

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Marines

## Challenges Faced by Military Families: Perceptions of United States Marine Corps School Liaisons

Aronson, K. R., & Perkins, D. F. (2013). Challenges faced by military families: Perceptions of United States Marine Corps school liaisons. *Journal of Child Family Studies*, 22(4), 516-525. doi:10.1007/s10826-012-9605-1

**SUMMARY:** Children of Service members must navigate many stressors and transitions, which prompted the U.S. Marine Corp to develop the school liaison program to promote academic success among children of Marines. A survey of Marine school liaisons regarding severity, frequency, and content of stressors experienced by Marine children and families suggests that school liaisons help children and families cope with a very broad range of stressors (e.g., academic, deployment-related, social, behavioral, emotional).

### KEY FINDINGS:

- School liaisons indicated that the most frequently encountered stressors for youth were school transitions (85%), anxiety about deployment (80%), disabilities (65%), and discipline problems at school (55%).
- The most severe stressors encountered for youth were special needs (85%), school transitions (80%), and discipline problems at school (60%).
- School liaisons indicated that the most frequently encountered stressors for military families were feeling overwhelmed (95%), long or multiple deployments (80%), and conflicts with schools or school policy (80%).
- The most severe stressors encountered for families were feeling overwhelmed (85%), conflicts with school (70%), and parenting problems (65%).

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide outreach programs that include school liaisons seeking out military families at risk and providing early intervention for problems and concerns
- Educate military parents about the effects of frequent and severe stressors on youth's academic, social, behavioral, and mental health functioning and how to help youth cope with these stressors
- Offer youth peer support groups in schools as a way for youth to provide support to each other as they encounter multiple periods of transitions (e.g., deployment, homecoming) in their families

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support the school liaison program and other military-community partnership programs to help youth and families cope with stressors
- Encourage the development of outreach school liaison programs for school liaisons to travel and assist military families, schools, and communities that are more remote or do not have easy access to other installation support programs
- Recommend professional development for school liaisons to receive trainings about how to best assist military youth and families in coping with stressors surrounding transitions

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## METHODS

- All Marine school liaisons were recruited via phone to complete a survey (40 minutes on average) regarding the functioning of the families they assist.
- Survey questions asked the liaisons to rate the severity, frequency, and content of stressors faced by children and families of Marine Service members.
- The number of school liaisons reporting each youth and family stressor as fairly or very frequent and moderately or very problematic was calculated.

## PARTICIPANTS

- All 20 currently employed Marine Corp school liaisons, who were 85% female and had an average age of 43 years (SD = 7.4), participated in the study; no race or ethnicity data was provided.
- Participants' average length of time in their position was 18 months (SD = 14.4), and they were located in seven states (17 different installations) in the United States, with two located in Japan.
- The majority of school liaisons (80%) had advanced degrees in the field of Education or Social Work.

## LIMITATIONS

- Families seeking assistance from Marine school liaisons are a self-selected group who typically encountered difficulties that led them to seek assistance; they may not be representative of all Marine families, possibly limiting generalizability of results.
- Marine families with access to school liaisons may differ in some ways from families without access to school liaison assistance, including living further from installations.
- Due to confidentiality restraints, no data on Marine family's demographic information, circumstances, or other stressors were gathered.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Evaluate the long-term effects of parent deployment-related stressors on youth across development
- Gather data regarding stressors of military youth and families from multiple informants (e.g., school liaisons, parents, youth, teachers, physicians) to understand how stressors of military families manifest and impact functioning across different settings
- Examine the impact of school liaisons' interventions and whether they are effective in decreasing stress of military families and children

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>