**Children of military families** transfer schools an average of six to nine times in their lives. This places a strain on both parents and children. Not only having parents deployed but the transitioning process is difficult under normal circumstances, especially when children transition to new communities, new schools, and new rules. The deployment period includes six to eight weeks prior to separation, deployment, and a re-unification period that lasts at least six to eight weeks more.

Identifying students in such circumstances and then linking parents and students to available local and community resources is a very simple yet highly effective first step. The central theme of any intervention is **to connect**.

Local resources, including your school’s assigned social worker, counselor, and nurse, are central in supporting the student, family and teacher. The school social worker is the bridge between the school, community, and family and when necessary links students and their families to community resources.

There are two distinctions in the military community, and each has their own unique impact on students of military families (SMF). Success in support is dependent on providing connections. Students who have parents assigned to active military bases generally have parents who commute longer distances relative to where the family resides. Active military bases such as Fort Bragg and Pope Air Force Base have resources and support services located on base and have a long and developing history of linking parents, families, and service men and women to them.

Students of military families who are members of military reserves components and National Guard units tend to be dispersed throughout a wide community and are more difficult to identify and link to services and supports. While National Guard and Reserve units have representatives that can provide a wealth of information, connecting children, students, families, and veterans is vital. In Wake County there are around 1500 school aged children considered to be SMF’s, predominantly in National Guard and Reserve components.

A **military student** is defined as (a) an elementary or secondary school student who is a dependent of a member of the Armed Forces; (b) an elementary or secondary school student who is a dependent of a civilian employee of the Department of Defense (DoD); or (c) an elementary or secondary school student who is a dependent of personnel who are not members of the Armed Forces or civilian employees of the DoD, but who are employed on federal property.

* 48 percent of military members or DoD civilians have a child.
* 63 percent of military families children are of school age.
* 58 percent of children aged 6 to 18 years are impacted by deployments.
* Since 2001, approximately two million children have had a parent deployed.

## Emotional impact of deployments

These emotional signs can be seen across all ages.

* **c**hanges in behavioral and emotional patterns
* difficulty with transitions, increased difficulty coping with multiple stressors, difficulty concentrating and completing tasks
* prolonged sadness, withdrawal, tearfulness, constant worrying
* sudden disobedience and complaints of aches and pains, changes in sleep and eating patterns, changes in weight and appearance
* increased fatigue and self soothing behaviors
* increased risk taking and shortened tolerance threshold, change in self esteem and increase in self criticism
* change in academic performance and participation

## Universal interventions

* Connections. Connect students and parents to
  + people (teachers, positive peer buddies, adults and authority figures)
  + activities and academic connections
  + institutions (area services and supports)
* Communicate. Promote interconnectedness with parents and outreach with school social workers and counselors.
* Build your awareness of the impact of deployments, post-deployments, and separations.
* Don’t be afraid to ask about the possibility of a parental deployment.
* Assess your student’s needs.

## Conclusion

Military deployments impact students and children in numerous ways for a sustained period of time. It is not unusual for National Guard and Reserve families to keep information regarding their deployment status confidential. Forty-two percent of the at-home spouses of military personnel reported “high-risk” levels of parental stress on another questionnaire. Children of military families show high stress levels and were about seven times more likely to score at high risk for development of ongoing psychosocial problems. Thus it remains critically important to have open lines for communication with parents.

**Resources:**

[**http://www.tutor.com/military**](http://www.tutor.com/military)

**http://www.nc.ngb.army.mil/index.php/fp/**

**http://www.ngaus.org/index.asp?bid=181**

**http://www.operationmilitarykids.org/public/statePOCHome.aspx?state=North Carolina**

**Questions:**

1. What are some ways to help children deal with the deployment process of a parent?
   1. Make sure the child knows you care.
   2. Involve your student support services personnel, the school counselor, school social worker, and the school psychologist for continued support and direction for your student.
   3. Connect a student with a positive peer.
   4. All of the above
2. Pre-deployment and separation of a parent in the military can have what impact on a student regardless of age?
3. What intervention(s) can a teacher make that can have a positive impact on a student experiencing a parental deployment?
   1. Assessing student needs
   2. Connecting a student to people
   3. Communicate with the school social worker and counselor
   4. Be aware of warning signs that a student is having difficulty
   5. All of the above
4. Pre-Separation periods can impact a child’s emotional well being?
   1. True
   2. False