

From Awareness to Action: The Military Family in Our Communities

Leader's Guide

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Introduction

Many families in our communities have experienced the strain of lengthy wartime deployments. According to a 2011 White House report, nearly 2 million children in the United States have parents who are military service members. In Kansas, more than 33,000 children have a parent currently serving in the military, and these children live in small towns and rural areas as well as cities. The military families in our communities have faced multiple and prolonged deployments. Many of these families, though thankful that their loved one is no longer deployed, must cope with the strain and negotiation of new roles that are part of reintegration. Reintegrating the formerly deployed family member back into a family is not always easy. Reintegration is a process that requires time, understanding, and intentional efforts by each family member. This is where individuals, neighborhoods, and whole communities can help. By providing military families with timely opportunities to acclimate, adjust, and discover a “new normal,” community members can help strengthen the health and well-being of families. Support can be as simple as offering to provide a meal, mow the lawn, or baby sit. These simple acts can give parents time for themselves and let children know that other adults care. More broadly, support can also include neighborhood cookouts and community programs organized specifically for military families.

The *Awareness to Action: The Military Family in Our Communities* program helps civilian audiences understand and then appropriately act to support military family members and help them cope and thrive after deployment.

Objectives

From Awareness to Action: The Military Family in Our Communities creates awareness and generates community support for military-connected families, with special focus on families of National Guard members and Reservists. Most often, Guard and Reserve families do not live near a military installation, so they must cope with the lack of easy access to many military services and local networks of support. Guard and Reserve families are typically dispersed in communities and may be one of a few military families living in neighborhoods, enrolled in local schools, attending churches, or employed in local businesses. This isolation adds to the stress that a family may experience when reintegrating a loved one after deployment.

Participants in *From Awareness to Action* will:

- increase understanding of military family life, and specifically the Army culture,
- understand how deployment and training cycles present challenges, reveal attributes, and foster resilience in families,
- identify supports and resources necessary for military families to thrive in civilian communities, and
- commit to one tangible, sustainable act of support for military families.





Ideas for Community Activities

- Plant “Welcome Home” and “Thank You” gardens and trees.
- Hold child care trainings for teens.
- Ask military families to identify what they need and want.
- Volunteer to babysit so parents can have time together.
- Help with (outside, inside) household chores.
- Offer to read to children while parents have some alone time.
- Purchase books for school libraries about the military family experience.
- Volunteer to run errands.
- Drop off a home-cooked meal.
- Teach board games at a family game night sponsored by the local K-State Research and Extension office.
- Listen to military-connected youth.
- Produce a play by military-connected youth.
- Connect families to helpful community organizations.
- Provide opportunities for military families to strengthen communication and connections.
- Invite family members to take walks.

Suggested Presentation Format

Before you Begin

- Invite military participants and a co-facilitator with military experience.
- Have copies of handouts, evaluation form, and local resources for participants.
- Download the PowerPoint presentation from www.ksre.ksu.edu/families, should you choose to use it.
- Provide newsprint, flip chart, and markers to record ideas for community efforts.
- Provide healthy refreshments — food always makes people more comfortable and more attentive.

Presentation (approximately 1 hour)

- 5 minutes — Welcome and introductions. If time permits, facilitate “A Blanket Community” activity (on next page) to build rapport.
- 2 minutes — Introduce the topic by covering the Introduction and lesson objectives (see previous page).
- 15 minutes — Use the PowerPoint program from the K-State Research and Extension “Families!” website or design your own.
- 15 minutes — Facilitate a discussion of how participants and the community could support military families. Encourage questions and reflection. Move the discussion toward two or three ideas. Reflect on the list of ideas from the participant handout. Write



Resources With More Information

1. Military Home Front), www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil
2. Military OneSource — online, phone and face-to-face counseling for military families, www.militaryonesource.com
3. Military Child Education Coalition www.militarychild.org
4. Operation: Military Kids www.operationmilitarykids.org
5. Strengthening our Military Families, White House report, January 2011, www.defense.gov/home/features/2011/0111_initiative/strengthening_our_military_january_2011.pdf
6. MacDermid, S.M., Samper, R., Schwarz, R., Nischida J., & Nyaronga, D., (2008) *Understanding and Promoting Resilience in Military Families*, Military Family Research Institute, Purdue University, www.cfs.purdue.edu/MFRI/resources/public/reports/Understanding%20and%20Promoting%20Resilience.pdf

Take the Activity a Step Further

Have three or four people hold the blanket as the group discusses what happens when soldiers return after deployment. Everyone now picks up the blanket, but in different locations. The “blanket” is back, but it is now different. The dentist who was deployed is back to work, but is missing a leg. Your neighbor is home, but no longer likes to go hunting and doesn’t like to be in crowds. His daughter says that he has PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder).

Ask Participants:

1. How might you feel about this person being added back into the community?
2. Now that service members are home, can we stop helping military families?
3. Due to these changes, how might a community member help these families?

ideas, action steps, and possible responsibilities on the newsprint or flip chart so the group sees the tangible acts that resulted from their awareness. Ask a key participant to follow up with volunteers to implement any of the ideas. Collect that key participant’s contact information and send that information along with the evaluations to Elaine Johannes (see below).

- 2 minutes — Thank the participants (especially those who are military connected) and ask that all complete and return the “Awareness to Action” evaluation form.

Evaluation

Send the completed forms and contact information of key participant* to:

Awareness to Action c/o Elaine Johannes
Kansas State University
School of Family Studies and Human Services
343 Justin
Manhattan, KS 66506

**Within three months, the key participant will receive a follow-up email or phone call from Elaine Johannes inquiring about any community actions resulting from the program.*

Activity: A Blanket Community

Supplies

- Blanket, tarp, or tablecloth
- Several objects to represent various aspects of the community such as balls, empty plastic water bottles, other objects with different shapes and textures.

The Activity

Place the blanket or tarp on the floor and have all participants align themselves on the edges. Each member picks up an edge of the cloth and holds the blanket tightly. Add objects to the center of the blanket. Each participant holding the blanket will assume a community role: teacher, parent, business owner, law enforcement officer, doctor, county employee, school administrator, elected official, or other community member.

Add the objects and tell the group that these are the children in our community, and that we have to keep them safe. Have the group make a wave with the blanket but at the same time keep the children on the blanket. Begin telling the group that the business owner, a member of the National Guard has been deployed. That person drops out; then call more people to be deployed until you are down to two or three people.

Reflection — Ask Participants

1. What happened as people started leaving their spots on the blanket?
2. How did you feel in trying to keep all the objects on the blanket?
3. How did your role/responsibility change as others left the blanket?
4. What implications does this activity have for how we respond to the military youth and families in our community?

Contact Information

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From Awareness to Action: the Military Family in Our Communities — Evaluation Form

Your comments about “Awareness to Action” are important. Please complete this form and return it to your leader. There is space on the back of this form for additional remarks and suggestions. Thank you.

Training Date: _____ Trainer’s Name: _____

Training Location: _____

Organization sponsoring the training: _____

	Circle your skill level or knowledge BEFORE the training					Circle your skill level or knowledge AFTER the training				
	Very little				A lot	Very little				A lot
Knowledge of military culture	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledge of military family challenges and strengths	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledge of ways communities can support military families	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Motivation to support military youth and families	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

List the most important thing that you gained from “Awareness to Action”:

List one tangible, sustainable act you can do to support military families in your community:

Circle the number that best reflects how worthwhile this training was to you.

1
2
3
4
5
 Not worthwhile Somewhat worthwhile Very worthwhile

Optional

Your name: _____

Your email and/or phone number: _____

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Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

MF3063

August 2012

K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, as amended. Kansas State University, County Extension Councils, Extension Districts, and United States Department of Agriculture Cooperating, John D. Floros, Director.