



## Military Families and PTA Toolkit



### TOOL #1. PRIDE..."We are proud of our parents."

There aren't many careers where teens learn how to identify an aircraft or explain rank. The military culture is so unique that being part of it makes you feel kind of special. Throw in terms like "American hero" and it's easy to see why teens say they are proud of the job their parents do for the country.

Teens have complicated emotions relating to their military parents sometimes, for example, resenting parents for missing important events while at the same time being proud of the work they are doing.

Military teens overwhelmingly name their military parent as a positive role model. As someone who works with teens, you know these years can be tumultuous. Ensuring they have a support structure when they may not have extended family or their military parent around is critical.

#### Strengthen the bond with parents with these strategies:

... Invite the military parent to your organization to talk about the role they play in the Service. This can be especially helpful when the parent comes home from a deployment. It gives the teen a chance to show how proud they are of their parent without saying a word.

... Distinguish between the parent's service and politics of war. Youth are able to separate the two and be proud of their military parent without necessarily agreeing with the country's decision makers. Understand that military families, like many families, are divided in their position on the war. Still, political statements can be taken negatively if they are perceived to be "against" the Service. Using statements that recognize the duty of a service member such as, "While our service members have done incredible work," and then talking about the bigger issues of politics and American involvement in global conflict shows you are sensitive to the division between duty and debate.

... Military kids understand the value of service to others. Develop that understanding by letting them lead a community service event.

... Highlight local heroes like firemen and police officers, along with military service members, to show military youth they are part of an even larger supportive community of public servants who live with some uncertainty about safety and absence from the family. Invite those teens, along with military teens, for a roundtable discussion about public service.

... Create a column in your organization's newsletter, blog, or magazine that discusses military life. Let military teens contribute personal essays.

Along with the tips you'll find in this toolkit, the best thing you can do for a military teen is know who they are and be there when they need someone to talk to.

**Resources:**

**NMFA Family of the Year Award** – nominate an extraordinary military family for a cash prize and a trip to Washington D.C. at [www.nmfa.org/familyaward](http://www.nmfa.org/familyaward).

**"My Hero: Military Kids Write About Their Moms and Dads"** by Allen Appel and Mark Rothmiller – Armed Services YMCA (ASYMCA) youth tell heartwarming and candid stories about their military parents. For more information about the ASYMCA's annual art and essay contests go to [www.asymca.org](http://www.asymca.org).

**NMFA Very Important Patriot (VIP) Award** program – service members and their family members who are at least 18 years old are eligible to be nominated for the VIP award. VIP winners exemplify extraordinary volunteer service to their military or neighboring community. Nominate a VIP at [www.nmfa.org/vip](http://www.nmfa.org/vip).

Reference: National Military Family Association Teen Toolkit

**"My Mom wouldn't be in Iraq if she wasn't thinking about us!"**

