

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Civilian

## Parent Perspectives of Applying Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Strategies to Special Education

Burke, M.M., Chan, N., & Neece, C.L. (2017). Parent perspectives of applying mindfulness-based stress reduction strategies to special education. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 55(3), 167-180. doi:10.1352/1934-9556-55.3.167

**SUMMARY:** Interview data from parents who completed the mindfulness awareness for parenting stress (MAPS) program were utilized to explore whether participation reduced school-related stress in parents of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Parents who completed the MAPS program reported using mindfulness techniques to cope with stress during IEP (Individualized Education Program) meetings and that these techniques reduced school-related stress and increased positive outcomes (e.g., parental well-being).

### KEY FINDINGS:

- The majority of participants (69%) reported feeling stressed during IEP meetings; those who reported no stress during IEP meetings reported having positive and respectful relationships with school personnel.
- Seventy-three percent of participants used mindfulness strategies during IEP meetings; 54% remained nonreactive, 42% stayed in the moment, 38% used breathing techniques, 24% focused on the overall picture, and 12% took a break.
- Using mindfulness strategies during IEP meetings improved parental well-being (69%), parental advocacy skills (58%), the parent-teacher relationship (54%), and parent's ability to get their child services (27%).

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Collaborate with school personnel and military parents of children with IDD during IEP meetings
- Facilitate parenting support groups for military parents of children with IDD

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer mindfulness-based interventions to military parents of children with IDD to reduce school-related stress
- Disseminate information regarding the services and resources available to military parents who have a child with IDD

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs and services for military parents of children with IDD
- Recommend education for service providers regarding the effects of relocation on military families of children with IDD

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## METHODS

- Participants were recruited via the Inland Empire Regional Center, newspapers ads, elementary schools, and community disability groups.
- Parents could participate in the study if they had a child between the ages of two and a half to five years who had developmental delays with more than 10 parent identified behavioral issues.
- Parents could not be receiving any form of psychological or behavioral treatment prior to the intervention and had to agree to complete the MAPS program and the follow-up interview.
- The MAPS intervention included eight weekly two-hour sessions, a six-hour retreat, and daily meditation home practice.

## PARTICIPANTS

- This study included 26 parents who completed the MAPS program between the summer and fall of 2014.
- The majority of participants were female (92%) and White (46%).
- The mean age of participants was 37.14 (SD = 6.13).

## LIMITATIONS

- Results may not be generalizable due to the small sample size and use of convenience sampling within one state.
- The sample only included civilian parents and may not accurately reflect the experiences of military parents of children with IDD.
- This study did not report how many MAPS sessions parents attended, which could influence the results.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine ways to develop strong family-school partnerships to reduce school-related stress for military families of children with IDD
- Explore the efficacy of online mindfulness-based interventions at reducing school-related stress for military parents of children with IDD
- Investigate whether mindfulness-based intervention would benefit school personnel working with military families who have children with IDD

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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