

Connecting to Special Education Services for Military Families Formed through Foster Care, Adoption or Kinship Care

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Learning Objectives

- Identify some characteristics of military families
- Describe two ways to get started on the evaluation path
- Explore challenges specific to formed military families receiving special education services
- Identify military programs that can provide support and guidance

Poll

Military parent

Military family member

Grew up in military family

Professional working with military families

Interested parent or professional

Foster, adoptive or kinship care family

Can Military families?

Yes! Military families **can and do** become foster families, adopt and provide kinship care.



Military Family Culture

- Duty to serve
- Mobile lifestyle, frequent PCS's
- Inconsistent work schedule
- Frequent marital/family separations
- Spouse's education/career may be interrupted
- Child's education/services may be disrupted
- Separated from family and community
- Stress of deployment and possible injury

How many times does the average military child move?

- 1-2
- 3-5
- 6-9
- 10-12

The average military child

Moves 6-9 times during their childhood, every 2-3 years.

Children in military formed families aka “Brats”

- Share that pride
- Feel pressure to perform well at home and school
- Boys may feel they need to be the “man” of the family
- Have additional duties/responsibilities at home
- Frequent moves may mean no sense of home or roots
- Be worried, anxious about their parent especially during separations
- May be dealing with grief and loss issues
- Be processing their own trauma as well as the family trauma

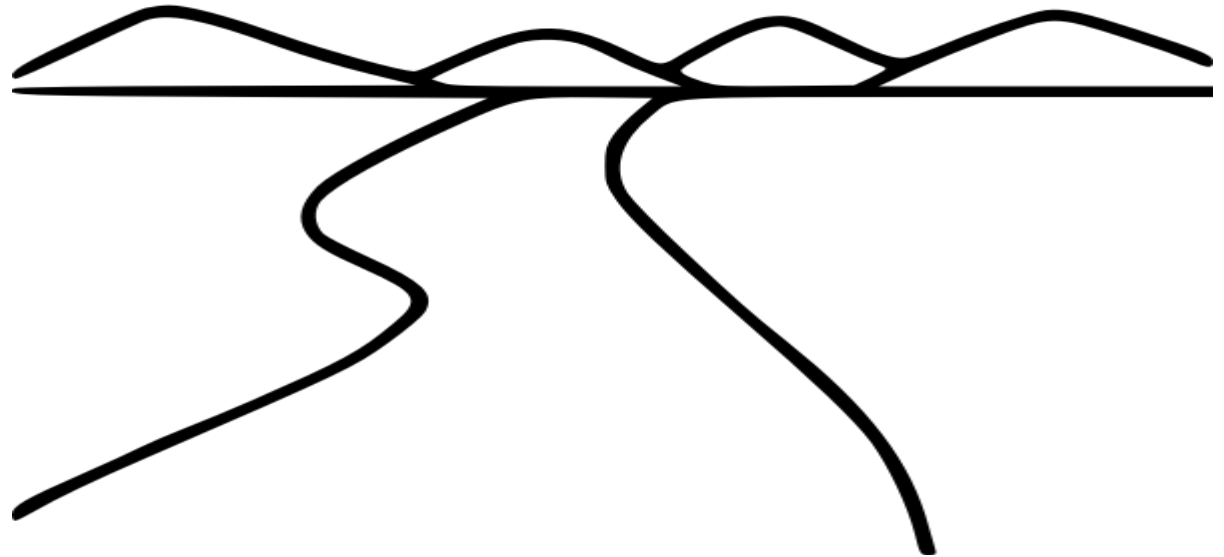
Formed family + military + special needs = one unique family

- Most foster, adopted and kinship care children do well
- Children and youth in foster care are significantly more likely to be eligible for special education
- A third of adopted children have special health care needs

*Office for the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation

The path of connecting to services

- Identification
- Referral
- Evaluation
- Eligibility



You are not alone!



The Department of Defense (DoD) has established systems of support for military families with children with special needs to help them navigate through the educational and medical system.

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What is Special Education?

- Special education is specially designed instruction covered under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- Part A outlines the general provisions of the law.
- Part B covers assistance for providing a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment(LRE) for children with disabilities ages three through 21.
- Part C includes provisions for serving infants and toddlers with disabilities birth through age two and their families.
- Part D includes provisions for federal grants available to support activities related to improving services for children with disabilities, including personnel development, technical assistance and dissemination of information, technology, and parent-training and information centers.

Tricare

- Service member or sponsor should register adopted and pre-adoptive children in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) in order to be eligible for military services.
- If they have guardianship, a child in kinship care is a dependent and can be enrolled in DEERS.
- Once enrolled in DEERS they are eligible for Tricare.
- Foster children should have their own insurance, usually Medicaid.
- Important for related services and medical needs.

Identification

- Your child does not have to have a medical or mental health diagnosis to start the process.
- If your child has received a diagnosis from a military or civilian provider bring it to the early intervention program or school system and request an evaluation.
- Identification of a possible delay in development or learning difficulty may be made by the early intervention program or the school system after the child has been referred.

Referral

- The first formal step in the process.
- Contact the early intervention program for a screening. The parent is part of that team and they decide along with the program whether the child needs a comprehensive evaluation.
- In the school system a parent, or teacher can initiate a referral if a lack of progress or signs of physical or behavioral challenges that interfere with learning is noticed.
- Referral may be verbal, written, or on-line. **Written** is recommended to start the timeclock and a paper trail.

Evaluation

After a referral is made, a special education committee (different programs and schools have different names for it) meets to determine if the child needs a full and comprehensive evaluation. If the special education committee decides an evaluation is needed, early intervention or school will request the parent/caregiver written permission to evaluate the child.

Early Intervention

- Part C of IDEA
- Birth to three
- Family based services
- Screening, evaluation and some services are free
- Voluntary



Military and Civilian Early Intervention Services

Military

Educational and Developmental Intervention Services (EDIS) on military bases with a Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) school

Civilian

Virginia statewide early intervention program is known as the Infant Toddler Connection of Virginia. Services delivered through the local jurisdictions.

Both follow IDEA

Early Intervention Eligibility

- Developmental delay
- Atypical development or behavior
- Diagnosed physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in delay, even though no current delay exists.

Early Intervention Services

- Routine based.
- Take place at home or in the community since that is where most learning takes place for young children.
- A primary provider will work with the caretakers and teach them how to intervene in daily routines.
- Within **45 calendar days**, the early intervention team must complete the screening, initial evaluation, initial assessments of the child and family, and the IFSP if eligible.
- Telehealth during COVID

When a child turns three

Once a child is three years old they go through the school system, both military and civilian. If coming from EI they may qualify for special education preschool by going through the school's transition process. For three and four year olds who have not been identified this process would mean a referral to the school system. Children are determined eligible under one of the 13 categories of disabilities.

Special Education Preschool

Part B of IDEA

Ensures that all preschool-aged children (age 3-5) with disabilities receive free appropriate special education and related services in their least restrictive environment.

The goal of preschool special education services is to enable young children to be active and successful participants in home, school, and community settings resulting in positive outcomes for children and their families.

School age children

- May be referred through a screening process, by school staff, or the parents. May be written, electronic, or verbal.
- Within 3 days, the school administrator or designee must:
- Initiate the evaluation process.
- Require the school based team to review and respond.
- Deny evaluation with prior written notice given to the parents, including the right to appeal.
- Referral starts the clock.
- All evaluations are to be completed and eligibility decisions made within **65 business** days.

Schools Kindergarten-12

Military

Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) school

Civilian

Local school, includes home and alternative schools.

Both follow IDEA

Evaluation

- Special educator administrator determines need for a team review and responds to the referral request.
- Summary of discussion and decision of the group is documented.
- If group determines that a disability is suspected and an evaluation is warranted, school proceeds with evaluation.
- If a disability is not suspected and an evaluation is not warranted, school provides family with prior written notice, including information regarding the determination and the reasons for it.

Not eligible for services

- May pursue a 504 Plan. This is based on eligibility under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and not the IDEA. A child may be identified as a student with a disability under this statute if she has a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits a major life activity.
- May request an independent evaluation
- May decide to go through the appeal process

Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP)

- Purpose of EFMP is to ensure that the needs of family members with special medical or educational needs are met.
- Assignment coordination to determine the availability of services at the projected duty station.
- To offer support to help families identify and access programs and services.
- Family will work with their case worker to develop a Family Service Plan.
- This is a DoD program, each branch has one.

Myths

Enrolling in EFMP will negatively impact the service member's career.

EFMP families cannot go overseas.

Service member will have to go unattended.

Military Trivia

EFMP is a DoD program with each branch having their own. Except the Coast Guard. Why doesn't the Coast Guard have an EFMP program?

Coast Guard falls under Homeland Security not DoD. They have their own program, The Coast Guard Special Needs Program

What about Reserve and National Guard?

When activated they are eligible for the same services and programs as active duty. In some instances may be eligible for extended services.

Extended Child Healthcare Option (ECHO)

- Cost share health program
- Can help with medical equipment, services
- Need to enroll to get Autism Demonstration Project

Autism Demonstration Project

- Covers Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) services for all eligible TRICARE beneficiaries
- The demonstration began Jul. 25, 2014, and will continue through Dec. 31, 2023
- Must enroll in the EFMP and register in ECHO

Challenges facing formed military families receiving special education services

Frequent moves may impact services

IEPs may not hold between states

Schools may wait out a military family

Schools may not be trauma informed, or culturally sensitive

May be acts of reprisal against parents, i.e. come get your child

Service member may have trauma

COVID has impacted service delivery

Adoptive, foster and kinship families may face additional challenges

Military Specific Supports

EFMP

Family Service Centers

School Liaison Officers

Military One Source-Available 24/7

Regional Special Education Attorneys

Parent Education Advocacy Training Center (PEACT) has military liaisons

Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission

Family Service Centers

- Parenting classes and education
- New Parent Support Program
- Non-medical counseling
- EFMP
- Relief Societies
- Additional programs

School Liaison Officers (SLO)

School Liaison Officers are located at each installation and are the main contact for military families, local school systems and installation leadership for school-related matters pre-K through 12. School liaisons are experienced professionals who support, advise and build partnerships with the civilian and military community to help address common education challenges of military families.

School Liaison Officer

- Student and family support
- Transition support- PCS and educational
- Alternative/home schooling support
- Special education support
- Deployment support
- Parenting workshops

Military One Source

- Electronic clearinghouse
- EFMP and Me, digital tool
- Special Needs Parent Toolkit, downloadable
- Special Education Resources
- Exceptional Family Member Program videos
- Special Education Consultants
- Professionals can get an account
- Militaryonesource.com

Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission (MIC3)

- Agreement signed by all 50 states and DC
- Aids the transition of school-age children in military families between school districts.
- Each state agrees to address specific school transition issues in a consistent way and minimize disruptions for military children transferring from one school system to another.
- Policies in four areas: eligibility, enrollment, placement, and graduation.

Additional resources

- Military service members who adopt a child, including step-children, may be reimbursed for up to \$2,000 per adoptive child (up to a total of \$5,000) per calendar year
- Coast Guard has an Education Advocate Grant (EAG) up to \$500
- Grants or short term loans maybe available through Army Emergency Relief, Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society, Air Force Aid Society or Coast Guard Mutual Assistance
- Legal guidance is available
- Programs may have respite care options

The good news!

- Resilient
- Flexible
- Resourceful
- Adaptable
- More tolerant, used to different environments
- Part of a larger community
- Not alone!



How to help?

Education and information is important

Link families to resources

Educate them on the EI or school system

Opportunity to share their feelings both parents and children

Self care

Encourage them to use their resources, the military has recognized how important it is to support families. “Family readiness is military readiness”

They are not alone

Additional Considerations

Resilience is learned behavior and depends on child's age, developmental status and previous experiences

During deployment, children are especially vulnerable

Length of time the child has been in the family

Number of separations and parental absences

Additional family stressors

We are all on the same team and want what is best for the child

FFF is available for support and guidance

Questions?

