

Supporting the Mental Health of Military-Connected Children



The research and supporting materials for this project were made possible thanks to the generous support of Bread Financial.





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Why Supporting Military-Connected Children's Mental Health Is Urgent

At Bread Financial, we believe in the power of partnership to drive lasting, positive change. With a history of making bold, strategic investments that strengthen our communities, we are especially committed to supporting military and veteran families. As a longtime partner of Nationwide Children's Hospital, one of the nation's largest and most comprehensive pediatric healthcare systems, we are proud to extend our support to The Kids Mental Health Foundation to better serve the military community.

A leading organization dedicated to advancing children's mental health, The Kids Mental Health Foundation equips parents, caregivers, educators and other trusted adults with free, research-backed resources to better understand and support children's mental well-being. Among its most urgent findings is that military-connected children often experience a deep sense of isolation from frequent moves, parental deployments, limited access to care and a lack of understanding from peers, schools and communities. These unique challenges can have a profound impact on a child's mental health.

Last year, Bread Financial proudly announced a \$2.5 million gift to The Kids Mental Health Foundation to help support critical research and develop needed programs focused specifically on the mental health needs of military-connected children. This report illuminates these important research findings, including how this community can be better served through impactful programs centered on creating easily accessible resources for trusted adults like teachers and parents to support the compounded mental health challenges of military children.

As a purpose-driven organization with deep roots in service, we are honored to contribute to this effort. We hope the insights and strategies shared in this report will spark new conversations, foster deeper partnerships and inspire action that truly makes a difference for the families who serve and sacrifice for us all.



Ralph Andretta

President & CEO, Bread Financial

Nationwide Children's Hospital Board Member

About This Report

Military-connected children – those with a parent, caregiver or close relative who serves or has served in the armed forces – face unique challenges that can significantly impact their mental health. Frequent relocations, parental deployments, barriers to care and other service-related stressors contribute to a complex landscape of emotional and psychological needs. Despite growing awareness of mental health concerns among youth, the specific needs of military-connected children remain underrepresented in national conversations.

The Kids Mental Health Foundation, founded by Nationwide Children's Hospital, in collaboration with community and hospital partners, set out to find the gaps in mental well-being resources for military families. The needs assessment started in the spring of 2024 and the majority was finished by the end of 2024. The literature review time period was expanded, and concluded August 2025 to include information from newly published articles. Findings were reviewed with experts and organizations working with military-connected youth to ensure the accuracy and validity of our findings.

Acknowledgements

Many people and organizations contributed to this report, including:

- Dayton Children's Hospital On Our Sleeves
- Nationwide Children's Hospital
- Ohio's Purple Star School educators, counselors and leaders
- The T. D. Rutan State Council of the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children—as appointed by The Honorable Mike DeWine

Thank you to these partners and many others from various schools and organizations who allowed us to interview them.

The research and supporting materials for this project were made possible thanks to the generous support of Bread Financial.



Executive Summary

Military-connected children are kids with a parent, caregiver or close relative (such as a sibling or grandparent) who has served or is serving in any branch of the armed forces (Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, Coast Guard, National Guard, Space Force or Reserves).

Military-connected children are a resilient, yet vulnerable population. The Kids Mental Health Foundation conducted a needs assessment, consisting of interviews, a literature review and analysis of web-based resources to determine where military-connected families may need additional support. The needs assessment's results were verified by community members and organizations serving military-connected children.

In conducting the needs assessment, the team set out to answer the following questions:

1. *What are the most pressing mental health concerns for military-connected children?*
2. *What resources currently exist to support these children and where are the gaps?*
3. *What do educators, health care providers and community members need to better support these children?*

Key Findings:

General mental health considerations:

Belonging & Connection

With frequent moves to new cities and extended family often geographically distant, it can be hard for children to feel like they fit in. Children crave understanding from peers, teachers and community members. A lack of awareness about military life can lead to feelings of isolation.

Stigma Reduction

Military families often avoid seeking mental health help due to fears of judgment or negative career implications for the service member.

Resilience Support

While military-connected children often develop resilience, they still need support navigating change and uncertainty and knowing it's OK to be vulnerable.

Audience gaps:

- There is a lack of knowledge about military-connected youth and few resources were found for the general public.
- There are limited resources for **teachers** and **medical providers**, with few providing information on how they can be a protective factor and reduce stress for military-connected children. Teachers and medical providers have an opportunity to build belonging for the child who has moved to a new place and can help the child build resilience.
- Few interactive materials exist for **older children**.
- There are few, if any, materials about the mental health needs of **veterans' children**.

Content gaps:

- Few materials are **specific to the mental health of military-connected children**; most focus is on the service member and not on their children.
- Materials that do focus on the **mental health of military-connected children**, focus on mental health problems or concerns, not building mental wellness.
- There's significant **focus on deployment**, which is important, but only applies to some military-connected children.
- Materials are not always easily understood or **lack specific action steps**.

The needs assessment revealed gaps in community knowledge and resources for these youth, especially in organizations with less connection to the military.

Opportunities and Recommendations:

Three areas to fill the gaps of military-connected content were identified:

Focus on military-connected children's mental wellness by helping all the adults in the children's lives build skills, to talk with and teach kids about resilience and emotional regulation.

Educate teachers and medical providers who are integral to the overall health and well-being of military-connected families, but may not be familiar with military life.

Provide actionable content that's family friendly and easy to use in the home, neighborhood, classroom and beyond.

Introduction: State of Children's Mental Health

When discussing mental health, it's best to define it along a continuum versus only defining it by a mental health crisis or concern. The Kids Mental Health Foundation defines mental health as how we think, feel and act. Mental health also guides how we handle difficult moments, make decisions and treat others. However, sometimes our thoughts, feelings and behaviors may impact our ability to do everyday tasks. This would be considered a mental health disorder, requiring consultation or treatment from a mental health professional.

The U.S. Surgeon General gave a thorough definition of this mental health continuum in the 2021 report on "Protecting Children's Mental Health." It states: "Mental health affects every aspect of our lives: how we feel about ourselves and the world; solve problems, cope with stress and overcome challenges; build relationships and connect with others; and perform in school, at work and throughout life. Mental health encompasses our emotional, psychological and social wellbeing, and is an essential component of overall health."

To summarize, everyone has mental health, and mental health impacts every aspect of one's life.

It includes both mental wellness and mental health challenges and conditions.

“Mental health affects every aspect of our lives: how we feel about ourselves and the world; solve problems, cope with stress and overcome challenges; build relationships and connect with others; and perform in school, at work and throughout life.”

1 in 5

youth live with a mental health disorder.

For young people, mental health has been declared a national crisis by many organizations, including the former U.S. Surgeon General, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Psychological Association.

One in five youth live with a mental health disorder, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and **half of them not receiving the intervention needed.** National surveys show increasing rates of anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation among youth.¹

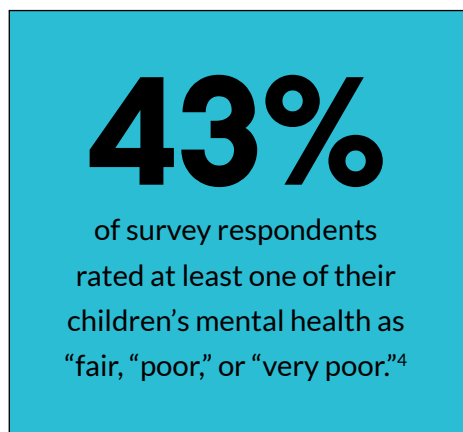
¹ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [Data and Statistics on Children's Mental Health](#). 2025. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed February 2025.

State of Military-Connected Children’s Mental Health

Military-connected families face additional stressors than their peers. Whether growing up on a military base or not, their mental health can be impacted by a variety of factors that other children may not experience. These could include caring for a family member with visible or invisible injuries; worrying about a family member serving in another part of the country or world; changing schools and homes frequently; and/or leaving behind extended family.

These factors can lead kids to feel socially isolated, which can put them at risk for developing anxiety and depression.² Every move means making new friends, signing up for and adjusting to a new school (often in the middle of a school year), and finding a new pediatrician and other specialists. If the child is receiving mental health treatment, moving can mean a disruption of care by having to find a new therapist and going on a waitlist that could be months long depending on the availability of care.

A meta-analysis conducted in 2019 and published in *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health* found that children with deployed parents have more mental health challenges when compared to children whose parents are not deployed.³ The Military Family Lifestyle Survey, conducted by the Blue Star Families organization in 2021⁴, found that 43% of survey respondents rated at least one of their children’s mental health as “fair”, “poor,” or “very poor.”



The National Military Family Association and Bloom’s 2022 report on their Military Teen Experience study found even more alarming rates. They surveyed over 2,000 military teens and found that **87% of military teens had low to moderate mental well-being scores.** According to the survey, “Military teens told us they often **don’t feel seen or heard.**”

In summary, the research shows that military-connected children face unique mental health challenges including:

- Facing stigma around mental health within the military culture
- Moving frequently, which disrupts their education and social lives
- Living away from extended family support systems
- Experiencing parental absence due to deployment
- Navigating dual identities, civilian and military, which can complicate relationships and sense of self

² Office of the Surgeon General (OSG). [Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community](#) [Internet]. Washington (DC): US Department of Health and Human Services; 2023.

³ Cunitz K. Döhlitzsch C. Kösters M, Willmund GD. Zimmermann P. Bühler AH. Fegert JM. Ziegenhain U. Kölch M. (2019). [Parental Military Deployment as Risk Factor for Children’s Mental Health: A Meta-Analytical Review](#). *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, 13:1.

⁴ Blue Star Families and D’Aniello Institute for Veterans and Families. [2021 Military Family Lifestyle Survey Comprehensive Report](#). Blue Star Families and D’Aniello Institute for Veterans and Families. Accessed October 2025.

⁵ National Military Family Association. (2022). [The Military Teen Experience Survey 2022 Findings and Insights](#). National Military Family Association and BLOOM. Accessed September 2025.

In addition, military-connected families may face delays in receiving mental health care due to frequent moves that can disrupt mental health care.

Psychiatry Online reported that between 2003 and 2015, outpatient mental health visits for children of active-duty parents more than doubled.⁶ This was even before the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated mental health concerns for many youths.

These findings underscore the need for tailored, consistent and accessible mental health support for military-connected children.

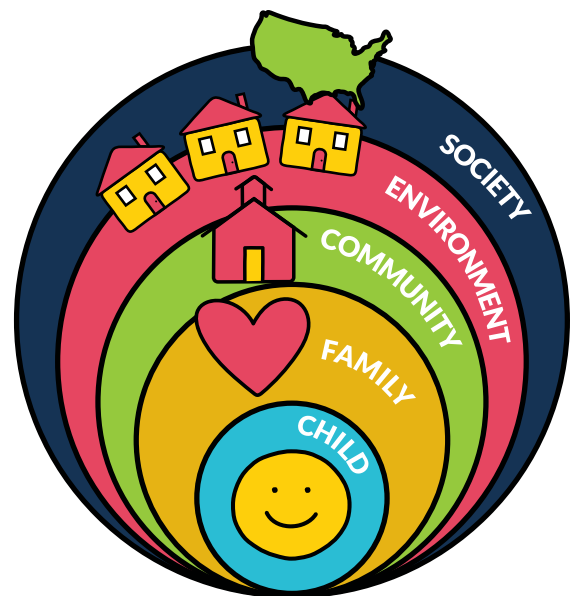
Foundational Theory

Mental health, ranging from mental wellness to specific mental health conditions, are impacted by several factors. For this reason, The Kids Mental Health Foundation used the bioecological theory⁷ to frame and explore the gaps in mental health for military-connected youth. The bioecology theory explains a child's development **by placing the child in the center and then using concentric circles to illustrate the different systems' effect and interactions among systems.** When each system is doing their part and working together, the child can be positively impacted. When systems work separately without awareness of each other, the overall positive impact may be reduced.

For this needs assessment, we aimed to examine many of the different environmental factors and systems that play a role in mental health of military-connected youth. These included military families, extended family, schools, extracurricular activities, community groups and the general public/broader community.

Depiction of Biobehavioral Theory

Adapted from the U.S. Surgeon General's 2021 Report on Protecting Youth Mental Health



Society: Culture, laws and policies

Environment: Access to resources such as food and housing

Community: Extended family, friends, teachers, coaches, faith groups

Family: Parents/caregivers, siblings and others in the home

Child: Genetics, personality, stage of development, race/ethnicity

This is not a comprehensive list.

⁶ Hisle-Gorman E. Susi A. Gorman G. (2019) Mental Health Trends in Military Pediatrics. *Psychiatric Services*. 70:8.

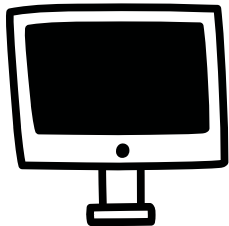
⁷ Bronfenbrenner U. Morris PA. (2006). The Bioecological Model of Human Development. In R. M. Lerner & W. Damon (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology: Theoretical models of human development* (6th ed., pp. 793–828). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Approach: Needs Assessment Methodology

To find what mental health and wellness resources exist for military connected families, The Kids Mental Health Foundation conducted a mixed-methods needs assessment, including:



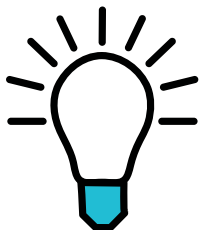
Interviews: Structured and semi-structured interviews with a diverse group of over 50 military-connected community members including military families, educators, community leaders, and representatives from veteran's and military support organizations were conducted to provide contextual insights into the lived experiences of military-connected children and their caregivers.



Website and Resource Analysis: Those interviewed were asked where they go or would go for more information on children's mental health. Based on their suggestions, learning about nationally recognized organization's websites and searching for other military-connected materials, we reviewed over 20 existing resources and platforms, including: Sesame Street for Military Families, Blue Star Families, Mental Health America, the Department of Defense and the American Academy of Pediatrics. Our analysis focused on identifying the scope, accessibility and relevance of materials available to support military-connected children's mental health. See Table 1 for the analysis.



Literature Review: We reviewed 16 articles published in the last five years (2020-2025) that examined the mental wellness and mental health concerns of military-connected youth.



Community Feedback: To ensure the accuracy and cultural relevance of our findings, we engaged community members in validating our interpretations. This process helped refine our understanding and ensured that our recommendations were grounded in real-world experiences.

In conducting the needs assessment, the team set out to answer the following questions:

- *What are the most pressing mental health concerns for military-connected children?*
- *What resources currently exist to support these children, and where are the gaps?*
- *What do educators, health care providers and community members need to better support these children?*

Findings

Across all methodologies, we consistently found that for military-connected youth:

- Mental health concerns often take longer to get diagnosed and treated.
- Parental deployment, even temporary or within the U.S., can have a profound impact on a child's mental health.
- Military-connected children tend to feel isolated or invisible, which is linked to negative mental health outcomes.
- Schools can play a key role in providing understanding and services.
- More resources are needed for school-aged and teen youth.

Interview Findings

We communicated with the Office of the Surgeon General of the Air Force, representatives from the Department of Defense Education Activity, Purple Star Schools, Blue Star Families, the Ohio National Guard, the Ohio Department of Veteran's Services, current and former teachers who've worked with military-connected children and others who serve active duty or veteran families.

Findings	Implications
<i>Eighty percent of military-connected children go to public schools.</i>	<i>Many educators are not aware of military culture or the unique needs of military-connected students.</i>
<i>Military-connected children move an average of nine times and may attend six or more different schools.</i>	<i>Children may lack the feeling of belonging in the classroom. Teachers play a crucial role in helping students feel like they belong.</i>
<i>Early intervention is key.</i>	<i>Few kids get resources until there's a problem, and then there can be delays in getting care.</i>
<i>Military families may be reluctant to share information via surveys or other methods because of stigma and the fear of it getting back to their superiors.</i>	<i>This suggests that mental health concerns in military-connected children may be under-reported.</i>
<i>The transition from active duty to retired or veteran can be a big change for the whole household.</i>	<i>There is an opportunity to create materials for families during that transition time.</i>
<i>Having a family member with a visible or invisible injury can cause a great deal of pressure/stress on the children in that household.</i>	<i>Children living with this challenge may need specific help in separating their identity from their parents.</i>

Website and Resource Analysis:

For each resource, The Kids Mental Health Foundation's review team analyzed the following:

- **Target Audience:** Is the resource tailored to service members, family members, children, health care providers, teachers or others?
- **Age Group:** What age(s) of children does this material pertain to?
- **Main Points/Purpose:** What are the specific topics the resources are covering?
- **Actionable Activities:** Do the resources include downloads, videos, webinars and other materials?
- **Areas of Strength:** What did the site do well?*
- **Gaps or Needs Identified:** What was missing?*

*See Appendix D for these findings in more detail.

Table 1: Website Analysis

Source	Audience	Age Range	Main Points
Sesame Street	Military parents Kids	0-5	• Coping with deployment • Reconnecting after deployment • Managing loss/trauma/grief • Transitioning to a new school • Promoting general mental health • Managing behaviors • Teaching parenting skills
Military Child Education Coalition	Military parents Teachers Kids	5-18	• Coping with deployment • Reconnecting after deployment • Managing loss/trauma/grief • Teaching parenting skills • Dealing with TBI/PTSD/physical injury
The American Academy of Pediatrics – Mental Health Needs of Military Children	Clinicians working with military families	0-18	• Coping with deployment • Transitioning to a new school • Promoting general mental health
Mental Health America – Military Mental Health	Military parents Kids	7+	• Coping with deployment • Reconnecting after deployment • Managing loss/trauma/grief • Dealing with TBI/PTSD/physical injury

Source	Audience	Age Range	Main Points
<i>Department of Defense – Month of the Military Child</i>	<i>Military parents Kids</i>	<i>5-18</i>	• Promoting general mental health • Staying connected/community
<i>MilitaryChild.org</i>	<i>Military parents Kids Other professionals</i>	<i>5-18</i>	• Transitioning to a new school • Staying connected/community
<i>Blue Star Families</i>	<i>Military parents Kids</i>	<i>0-18</i>	• Staying connected/community
<i>Wolfson Children's Hospital</i>	<i>Military parents Kids</i>	<i>0-18</i>	• Coping with deployment • Reconnecting after deployment • Advocating for military families
<i>Bob Woodruff Foundation</i>	<i>Military parents Kids Health care providers</i>	<i>5-18</i>	• Reconnecting after deployment • Advocating for military families
<i>MilitaryFamily.org</i>	<i>Military parents Kids</i>	<i>0-18</i>	• Staying connected/community • Advocating for military families
<i>Zero to Three</i>	<i>Military parents Kids</i>	<i>0-3</i>	• Managing loss/trauma/grief • Staying connected/community • Promoting general mental health • Supporting racial and/or gender equity
<i>CHAMP (Consortium for Health and Military Performance)</i>	<i>Military members</i>	<i>0-18</i>	• Promoting general mental health with actionable content • Providing strategies to strengthen the family
<i>Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment (ADAPT)</i>	<i>Military members Parents</i>	<i>4-13</i>	• Teaching parenting skills • Dealing with TBI/PTSD/physical injury • Managing behaviors

In our assessment, we noticed a limited number of resources for teachers or primary care clinicians. There were also limited resources aimed at the public. Many materials and resources included military acronyms that those not in the military would not be familiar with, which could cause frustration or confusion.

Literature Review

The Kids Mental Health Foundation conducted a search of American Psychological Association's (APA) PsycINFO, Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL) and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) with the phrase "military connected children AND (mental health or mental illness or mental disorder or psychiatric illness)." Below is a brief summary of the findings from that review:

A number of common mental health concerns for military-connected youth were uncovered, along with current resources provided and opportunities for better support.

Common Mental Health Concerns for Military-Connected Youth

Higher risk of depression, anxiety, substance use and suicidality

- Military-connected adolescents report higher rates of suicidal ideation, depression symptoms, substance use and bullying than their civilian peers.
- Military adolescents were 45–75% more likely than civilian peers to use substances and 120% more likely to carry a weapon at school.⁸
- For preschool and elementary military-connected children, challenges with externalizing behaviors such as tantrums, aggression, self-control and emotional regulation have been reported.
- Deployment-related separations are connected to an increase in emotional and behavioral problems, including stress disorders and acting out (typically with aggression, defiance, impulsivity or rule-breaking).

Increased risk of family stress

- Parent mental health (including PTSD and depression) strongly predicts child outcomes. If the primary caregiver has low or poor mental health, this increases the risk factor for the child.
- Preschool-aged children's mental health, particularly their social and emotional development, is impacted by maternal PTSD symptoms.

Lack of school belonging increases loneliness

- Students often move six to nine times during K–12. Frequent transitions disrupt peer relationships, school connectedness and academics, which can increase stress. Students who feel like they don't belong at school are more likely to engage in risky behaviors or experience anxiety or depression.

Developmental Risks

- Tweens and teens may experience "parentification" (taking on adult responsibilities) during deployment cycles. This can add pressure and stress.
- Preschool children are especially sensitive to caregiver well-being; their mental health is less tied to military service than to parent stress and trauma history.

Protective factors make a big impact

- Those with more protective factors (such as social support, family cohesion and social connectedness) were less likely to be diagnosed with a mental health condition.

⁸Sullivan K. Capp G. Gilreath TD. Benbenishty R. Roziner I. Astor RA. [Substance Abuse and Other Adverse Outcomes for Military-Connected Youth in California: Results From a Large-Scale Normative Population Survey](#). *JAMA Pediatr*. 2015;169(10):922–928

Current Resources for Military-Connected Youth

Military-Provided Resources:

- Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) schools (However, 80% of military-connected students do NOT attend a DoDEA school.)
- Child Development Centers (on some bases)
- Family Life Counseling
- Family Advocacy Program
- Programs for families during deployment include: Families OverComing Under Stress (FOCUS), ADAPT parenting program and HomeFrontStrong

Family Supports:

- Play Therapy and Child-Parent Relationship Therapy and parent training show promise in addressing military children's needs and building resilience.
- Nonprofit organizations like Cohen Veterans Network, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) and Blue Star Families provide resources for families including counseling, grief support and peer community.
- Military families often rely heavily on extended family, pets, peer groups and online communities, though stigma around mental health can limit access or use.



Opportunities for Better Support and Understanding

Lack of rigorous evaluation of interventions

- Many programs for military-connected children have little research evidence, low fidelity monitoring and a high rate of turnover.
- Few validated tools exist to systematically assess stressors and supports.

Lack of awareness and materials in civilian schools

- Civilian schools don't always know which students are military-connected.
- Educators may not understand military culture or the unique stressors military youth experience.
- Educator and community organizations need more wellness and socioemotional programs to increase social skills and reduce mental health stigma.

Hesitation and barriers to seeking mental health help

- Families underutilize Veterans' Affairs and Department of Defense-affiliated programs due to distrust, stigma or logistical barriers.
- In part due to frequent moves, caregiver burden is significant. Many parents struggle to find reliable help caring for their children and feel isolated.

Need for family-centered approaches

- Children's well-being is strongly tied to the well-being of their parents. Support must address the family system, instead of just individual children.
- Various age groups (preschool, teen, etc.) need developmentally-specific interventions (e.g., relational/strength-based play therapy, school transition supports).

Community Review/Feedback:

The Kids Mental Health Foundation discussed gaps found with organizations who serve military-connected children to make sure the information obtained aligned with their experiences:

Audience Gaps:

- Limited Focus on Children:** Most existing resources prioritize the needs of service members, with few materials specifically focused on children. Of those for children, many were for young children or teens, leaving out kids in elementary or middle school.
- Veteran Families Overlooked:** Resources rarely focus on the children of veterans, even though families may face greater challenges due to acclimating to civilian society after their military service ends.
- Lack of Knowledge for Health Care Providers and Educators:** Teachers, school counselors and health care providers frequently lack understanding of military life and its impact on children. Military life comes with its own vocabulary and values, and these groups may have no military context, understanding or training.

Content Gaps:

Lack of Child-Focused Mental Health Materials	Plain Language Deficit
Few resources are designed specifically for children’s mental health, and even fewer are interactive or developmentally appropriate for all ages.	Many materials are not easily understood by individuals outside of military culture, making them less accessible to educators, health care providers or extended family who lack a military background.
Minimal Actionable Guidance	Overemphasis on Deployment
Resources often lack clear, practical steps for adults to take after reading or viewing content. Families and professionals are left unsure of how to apply the information in real-life situations.	A significant portion of existing content focuses on deployment-related stress, which does not apply to all military-connected children. This narrow focus excludes those affected by other service-related challenges, such as frequent relocations or parental injuries.

Stakeholders consistently emphasized the need for content and resources around:

Belonging and Connection

With extended family not around and with multiple moves, it can be hard for children to feel like they fit in. Children crave understanding from peers, teachers and community members. A lack of awareness about military life can lead to feelings of isolation.

Stigma Reduction

Families often avoid seeking help due to fears of judgment or negative career implications for the service member.

Resilience Support

While military-connected children often develop resilience, they still need support in navigating change and uncertainty, and knowing it’s OK to be vulnerable. These findings underscore the need for targeted, accessible and culturally competent resources that empower all adults in a child’s life to support their mental health.

Going Upstream to Help Military-Connected Children

Since 2018, The Kids Mental Health Foundation has focused on creating upstream resources so that adults can take action before a child’s mental health crisis or concern. The Kids Mental Health Foundation provides resources that focus on breaking stigmas, building skills and enhancing mental health literacy for parents/ caregivers, educators, pediatric health care providers and coaches.

After reviewing the needs assessment, The Kids Mental Health Foundation identified three areas to assist in the gaps of military-connected children’s mental health content:

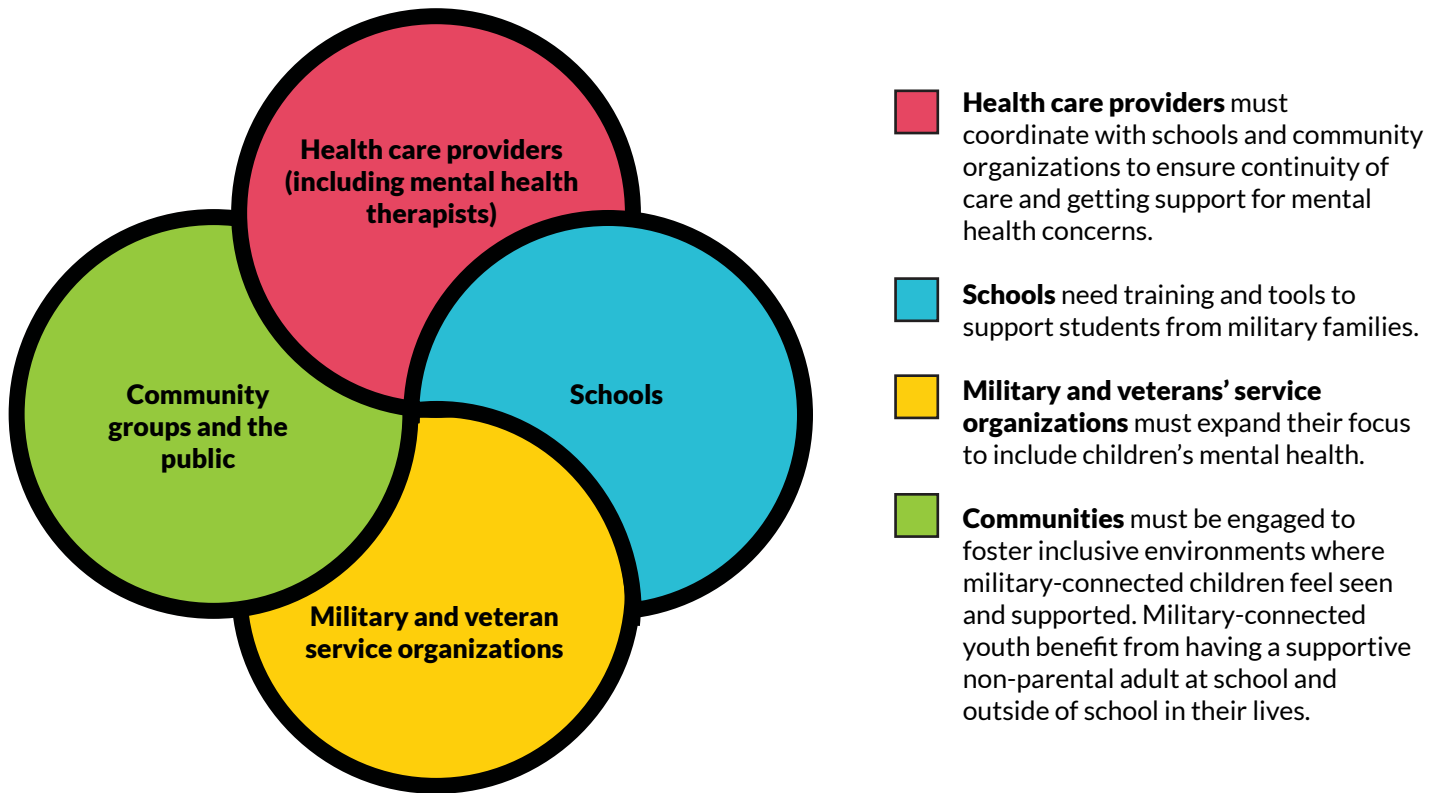
- 1. Focus on mental wellness to help all the adults in the children’s lives build skills so they can talk with and teach kids about resilience and emotional regulation.**
- 2. Educate teachers and medical providers who are integral to the overall health and well-being of military connected families but may not be familiar with military life.**
- 3. Provide actionable content that’s family friendly and easy to use in the home, neighborhood, classroom and beyond.**

Table 2: Proposed Resources for Audiences Serving Military-Connected Children

	Military Families	Teachers/Schools	General Public	Pediatric Therapists and Primary Care Clinicians
<i>Needs</i>	- Resources - Digital and physical kits - Actionable materials	- Information on military life - Actionable materials - Support	- Information on military life - Tangible ways to understand and support	- Information on military life - Materials to help military connected children
<i>Potential Products</i>	- Digital and physical kit for families with activities to do together/ conversation starters “While You Wait” materials/kit for families waiting for mental health care	- Lesson plan for classroom on needs of military connected students with activities and a book guide - Conversation starters to build community in the classroom - More information on supporting families through deployment	- Resources on defining common military terms - Information and materials to help them understand and support kids in their community	- Information to help them understand the unique needs of military connected kids with actionable materials - Information on resilience, celebrating military kids and encouraging vulnerability

The Need for Cross-Sector Partnerships

Through the needs assessment, it became clear that no single organization or system can meet the needs of military-connected children alone. Addressing these challenges requires collaboration across multiple sectors:



To effectively support the mental health of military-connected children, it is essential to engage a range of community members. Each group – whether family, educator, health care provider or community member – has a unique role to play. The following recommendations are designed to be actionable, accessible and tailored to the needs and capacities of each audience.

1. General Population

- **Increase Awareness:** Promote public education campaigns that explain the experiences of military-connected children and the impact of military life on mental health.
- **Foster Inclusion:** Encourage community events and school programs that celebrate military families and create opportunities for connection.
- **Combat Stigma:** Normalize conversations about mental health and military life through storytelling, media and community conversations.

2. Immediate and Extended Family

- **Stay Connected:** Maintain regular communication with children, especially during times of transition or deployment.

- **Offer Stability:** Provide emotional and logistical support when families relocate or face challenges.
- **Educate Yourself:** Learn about military culture and the specific stressors children may face to better understand and support them.

3. Schools and Educators

- **Implement Military-Friendly Practices:** Adopt policies such as the Purple Star Schools designation to recognize and support military-connected students.
- **Provide Training:** Equip educators with tools to identify signs of mental health distress and respond with empathy and appropriate referrals.
- **Integrate Lesson Plans and Activities:** Include military-related topics in classroom discussions to foster understanding and reduce isolation for military-connected students. Celebrate military-related holidays such as the month of the Military Child in April.

4. Communities and Neighborhoods

- **Build Support Networks:** Create local groups or events where military families can connect with one another and with civilian neighbors.
- **Partner With Organizations:** Collaborate with veteran and military service organizations to offer family-friendly programming and resources.
- **Promote Safe Spaces:** Ensure that community centers, libraries and recreational programs are welcoming and inclusive for military families or offer programming specific to this population.

5. Health Care Providers:

- **Screen for Military Connection:** Include questions about military affiliation on intake forms to identify children who may need specialized support.
- **Provide Culturally Competent Care:** Understand the unique stressors of military life and how they may manifest in children's behavior and emotional health.
- **Offer "While You Wait" Resources:** Share interim support materials with families facing long wait times for mental health services.

Conclusion

Military-connected children are resilient, resourceful and deserving of comprehensive support. By understanding their unique experiences and addressing the gaps in current systems, we can create a more inclusive and responsive mental health landscape. The Kids Mental Health Foundation is committed to leading this effort through resource development and collaboration.

With the support of funders and partners, we can ensure that every military-connected child has the opportunity to thrive – emotionally, socially and academically.

Thank you to Bread Financial for their generous support in funding the research and creation of these materials.

Appendix A: Organizations that Support Military Families

[Military Child Education Coalition](#) – The Coalition provides materials for families and educators including podcasts and webinars.

[Purple Star Schools](#) – The Purple Star School program is designed to help schools respond to the educational and social-emotional challenges military-connected children face during their transition to a new school and keep them on track to be college, workforce and life-ready. Forty-three states have Purple Star Schools designation.

[Blue Star Families](#) – Founded by military family members in 2009, their goal is to connect military families to one another and to civilians in their area. They have over 350,000 members in their network.

[Bob Woodruff Foundation](#) – Dedicated to helping service members and veterans get the resources they need, the Bob Woodruff Foundation works to support the overall health and well-being of military families.

[Help Heal Veterans](#) – This national organization has worked for 50 years to help heal visible and invisible wounds of war through therapeutic crafts. They've distributed over 33 million kits.

[Zero to Three](#) – Zero to Three is a national organization dedicated to children ages 0 to 3 years old by emphasizing the importance of those years to caregivers. They take a holistic approach and include mental health and building the emotional life of babies and toddlers.

[National Military Family Association](#) – Since 1969, the National Military Family Association has worked with military families to identify and solve the unique challenges of military life. They have programs for families and children and support military spouses with scholarships. They collect data from military families on their wellbeing.

Appendix B: Other Resources

These specific sites provide both information and actionable activities for military families.

[Sesame Street for Military Families](#) – Videos, information and downloads for families with young children

[Month of the Military Child Toolkit](#) – Materials for schools/teachers looking to recognize the month of the Military Child in April

[Military Family Toolkit from the Military Child Education Coalition](#) – Includes back-to-school resources and a military child well-being resource

[Annual Training Summit for Educators](#) – Opportunity to explore how technology is transforming education and what that means for military-connected students

[Mental Health America](#) – Resources geared at addressing common stressors impacting military families

[Human Performance Resources by CHAMP](#) (Consortium for Health and Military Performance) – Resources to help strengthen family relationships and build resilience

Appendix C: White Paper Contributors

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Appendix D: Detailed Findings From Web Analysis

TABLE 1

Source	Ages				Teachers	Kids	Target audience Military members and military families	Healthcare Providers	Other Professionals
	0-3	4-6	7-18	Parent/ Caregivers					
Sesame street	✓	✓		✓		✓			
Military Child Education Coalition		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
AAP-Health and MH Needs of Children in US Military Families									
Mental health America -Military mental health			✓	✓			✓		
Dept of defense- Month of military child			✓	✓		✓			
Military child.org		✓	✓	✓					✓
Blue Star families	✓	✓	✓				✓		
Wolfson children military material	✓	✓	✓				✓		
Military Podcast	✓	✓	✓				✓		
Bob Woodruff foundation		✓	✓				✓	✓	
Military family.org	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		
TriCare									
Zero to Three	✓						✓		
Operation we are here									
ADAPT				✓			✓		
FOCUS				✓			✓		
Consortium for health and military performance (CHAMP)				✓			✓		

TABLE 2

Source	Themes										TBI/ PTSD/ Physical injury
	Coping with deployment	Reconnecting after deployment	Loss/ trauma/ grief management	Staying connected/ community	Transitioning to a new school	General mental health*	Advocacy for military families	Racial and gender equity	Parenting skills	Behavior management	
Sesame street	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Military Child Education Coalition	✓	✓	✓						✓		✓
AAP-Health and MH Needs of Children in US Military Families											
Mental health America -Military mental health	✓	✓	✓								✓
Dept of defense- Month of military child				✓		✓					
Military child.org				✓	✓						
Blue Star families				✓							
Wolfson children military material	✓	✓					✓				
Military Podcast	✓	✓				✓					
Bob Woodruff foundation		✓					✓				
Military family.org				✓			✓				
TriCare						✓					✓
Zero to Three			✓	✓		✓		✓			
Operation we are here						✓					
ADAPT									✓	✓	✓
FOCUS						✓			✓		
Consortium for health and military performance (CHAMP)						✓					

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The Kids Mental Health Foundation is working to create a world where mental health is a vital part of growing up. We provide free resources across the U.S. to help promote children's mental health and wellness, before a crisis of concern.

If you'd like to learn more about children and mental wellness, feel free to check out our website at KidsMentalHealthFoundation.org and sign up for our newsletter at KidsMentalHealthFoundation.org/Sign-Up.