

MILITARY FAMILIES, CHILDREN AND PTA

By Kathy Allred, Utah PTA Military Family Specialist, National PTA Military Family Support Committee,
kathy@utahpta.org

The life of military families and children has always had challenges, foremost among them being frequent relocations and separations. Every time military families move, children have to adapt, make new friends, get used to new schools, and find new clubs and teams to join. It is hard for kids to have to rebuild their world every time and find their place in it. Having a PTA board member as a Military Family Appointee or Specialist provides a powerful opportunity to raise awareness and build support to help these children meet the unique challenges they face! It is an opportunity to recognize military children and youth for their heroism, character, courage, sacrifices and resilience.

Did you know?

- Two million military children have experienced a parental deployment since 2001.
- There are currently 1.7 million military children of active duty members worldwide.
- Nearly 80 percent of military children attend public schools throughout the United States.
- The average military family moves three times more often than their civilian counterpart.
- The repeated and extended separations and increased hazards of deployment compound stressors in military children's lives.
- One third of school-age military children show psychosocial behaviors such as being anxious, worrying often, crying more, and/or acting out.
- The U.S. military consists of approximately 1.4 million active duty service members and 810,000 National Guard and Selected Reserve. Usually Active Duty military families live on or near military installations. National Guard and Reserve families might never live near a military installation, and look within their community for educational services, friendship and support.
- A positive school environment, built upon caring relationships among all participants—students, teachers, staff, administrators, parents and community members—has been shown to impact not only academic performance but also positively influence emotions and behaviors of military connected students.
- Supporting the military child takes a school-wide and community-wide effort, and professional development opportunities to inform school staff of the academic and social-emotional challenges military children face.



Utah PTA has a Military Family Specialist and we encourage all local PTAs to have one. On our website, www.utahpta.org, under Programs then Military Families, you will find numerous ideas and resources to help all school personnel, PTA leaders and members understand, identify and recognize these military families and children. In Utah there are over 18,000 children who have one or more parents, step-parents, siblings, or extended family members on full-time duty status in the military, including members of the National Guard and Reserves on active duty. Help us to help them!

UTAH PTA SUPPORTS OUR MILITARY FAMILIES

What are the challenges our Military Families face? They face frequent relocations, educational inconsistencies—different school systems, adjusting to new neighbors and communities, leaving friends and making new friends, family separations, grandparents as care givers, disability or loss of family member and many other challenges.

What can PTA do? Communicate with military families, educate the community, advocate eliminating nation-wide educational inconsistencies, and being a source of information and support.

How do we reach and include them? Identify them, and find out who they are. Invite them, welcome them, and ask them to participate. Inform them of events and programs and communicate with them. Involve them, because volunteering is what they do. Include them, because no job is too small to use their skills.

How does PTA benefit Military Families? PTA supports them by reaching out to them. PTA sustains them by being there for them. PTA leaders and members recognize and honor their sacrifice and acknowledge their service.

Ideas to Celebrate and Recognize Military Families and Children

1. Have a patriotic program in a School Assembly (See *Planning Assembly* on website: www.utahpta.org) and wear a camouflage ribbon or article of clothing on Assembly Day, or on Veteran's Day, President's Day or any patriotic day.
2. Have the students wear red, white and blue to school and have each child describe what each color means to them. Then discuss the real meaning of the colors.
3. Have students create artwork that promotes patriotism and display it in the classroom and/or school. This could be done anytime during the school year but throughout November, Military Family Month or April, the Month of the Military Child, or around any patriotic holiday it would be especially meaningful.
4. Encourage the reading of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States.
5. Present a patriotic play or story in class prior to Armed Forces Day, Veteran's Day, Flag Day or Memorial Day.
6. Have a "Take Your Veteran to School Day" (See ideas on website: www.utahpta.org) Suggest veteran wear his/her military uniform to the assembly, or a program or to the child's classroom. The child could introduce him/her.
7. Have students write a paper on "Serving our Nation" by interviewing a former or current member of the military.
8. Sing a patriotic song, or learn a dance or memorize a patriotic poem as a class.
9. Have students write a paragraph, poem or short story about, "Why I am Grateful to Those in Military Service".
10. Invite a student's military family member to the class to explain what their military service meant/means to them.
11. Have the students write a letter, as a class or individually, to a soldier. (Mailing addresses can be provided)

Celebrate Patriotic holidays and/or Military Family Month in November and Month of the Military Child in April
(See ideas, planning timelines and suggested patriotic program on website: www.utahpta.org)

National PTA Supports our Military Families by creating and continuing The National PTA® Military Alliance for Parents and Partners. This is a group of organizations that work together to provide resources to and advocate for military-connected families. MAPP develops collaborative strategy to create awareness of military families and their needs. National PTA has a Military Family Support Committee. Along with MAPP, it serves military families and PTA by providing and developing resources that will help and support them.

The participants include: **AUSA:** [Association of the United States Army](#), **DoDEA:** [U.S. Department of Defense Education Activity](#), **MCEC:** [Military Children Education Coalition](#), **MISA:** [Military Impacted Schools Association](#), and the **NMFA:** [National Military Family Association](#)

Resources on the Internet: Utah PTA: www.utahpta.org, National PTA: www.pta.org, Military Children Education Coalition: www.militarychild.org, National Military Family Association: www.militaryfamily.org, Military Impacted Schools Association: www.militaryimpactedschoolsassociation.org, U.S. Department of Defense Education Activity: www.dodea.edu.org.