



Coming Together Around Military Families®
The Needs of the Young Military Child




Dedeke Silver Williams, LCSW-C
 Military Projects @ ZERO TO THREE



Translating What We Know Into What We Do

EARLY EXPERIENCES MATTER




We are a national, nonprofit organization that informs, trains and supports professionals, policy makers and parents in their efforts to improve the lives of infants and toddlers.


*We train professionals and build networks of leaders
 We influence policies and practice
 We raise public understanding of early childhood issues*

*All our work is:
 Grounded in research and experience
 Multi-disciplinary
 Culturally responsive*

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Julian Taylor

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Why talk about the youngest children?

- The Department of Defense 2007 Demographics report indicates there are 332,771 children ages 0–3 of Active Duty members.
- The largest percent of children of Active Duty members are between birth and five years of age, constituting 41.0% of minor dependents.
- There are 104,505 children ages 0–3 of Selected Reserve members. Of the total number of children of Selected Reserve, 24.7% are between the ages of 0 and 5

The Office of the Deputy United Secretary of Defense, 2007

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4

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!

(D’Alessio & Nelson, 2002)

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5

Brain development in the earliest years

What’s going on and how do interactions influence it?

The infant brain is growing faster than at any other time.
 By one year of age it will be 35% bigger than at birth;
 by age three it will be 50% larger; by age 6 it will be almost adult sized.

Kevin W. Davidson, Boston University School of Medicine, Systems Institute, Z380 TO TR433, 1993-2001

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6

Neuroplasticity



The lifelong ability of the brain to reorganize neural pathways based on new experiences

Over the first few years of life, the brain grows rapidly

- At birth, each neuron in the cerebral cortex has approximately 2,500 synapses
- By the time an infant is two or three years old, the number of synapses is approximately 15,000

(Miller & Cotler, 1996, as cited in Berger & Carter, 2001, p. 20)

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7

Nature and Nurture Working Together



“The mind emerges from the activity of the brain, whose structure and function are directly shaped by interpersonal experience.”

(Siegel, 1988, p. 74)

In other words, relationships directly sculpt our brains.

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8

Family wellness and early relationships



“Emotional problems such as depression, economic stress, and marital conflict can interfere with sensitive and responsive parenting, be disruptive of secure attachments (see Belsky and Isabella, 1988; Thompson, 1999b; Waters, 1978), and constitute a significant source of instability over time in attachment security.”

(National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000, p. 234)

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9

Military Family Experiences



- Repeated and extended deployments
- Individual family circumstances that could further complicate deployments
 - Relocation
 - Pregnancy and/or new baby
 - Caregiver depression
 - Special needs child
 - History of family violence and/or child maltreatment

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10

Military Family Experiences (cont'd)



- Individual family circumstances
 - Isolation from family/friends
 - Perception of the military lifestyle and/or of the deployment
 - Anything that is perceived by the family as a chronic and/or significant stressor.
- Injury
 - Physical
 - Emotional
 - Traumatic brain injury
- Service member's death

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11

According to a 2008 RAND Study



- Within their survey of military personnel who had been previously deployed for OEF/OIF
 - 14 percent met the screening criteria for probable posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and 14 percent met the screening criteria for probable major depression
 - there was a co-occurrence in the two conditions; approximately two-thirds of those meeting the criteria for PTSD *also* met the criteria for major depression.
 - 19 percent met the screening criteria for having experienced a probable traumatic brain injury (TBI).

Shaw & Mitchell, 2008

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12

Our Goal for Infants and Toddlers



Promoting Resilience



Infant Resilience

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13

Coming Together Around Military Families®



Strengthening the resilience
of young children and their families
who are experiencing trauma, grief and loss
as a result of a Service member's deployment
to Iraq and/or Afghanistan.

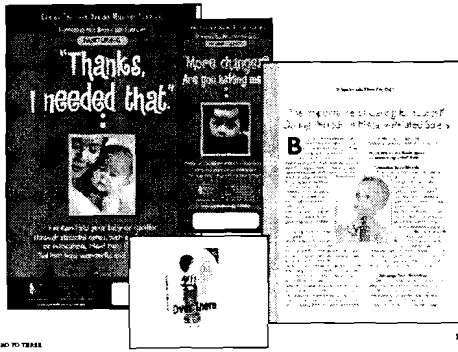


Deployment of Services

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14

Coming Together Around Military Families® (CTAMF)



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15

Honoring Our Babies and Toddlers



Supporting young children affected by a military parent's deployment, injury, or death: A Guide for Caring Professionals



Dombro, ZERO TO THREE 2009
Available at www.zerotothree.org/military

Using the Guide to Support Families



Part One:

- Working with Military Families in a Wartime Environment

Part Two:

- Situations That Families and Their Babies and Toddlers May Be Experiencing

Part Three:

- Creating Respectful, Responsive Relationships With Families, Supporting Babies and Toddlers

The Voice of the Baby



Area	Focus	Key Messages
Attachment	Secure attachment	Secure attachment is the foundation for healthy relationships and learning.
Communication	Responsive communication	Responsive communication supports language development and social interaction.
Emotional Regulation	Co-regulation	Co-regulation helps children learn to manage their emotions and behavior.
Exploration	Supporting exploration	Supporting exploration encourages curiosity and learning.

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Programs and Efforts in Support of Military Families

Military One Source 1 800 342-9647
Remote Areas: Call Collect
484-530-5908

Courage to Care for Me www.couragetocareforme.org

**Tragedy Assistance Program
for Survivors (TAPS)** www.taps.org

Sesame Workshop
www.sesameworkshop.org/initiatives/emotion/ttc

Programs and Efforts (cont'd)

Military Homefront www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil

**National Military Family
Association** www.nmfa.org

**Military Child Education
Coalition** www.militarychild.org

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