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Military Children and School

Posted by: **Dr. James Bender** | Psychologist

Friday, July 16, 2010

*This post is republished from the **DCoE blog**. Dr. James Bender recently returned from Iraq after spending 12 months as the brigade psychologist for the 4-1 CAV out of Ft Hood. He served for four and a half years in the Army. During his deployment, he traveled through Southern Iraq, from Basra to Baghdad and many spots in between. He writes a monthly post for the **DCoE Blog** on mental health issues related to deployment and being in the military.*

According to Department of Defense (DoD) officials, more than **90 percent of military children** attend public, private and charter schools (non-DoD schools). Losing a parent for a year is tough on kids and while many children do well during the year, some kids struggle with school. This month, I'm focusing on military children in non-DoD schools, guard and reserve kids in particular, and what you can do to help.

Children of guardsmen and reservists often live in places where there is less community support, as opposed to other military children, who can share their issues with a community of people dealing with the same challenges. Even if the children of an active-duty service member attend a non-DoD school, they almost certainly have many classmates who are military children. Teachers at these schools usually gain expertise about the unique challenges these military kids face. Also, these children come back at night to a base community with kids who are going through the same things they are. A child of a guardsman or reservist doesn't have the same advantages and may be in a school where teachers don't understand how deployment can impact school performance.

The below are tips that you can use to help your non-DoD school understand the stresses that your child faces and can be used by all military parents. I especially encourage guard and reserve parents to take note, as it is critical for you to proactively build supportive and understanding networks for your child.

- Talk to your child's teachers and educate them on the impact deployment has on kids. You can show the teachers this blog post.
- There's help out there for your kids. There is free online tutoring available 24/7 at www.tutor.com/military.
- www.militarystudent.org is a website for parents and teachers with lots of tips about special challenges military kids face
- If possible, don't pull your kids out of school for vacations or non-emergencies. You should send a message that attendance is important and school is their job.
- Encourage extra-curricular activities. These tend to increase school attendance and foster friendships. You may want to check out www.ourmilitarykids.org/, which provides grants for enrichment activities and tutoring for guard and reserve children.
- Keep track of your child's school progress. Do homework together, look at tests, and know what grades your child is getting. Children with involved parents generally have much higher grades than children whose parents are not involved.
- Link your child's schoolwork to the deployment. For example, have your child do a book report on the history of Iraq or the climate in Afghanistan. You can also incorporate schoolwork into your child's communications with the deployed parent. For example, you can say: "Dad's good at science, let's ask him for help with your homework when we talk to him tomorrow."

Deployment is a challenge for children. But there are things you can do to ease the burden and make sure academic performance stays on track.

I want to thank military members, spouses and children for your sacrifice. I'll write again next month.

*Guardsmen and reservists, be sure to check out DCoE's **Web page** devoted especially to you. There you'll find fact sheets, links to valuable resources and more.

*Also, be sure to stay tuned for our July edition of "DCoE in Action," where you'll find more content on all things guard and reserve.