

Transitions: Supporting Military Children

Overview

Thank you for choosing *Transitions: Supporting Military Children* as a part of your professional development programming.

After teachers and staff complete the simulation individually, it is best to gather them and discuss their experiences and the material covered. This guide was designed

to help facilitate that discussion. Such a discussion allows school and after-school program leaders to localize the professional development to the specifics of their school or program, for example to review the school's policies for assisting transfer students. It also enables participants to raise any questions or issues that may have come up during the simulation.



Group Discussion

Experiences with the simulation will naturally vary from participant to participant due to their ability to embark on different conversational paths in the simulated conversation with Sam. For example, depending on the choices they made, participants may or may not have learned about all the concerns that Sam has about his family and they will have received different feedback depending on their choices. As a result, participants may express not only a variety of opinions but also a diversity of experience within the simulation.

Used as either a springboard or a roadmap, this document provides guidance for using the participants' experiences to facilitate an engaging and valuable group discussion. You may want to stray from this guide to follow the interests and experiences of the participants; this is an acceptable and valuable approach to enhancing the impact of the simulation. Another helpful document for the discussion is the Content Summary which reiterates key information from the simulation and is available within the Resources section of the simulation and attached to this document.

This discussion should take about one hour. It can occur immediately after participants go through the simulation or at a later date.

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Preparation

Below is a checklist to use in preparation for the discussion.

- Simulation:** You've completed the simulation yourself and are familiar with its contents. Review the Content Summary (attached).
- Participant Training:** Participants should have completed the simulation within the past week. The simulation takes about 60 minutes to complete and can be taken in multiple sittings.
- Location/Timing:** For the discussion, consider choosing a location you feel is most conducive, possibly where participants can sit in a circle and see each other as they share answers. The discussion can occur immediately following the training or during a regularly scheduled group or department meeting, once all participants have completed the simulation individually.
- Computer Access (OPTIONAL):** Consider choosing a location with a computer, projector, and speakers for the discussion, so you can refer to the simulation during the discussion.
- Content Summary:** Print out copies of the Content Summary (attached) to distribute to participants and refer to throughout the discussion.
- Local Resources:** Print out copies of your list of "Local Resources," if this is in a PDF format. Otherwise, you may want to bring these up on screen if you have access to a projector or monitor that can be shared.

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- Information Specific to Your School or Program:** Learn the answers to the following questions about military children, new students, and support personnel in your school or program, so you can share them with the group.

Q. How many of the children in your school or program are in military families?

Q. What policies are in place to help new children adjust?

Q. What policies are in place to help children who are leaving?

Q. If a child shows signs of trauma or distress, what support personnel can become involved, and how is that referral made? Examples might be a school counselor, social worker, principal, or program director.

- Review:** Look over the rest of this document so you can be familiar with the questions you'll be asking the group and get an idea of what sort of questions and concerns may arise during the discussion. Note which questions you feel are most important to make time for because you might not have time for all of them.

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Discussion Questions: Growing Up in a Military Family

Let's start by reflecting on the first section of the simulation, about the changes and challenges that many military families face, including the stages of the deployment cycle and how they can affect children.

- Q.** Which changes and challenges of being in a military family were you already familiar with?
- Q.** What did you learn about the ways frequent moving and the deployment cycle can affect military children?
- Q.** Why is it helpful for you to know which stage of the deployment cycle the children you work with are currently experiencing?
- Q.** How might deployment be especially difficult for families of service members in the National Guard or Reserves?

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Discussion Questions: Supporting a Military Child

Next, let's discuss the three goals you were given in the simulated conversation with Sam:

- Discuss the incident that just happened.
- Get to know him better and better understand his behavior.
- Explore ways to help him adjust and make friends.

Q. When you have initiated conversations with children in the past, what worked well for you? What were your goals and what happened?

Q. In the past, how have you addressed challenging behavior from a child?

Q. When speaking with a child about their behavior, how can you give them a chance to share their side of the story while also making clear to them what behavior is appropriate and inappropriate?

Q. What did you learn about Sam and his family's situation in the simulated conversation? How might what you've learned relate to his behavior?

Q. What ways did you find to help Sam adjust and make friends?

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Throughout the conversation with Sam, you were advised to:

1. Show a genuine interest in Sam
2. Have empathy
3. Help him adjust and make friends

In the Content Summary, there are good and bad examples of these.

- Q.** Is one of these easier for you to do? Have you had more practice with one than the other?
- Q.** When have you found it difficult to show a genuine interest in getting to know a child or have empathy for them?
- Q.** In the conversation with Sam, did any of the guidance from your coach, Jackie, surprise you?

Discussion Questions: What You Can Do

The simulation points out that if any child has had a traumatic experience, their reactions may be defiant or angry if they feel unsafe or scared.

- Q.** If a child shows signs of trauma, who in your school or program can you make a referral to?
(At this point, the discussion facilitator helps the group answer this question by sharing information about support personnel)

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In the Content Summary (attached), you can see a list of techniques for easing a military child into your class or program. You might notice that they all involve communication and sharing information.

- Q.** Have you tried any of these before? How did it go?
- Q.** Are there other techniques that have worked for you that you would like to add to the list and share with the group? (At this point, you would share information about the policies in place to support children who are new or leaving.)
- Q.** After having this opportunity to learn about military children and to practice speaking with one to understand and support his needs, how do you feel about using what you learned in real life?
- Q.** What can we as a community do better to ensure that children in need of support get the help they need?

Wrapping Up

Because of frequent moving and other transitions in the lives of military children, a supportive adult at school or an after-school program can be especially important in helping them adjust and build emotional resiliency. You're in a position to help—sometimes by just checking in and at other times by having a more substantial conversation. By responding to a child's challenging behavior with genuine interest and empathy, you may learn what is driving a child's behavior and find effective solutions.

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Growing Up in a Military Family

Almost two million children in the U.S. have one or more parents in the military, and most will change schools 6-9 times. Military-connected children can face other big changes, too, like a parent's absence, injury, or death; and studies show that, due to their frequent transitions, military children are more likely to report being bullied and may struggle with problematic behavior or low grades.

A supportive adult at school or in an afterschool program can create a more welcoming, supportive environment for military children and help them build emotional resiliency. Users of this simulation should also be aware that service members might be in the National Guard and Reserves. These members serve part-time while otherwise living as civilians, but they can be quickly sent from home to serve fulltime. Until then, their families might not even think of themselves as military families. Reservist families are also less likely to live near other military families and might not know about the support services that the military offers.

The Deployment Cycle

It can be helpful for adults working with youth to understand the deployment cycle for military families.

- **Pre-deployment:** The military parent is training or serving while living at home.
- **Deployment:** The military parent leaves home, often for more than a year. Children may feel anxious about who will care for them or worried that the parent might get hurt or not return.
- **R&R:** Sometimes deployed parents come home and spend a few weeks with their families before leaving again. Often military children take time out of school or other activities to be with their parent.
- **Post-deployment:** When the parent returns from deployment, he or she may struggle to find their place in the family and adjust to new routines. They might also have been wounded or traumatized by their deployment; changes in the parent's behavior can be stressful for their children.

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Supporting a Military Child

Taking some time for a one-on-one conversation can help you understand and support the needs of any child you're concerned about or who is new, whether they're in a military family or not. If you notice a student is having difficulty fitting into your class or program, get to know them better and try to better understand their behavior and then explore ways to help them adjust and make friends.

Show genuine interest in them and their experiences.

Examples:	<p>“Tell me about your old school.”</p> <p>“In places you lived before, did you know other military families?”</p> <p>“I bet you’ve learned a lot from living in different places.”</p> <p>“What else has changed?”</p>
Bad examples:	<p>“Has your dad ever shot anyone?”</p> <hr/> <p>There are many ways to serve in the military that do not involve being in combat, and this is an emotionally-charged question. Instead, focus on how the child is feeling and how you can best support them.</p>

Have empathy. (a genuine interest in understanding their experience)

Examples:	<p>“What was it like when you found out you’d be moving here?”</p> <p>“That sounds stressful for your whole family.”</p> <p>“It’s tough being new and getting teased. Now I understand why you got upset.”</p> <p>“You said you didn’t want to get to know the kids here. Tell me more about that.”</p>
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<p>Bad examples:</p>	<p>“Moving that much isn’t good for a child.”</p> <p>“I’m sorry your parents are making you upset.”</p> <p>“It’s awful how people in the military have to move around so much.”</p> <hr/> <p>Criticizing a child’s parents or their military lifestyle can make the child defensive.</p> <hr/> <p>“You’re older now and that means you’ve got to be stronger.”</p> <p>“No matter how you feel, you’ve got to keep it together.”</p> <p>“There’s no point in getting mad about things you can’t control.”</p> <hr/> <p>Children need support through the big changes in their lives. Be careful not to minimize their feelings, imply they aren’t strong enough, or make them feel ashamed. Instead, help them identify, understand and accept their feelings.</p>
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Help them adjust and make friends.

<p>Examples:</p>	<p>“What did you like to do in your old school?”</p> <p>“You said you like soccer. I can help you join the after-school soccer group.”</p> <p>“Maybe you could help me hand out the snacks to the other kids?”</p> <p>“You said you lived on base. What did you do there to welcome new kids?”</p> <p>“What do you think about meeting other military kids here?”</p> <p>“Does your teacher know that you have a parent in the military and your family just moved here?”</p> <p>“What can we do to help you?”</p>
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Factors to Keep in Mind

Every military child's story will be different. Here are some factors to keep in mind while learning what kind of support each child needs.

- **Age:** Children of different ages benefit from different types of support.
- **Previous Experience:** Ask about the child's previous experiences with moving and with the deployment cycle.
- **Community:** Help military families in your school meet each other. This is especially important for families in the National Guard and Reserves, who may have much less contact with other military families.
- **Trauma:** If a child seems defiant or angry, try to find out if there's something in their life that they're struggling with and whether their behavior is a reaction to feeling unsafe or scared. This helps you avoid responding in a way that escalates those feelings. If a child shows signs of trauma, one of the first steps is to make a referral to other student support personnel, such as a school counselor, psychologist, social worker, teacher, or principal.
- **Resilience:** Military children often develop strengths from their experiences. Learn about the skills and experiences of the military children in your school and give them opportunities to share their strengths.

Techniques for Easing a Military Child into Your Class or Program

1. Ask whether children have a parent in the military during registration as part of the standard process.
2. Assign a "buddy" for the first week or two to show new children around.
3. Encourage military children to talk with the group about other places they've lived.
4. Ask military families to feel free to communicate with you and your colleagues throughout the deployment cycle. Keep them informed about their child's progress and behavior so you can work together.
5. Don't worry if your first one-on-one conversation with a new student is cut short. Later, you can always pick up where you left off. Also, a new student's needs change over time, so make sure to have periodic check-ins.

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Some great additional resources for supporting military children.

[Classroom Activities »](#)

Integrate into your curriculum an awareness and understanding of military culture with these lesson plans for various age groups.

[Military Kids Connect - Section for Educators »](#)

At Military Kids Connect, learn about military culture and the life of military children coping with a parent's deployment. There are also lesson plans for various ages and tips for helping students cope with deployment and other tough situations.

[Working with Military Students »](#)

Hear educators talk about their work with military children in this video.

[Military Youth Coping with Separation »](#)

Hear military children talk about their experiences in this video.

[10 Things Military Teens Want You to Know »](#)

Tips to help military children manage the stressors and affirm the positive aspects of military life.

Working with Children who are Coping with Trauma

Remember, not every child in a military family is coping with trauma.

[Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators »](#)

Learn about the impact of childhood trauma and get suggestions for how educators can help children cope.

[Tips for Helping Students Recovering from Traumatic Events »](#)

Although the focus is on natural disasters, these tips may apply to other traumas students may experience.

[10 Things about Childhood Trauma Every Teacher Needs to Know »](#)

A brief blog entry for teachers to help them understand the experiences of children coping with trauma.