pediatricians and behavioral health specialists have partnered to create a preventative, psychoeducational, resiliency based multimedia program to address the emotional and behavioral health needs of military children and teenagers.
- Maintaining this level of support for the children of modern warriors is crucial to recruiting and preserving a military force emotionally prepared to perform vital combat missions.

METHODS:

-Objective data on the effects of military deployment on child and adolescent mental health has yet to be systematically gathered.

-However, through collaborative practical experience and emerging research, it is becoming more clear that military children and adolescents exposed to parental deployment experience ambiguous loss and stress, often beyond normative levels, that may become toxic if not detected and addressed in a timely manner.

-Participants from across the Armed Services have begun a collaborative effort to oversee and coordinate research, training, youth support, and advocacy efforts.

- Some of the major facilitators of this effort have included the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the Uniformed Services Section and Uniformed Services West Chapter of the AAP, the Office of the Army Surgeon General, and military pediatricians and behavioral health experts from all branches of the service.

RESULTS:

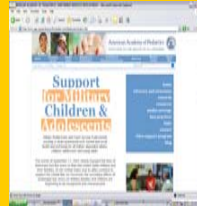
The major impetus for this work came with a \$20,000 grant awarded by the AAP in May 2005 through the Friends of Children Fund and the Healthy People 2010 Chapter Grant Program.

The grant energized several of the following collaborative efforts:

1. Creation of a DVD entitled **Mr. Po and Friends Discuss Family Reunion After Deployment** - a support product for school age children and families. 100,000 copies have been distributed and another 100,000 copies are being produced with funding from US Army MEDCOM

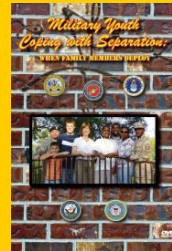


2. Creation of an AAP sponsored deployment support web site entitled **Helping Children and Adolescents Through the Difficulties of Deployment in the Family** - a resource for families, youth serving professionals and researchers



[HTTP://WWW.AAP.ORG/SECTIONS/UNIFSERV/DEPLOYMENT/INDEX.HTML](http://www.aap.org/sections/unifserv/deployment/index.html)

3. Creation of a DVD entitled **Military Youth Coping with Separation: When Family Members Deploy** - a support product for older children and teens and an emotionally sensitizing glimpse for all concerned stakeholders at the effects of deployment on families. 100,000 copies have been distributed and another 100,000 copies are being produced with funding from US Army MEDCOM



4. The Adoption of an AAP Annual Leadership Forum Resolution in March 2007- Prioritized into the Academy's top 10 (out of 81 adopted resolutions) - which will ensure direct involvement of the Academy's Board of Directors and improving access to the Academy's resources. This has led to the AAP publishing multiple articles in AAP News, chapter and section newsletters and other outlets important educational stories related to military youth deployment support. In August 2008 the AAP published its Prep Audio CME course entitled **The Effect of Deployment on Children**. Also currently in press in the online Pediatrics In Review Journal an article entitled **Caring for America's Children: Military Youth During Time of War**. Also underway is the production of an AAP technical report to offer resources to pediatricians and other youth serving professional while taking care of military children. These important educational venues for pediatricians are direct results of the initial resolution.

5. In conjunction with UCLA a research project has been initiated to examine the effects of deployment on military children age 6-12. Other research projects including protocols examining levels of psychosocial morbidity in military children whose parents are deployed have been completed by the staff of the Madigan Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics Fellowship. A study of the efficacy of the military youth deployment support DVDs has also been done.



6. The first Summit on Military Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health and Well-Being During Wartime and Beyond was held 2-4 June 2008 at McChord Air Force Base. The conference was attended by over 150 military and community youth serving professionals. Conference presentations and work products are available for review at :

www.mamc.amedd.army.mil/mamc/MilitaryChildSummit/ConferenceHome.htm

7. Incorporation of the Military Youth Deployment Support Video Program into the Battlemind Soldier Support Program Line

www.battlemind.army.mil



8. The new Military Child and Adolescent Center of Excellence (MCA CoE) has been approved and funded by the US Army MEDCOM as a 2 year, \$3 million pilot project. The MCA CoE will focus on standardization of existing emotional and behavioral support programs offered to military youth while developing the next generation of programs.

MCA CoE Vision

Expand distribution of video program products through Triservice and civilian networks

Conduct official program analysis of the video support products along with other promising military child and adolescent support programs

In conjunction with the Battlemind project and AMEDD TV begin production of new emotionally connecting, destigmatizing products for more specific populations such as youth whose parents have sustained serious physical injuries, PTSD, TBI, etc

Develop hybrid school based health program combining primary care and behavioral health concepts to maximize outreach and prevention efforts to military children in their educational environments

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