

What School Counselors Can Do to Help  
Children of Military Families

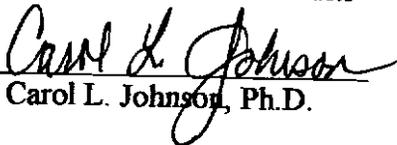
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**ABSTRACT**

With 1.2 million children coping with military parents serving their country, it is important for educators to recognize their needs and to understand how to support these children (Stroul, 2006). Since children spend so much time at school, the effects of parent deployment may surface within the school setting. Although a safe return of the loved one is usually the ultimate concern, in the meantime, children have to deal with not having contact with the loved one for extended periods of time, dealing with other family members' anxiety, changing routines, and taking on new responsibilities (Stroul, 2006).

It is important for educators to become familiar with the stages of military deployment which include pre-deployment, deployment, sustainment, reunion, and post-deployment (Stoul, 2006; Kennedy, 2007). While children typically show a range in emotions during deployment, there are common themes that research indicated children generally experience. Throughout these stages, counseling strategies and activities that school counselors can use to help children are identified. These include genuinely

listening to the child's feelings, monitoring political views when around children, keeping in contact with the child's current guardian, and modifying educational plans for the child, if needed.

As redeployment or relocation may also be a strong possibility for many families, children may have different responses to the repeat cycle of deployment stages. Relocation to live with a temporary custodial grandparent, aunt or uncle is also a common challenge children with military parents can face in times of war. Counselors can open lines of communication with the temporary guardian and assist with the transition to a new school while helping with unfamiliar school related issues.

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## Chapter I

There are many unique issues facing the families of those serving in the United States Military. In 2006, there were 1.4 million active duty service men and women serving at home and abroad, leaving 700,000 spouses behind. There are also 1.2 million children who are coping with military parents serving their country (Stroul, 2006). In times of peace or in times of war, family members are challenged to deal with the stress and anxiety of living with a military service family member. Schools are becoming aware of the impact this has on children and of the needs of children of deployed service members. This literature review will present strategies to assist children as they cope with parents on military deployment.

Children with deployed parents live with the fear of deployment to a high-risk area. Although safety of the loved one is usually the utmost concern, children also have to deal with not having contact with the loved one for extended periods of time, dealing with other family members' anxiety, changing routines, and taking on new responsibilities (Stroul, 2006). Children may have a variety of responses, including anger, loss, fear, confusion, sadness, feelings of abandonment, apprehension, and depression (Lemmon, n.d.). Children's responses can also vary depending on which stage of deployment the loved one is in (Kennedy, 2007).

With 56% of the 1.2 million children being between the ages of 5 and 18, the effects of parent deployment are also being seen at school (Stroul, 2006). Separation can lead to a variety of responses seen within school including: absenteeism, dropping out, isolation or withdrawal from family and/or friends, depression, acting out, or a decrease in grades (Hayes, 2007; Kennedy, 2007).

Although the typical person thinks of deployment as the primary concern of military families, even if deployment does not occur, there can still be unique issues children of military

families face. The 714,000 children (ages birth to 18) in National Guard and Reserve families face many challenges. Military families tend to move frequently—up to two to three times more often than civilian families, which may create potential academic, emotional, and social problems (Stroul, 2006). It is harder to make and keep friends if children are moving and changing schools often. Language barriers may be another obstacle for these children. It is also hard to keep track of the graduation requirements that need to be met and those that have been met since the requirements tend to be different at each school. There is also always the fear of the parent being deployed soon after relocation (Kennedy, 2007).

Military families may incur more stress if one (or more) of the children has a learning disability or special needs. Leaving helpful resources behind may be distressful, while finding and coordinating new resources only adds to the burden of moving (Stroul, 2006). Counselors can help with this transition if they are aware of the military family's needs.

During these tough times of deployment and relocation, schools may be one of the only places where there is structure in military children's lives, if the student is in school long enough to get into the routine. Therefore, it is important that schools level the playing field for these students. Schools must first find out that the family is indeed a military family. This can be accomplished by requesting this information on school registration materials. Once this is established, schools can work with the family on problems that may arise during the school year, develop support groups for students, and refer to outside agencies for other needs (Stroul, 2006).

It is also important for educators to be involved because of the amount of time they spend with the children. Adult reactions may impact how children respond to situations. Even if the other parent is present, he or she is also probably dealing with his or her own feelings (D'Andrea & Daniels, 1992). Therefore, it is important that the child sees a model of how to deal with the

situation effectively. Classmates can also provide support for the children when they feel they have nowhere else to turn (Educator's Guide to the Military Child during Deployment, n.d.).

Parents also need support and education about preparing and supporting their children during the different stages of deployment or transitioning after a move. Since military families are new to the community in many cases, they will typically not know about any of the community resources that could be very valuable to their families. These resources may include various clubs where connections can be made with other families, financial help, and housing assistance, for example. It may also be beneficial to supply the family with books, Internet sites, and articles to help them with the transition. Schools should work in connection with the community agencies and serve as the link between families and community resources (Stroul, 2006).

Many school personnel do not have experience or expertise with the military. Not all families live on or near large military bases; some families live far away from military support groups. This makes it especially hard for school staff to know what to do to help children of military families during the variety of difficult situations they endure.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

Children of military families need support during difficult times; however, many school counselors and other school personnel are unsure of how to help them. Many must search multiple sources for ideas for what may help these children. With little spare time in their schedules, this often proves to be a tedious and difficult endeavor. Therefore, school counselors face the problems of little knowledge or resources to help children and not enough time to thoroughly research the topic.

### *Purpose of the Study*

Through this literature review, counselors and other school personnel may gain a better understanding of ways they can help children from military families cope through the various stages of military deployment and relocation. The purpose of the literature review is to explore ideas from multiple sources so that a variety of strategies for helping children can be encapsulated into one source. It is important to recognize the needs of children with family members on military deployment and offer suggestions for school counselors to assist them. Literature will be reviewed in the spring of 2008.

### *Research Questions*

This literature review is being developed to answer the following questions:

1. What can school counselors do to identify and help children of military families?
2. What are the stages of military deployment and what impact do they have on children?
3. What resources are available for schools and families with members serving in the military?

### *Rationale*

This literature review will be a compilation of ideas of how counselors can identify children with family members on deployment and in transition. This information may help school personnel recognize the unique needs of military families, become aware of the stages of deployment, and develop strategies to assist the children. This may help the students receive the support they need sooner.

### *Definition of Terms*

To clarify the information and make it as useful as possible, it will be important to define several terms.

*Deployment.* Deployment refers to the temporary “movement of an individual or military unit within the United States or to an overseas location to accomplish a task or mission. The mission may be as routine as providing additional training or as dangerous as war” (Educator’s Guide to the Military Child during Deployment, n.d., p. 3).

*Military family.* Military family refers to a family who has one or more of its members in the Army, Army Reserve, Army National Guard, the Navy, the Naval Reserve, the Marine Corps, the Marine Corps Reserve, the Air Force, the Air Force Reserve, the Air National Guard, the Coast Guard, and/or the Coast Guard Reserve.

### *Assumptions of the Research*

There are several assumptions within this literature review. The first is that some children of military families need special support due to their response to living within the military culture. The second assumption is that literature on this topic is readily available. The third assumption is that there is research from scholarly sources available in the spring of 2008.

### *Limitations of the Research*

There are also limitations within this literature review. The first limitation is the vast amount of literature paired with the limited amount of time and resources available. The second limitation is that not every circumstance related to military families that a counselor may encounter will be covered.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

This chapter will include a discussion of multiple topics related to helping children of military families. First will be an exploration of the various reactions children may have due to military family related issues. Next will be the phases of the grief process followed by an explanation of the five stages of deployment: pre-deployment, deployment, sustainment, reunion, and post-deployment. Suggestions for school counselors will also be provided within this section. Redeployment will also be discussed. The chapter will conclude with ideas of how school personnel can help children of military families.

### *Children's Reactions*

As expected, children may have a plethora of reactions and emotions associated with the various circumstances they are enduring living with a military family. Many parents who remain behind while a spouse is deployed in a crisis are often struggling with their own reactions, which may make it difficult to address their children's emotions (D'Andrea & Daniels, 1992). Therefore, it is important that school counselors understand the various emotions that may surface during these times of transition.

In order for educators to understand and support military families, it is important that they know what transitions military families experience. Several sources (Stoul, 2006; Kennedy, 2007) have reported that there are five stages of deployment. These include pre-deployment, deployment, sustainment, reunion, and post-deployment. This section may help educators understand the unique challenges that each stage of deployment may invoke. By having awareness of different stages and possible emotions that may accompany these phases, counselors may be better able to help the children successfully transition through each phase (Kennedy, 2007).

Children can have many different emotions during different phases of deployment. It is important for educators to remember that children react differently, even if they are in similar situations. Children within the same family and circumstance may respond very differently, as well. Each phase in the cycle of deployment entails possible emotions or reactions that accompany each phase (Educator's Guide, n.d.). One of the most prevalent responses is grief, which may be one of the earliest and most common emotional reactions to news of an impending deployment of a parent. Having a parent deployed in a crisis situation is perceived as a loss for the child.

### *Phases of the Grief Process*

Because children react differently to the phases of deployment, it is important to identify the stages of loss or grief process of a pending deployment in order to understand children's emotions and reactions. The four phases of the grief process include the numbness phase, the yearning phase, the disorientation and depression phase, and the reorganization phase (D'Andrea & Daniels, 1992). These phases frequently overlap and do not have distinct boundaries.

*Numbness phase.* The numbness phase often includes shock and disbelief about the current situation. Children are often distracted or appear dazed during this phase. However, just below this sense of numbness there is a volcano ready to erupt with emotion. It seems as if "the psychological numbness that characterizes this stage of grieving serves to defend children against the full weight of thinking about the dangers or facing the painful feelings associated with having their parents involved in the war" (D'Andrea & Daniels, 1992, p. 3). Learning that a parent will soon be packing and leaving for a duration of up to 18 months is incomprehensible to many children. They feel numb and cannot believe this is happening to them.

*Yearning phase.* With time, the numbness lifts and children begin to become conscious of their feelings. Many of these feelings may be due in part to separation anxiety. Strong emotions of sadness, loneliness, and agony may be seen during this phase (D'Andrea & Daniels, 1992). As children learn to take on additional responsibilities and adapt to not having the missing parent available, they learn independence and coping strategies. Those who struggle to adjust may begin to show some anger or discipline issues.

Both in the school setting and at home, children may be more disruptive during this phase. This phase often includes misdirected anger, which may be directed at classmates, teachers, siblings, or the remaining parent. According to D'Andrea and Daniels (1992) children often suffer from "increased restlessness, agitation, insomnia, nightmares, sudden bouts of uncontrollable crying, physical aches and pains, and feelings of panic" (p. 3). Parents may wish to seek outside help and support during this initial stage of yearning for the deployed parent.

*Disorientation and depression phase.* During the disorientation and depression phase, children often change the way they think about being separated from their parents. Within the previous stages, it seems that children often believe a miracle could reunite them with their parents. However, during the disorientation and depression phase, children often start to understand that will not be reunited until the end of the deployment. Although they are more realistic about the deployment, this may evoke a more depressed and apathetic response (D'Andrea & Daniels, 1992).

People around a child during this phase may notice disorganization or lack of self-management. Many children have a noticeable decrease of interest of previously enjoyable activities. Lack of focus and purpose may result in misplacing homework or forgetting

assignments. In severe cases, depression may emerge with the realization that the parent will not be returning in the near future.

School counselors and other adults within the child's life should work on underlying factors of the disorganization. It is imperative to understand that punishment is often ineffective at this point. With the child being in a depressed state, he or she may genuinely not care about being punished. Although adults may become very frustrated during this phase, it is important to have patience with the child. Children need time and opportunities to express their feelings about the situation. It is important that they are also met with support from trusted adults. By affording children these opportunities, they "gain confidence to reorganize their thoughts and feeling in ways that enhance their personal development" (D'Andrea & Daniels, 1992, p. 4).

*Reorganization phase.* During the reorganization phase, children's resiliency shines through. Most are able to overcome the sadness, loneliness, and depression of the previous stages and actually become stronger from the experience. Inner strength and confidence are boosted. Many appreciate their friends and family members more or find new friendships along with new interests. Children and adolescents also reported increased motivation and personal growth during this stage of reorganization. Despite the serious nature of these experiences, the vast majority of children do not experience long-term negative psychological effects (D'Andrea & Daniels, 1992).

Although no two children experience exactly the same emotions when faced with the challenges of a parent on deployment, it is important to keep these phases in mind. It is also important to remember that no two deployments are the same. Some deployments may locate the soldier in the middle of a war, whereas others may find a deployment to another country serving in a support role. The stages of deployment will be discussed next. By combining the previous

phases of grief with the stages of deployment, school counselors will have a better understanding of what children are experiencing.

### *Stages of Deployment*

From the review of literature, activities for counselors or other educators to utilize are also included within each phase of deployment. Although not every one of these ideas will work for each child, many of them can be tailored or changed to meet the needs of a particular student. Counselors should not be afraid of coming up with new ideas to meet other individual needs of students, as well. Overall, counselors should try to stay in contact with the family so things can be modified as needed to meet the current status of the deployed loved one and those remaining behind (Allen & Staley, 2007). The stages of deployment include pre-deployment, deployment, sustainment, reunion and post-deployment.

*Pre-deployment.* The pre-deployment stage begins with the soldier receiving the notification of possible deployment and continues through the actual deployment (Johnson, n.d). The time from notification to the actual departure will vary from a few days to months (Kennedy, 2007). Within this stage, tension builds as the family gets affairs in order and prepares for all possible outcomes. Many times, there is a mental or physical distance between the soldier and the rest of the family. The soldier may be required to do extra training, which may or may not be close to home. The family members may be experiencing apprehension about the loss of the family member or may be denying it altogether. Children may have many questions such as “Why us?” or “Will my mommy/daddy be okay?” Children may also experience an array of emotions. Kennedy (2007) reported that children may feel anger toward the parent who is leaving during this phase. Contrarily, they may also be clingier during this time. Children may protest and push boundaries, as well. Knowing that the parent will be leaving soon, some

children may pull away from the departing parent, feeling that it is too difficult to spend time with him or her. “The order, security and safety of their lives and the lives of their family members will feel temporarily shattered” (Educator’s Guide, n.d., p. 3).

In order for the child to make connections with others in similar situations, counselors or other educators may consider creating a buddy system within the school between children who have experienced deployment before and those new to it (Kennedy, 2007). This could be done within a group counseling setting or outside group counseling. Counselors may also help families find support outside of school by connecting them with families who are dealing with the same thing or have dealt with it in the past. Technology, such as teleconferences and the Internet could be useful for making connections (Hayes, 2007). Counselors should also consider planning an open house where military families can meet and hear military organizations’ presentations (Kennedy, 2007). It may be helpful to encourage the family to make a list of family or friends they could call on if needed. If the list is made ahead of time, it is more likely they will ask for help when they need it (Kennedy, 2007).

During individual counseling, counselors could help the child make a time capsule filled with items from pre-deployment. Items could include the height of the child, a tracing of his or her hand, pictures, etc. The child and deployed parent can go through the items to see how much has changed when he or she returns (Kennedy, 2007). If time permits, encourage the family member to tape record or videotape some bedtime stories, songs, or a message before they leave (Surles & Akers, 2003). This way, a child could keep memories fresh of the deployed parent.

Counselors should make a point to keep in touch with military families within the school. They should try to contact the parent (or current guardian) on a regular basis to check for updates. By doing so, the school will stay updated on the deployed family member. This may

also help develop rapport and trust which may help the family ask for help if they need it (Kennedy, 2007). Counselors should also be familiar with child and family resources in the area so they know where to refer, should support be needed for military families (Stroul, 2006). Although it is difficult to think about, counselors should be proactive by having a crisis plan ready, in case of an injury or death (Allen & Staley, 2007).

*Deployment.* Johnson (n.d.) defined the deployment stage as the “period immediately following [the] soldier’s departure from home through [the] first month of deployment” (p. 1). During this time, there is usually an abundance of support from the family and community, according to research by The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (n.d.). Again, there can be a mixture of emotions during this phase. Some family members may feel relief during this phase, since the pre-deployment phase was so intense. They may feel that they can now go on with their lives, instead of counting down the days until the soldier departs. However, family members can also feel numb, sad, or alone during this time, since this may be the first time they are actually without the missing member. There may be sleep difficulties, as well as security and safety issues (Johnson, n.d.).

Family members are also left with changing roles, responsibilities, and routines. Extended family may be needed to help with the guardianship of the children. According to research by The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (n.d.), this may further contribute to the changes within the family. This can make it especially hard for children. Due to these transitional changes, they may feel that their lives are disorganized and chaotic. Children usually look to the remaining parent or other family members for a model of how to respond to this phase. If the remaining parent or family is having a very difficult time with this phase, the children usually follow suit. Older children often feel the need to assume the role of the missing

parent. While some extra responsibility may be beneficial, too much can create problems by blurring the line between parent and child. Schools need to be especially vigilant during this time in order to help the children through this phase (Kennedy, 2007).

During the deployment phase, counselors may want to help the child make a memory book that can be shared with the loved one when he or she returns home. Along the same lines, the child may start a journal to share with the loved one so he or she feels more connected to what is going on. The child could also write letters or make cards for the loved one. Counselors may want to ask the remaining parent or guardian to supply the school with addressed, stamped envelopes so that the student can send letters, cards, newsletters, artwork, or notes from the teacher to the deployed family member (Kennedy, 2007). Perhaps another way to keep the deployed loved one connected is to have a special section of the school's website devoted to military families. Information such as a calendar of school events, classroom pictures, or descriptions of special events or activities could be posted for the deployed family member. Classmates and teachers could also post messages for the family (Surlles & Akers, 2003).

Counselors or teachers may also want to start a pen pal program between the class and the deployed family member. Students could ask the military member if they can send coins, stamps, pictures or other information from the region of deployment for class activities (Kennedy, 2007). Another generous idea is to develop a school-wide collection of letters, snacks, and reading materials for deployed troops (Allen & Staley, 2007).

Since children may also need support from classmates, counselors may create a support bulletin board where students can post comments for the deployed parent or child of a deployed parent (Hayes, 2007). Similarly, a "Proud to be a Military Kid" bulletin board may also be created for children to post pictures of military family members (Kennedy, 2007).

*Sustainment.* Sustainment refers to the first month of deployment until the last month of deployment (Johnson, n.d.). During sustainment some sources of support fade, while new sources of support are being found (Stroul, 2006; Johnson, n.d.). Many times, the extended family and friends who were there to support the family during the pre-deployment and deployment phases return their focus to their own lives. As time passes, fewer people stop by, calls and emails come less frequently, and sustainment becomes a way of life. The family adjusts to the transition and new routines and roles emerge. The family of the deployed military personnel then finds sources of support in new places (Stroul, 2006).

After the chaos of increased responsibility during the deployment stage, many families settle into the new routines and responsibilities during the sustainment phase. Many times, children take pride in their independence, new responsibilities, and their ability to help the family. The spouse left at home may also feel a new sense of confidence and a feeling of hopefulness that he or she can make it through this tough time (Stroul, 2006).

During the sustainment phase, it is important that children are able to continue with activities they participated in before the deployment of their family member (Stroul, 2006; Hayes, 2007). Although they have newfound responsibility, this needs to be balanced with enjoyable activities. If they do not have time for these previous activities, children may blame or resent the deployed family member. However, if they continue with their scheduled activities, it may provide structure and routine while also providing a distraction from their worries about the deployed family member.

In light of recent extended deployments, parents and educators also need to be prepared for the possibility of the deployment being extended for an additional six months (Surles & Akers, 2003). This extended absence may bring out emotions and behaviors that were seen

during the pre-deployment stage. It is important for the adult caregiver to put the extension into perspective. For example, letting the child know that the loved one has already been gone nine months and the extension is opportunity to continue to grow as a family.

During the sustainment phase, counselors may want to help children continue projects started during the deployment stage, such as journals, scrapbooks, cards and letters, pen pal programs, care packages, support bulletin boards, and websites. The family could be invited to explain their experiences and talk with others in a similar situation (Kennedy, 2007). A patriotic gesture may be to have an "American Spirit Day" and encourage the children to dress in red, white, and blue (Allen & Staley, 2007).

*Reunion.* The reunion stage actually starts about a month before the soldier is scheduled to return home and extends through the time he or she actually returns home (Surles & Akers, 2003). This stage is also known as re-entry transition according to some literature (Stroul, 2006; Johnson, n.d.). This stage can elicit mixed emotions as well. Family members may be excited to see the family member again; however, they may also be worried or anxious about the reunion (Surles & Akers, 2003). Family of the deployed loved one may feel a burst of energy in reaction to the anticipation of his or her return. Many times, family members engage in nesting, or trying to make everything perfect for the soldier's return (Stroul, 2006; Johnson, n.d.).

Although there can be many positive emotions as the soldier's arrival date nears, there may also be issues that need to be addressed. Children tend to be easily distracted during this stage. They may have problems concentrating and/or difficulty making decisions. Children may also be worried about the reunion. Many times children wonder if their parent has changed or if they will recognize them. Older children or spouses may worry about what the soldier has been through and how it will affect them at home (Surles & Akers, 2003). There may also be some

romanticizing about the reunion. Children commonly assume that all problems will be solved when the soldier returns home (Stroul, 2006). Even if there do not seem to be lingering issues, children usually assume that the transition will be an easy one. It is important to help the child understand that it will take time to readjust. Working on this concept should start before the family member returns home. Again, parents and educators should also be ready for the possibility of an extension on the soldier's deployment during this stage (Surles & Akers, 2003).

In preparation for the return of the loved one, counselors may want to help children continue projects started during earlier stages, as well as decorate the school with yellow ribbons, which the child can show to the loved one upon his or her return (Allen & Staley, 2007). Counselors may also want to have a bowl of Hershey's hugs and kisses, with one hug or kiss to represent each day until the loved one's return. Then, the child can count down the days until the loved one is home by having a hug or kiss from the loved one each day (Surles & Akers, 2003). This could be started earlier, but just make sure the child is not overwhelmed by the amount of candy or days left.

*Post-deployment.* The final stage, post-deployment, begins with the return of the soldier. The length of this stage varies, but typically lasts three to six months (Johnson, n.d.). Like the other stages, numerous emotions and behaviors may be displayed during this stage. This stage can start with a honeymoon-like phase, when everyone is full of excitement and happiness with the family member's return (Johnson, n.d.). However, the readjustment for the family members and for the soldier can take a toll on the family.

Since the family has gotten used to the new responsibilities around the house, they may feel a loss of independence when the soldier returns home (Stroul, 2006). The children may also have a hard time going to the newly returned parent for help since they have made a habit of

going to the other parent (Surlles & Akers, 2003). It is important to encourage the child to go to either parent for help. It is also important that all of the family members are patient with each other, as the transition back into a whole family tends to be a slow process.

It will also take time for the soldier to readjust to life at home. It is not unusual for returning soldiers to need some time alone to deal with what they have experienced (Stroul, 2006). The family should be aware of this so they do not misinterpret time alone as pushing them away. The soldier must also transition back into being a parent, since it may have felt like he or she had little responsibility for the children throughout the deployment. It may be easy for the parent to spoil the children and not hold them accountable for their actions. The returning soldier may also feel like he or she is unneeded in the home, since all of the responsibilities have been claimed by the rest of the family (Kennedy, 2007).

Another issue could arise if there were different rules while the family member was deployed. If the returning parent sets stricter rules, he or she may be met with resistance. If the children are very young, they may not know the parent when he or she returns (Stroul, 2006). This may create a whole list of other emotions for the returning parent. Although many of these issues directly impact the returning parent, they can indirectly affect the rest of the family by affecting the returning soldier's emotions. It is important that the rest of the family understands that the returning parent is also going through a lot of emotions during this period.

With the return of soldiers, much too often there is a need for adjustment to their mental or physical injuries, as well. The soldier may have to adjust to life with a disability while adjusting back to family life altogether. The family has to learn to accept the disability, as well. Many times, soldiers with severe injuries must remain hospitalized once back in the United States. In many cases, this hospitalization will occur outside of their state of residence

(Lawrence, 2006). The other parent may decide to leave the family with other caregivers to be with the returning soldier. This will require another adjustment period. Children may also be afraid of what their parent will look like with the injury or they may not be prepared to cope with post traumatic stress or a physical disability in some cases (Lawrence, 2006).

There is also always the possibility of the soldier being killed during deployment. This, of course, could happen during any stage of deployment. Although this is a real and necessary topic, it will not be covered in this paper due to the length of the discussion that would be needed to cover this sensitive topic. Counselors will be best equipped to deal with this situation if they have a crisis plan in place.

After the reunion, counselors or teachers may want to invite the returned parent to talk to the class (Surles & Akers, 2003). The child can share all of the projects, such as the bulletin boards, decorations, time capsule, and pictures with the returning parent. It may also be helpful to talk to the child about what helped the most during the process, in case of redeployment. The child may also want to be available to talk to students who have recently heard about the possibility of deployment or recently had a parent deployed.

### *Redeployment*

Redeployment, which means the soldier's unit is activated for deployment again, is also a concern for military families. In the past, redeployments were not as prominent as they are today. The recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have contributed largely to this trend since third, fourth, or even fifth redeployments are not uncommon (Lawrence, 2006). Returning to a hazardous zone can take a toll on the soldier, who may not be totally adjusted back to life as a civilian (Hayes, 2007). Redeployment would put the family back into the cycle at the pre-deployment stage. However, an individual may react to multiple deployments differently than the original

deployment. Even though the family has been through deployment before, it is still very important to help and support the family during this time. Educators still need to be watchful for symptoms of maladjustment.

School counselors may find that previous activities used during redeployment would be helpful again. It may be wise to ask or take notes on which activities helped the child during the previous deployment as it is important to remember that the child may be just as anxious or scared during the current redeployment. The child may also react differently than previous deployments.

### *How Educators Can Help Children of Military Families*

Since children spend a significant part of their time at school, it is imperative that educators help and support children through deployment. Schools are often one of the few places children of deployed parents can find stability and routine (Surles & Akers, 2003). This section offers general suggestions that can be practiced by a variety of individuals, including counselors, teachers, support staff, coaches, administration, and other educators.

Generally speaking, there are many things educators can do to support students during the different stages of deployment. Individuals need to remember to be sensitive to these children who are facing so many pressures (Surles & Akers, 2003). Adults need to remember to monitor their views about wars and the military when around children (Kennedy, 2007). When children hear others disagree with the war, they may feel confused about what their loved one is doing or feel their loved one is doing something that is wrong. They may also feel angry at the person who said it (D'Andrea & Daniels, 1992). They may also feel that they cannot talk to anyone about their feelings, since wars tend to be controversial subjects. However, censoring all political views should not mean that people cannot talk about the military or wars. It can actually help

children if people ask thoughtful questions about their needs (Surles & Akers, 2003). Individuals should also ensure the child feels that someone is listening to him or her. By doing so, it is more likely the child will feel comfortable with the person and ask for assistance if needed. Although talking about the child's experience can be beneficial, potentially painful topics should be brought up by the child when he or she is ready (Surles & Akers, 2003). Children are usually fully aware of the risks their loved ones face; therefore, others do not need to remind them by asking painful questions, criticizing the military operations, or calling attention to the latest number of injuries or deaths.

Much like raising awareness of adult conversations and opinions about the war in front of children, it is also important to monitor what the children are seeing or reading about the war (The National Association of School Psychologists, 2002; Surles & Akers, 2003; Educator's Guide, n.d.). This could be in the form of television broadcasts, newspaper articles, or magazine articles, for example. Many times, these forms of media show tragic pictures and remind the public of how many soldiers have lost their lives or have been injured. This information is usually meant for the adult population. It is important that this information is appropriate for children, especially if they have a loved one who is deployed.

It is also important for individuals who see the children on a regular basis to keep in contact with the remaining parent or guardian, and vice versa (Allen & Staley, 2007). This allows one to monitor the children's reactions to see if they are able to successfully move past the current situation. Open lines of communication ensure the child is being supported at home and at school. Supporting the military children emotionally is very beneficial to their adjustment. If the children simply know that someone cares enough to talk to and listen to them, it can make a world of a difference. "Children who receive emotional support are also more likely to

maintain their academic performance even during difficult times” (Allen & Staley, 2007, p. 84). By maintaining open lines of communication, the adults in the children’s lives can be sure their emotional needs are being met.

Every individual who comes in contact with the military family can help provide the family with a strong network (Surles & Akers, 2003). Most citizens do not know about all of the community resources available to them. By building networks, the family can be connected to the resources that are greatly needed during this time. Schools generally have strong connections to community agencies. It is important to provide resource lists of agencies to the families and to also raise awareness of needs by connecting them with the community resources (Stroul, 2006).

It is essential that adults around the children lead by example. It has been shown that children’s experiences are greatly influenced by how adults respond to the crisis, according to information by The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (n.d.). Adults should practice being calm and in control (The National Association of School Psychologists, 2002). This does not mean that adults should be overly happy about the situation—they should still be honest and genuine about it. However, they should model how to cope with stress so the children can witness appropriate stress management skills.

Schools should not be afraid to modify educational structure for a child with a deployed loved one (The National Association of School Psychologists, 2002). Although it is beneficial to try to maintain the regular routines, children also need some flexibility during tough phases. Having tough tests or major projects during highly stressful times is not in the best interest of the child. Since children are most likely distracted during certain times, work loads may need to be decreased. Lessons may also be made shorter and slowed down to help the child get the most out of them (Educator’s Guide, n.d.). Allow for some leniency in order to keep school stressors

down when personal stressors are high. A specialized team of teachers, counselors, psychologists, and family members may also be beneficial when meeting the needs of the child with a parent on military deployment (The National Association of School Psychologists, 2002).

Although the previous recommendations can be done everyday by educators who have contact with the children, it is beneficial to do special activities as well. In order to help school personnel support children of military families, possible activities correlated with the stages of deployment should be explored.

### Chapter III: Summary, Discussion, and Recommendations

This chapter will summarize the key points from the literature review, including the stages of transition in deployment and redeployment. A discussion of ideas for school counselors and other educators working with children within military families will be presented.

Recommendations for future research will also be included.

#### *Summary of Key Points*

It is critical that the 1.2 million children of active duty service members in the United States (Stroul, 2006) are being supported. Since they spend a large amount of their time at school, it is important for school personnel to understand what they are going through and to know strategies to support them during this challenging time. Students who need to relocate to another school district and live with extended family members present unique challenges. Stress and anxiety during the transition of moving or deployment can impact student learning in the classroom. Some school personnel are unsure of what to do to help these children.

The first step is to understand a bit more about the lives of these families. Since many children experience loss during deployment, it is important for educators to understand the phases of grief. The first phase is the numbness phase, which is typically marked by shock and disbelief (D'Andrea & Daniels, 1992). Children have a hard time believing that their parent is going to leaving for a long period of time. They may appear distracted and preoccupied during this phase. Next is the yearning phase, which emerges when the numbness and shock dissipates. Children may be more disruptive during this phase due to the strong emotions they are experiencing. Following the yearning phase is the disorientation and depression phase. Children are apt to be more realistic during this phase, accepting that the deployment will soon happen, which may lead to depression about the situation. The final phase is the reorganization phase.

During this phase, children typically overcome the negative emotions from previous phases. They are able to see positive aspects from their experience (D'Andrea & Daniels, 1992). By keeping these phases of grief in mind, educators can help children grow from their experiences.

Since deployment is a significant time of stress for the family, the adults within the child's life should understand the stages of deployment. Adults should also remember that a variety of emotions and behaviors can accompany each of these stages. The stages start with the pre-deployment stage, which is when the soldier and his or her family find out deployment will occur and extends through the actual deployment (Johnson, n.d.). This stage is usually marked by great sadness and apprehension. Next is the deployment stage, which is when the actual deployment occurs. This stage lasts through the first month of deployment (Johnson, n.d.). This can be an intense stage as well. Emotions can range from heartbreak to relief. The sustainment stage lasts from the first month to the last month of deployment (Johnson, n.d.). Family members readjust to life without the deployed family member. New routines and responsibilities are established during this stage (Stroul, 2006). The reunion stage starts about a month before the soldier is scheduled to return home and ends with the return of the soldier (Surles & Akers, 2003). Family members typically feel excitement and nervousness about the reunion. The final stage is post-deployment, which begins with the return of the soldier and lasts three to six months afterwards (Johnson, n.d.). This is another readjustment period that is full of mixed emotions. Patience with one another is especially needed during this stage. Families and friends also need to be prepared for the possibility of extended duty, injury, redeployment, and death. Despite certain emotions typically seen during each stage, adults need to remember that children have a variety of reactions (Educator's Guide, n.d.).

Educators and other adults can support children in multiple ways. First, they should remember to monitor expressing their views of the military and war when around children (Kennedy, 2007). They should also be aware of what the children are seeing and hearing on television, in newspapers, and in magazines (The National Association of School Psychologists, 2002; Surles & Akers, 2003; Educator's Guide, n.d.). Simply listening to the child's concerns and asking about what he or she might need are other ways to support the child (Surles & Akers, 2003). Adults should also provide a model for dealing with stress (The National Association of School Psychologists, 2002). Schools should be sensitive to the child and be willing to modify his or her educational plan during trying times (The National Association of School Psychologists, 2002). Above all, it is important to stay in contact with the family so the adults in the child's life are updated on the status of the deployed parent (Allen & Staley, 2007). This allows adults to monitor the child's reactions more closely during difficult times. By staying in contact with the family, networking can also be accomplished (Surles & Akers, 2003). By taking these suggestions into account when working with a child with a deployed loved one, the transitions through the stages are made a bit easier.

### *Discussion*

The literature reviewed indicated the variety of needs and range of emotions children may experience in military families. In addition, each child experiences different circumstances and will therefore react differently depending on their age, family status, and emotional state. It is important that these emotions and behaviors are not inappropriately generalized to all children who come from military families.

It is beneficial for counselors, teachers, administration, and support staff within schools to understand the lives of military families and the emotions and reactions they can expect from

these children. It is vital for these adults to know what kind of interventions or modifications should be made when children of military families are having a tough time in school.

By having one-on-one time with counselors, children are less likely to feel isolated. Having a safe place to discuss thoughts and concerns will help the child learn the most from the situation. Although the child may be encouraged to talk about his or her feelings at home, it may be valuable to also converse with a counselor, who may be seen as an outsider to the child.

It is also beneficial for children to feel that their classmates support and understand their situation. By employing activities the whole class or school can engage in, the student will feel support from sources other than adults, as well. Offering counseling support groups for children in similar situations has benefits, too.

### *Recommendations*

Further research on children of military families should focus on the unique challenges faced by families in various circumstances. With the information available on the stages of deployment, adults within the child's life can better understand the child's emotions and behaviors. This, in turn, can help the adults provide the support the child needs to transition successfully through the stages.

There is also an abundance of specific ideas and counseling strategies that adults can offer children to help them process their experiences. However, there does not seem to be any empirical research about what strategies work best with certain situations. Also, as more information is learned on post traumatic stress, injuries and physical disabilities, and loss of life, children will continue to be impacted by the trauma of war. More research in the area of emotional and physical adjustments of returning soldiers and the impact on family members will continue to add to the future stability of the children. Adjusting to post-deployment is also an

area that is in need of more research. Families may need to modify their lives to include a family member with mental illness, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, or a disability. While these circumstances require a great deal of adjustment, some families must adjust to life without the family member due to loss of life. All of these issues present opportunities or obstacles for professional educators in the school setting. Advocating for all children includes furthering research on these topics to assist with transitions, emotional stability, and opportunities for strong performance in the classroom.

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