

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Perceived Outcomes of Military-Extension Adventure Camps for Military Personnel and Their Teenage Children

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SUMMARY: Military-Extension Adventure Camps provided an opportunity for military personnel who recently returned from deployment to reconnect with their teenagers. The camps used the Campfire Curriculum, and nightly campfire programs from the Blue to You curriculum for military families. Open-ended survey responses from parent participants suggested that time together with their children, interacting with fellow Service members and their kids, sharing stories, and opportunities for camaraderie were especially important and meaningful.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Parents noted that they developed better interaction skills, including listening and communicating in different ways with their teenagers.
- Camp activities and environments provided an outlet for parents to spend valuable time with their children, which parent hoped they could continue in their home environments.
- Parents found that through the camp activities they gained more of an appreciation for working together as a family team at all levels.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Expand opportunities for participation in the wilderness and adventure camps to pre-deployment or other critical points in military families' lives
- Increase access for more returning military personnel and their teens to attend adventure camps
- Utilize the adventure and wilderness therapy models for other military family and youth programming

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Build awareness among professionals working with military families of the importance of fostering family relationships and effective communication
- Continue support for opportunities for families to spend time together
- Continue to build civilian organization- military partnerships that support military members and their families

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited through flyers, e-mails, and presentations given by the camp coordinator.
- A survey that included three open-ended writing prompts about their experience at the camp was administered to all participants (n=28) on the last day of camp.
- Responses from each prompt were combined and coded and analyzed for common themes. A second researcher then coded responses to test for reliability of the themes, in which agreement was high.

PARTICIPANTS

- Eligibility criteria included having a child who participated in the adventure camp.
- Participants were parents ranging from 34-52 years old (n=28), 86% were married, 63% were male, 71% were White, 14% reported other or a mixed ethnicity, 7% Native American, 4% African-American, and 4% Hispanic.
- Service members were deployed with the Army (56%), National Guard (26%), Air Force (11%), and Navy (7%).

LIMITATIONS

- This study included only the parents' perspectives; therefore, it was not representative of all members of the family unit.
- The study did not include Service members with teenagers who did not participate in the Military-Adventure Camp.
- Only three questions were asked of parents about the Military-Adventure Camp experience and curriculum.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- A more detailed evaluation of the Campfire Curriculum, including how it was implemented and what the facilitators observed, would be helpful in replicating and improving the program.
- Including in future research adolescent reports regarding perceived outcomes of the camp would give a more holistic understanding of how the camp impacts the family system.
- Follow-up surveys at various times after the conclusion of the camps, such as one year later, could test the sustainability of change for camp participants.

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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