

From Awareness to Action: The Military Family in Our Communities

Fact Sheet

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Introduction

Many families in Kansas 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 these 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.

What You Can Do

Community groups have a lot of power to help local military families. They can provide supplies to local military support groups, or teach other groups around the community about deployment and military culture. They can even put together their own care packages for area families whose loved ones are deployed. Families and individuals can make a big difference simply by volunteering to watch a military family's kids for an evening, offering to rake their leaves, or setting up a monthly get-together with neighborhood families.

Getting Others Involved

Once you've become active, take it one step further by spreading the word. Inspire teachers, businesspeople, and other civic leaders to take action. Healthcare providers, for instance, can teach others about post-traumatic stress disorder and how it affects returning soldiers. And contractors and other crafts people can donate time on projects at a military family's home.



Community Action

It seems the hardest part about providing support to military families is figuring out what to do. But in reality, military families are very much like other Kansas families. So consider what you might appreciate if a member of your family were deployed. There are dozens of things, both big and small, that you can do to help. Try brainstorming your own options to add to the list.

Community Groups

- Sponsor parades or special events.
- Compile and distribute a list of community resources.
- Provide Operation: Military Kids (OMK) with materials for Hero Packs (backpacks full of activities and ways to stay connected to deployed parents).
- Sponsor military support networks in businesses and neighborhoods.
- Provide the local Army Family Readiness Group with requested items.
- Organize an around-the-house help day.
- Hold child care training for military kids.
- Provide transportation to practices and appointments.
- Create scholarships for youth to join teams and attend special events.
- Invite soldiers and their families to speak at club meetings.
- Coordinate a community resource festival for military families.
- Connect military families with helpful organizations.
- Sponsor a mother's/father's day out.



Schools

- Educate staff about challenges military kids face.
- Allow time for communication with deployed loved ones.
- Sponsor military appreciation events at school functions.
- Display OMK banners in schools.
- Educate staff about post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

City and County Officials

- Recognize the contributions of military families.
- Provide waivers or passes for local recreational facilities.
- Include military families on committees and boards.
- Designate a committee or commissioner as the community's military champion.
- Include military family support messages on government websites.
- Display OMK banners in government offices.
- Distribute OMK seals and stickers as bill inserts.
- Adopt a local military branch.

Everyone

- Volunteer to babysit.
- Offer to help with household chores.
- Educate others about how deployment affects families.
- Tutor military kids.
- Invite military kids to join recreational teams and groups.
- Volunteer to do a family's shopping.
- Drop off a home-cooked meal.

Families Helping Families

- Encourage families to enjoy each other's company.
- Support lots of quality time.
- Share fun times.
- Appreciate the fact that good things take time.
- When families are ready to accept help, offer something specific and useful. Few people request help when they're told, "Just let me know if you need help."
- Remember, do not push too hard to help families that do not want help at the moment. Show that you care, but do not overwhelm.

Adapted from: Qualities of Strong Families, by Charlotte Shoup Olsen.

Available at: www.ksre.ksu.edu/Families/~/doc8735.ashx



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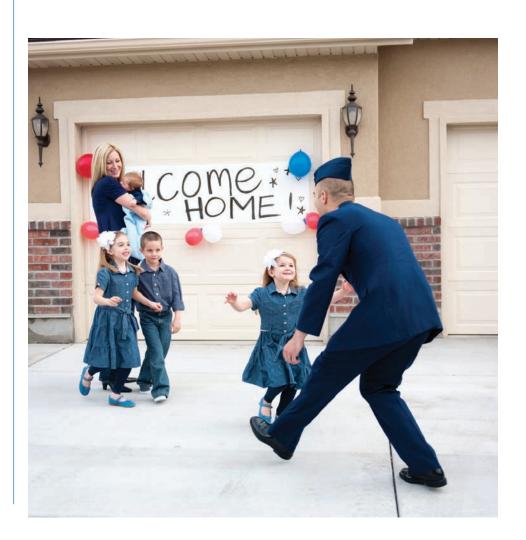
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Resources for Helping

- Operation: Military Kids www.operationmilitarykids.org
- Military OneSource www.militaryonesource.com
- Military Child Education Coalition www.militarychild.org
- Military HOMEFRONT www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil



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