



## Coming Together Around Military Families®

*The Needs of the Young Military Child*



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

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## 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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## Military Projects @ ZERO TO THREE



Andrew Brooker

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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 Under Secretary of Defense, 2007)

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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!**

(Pulaskian & Scheel, 2002)

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### 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.**

BrainWonders, Boston University School of Medicine, Erikson Institute, ZERO TO THREE, 1998-2001

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**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

(Nelson & Carver, 1998, as cited in Bergen & Ciccia, 2001, p.30)

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**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, 1999, p. 76)

**In other words, relationships directly sculpt our brains.**

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**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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## 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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## 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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## 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).

(Schell & Marshall, 2008)

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# Our Goal for Infants and Toddlers



## Promoting Resilience



Allison Silboberg

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# 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.



Department of Defense

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# Coming Together Around Military Families® (CTAMF)



**Coming Together Around Military Families**  
Sometimes the babies and toddlers  
**TOURNAMENT**

**"Thanks, I needed that."**

**More changes are you kidding me**

**The Importance of Caring for Yourself During Periods of Military-Related Stress**

**10 Years OK, That's For Good**

**You can help your baby or toddler through stressful times, such as relocation. Hold him. Cuddle him. Tell him how wonderful and**

**Over there**

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**Programs and Efforts in Support of Military Families**

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

**Courage to Care for Me**        **[www.couragetocareforme.org](http://www.couragetocareforme.org)**

**Tragedy Assistance Program  
for Survivors (TAPS)**        **[www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org)**

**Sesame Workshop**  
**[www.sesameworkshop.org/initiatives/emotion/tlc](http://www.sesameworkshop.org/initiatives/emotion/tlc)**

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**Programs and Efforts (cont'd)**

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**Military Homefront**            **[www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil](http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil)**

**National Military Family  
Association**                    **[www.nmfa.org](http://www.nmfa.org)**

**Military Child Education  
Coalition**                        **[www.militarychild.org](http://www.militarychild.org)**

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The Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, Military Community and Family Policy (2007). *2007 Demographics: Profile of the military community*. Retrieved from [http://www.militaryonesource.com/Portals/0/Content/Service\\_Provider\\_Tools/2007\\_Demographics/2007\\_Demographics.pdf](http://www.militaryonesource.com/Portals/0/Content/Service_Provider_Tools/2007_Demographics/2007_Demographics.pdf).

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