

Module 8: Supporting Student Success

Lesson One: Military-Connected Students' Unique Needs

Lesson Two: Services Offered by the Military

Lesson Three: The School Liaison's Role in Connecting Families and Districts to Appropriate Resources

Module Overview: Welcome to Module 8: Supporting Student Success. In this module, School Liaisons will learn about various military and non-military resources available to help meet the unique needs of military-connected children and ensure their academic success. Connecting families, schools, and community groups to appropriate resources that offer targeted and actionable information is an integral part of the duties of the School Liaison. This module offers a general understanding of the common challenges that military-connected children face and provides School Liaisons the tools they need to offer solutions across a variety of audiences.

Learning Objectives: Through this module, School Liaisons will be able to:

- List and describe the unique needs of military-connected children, including academic and social/emotional needs and issues related to deployment and transition.
- Identify and advocate for appropriate support services available to military-connected children, such as afterschool programs, counseling support, tutoring opportunities, and homework and technology centers through the military, community agencies, and schools.
- Identify and develop partnerships for supporting best practices in meeting the academic needs unique to children of the military.
- Communicate tips to help parents, teachers, and military leadership foster connections with schools.
- Explain the features and benefits of various resources and services.

Lesson One: Military-Connected Students' Unique Needs

Lesson Overview: Supporting the academic success of military-connected children begins with a deep understanding of their needs, primarily their social and emotional needs. School Liaisons need to understand the unique needs of military-connected children in order to help families understand and connect to appropriate and available resources.

Learning Objectives:

Upon completion of this lesson, School Liaisons will be able to:

- List and describe the unique needs of military-connected children, including academic and social/emotional needs and issues related to deployment and transition.

Social and Emotional Needs

Military-connected children live a lifestyle where relocation, loss, and change are ever-present. The experience of relocation is further complicated for many children by the uncertainty of a parent being deployed or returning with a physical and/or psychological injury. According to a report on school connectedness prepared by the Military Child Initiative, when students feel connected to their school, they believe that adults in the school care about them and their learning.¹ School Liaisons can improve school connectedness by helping parents and teachers understand the importance of and encourage

- high academic rigor and expectations,
- support for learning,
- positive adult-student relationships, and
- an environment of physical and emotional safety.

Research has shown that school-connected students are more likely to succeed, exhibiting positive behavior and avoiding risky behavior.

Today an increasing number of military families experience the added stress of multiple deployments and longer tours of duty. According to the Educator's Guide to the Military Child During Deployment when military families are returning from a tour of duty overseas, the "culture shock" upon returning to the U.S. can be very real and significantly impact the life of their children; family connectedness can suffer and exacerbate the unsettling experience of relocating to a new school.²

A report entitled *Children on the Homefront: The Experiences of Children From Military Families* found that across all age groups, children from military families reported significantly higher levels of emotional difficulties than children in the general population. In addition, about one-third of the military-connected children surveyed for the report cited symptoms of anxiety. The types of problems that children reported varied by age and gender. Older students had more difficulties with school and more problem behaviors such as fighting, while younger students reported more symptoms of anxiety. Girls had fewer problems in school and with friends but reported more anxiety than boys.³

¹ Blum, R. (2005). *School connectedness: Improving the lives of students*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Retrieved from http://www.jhsph.edu/bin/i/e/MCI_Monograph_FINAL.pdf

² *Educator's guide to the military child during deployment*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/os/homefront/homefront.pdf>

³ Castaneda, L. W., Harrell, M. C., Varda, D. M., Hall, K.C., Beckett, M. K., & Stern, S. (2008). *Deployment experiences of Guard and Reserve families: Implication for support and retention*. Retrieved from the Rand Corporation Web site: http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG645.pdf

Social and emotional needs can appear directly in the form of behavior and reactions that parents and teachers may observe in military-connected children. It is helpful for parents and schools to contact one another when they observe students exhibiting signs of social and/or emotional distress. A report prepared by the Virginia Joint Military Family Services Board entitled *Working With Military Children: A Primer for School Personnel* offers important social and emotional signs to watch for by age group:⁴

Preschool or Kindergarten Children

In preschool or kindergarten children, families and teachers might observe

- clinginess to people or a favorite object or toy;
- unexplained crying or tearfulness;
- changes in relationship with same-age friends;
- choosing adults over same-age friends;
- increased acts of aggression toward people or things;
- shrinking away from people or things;
- sleep difficulties (nightmares, frequent waking);
- regression, such as toilet accidents, thumb sucking, etc.;
- eating difficulties; or
- fear of new people or situations.

School-Age Children

In school-age children, families and teachers might observe

- any of the signs exhibited by younger children *and*
- a rise in complaints about pain or illnesses when nothing seems to be wrong;
- increased irritability;
- increase in school problems such as a drop in grades, an unwillingness to attend school, or odd complaints about school and/or teachers; or
- behavior changes.

Teens

In teens, families and teachers might observe any of the signs exhibited by younger and school-age children. Also, military-connected teens in particular want communities—school communities and

⁴ Virginia Joint Military Family Services Board. (2003). *Working with military children: A primer for school personnel*. Retrieved from http://www.il.ngb.army.mil/familyreadiness/educationoutreach/Working_with_Military_Children%5B1%5D.pdf

otherwise—to know what they are going through. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network states that those at a high risk for stress include youth who have endured multiple deployments and those who do not live close to military communities and do not have the same level of access to or support from installation services. With the support and direction of School Liaisons, schools can provide support and referrals, beginning by identifying impacted students and reaching out directly to their families to understand their unique needs.

Academic Needs

Academically, military-connected students are often very adaptive and savvy about adjusting to a new school in the case of transition or to their school environment in the face of the stress of deployment of a family member. Some may deal well with practical problems associated with transferring their records, having to repeat classes, facing a delay in their graduation, or diminished opportunities to sign up for extracurricular activities. Still others may exhibit changes in behavior or academic performance during times of family changes due to deployment, an injured or ill parent, or reunification⁵ Statistically, military-connected students generally perform well academically. They also graduate at higher-than-average rates compared to their nonmilitary peers and have fairly sound support networks at home⁶

⁵ *Educators Guide*, op. cit.

⁶ Chandra, A., Sandraluz, L-C., Jaycox, L. H., Tanielian, T, Burns, R. M., Ruder, T., & Han, B.(2010). Children on the homefront: The experience of children in military families. *Pediatrics*, 125(1), 16–25.

Student Transitions

The family dynamic of military-connected children can change, however, over the course of a school year. As a parent is deployed, another family member may care for a child. In some instances, especially with high school students nearing graduation, parents may opt to leave the child with a guardian to finish out the school year while they move to another location. These changes are not always disclosed to existing schools and can impact student behavior and performance. School Liaisons can help administrators and teachers become aware of the likelihood of these changes and actively encourage the student's guardian(s) to become aware of available resources and ensure proper services and support are provided consistently.

School Liaisons can help make parents aware of the potential impacts that moving from one school to another may have on their child. Some important aspects for School Liaisons to consider when working with military families facing transfer include the following:

School Schedules

Schools may operate on different vacation, start, and ending dates. Families that relocate during a school year or want to ensure their graduating senior meets exit exam requirements should consider schedules.

Graduation Requirements

Generally, the transfer and acceptance of education records in the U.S. can be a challenging process. Each state sets its own graduation requirements, usually specifying the number of courses a student must pass in each subject. In addition, 28 states require students to pass tests before graduating from high school. Each state's test is unique, and the results are not necessarily transferrable from state to state.

Class Sizes

State and local regulations and collective-bargaining agreements dictate how large or small classes can be. Families will be well served by knowing this information so that they can make more informed decisions about the school they select for their child.

Curriculum Standards

Each of the 50 states determines student standards for learning—and in some cases makes decisions about the specific curriculum used in schools. More often, school districts select their own curriculum. Because each state has a unique set of standards, the requirements from grade to grade and from subject to subject are generally not comparable. Families should be made aware and understand the variations so that they know how best to prepare their child. (Note: With the adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards in most states, this problem should be significantly mitigated.)

Teacher Qualifications

Each state sets qualification standards for teachers. Understanding the relative differences among states can help families gauge how qualified teachers are in each subject being taught, especially in middle and

high school. For example, some states require prospective teachers to earn a major in the subject, while others require a major and a passing score on a subject matter licensure exam.

Academic Performance

Every school district is required to report on the performance of students on state tests in reading/language arts and mathematics for all students and for subgroups of students. Module 7: How School Performance Is Determined provides School Liaisons with more detailed information to help families understand how to use school performance data.

Extracurricular Activities

The requirements for participating in sports, arts, or other nonacademic programs can vary from one school to the next. Again, parents alerted to the receiving school's criteria can make better decisions for their child, which can assist in creating a more seamless transition.

Unique Needs of Guard and Reserve Families

The National Guard and Reserves for the different military branches make up about half of the military capability of the United States. More than 500,000 children have one or both parents serving in the Guard or Reserves, and about 72 percent of these service members are called up each year. The amount of time that these individuals are given to deploy varies by assignment. Children with a family member in the Guard or Reserves may find themselves instantly becoming a “military family,” which is not a role that they are familiar with. As such, these children may not be emotionally prepared for rapid deployments, especially when they may need to relocate to stay with a caregiver. In addition to the issues associated with a move or the sudden absence of a loved one, the economic circumstances of the family may also change during this time and put additional strain on students.

Another challenge is that districts may not be aware of Guard and Reserve families within their schools. Many times these families do not live near installations and schools that are aware of the challenges of children from military families. Therefore, children of Guard and Reserve personnel may not have the support systems in place to cope with the deployment of a parent that other children from military families might have on the installation and within their schools. School Liaisons play a critical role for National Guard and Reserve families in helping to bridge communication gaps by building key relationships with school leaders and educators. Module 10: Building and Maintaining Relationships provides more detail about ways School Liaisons can create mutually beneficial relationships with local school leaders and community stakeholders.

Positive Impact of Transitions

Transitions are not always necessarily a cause for concern. Military families typically come to accept and commit to their new duty station. Of course, if parents are positive about the changes and provide support, it will help their children adjust as well. For parents, moves may represent an opportunity for career advancement or a chance to broaden horizons. For the children, such moves can also be exciting, and they are likely to develop skills that their civilian counterparts may not have, such as independence and broader cultural awareness. And, for teens especially, meeting new people and traveling to new places can be very rewarding. “Working With Military Children: A Primer for School Personnel” highlights several psychological studies that show despite the stress of separation, many positive impacts have been documented for military-connected children, including the following:

Maturity

Military-connected children have broader and more varied experiences than nonmilitary-connected children.

Growth

Military-connected children learn more about the world and how to function within a community at an earlier age.

Independence

Military-connected children tend to be more resourceful and self-motivated.

Flexibility

In an ever-changing environment, military-connected children often learn the importance of flexibility in dealing with day-to-day life.

Coping Skills

Military-connected children are more likely to build skills for adjusting to separation and losses faced later in life.

Strong Family Bonds

Military families make emotional adjustments during separations and relocations that often lead to the discovery of new sources of strength and support among themselves.

Lesson One Summary

Key Points:

- Research has shown that military-connected students are more likely to succeed, exhibiting positive behavior and avoiding risky behavior.
- School Liaisons can improve school connectedness by helping parents and teachers understand the importance of, and encourage, high academic rigor and expectations, support for learning, positive adult-student relationships, and an environment of physical and emotional safety.
- There are important social and emotional indicators by age group to watch for in students that may be experiencing distress.
- Children with a family member in the National Guard or Reserves may experience unique challenges as a result of unexpected deployments or transitions.
- Academically, military-connected students are often very adaptive and savvy about adjusting to a new school in the case of a transition.
- Important topics for School Liaisons to consider when working with families facing transfer include school schedules, graduation requirements, class sizes, curriculum standards, teacher qualifications, academic performance, and extracurricular activities.

Looking Forward: Next, learn about services offered by the military to support student success.

Lesson Two: Services Offered by the Military

Lesson Overview: When required to move or given a Permanent Change of Station (PCS) order, military families benefit from relocation assistance provided by their service branch. The military supports the success of military-connected children, youth, and families through a host of programs and services. These include everything from full-scale Family Centers at each installation to support programs for academic tutoring, partnerships with community resources, afterschool services, supports for children with special needs, and psychological health supports. School Liaisons play an important role in connecting families to appropriate military and other resources available to military-connected children.

Learning Objectives:

Upon completing this lesson, School Liaisons will be able to:

- Identify and advocate for appropriate support services available to military-connected children, such as afterschool programs, counseling support, tutoring opportunities, and homework and technology centers through the military, community agencies and schools.

Family Centers

Family Centers (also called Fleet and Family Support Centers, Marine Corps Community Services, Airman & Family Readiness Centers, or Army Community Service Centers) provide a variety of services to assist relocating service members and their families, including relocation counseling, planning assistance, destination information, and seminars on move management and financial preparedness. They also offer professional support services as well as information and referral to community resources.

Guard and Reserve commands have organized family support systems of staff and volunteers. Family Coordinators, Family Readiness Officers, or other designated family support specialists are the primary links to information and support services. Family Readiness Groups (Army), Key Volunteer Networks (Marine Corps), Key Spouse Volunteers (Air Force), and Ombudsmen (Navy) work with unit leaders to strengthen their bonds with families and provide a way for families to share information and support.

As an immediate family member of a Reserve Component service member on active duty, one is entitled to all the services available at military installations. Fleet and Family Support Centers, Marine Corps Community Services, Airman & Family Readiness Centers, and Army Community Service Centers offer a wide range of professional support services as well as information and referrals to community resources. If a service member lives near a military installation, a visit to the Family Support Center will give an indication of the services available, even if the nearest installation isn't the service member's branch. The Resources section of this guide provides specific Web links for each branch's family assistance programs.

Mental Health Supports

Parents and guardians can utilize a host of emotional supports for themselves and their children through specially designed programs in each service branch. These can be of assistance not only when children are exhibiting signs of stress but also to assist in general family functioning. The unique needs of a military family can require emotional supports, even during times of relative stability. Equipped with the right tools, military parents can serve as a source of strength for the challenges their children face during times of change, loss, or normal developmental milestones.

The following are resources offered by the military to assist in supporting the emotional well being of military children and families due to the stress of relocation, deployment, or for general support:

Military One Source

This is an online resource that provides links to every program and resource from the military, including psychological health supports from each service branch. It also offers real-time support through “face-to-face,” telephone, and online access to counselors. Access to these services can be gained by logging on to the site. This service is available to active duty military, Reserve, and Guard service members and their immediate family members.

TRICARE Assistance Program (TRIAP)

This is short-term, nonmedical assistance provided to eligible active duty service men and women and their families. It augments TRICARE’s many existing counseling assistance benefits for service members and their families by providing the support they need, when it’s needed. Services provided under this program include short-term counseling about family, personal, and parenting issues. TRIAP launched a Web-based service to provide behavioral and psychological health counseling through private and secure web portals 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The medical support for service members and their families offers a host of supports for outpatient and in-patient psychological health evaluation and treatment for all age groups.

Military Teens on the Move

This Web site provides information directly for children and youth. They can find answers to questions, work with online tools, and read tips designed to assist them with the emotional and academic changes they face when they move.

KidLink Network

This service provides assistance to parents, social service and court agencies, as well as other referral sources by locating the most clinically appropriate treatment setting for children and adolescents suffering from a variety of psychological health disorders.

Military Family Life Consultants (MFLC).

These are counselors providing free-of-charge assistance to National Guard and Reserve Component members and their families. MFLCs deploy to active duty installations for up to 90 days and to National

Guard and Reserve events to provide on-site support. They assist with a range of nonmedical counseling issues in individual, group and family settings. DoD has now extended the program to public schools with a high percentage of military-connected children from families that are stationed at installations that are heavily deployable. They assist with a range of issues in individual, group, and family settings.

Children and Youth Behavioral Military and Family Life Consultant (CYB-MFLC) Program

Military Family Life Consultants utilize the CYB-MFLC Program to support faculty, staff, parents, children and youth in a variety of settings, including but not limited to Child and Youth Programs, Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) schools, National Military Family Association “Operation Purple Camps,” Guard and Reserve camps for children, local education agencies (LEAs), and through the Joint Family Support Assistance Program (JFSAP). CYB-MFLCs provide confidential, nonmedical, short term, solution-focused counseling to military personnel, their families, faculty, and staff to enhance operational and family readiness.

Services for Children With Special Needs

The military understands that families with children who have a medical, emotional, or physical challenge can benefit from extra supports. Some children require in-home medical support, additional academic support, or therapeutic intervention, for example. In other cases, families just need guidance about school policies. The following is a list of just some of the additional supports available to military families and their children. This list includes both military and nonmilitary resources. Detailed information about each of the guidebooks and services listed below can be found in the Resources section of this module.

Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP)

This program applies when an eligible family member residing with a sponsor possesses a physical, intellectual, or emotional disability that requires special medical or education services. The EFMP ensures that a sponsor will be assigned to a location where appropriate services exist to support the special needs of the family. All of the military branches have an EFMP.

Special Needs Parents Handbook

This is a comprehensive guide to information and tools that are geared towards helping military families with special-needs children navigate medical and special education services, community support, benefits, and entitlements. The handbook, produced by DoD, is broken down into six colorful modules that can be easily downloaded and printed. Also included are facts, records, tools, and sample letters.

Special Needs Organizational Record (SCORE)

This tool is a series of documents and forms designed to assist families of children with special needs to organize and record necessary care information. Use of this tool can assist parents in maintaining consistent care for their children.

Specialized Training of Military Parents (STOMP)

This is a federally funded Parent Training and Information (PTI) Center established to assist military families who have children with special education or health needs. The staffs of the STOMP Project are parents of children who have disabilities and have experience in raising their children in military communities and traveling with their spouses to different locations.

Yellow Pages for Kids With Disabilities

This resource lists education consultants, psychologists, diagnosticians, health care specialists, academic tutors, speech language therapists, advocates, and attorneys in each state, along with government agencies, grassroots organizations, special education schools, and parent support groups.

Afterschool Resources

High quality before- and afterschool programs not only provide safe care while parents are working, but they also augment the learning that takes place during the school day. For elementary students, this care is critical for providing additional extracurricular activities like sports and arts. In addition to providing interesting activities, these programs offer an excellent way to help a child find new friends and integrate into a new school. For older students, this socialization is especially important. In addition, according to the National Afterschool Alliance, high quality afterschool programs also reduce engagement in risky behaviors such as substance use, early sexual exploration, and gang involvement (<http://www.naaweb.org>).

Each service branch generally operates accredited centers on their installation sites. The military has the largest number of accredited afterschool programs of any group in the country. Most branches also have partnerships with recognized national providers of afterschool and youth services to extend their offerings. Programs may be offered on the installation or through relationships with local schools. Examples of these are 4-H clubs, Boys & Girls Clubs, and Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Below is a list of what is provided through each service branch. Details about the national groups mentioned above can be found in the Resources section of this guide:

Air Force

School-age programs (SAP) or full-day care are offered on a weekly basis for full-time working parents and parents enrolled in school full-time on Air Force installations. Summer camps are also offered, as well as respite care programs.

Army

The Army School Age Care Program and Army Youth Program offer before- and afterschool programs during the school year, weekend activities, a comprehensive summer program, and camps during school vacations for children and youth ages 6 to 18. Through formal partnership agreements with several nationally recognized youth-serving organizations such as the United States Department of Agriculture, 4-H, and Boys & Girls Clubs of America, youth have access to programs, standardized curricula, special events, camps, scholarships, etc., no matter where they live. Army School Age Care and Youth Programs provide predictable, affordable, and quality services that are easily accessible for eligible children and youth on or off post. This is achieved through a comprehensive program framework consisting of four service areas, each area focusing on specific developmental outcomes. The four service areas are Sports, Fitness and Health Options; Life Skills, Citizenship, and Leadership Opportunities; Arts, Recreation, and Leisure Activities; and Academic Support, Mentoring, and Intervention Services. The Army also has a Youth Sponsorship Program that supports youth who move as a result of a parent's Permanent Change of Station. The Army Youth Sponsorship Program not only encompasses relocation support and school transition assistance but also anticipates the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual changes youth experience. In addition to care and activities offered on each installation, the Army partners with local school districts to provide after school activities in the local community. School Age Care Programs are accredited by the Council on Accreditation (COA).

Navy

The Navy Child and Youth Programs (CYP) provide high quality educational and recreational programs. Teams of caring, knowledgeable professionals plan developmentally appropriate and accredited programs that are responsive to the unique needs, abilities, and interests of children. The Child Development Centers provide full and part-day child care for ages 6 weeks to 5 years, and Child Development Homes provide full and part-day, as well as night and weekend, child care for ages 4 weeks to 12 years. School-Age Care provides before and after school and day camps for ages 6 years to 12 years. Navy also has a Youth Sponsorship Program that provides access to positive peer groups and social activities, helping Navy children feel connected at their new duty station, as well as Youth and Teen Programs that provide sports programs, leisure classes, youth Internet labs, and teen programs for ages 6 years to 18 years. For Navy families that may or may not live close to a military installation where affordable, quality child care opportunities are available or accessible, the Navy currently contracts with national organizations and community partners to support the needs of Navy Active Duty and Reserves parents. Contract spaces are designed to provide subsidized, quality care for members living/working away from military installation infrastructure and to provide additional support around installations.

Coast Guard

Partnerships have been established with nationally recognized groups like the Sea Cadets, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Big Brothers/Big Sisters to provide afterschool activities.

Additional Supports

Supplemental Academic Supports

Many afterschool programs, as well as school and military programs, offer additional academic support for school-age children, ranging from homework help and online tutorials to face-to-face, individualized tutoring. This level of support can be critical, especially for military children who may be transitioning to a new school. Academic performance can also suffer when children are emotionally and physically adjusting to a deployment or when the family environment has changed.

Support Services from Community Agencies and Schools

Module 10: Building and Maintaining Relationships provides more detail about ways School Liaisons can create mutually beneficial relationships with local school leaders and community stakeholders. What is important is that while the military offers a vast array of services and supports, linkages to strong local providers can also be beneficial for military families. In addition, the relationships created with key education leaders by School Liaisons can provide many additional supports and insights for families about the local school system.

Lesson Two Summary

Key Points:

- The military supports the success of military-connected children, youth, and families through a host of programs and services including everything from full-scale family centers at each installation to support programs such as tutoring, partnerships with community resources, afterschool services, supports for children with special needs, and psychological health supports.
- Each military branch has specifically designed mental health support programs with offerings for families and children.
- Afterschool programs and resources are critical to supporting the needs of military-connected students, as not only do they aid in socialization and integration, research shows afterschool activities reduce participation in risky behavior.
- Many afterschool programs, including school and military programs, offer additional academic support for school-age children that can be critical to ensuring their academic success.

Looking Forward: Next, learn more about the School Liaison's role in connecting families and children to appropriate resources.

Lesson Three: The School Liaison's Role in Connecting Families and Districts to Appropriate Resources

Lesson Overview: School Liaisons need to understand their role in connecting families and districts to available resources that meet the unique needs of military-connected students. A toolkit of tips and resources for families and districts effectively arms School Liaisons with the information needed to help ensure the academic success of military-connected children.

Objectives:

Upon completing this lesson, School Liaisons will be able to:

- Identify and develop partnerships for supporting best practices in meeting the academic needs unique to children of the military.
- Communicate tips to help parents, teachers, and military leadership foster connections with schools.
- Explain the features and benefits of various resources and services.

Strategies for School Liaisons

There are some key ways School Liaisons can effectively connect families and districts to the best available resources.

Stay Informed

These modules are an important source of general information about the academic environment that supports military-connected children; however, the information changes often, especially information about local resources. School Liaisons are therefore encouraged to participate in community groups, committees, and task forces that will provide not only updates on the most effective resources for installation families but also information to districts and the local community about what military-connected students need.

Help Parents and Schools to Understand the Unique Needs of Military-Connected Students

When children's lives change through moves and deployment—including reintegration—parents, guardians, teachers and schools can be strong supports helping to maintain emotional, social, and academic stability. However, even the most capable, committed parent requires additional resources to ensure the best educational experience for their child. School Liaisons can offer guidance and support to parents, helping them understand what behaviors they may observe in their children and where to find resources for support. Likewise, school leaders and teachers can benefit from obtaining relevant resources from School Liaisons to help understand and better serve military-connected students and families.

According to the American Psychological Association, the best way to help children cope during a parent's deployment is to:

- help children keep up their routine;
- listen to the child's concerns and respond accordingly;
- reassure them that the deployed parent is trained to do his/her job; and
- communicate in a way that the child will understand based on his or her age.

Build Bridges of Communication

School Liaisons can also help create important bridges of communication by reminding parents to inform their child's teacher and school administrators about changes in their families, so that the needs of their children are well supported.

In addition to these kinds of active supports, School Liaisons should be aware of and promote the resource "Building Resilient Kids," a Web-based instructional course designed by the Johns Hopkins University Military Child Initiative. The course focuses primarily on students from military families and is directed at teachers and administrators to increase understanding of the military lifestyle as well as the social, emotional, and educational needs and challenges of military-connected students. The online course offers strategies used to improve outcomes for military-connected students as well as best practices for implementation and partnership building. (*Link to this course provided in the Resources section.*)

Tips That Foster School Connectedness

School Liaisons can use and share the following tips for parents, teachers, and administrators that foster school connectedness for military-connected children.

Tips for Parents That Foster Connections to School

- Model respectful, cooperative positive behavior in everyday interactions.
- Be part of the solution; don't share your problems in the "rumor mill."
- Participate in school events.
- Show interest and be involved in academic activities.
- Maintain regular contact with the child's educators.
- Monitor homework completion and work together on assignments that invite family participation.
- Be present when things go wrong.
- Know a child's friends and the friends' parents.
- Ask school leaders what can be done to support them.
- Volunteer at school.

Tips for Teachers That Foster Connections to School

- Help students get to know each other's and the teacher's strengths.
- Involve students in planning, problem solving, identifying issues, and assessing curriculum in the classroom.
- Promote cooperation over competition.
- Build a strong relationship with each student.
- Convey attentiveness to students and excitement about learning through nonverbal gestures.
- Involve all students, especially new students, in chores and responsibilities in the classroom.
- Integrate concepts of discipline and respect for classmates through instruction.
- Give students more say in what they learn.
- Involve students in developing the criteria by which their work will be assessed, and provide guidelines so they clearly understand what is expected.
- Use first person plural (we, us, let's) when presenting classroom activities.

Tips for Administrators That Foster Connections to School

- Brainstorm with students, faculty, staff, and parents around simple changes that could make school more welcoming.
- Create policies and practices that are based on student, family, and neighborhood strengths and assets.
- Turn mistakes into learning opportunities rather than failures that merit punishment.
- Acknowledge and honor accomplishments and all types of competencies such as helpfulness, good citizenship, most improved performance, volunteerism, participation in decision making, and cessation of negative behavior.
- Set high standards and challenge students to meet them.

- Reinforce explicit expectations for positive behaviors and academic success.
- Encourage highly interactive teaching strategies.
- Create a welcoming environment for all who come to school.
- Invite family and community members to take active and regular roles in the daily operation of schools.
- Create a common vision of success and keep the vision statement visible.

Creating Channels of Communication

Families are best served when they know where they can receive up-to-date information. Some ideas for notifying families about resources, such as those listed above:

- Provide links from the installation's Web site to local and military resources.
- Create or feature a few resources as part of a regular newsletter.
- Visit local groups to ensure that there is a good understanding of their service offerings and quality.
- Create a resource fair and invite military and nonmilitary service providers to attend. (Be sure to invite local school leaders as well, so that cross-sharing is encouraged).
- Attend school functions (e.g., back to school night, open houses).
- Present to local community groups, school boards, and schools officials about the unique needs of military-connected children to encourage dialogue and ideas about how best to serve them.
- Make sure to reach out to Reserve and Guard families that live near the installation. These families are often isolated because they are not connected to an installation.
- Create a connection with another installation nearby or in the same state so that families relocating to the state receive comparable information from all military installations.
- Ensure that families transferring to another location are provided with as much information about the receiving location's resources as possible. This information can be found by creating relationships with receiving installation School Liaisons and through service branch Facebook pages.

Lesson Three Summary

Key Points:

- School Liaisons should participate in community groups, committees, and task forces that will provide timely updates on the most effective resources for installation families, districts and the local community.
- According to the American Psychological Association, the best ways to help children cope during a parent's deployment include helping the child keep up their routine, listening to the child's concerns and responding accordingly, reassuring the child that the deployed parent is trained to do his or her job, and communicating in a way that the child will understand based on their age.
- School Liaisons should refer to key points that foster school connectedness for parents, teachers, and administrators included in the Military Child Initiative's report "School Connectedness."
- School Liaisons can help build important bridges of communication by reminding parents to inform their child's school about changes in their families.
- Families are best served by School Liaisons who know where and how they can obtain up-to-date information.

Looking Forward: Next, assess your understanding of this lesson.

Module Summary

Module Overview: In this module School Liaisons learn about various military and nonmilitary resources available to help meet the unique needs of military-connected children and ensure their academic success. Connecting families, schools, and community groups to appropriate resources that offer targeted and actionable information is an integral part of the duties of the School Liaison. This module offers a general understanding of the common challenges that military-connected children face and provides School Liaisons the tools they need to offer solutions across a variety of audiences.

Key Points:

- Research has shown that school-connected students are more likely to succeed, exhibiting positive behavior and avoiding risky behavior.
- School Liaisons can improve school connectedness by helping parents and teachers to understand the importance of, and to encourage, high academic rigor and expectations, support for learning, positive adult-student relationships, and an environment of physical and emotional safety.
- There are important social and emotional indicators by age group to watch for in students that may be experiencing distress.
- Children with a family member in the National Guard or Reserves may experience unique challenges as a result of unexpected deployments or transitions.
- Academically, military-connected students are often very adaptive and savvy about adjusting to a new school.
- Important topics for School Liaisons to consider when working with families facing transfer include school schedules, graduation requirements, class sizes, curriculum standards, teacher qualifications, academic performance, and extracurricular activities.
- The military supports the success of military-connected children, youth, and families through a host of programs and services including everything from full-scale family centers at each installation to support programs such as tutoring, partnerships with community resources, afterschool services, supports for children with special needs, and psychological health supports.
- Each military branch has specifically designed mental health support programs with offerings for families and children.
- Afterschool programs and resources are critical to supporting the needs of military-connected students, as not only do they aid in socialization and integration, research shows afterschool activities reduce participation in risky behavior.
- Many afterschool programs, including school and military programs, offer additional academic support for school-age children that can be critical to ensuring their academic success.
- School Liaisons should participate in community groups, committees, and task forces that will provide timely updates on the most effective resources for installation families, districts, and the local community.
- According to the American Psychological Association, the best ways to help children cope during a parent's deployment include helping the child keep up their routine, listening to the child's concerns and responding accordingly, reassuring the child that the deployed parent is trained to do his or her job, and communicating in a way that the child will understand based on their age.
- School Liaisons should refer to key points that foster school connectedness for parents, teachers, and administrators included in the Military Child Initiative's report "School Connectedness."

- School Liaisons can help build important bridges of communication by reminding parents to inform their child’s school about changes in their families.
- Families are best served by School Liaisons who know where and how they can obtain up-to-date information.

Looking Forward: Next, learn about how School Liaisons can support military families that have children with special needs.