Young Children of Veteran Families

Enhancing the Well-being of America’s Veterans and their Families: A Call to Action for A National Veterans Policy

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The Importance of the First Three Years

Period of extraordinary growth
Babies are born “wired” to learn
Development is continuous
For very young children, physical, cognitive, language and social/emotional development are “inextricably linked”
Babies learn in the context of relationships

EARLY EXPERIENCES MATTER!

(Parlakian & Seibel, 2002)
Focusing on Military and Guard/Reserve Families

- The largest percent of children of Active Duty members are between birth and five years of age, constituting over 42.8% of minor dependents. There are over 360,000 children ages 0-3 of Active Duty members.

- There are approximately 134,594 children ages 0–3 of Selected Reserve members. Of the total number of children of Selected Reserve, 28.8% are between the ages of 0 and 5

(Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, Military Community and Family Policy, 2012)
Serving as a secure base

What we ask of parents

• predictability
• Emotional attunement
• Sensitivity
• Contingent responsiveness
• Co-regulation
• Mutuality
Serving as a secure base

What we ask of parents

- Consistency
- Emotional attunement
- Sensitivity
- Contingent responsiveness
- Co-regulation
- Mutuality

PTSD symptomatology

- Sleep problems
- Hypervigilance
- Difficulty concentrating
- Irritability or outbursts
- Hallucinations/flash-backs
- Exaggerated startle response
- Feelings of detachment/estrangement
- Restricted range of affect

(American Psychiatric Association, 2000)
Serving as a secure base

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(Turner & Davidson, 2004)

TBI symptomatology

- Disorganization
- Impulsivity
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Vision problems
- Depression

(American Psychiatric Association, 2000)
• Service member parent’s PTSD symptoms predicted child depression, internalizing behaviors, and externalizing behaviors

• Service member parent’s depression served as robust predictor of child’s internalizing behaviors

(Lester et al., 2010)

• Nat’l Guard soldier parent’s PTSD had direct and indirect effects on self-reported parenting behaviors, including impaired parenting

(Gewirtz, Polusney, Khaylis, Erbes, & DeGarmo, 2010)
Suicide in the Military (cont’d)

• In 2010, 347 military personnel were killed in combat, while at least 381 warriors took their own lives.

• Numbers of attempts have increased sixfold in the Army
  (New York Times, 2010)

• Suicides of active duty service members in July 2012 more than doubled suicides in June 2012 (Burns, 2012)

• American Foundation for Suicide prevention points out that the largest portion of suicides are among National Guard and reservists who fall through the cracks of programs.
  (New York Times, 2010)
Focusing on Veteran families

• An estimated 250,000 service members transition out of service and into civilian life each year.
  (Small Business Administration, 2012)

• Varying states of healing

• Data is limited, but we know that 30% of all veterans have children.
  (Westat, 2010)

• We know that the face of the Veteran is changing
Focusing on Veteran families

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  (Small Business Administration, 2012)
- Varying states of healing
- Data is limited, but we know that 30% of all veterans have children.  
  (Westat, 2010)
- We know that the face of the Veteran is changing  
  And we know that young veterans may have young children.
Emerging data from Illinois

Nearly one of out of five new veterans has one or more children under the age of 5 in their household.

(Carrow, Rynell, & Terpstra, 2012)
Emerging data from Illinois

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(Carrow, Rynell, & Terpstra, 2012)

For female veterans, that number increases to nearly one out of four.

(Carrow et al., 2012)
Approximately one quarter of new veterans with children are single

(Carrow et al., 2012)
Emerging data from Illinois (cont’d)

Approximately one quarter of new veterans with children are single

(Carrow et al., 2012)

Nearly half of female new veterans with children are single parents

(Carrow et al., 2012)
Overlay of stressors for Veterans and Guard/Reserve families

• 2012 unemployment rates for Gulf War II veterans, ages 18-34
  • 10.4% for men; 12.5% for women (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012)

• About 1 in 5 women seen at VHA endorse MST when screened (DVA, 2010)

• Loss of military-specific support systems
  • Esprit de corps
  • Installation resources
  • Social support
  • Benefits
  • Cultural identity
• Veteran men 2x as likely to become homeless than non-veteran men.

• Veteran women 3x more likely to become homeless than non-veteran women.

• For females, risk for homelessness was highest in the 18-29 age group, with risk decreasing as age increased.

(DVA, 2011)
Military Family Projects @ ZERO TO THREE

Little Listeners (2004-2006)
Operation Parenting Edge (2005-2007)
CTAMF Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect: Parent Provider Partnerships in Child Care (2008-2009)
Coming Together Around Military Families (2009-2013)
**The Importance of Caring for Yourself During Periods of Military-Related Stress**

Being a parent to a baby or toddler is beyond a full-time job. For military families, the daily challenges of parenting can be increased by the stressors of military life. As parents and caregivers, it is easy to place our children’s interests above our own. Certainly, it is essential that we provide our young children with all the physical and emotional nurturing they need.

Nurturing ourselves, however, is also a basic part of healthy parenting. When we ignore our own needs and forget to physically or emotionally refuel, we begin running on fumes. We need to do good things for ourselves to do good things for our children.

Taking care of ourselves can benefit our children in another way. Babies and toddlers take cues from the world around them. Their parents and caregivers, whom they love and adore, serve as models of behavior. A 13-month-old toddler, for example, runs and looks for her soothie every time Daddy brushes his teeth. Of course, being a role model is both a great honor and a great responsibility. It is important to be mindful of what we communicate with our words and actions.

If we want our children to understand they are valuable and important then we, ourselves, need to model self-care. In this way, parents who learn to balance their own needs with those of their families may be supporting their babies and toddlers to develop a healthier sense of self.

**Here are some basic steps to practicing self-CARE:**

- **Consider Your Needs**
  Take a few moments to sit down and think about what gives you energy, strength, and a sense of calm. Is it deep exercise, bowling, spiritual reflection, a game of basketball, writing, gathering with friends? There are no right answers. However, make sure that the activities you consider are healthy for yourself and for your family. Self-care is about nurturing yourself, not engaging in behaviors that are temporarily distracting but potentially risky for you. For example, if getting a professional spa massage would increase your debt and ultimately your stress level, this is not an activity to put on your list. Instead, think about budgeting the time, rather than the money for an at-home, do-it-yourself pedicure.

- **Arrange Your Schedule**
  Self-care activities can be coordinated with other scheduled events and written into calendars. When we write plans down, they become more concrete and substantial. Staying on top of your prioritized activities. Taking time for yourself should be considered as important as any other obligation.
Veteran-focused Efforts

- Coming Together Around Veteran Families; Pilot training in LA (May 2012)
- Chicago Veterans
  Needs Assessment (October, 2012)
- Distribution of existing materials to community-based providers in Chicago (October, 2012)
  - Distribution of newly developed Sparrow
- Coming Together Around Veteran Families; training in Chicago (October, 2012)
- Focus group; key stakeholders in Chicago (October, 2012)
Strengthening our response

McCormick Foundation: sponsored adaptation of existing materials (June 2012 – May 2013)

- Adapt *Coming Together Around Military Families®* (CTAMF®) and other materials and tools, designed originally to address the needs of active duty families and their young children.
- Convene an expert advisory group to review existing resources and provide input for the adaptation or development of materials.
- Distribute materials to 100 Illinois-based programs in order to serve up to 2400 families and 1200 professionals.
- Explore opportunities to expand our reach by distributing materials more widely.
Sparrow

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Photo by Kiwi Street Studios
THANK YOU FOR ALL THAT YOU DO ON BEHALF OF MILITARY AND VETERAN FAMILIES!

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www.zerotothree.org/military
References


