

# Military Teen Toolkit

## Resources for Supporting Your Teen's Mental Health

*Military life can be exciting and adventurous, but it also comes with challenges, especially for teens who face frequent moves, deployments, and the stress of a parent serving in harm's way. This toolkit offers tips for military parents to help their teens navigate these challenges and maintain good mental health.*

### Communication is Key

- *Initiate Conversations:* Don't wait for your teen to "open up". Regularly check in with them about their day, school, friends, and feelings.
- *Active Listening:* When your teen talks, truly listen. Put away distractions, avoid interrupting them, offer empathy, and ask clarifying questions.
- *"I" Statements:* Use "I" statements to express your concerns without sounding accusatory. For example, "I worry when you stay up so late" instead of "Why are you always up so late?"
- *Respect Privacy:* Respect your teen's need for privacy but establish boundaries. Let them know you're always available to talk.
- *Deployment Discussions:* Talk about deployments well before they happen. Address their worries about safety, missing friends, and managing household responsibilities.
- *Deployment Traditions:* Create routines or traditions to maintain connection during deployments. This could be a weekly video call, writing letters together, or sending a small care package each week.

## **Building Resilience**

- *Develop Routines:* Establish consistent routines at home and school, even during deployments. This provides a sense of normalcy and stability.
- *Encourage Exercise:* Regular physical activity reduces stress, improves mood, and promotes healthy sleep patterns.
- *Healthy Eating:* Focus on providing nutritious meals and snacks to fuel your teen's body and mind.
- *Relaxation Techniques:* Teach your teen relaxation techniques like deep breathing exercises, mindfulness meditation, or progressive muscle relaxation.
- *Positive Coping Mechanisms:* Help your teen develop healthy coping mechanisms like journaling, creative outlets, or spending time in nature.

## **Recognizing Signs of Trouble**

- *Emotional Changes:* Be aware of sudden changes in mood like increased irritability, sadness, or anger.
- *Behavioral Changes:* Watch for social withdrawal, neglecting hobbies, or increased risk-taking behaviors.
- *School Struggles:* Pay attention to slipping grades, difficulty concentrating, or lack of motivation for schoolwork.
- *Physical Changes:* Notice changes in sleep patterns, energy levels, appetite, or self-care habits.
- *Substance Abuse:* Be aware of signs of drug or alcohol use, which can be a way of self-medicating.

## **Getting Help**

- *MFLC Program:* The Military and Family Life Counseling (MFLC) program helps military families overcome challenges with free non-medical face-to-face support. Services are private and confidential with a few exceptions. Support is available at many installations

and affiliated schools.

- *Military OneSource*: This program offers a variety of resources, including:
  - 24/7 confidential counseling: Speak with a licensed therapist specializing in military families.
  - Workshops and webinars: Learn about common challenges teens face and develop coping strategies.
  - Online resources: Access articles, videos, and tools to support your teen's well-being.
- *Chaplain Services*: Chaplains offer non-denominational emotional and spiritual support and can be a valuable resource during difficult times.
- *Military Teen Support Groups*: Connecting with other teens facing similar challenges can be a source of comfort and understanding. Talk to your teen's school counselor or local military base about support groups.
- *Mental Health Professionals*: If your teen needs more comprehensive support, consider seeking help from a therapist specializing in adolescents or military families.

## **Additional Resources**

- National Child Traumatic Stress Network: <https://www.samhsa.gov/>
- The Trevor Project: <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/> (for LGBTQ+ youth)

## **Remember:**

- Take care of yourself. A healthy parent can better support a healthy teen.
- Celebrate accomplishments. Acknowledge your teen's strengths and resilience.
- Be patient. Building resilience and coping skills takes time and practice.
- Seek professional help if needed. Don't hesitate to ask for help if you feel overwhelmed or your teen needs

additional support.

- The military community is here for you. There are many resources available to support you and your family.