

SUPPORTING YOUNG CHILDREN



TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF AND  
**YOUR VETERAN FAMILY**





**T**his brochure focuses on how taking care of yourself is one way of taking care of your baby or toddler. Choose an idea or two to support your child, your family, and yourself.

*I used to think it was selfish to think about myself. Then I realized that taking care of me is one of the ways I take care of my kids. There isn't too much free time for me, but even a little can go a long way.*

## Overview: TAKING CARE OF YOU = TAKING CARE OF YOUR CHILD

**T**aking care of your baby or toddler is not only about what you say and do but how you are. Are you calm or tense? Can you focus on your child, or are you constantly distracted? Do you have the time and energy to pay attention and be present with your child, to laugh and play with her?

These are important questions for all parents of babies and toddlers. They become even more important when you are coping with the added stressors of transitioning from active duty service to civilian life.



## WHAT YOU MAY EXPERIENCE AND FEEL

*To support your child, begin by trying to understand your experiences and feelings.*

**M**any parents are so busy caring for their child that they don't take time to physically or emotionally "refuel." Are you one of them? Do you find yourself running on empty? Are you running out of patience and energy to enjoy your child?

Like many parents experiencing a discharge, deactivation, or retirement from the military, you may be relocating far from friends you served with, but you are not alone even though you may feel that way at times. Family and friends are still in your life, ready to offer encouragement from a distance. In addition, there are people and services in your civilian community to whom you can turn. With some time and research, you can find rich resources through the Veterans Administration (VA) and other veteran organizations as well as community resources. Here are some strategies to help you find the support you need:

- *Remember, all parents need support.* Parenting is a wonder and joy. It is also an incredibly difficult and demanding job.
- *Be clear: It is OK to ask for help.* As one mom explains, "It takes courage to ask for something you need. Some people think it is a sign of weakness. I think if asking for help is good for my kids, it's a sign of strength."
- *Look for information about services in a variety of places.* As a dad explains, "The more people you talk with, the better your chances of finding what you need."

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### *What do you think?*

- At what time of day is your child most calm? Content? Engaged? When is he fussiest?
- When are you most calm? Fussiest?
- How do you know when you need a break?
- Who can you call when you need extra support?



- *If the person you are talking to can't help, ask him for the name and number of someone who can.* Eventually you will get to the person who can provide the information or service you need.
- *Don't be shy.* There are people in every community whose job it is to support families. They want to do what they can for you.

## Are You Noticing Any of These Changes in Yourself?

- Sleep difficulties like middle-of-the-night awakenings and nightmares
- Changes in eating habits, such as loss of appetite or overeating
- Irritability, emotional outbursts, and crying
- Resentment and/or anger about moving and other transitions to civilian life
- Doubts about your ability to cope
- Lack of energy and decreased pleasure in daily living
- The feeling that you have little control over your life
- Fear and anxiety about the well-being of the Veteran and the adjustment of your family.

These are common responses to major life transitions. If they persist or interfere with daily activities, speak with a professional who can answer your questions and provide additional support you may need.

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## YOU ARE NOT ALONE

### Supports and services to explore include:

- Personal support of family, friends, and neighbors
- Community services, including community centers, child care programs, resource and referral agencies, houses of worship, Armed Services YMCA, the American Legion, and the USO
- Veteran and community support services, including:

**State Veterans Administration Offices:** Veterans of the United States armed forces may be eligible for a broad range of programs and services provided by the VA. Eligibility for most VA benefits is based on discharge from active military service under other than dishonorable conditions, and certain benefits require service during wartime. This URL will help you find your state's VA office: <http://www.va.gov/statedva.htm>

**VA Caregivers Support:** VA offers a number of services that can provide you with the support that's right for you. Whether you and the Veteran you care for could use some help at home or you just need someone to listen, they're available to support you. <http://www.caregiver.va.gov>

**Wounded Warrior Resource Call Center (WWRCC):** The Department of Defense's WWRCC was created in September 2008 to provide Service members and Veterans who have become wounded, ill, or injured—as well as their immediate families and their primary caregivers—with a single point of contact for assistance with reporting deficiencies in covered military facilities, obtaining health care services, receiving benefits information, and any other difficulties encountered while supporting wounded warriors. Wounded Warrior consultants collaborate with representatives working with the Army Wounded Warrior Program (AW2), the Marine Wounded Warrior Regiment, the Navy SAFE HARBOR program, and the Air Force Wounded Warrior program. The service support programs are the primary avenues of support for the wounded and their families; the Center continues to connect members and families as requested to resources such as Military OneSource and can provide a liaison with other federal agencies and nonprofit organizations. The WWRCC can be reached toll free at 800-342-9647.

**WWRCC Web site:** The WWRCC Web site provides wounded Service members and Veterans, as well as their families and caregivers, with information that they need in the areas of military facilities, health care services, and benefits. It supports access to the WWRCC and trained specialists who are available 24/7 by phone at 800-342-9647 or by e-mail at [www.militaryonesource.com](http://www.militaryonesource.com). Information is also available on how to connect with other families for support and recreation. To access this Web site, visit [www.woundedwarriorresourcecenter.com](http://www.woundedwarriorresourcecenter.com)



#### **National Resource Directory**

**(NRD):** The NRD is a Web-based "yellow book" for wounded, ill, and injured Service members, veterans, their families, and those who support them. The Directory provides over 10,000 services and resources available through governmental and nongovernmental organizations to support recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration into the community. To access the NRD, visit <https://www.nrd.gov>

**Iraq-Afghanistan Veterans of America:** Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) is the first and largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization for veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. Their mission is to improve the lives of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans and their families through programs in four key impact areas: supporting new veterans in Health, Education, Employment, and building a lasting Community for Vets and their families (HEEC). <http://www.iaa.org>

**Wounded Warrior Project:** Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) takes a holistic approach when serving warriors and their families to nurture the mind and body and encourage economic empowerment and engagement. Through a high-touch and interactive approach, WWP hopes to foster the most successful, well-adjusted generation of wounded Service members in our nation's history. <http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org>

**Child Care Aware of America (formerly NACCRA):** Child Care Aware® of America works with more than 600 state and local Child Care Resource and Referral agencies to ensure that families in every local community have access to quality, affordable child care. They lead projects that increase the quality and availability of child care, offer comprehensive training to child care professionals, undertake groundbreaking research, and advocate for child care policies that positively impact the lives of children and families. <http://www.naccra.org>

**ZERO TO THREE:** This national, nonprofit offers a wealth of information on the social, emotional, and intellectual development of babies and toddlers. The military Web page supports military professionals and parents with postings of monthly articles, information, and events at [www.zerotothree.org/military](http://www.zerotothree.org/military)

## WHAT IT'S LIKE FOR YOUR CHILD

*Next, try to understand what your child experiences and feels.*

**B**ecause your connection is so deep, your child picks up on your feelings. When you feel cared for, your baby or toddler senses your inner confidence and calm. When you are running on empty, he may notice tension in your voice, your expression, or in your arms when you hold him. It may feel to him as if his foundation is shaky. He may become cranky, clingy, extra quiet, or even angry.

When you take care of yourself, you can be more available physically and emotionally for your child. He will feel safe, secure, happy, and free to explore the wonders of his world because you will have the energy, patience, and time to:

- Settle into your favorite rocking chair to snuggle
- Talk about what you are seeing and doing together
- Invite your child to participate in daily routines, such as setting the table, making the bed, and sorting the laundry
- Enjoy playing with words and sounds as you sing songs to your baby and make up silly rhymes with your toddler
- Patiently read the same book for the fifth time
- Walk to the park
- Share in your child's pleasure and excitement about new discoveries and accomplishments
- Play make-believe
- Remain calm as you wipe up spilled juice, explaining that "accidents happen"
- Respond to challenging behavior such as hitting, grabbing, or biting in positive ways such as redirecting the child, giving him words for his feelings and helping him to comfort himself with a favorite toy or "lovee" that help your child learn self-control



**Y**our child depends on you every day. When you have the support you need, you have more to give to your child. You have a bigger supply of energy, patience, delight, joy, laughter, and humor that will help your child feel safe, secure, and loved.

To support your child, take care of yourself. Schedule time for yourself in your family calendar or planner. Here are some ideas to try:

- Rest, exercise, and try to eat regular, balanced meals. When you are healthy, your child reaps the benefits.
- Maintain your daily routine as best you can. Predictability can be comforting for you—and your child.
- Shift your thinking when needed.
- Try to appreciate the little things. Enjoying coffee over the morning newspaper, taking a "power walk," or doing the crossword puzzle, for example, can help recharge your batteries each and every day.
- Let go of the guilt. As one mom says, "I don't feel guilty sitting around on Sundays doing nothing but hanging out with my son. It's our time for catching our breath and being together."
- Stay connected. Keep in close touch with family and friends. Share your fears and concerns and your pride and joy in your child.
- Monitor the exposure to media. You may want to limit how much news you watch — and watch when your child is asleep. Images and reports of violence can be frightening to a child and evoke anxiety for the Veteran.

*What do you think?*  
What makes you feel happy?  
Gives you energy? Helps you feel calm?  
What do you wish you had more time to do? How can you make some time for it this week?



- Have realistic expectations for yourself. No one has all the answers when it comes to raising a baby or toddler. Every parent at times wishes life had a replay button. Rather than be hard on yourself, see your mistakes as a chance to learn.
- Give yourself a pat on the back. Take pride in all you accomplished today and let those things yet to be done wait until tomorrow.
- Finally, keep in mind that caring for yourself doesn't have to be hard on your family budget. Is admittance to a theme park too costly? Set up the sprinkler in your backyard or give your toddler a bucket of water and let him "paint" your house while you enjoy the fresh air. If a massage at a local spa will increase your debt and stress, go for an at-home, do-it-yourself pedicure or team up with a friend. If tickets to the professional/college football game in town are too expensive, make some popcorn, order a pizza, and watch the game at home with a friend or two. There are also many civilian businesses that honor your service to our country, offering Veterans and their families discounts on services, usually around Veterans Day in November.

### Remember the Wonder of the Everyday

You and your child can find comfort in each other's presence. Your shared joy and sense of connection can help you make it through difficult times. Hang out in your pajamas and play together; take a walk to the park, or snuggle and enjoy reading a favorite book together.

### Reference

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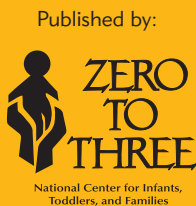
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