

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Effects of a Military Parenting Program on Parental Distress and Suicidal Ideation: After Deployment Adaptive Parenting Tools

Gewirtz, A. H., DeGarmo, D. S., & Zamir, O. (2016). Effects of a military parenting program on parental distress and suicidal ideation: After deployment adaptive parenting tools. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 46(S1), S23-S31.  
doi:10.1111/sltb.12255

**SUMMARY:** A randomized controlled trial of the after deployment, adaptive parenting tools (ADAPT) program for deployed National Guard and Reserve (NG/R) families with a school-aged child was conducted. ADAPT is a 14 week multifamily group program targeting improvement of parenting skills that uses active teaching methods such as roleplay, practice, and discussion. Overall, the observed outcomes of the program went beyond just enhancing parenting skills.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Participants in the ADAPT program improved their locus of control (the extent to which a parent believed that they could control events affecting them) which led to reductions in mothers' and fathers' suicidal ideation at 12 months post-baseline.
- Parents improved locus of control was associated with fewer concurrent difficulties in emotion regulation (one's ability to control how they react within a given context).
- Mother's emotion regulation problems decreased as well as their posttraumatic stress disorder symptomatology.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Utilize active teaching methods such as role-play, practice, and discussion in programming with military families to facilitate the development of parenting skills
- Offer pre- and post-deployment support groups for deployed parents and their children
- Support programming for deployed parents that focuses on emotion regulation and parenting

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue support for effective parenting and mental health of military parents
- Build awareness across military branches around the importance of supporting and promoting mental health and effective parenting for Service members and their partners
- Recommend education of professionals (e.g. child caregivers, mental health, education professionals) on the possible effects of parents' emotion regulation and parenting during deployment and post-deployment

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



## METHODS

- Participants were recruited through presentations at pre-deployment and reintegration events for NG/R personnel, mailings, and social media.
- Following the baseline assessment, 60% of parents were randomized to the ADAPT condition and 40% to a services-as-usual condition.
- Analyses were conducted to look at whether or not the ADAPT intervention improved parent locus of control and reduced emotion regulation problems.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Eligibility criteria included having a child between age 5-12 years and one parent who had deployed to current conflicts since 2001.
- Out of the 336 participating military families, there were 294 fathers, and 314 mothers. Fathers were deployed in 96% of families, and mothers in 18%, and both in 13% of families.
- Most parents were deployed with the Army National Guard (59%), Army Reserves (30%), and Air National Guard (11%).

## LIMITATIONS

- The sample was limited to NG/R families from one state, Minnesota, with school-age children; therefore, not representative of the entire military population.
- The measures used for suicidal ideation and behavior were limited in scope, only one question, so results should be interpreted with care.
- The 12-month post-assessment was completed by 255 (81%) mothers and 226 (76.8%) fathers, which could have biased towards the outcomes of those who were motivated to complete the program.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Investigate the associations over time among parenting, emotion regulation, and deployment of both mothers and fathers
- Broaden access of the ADAPT program to other military branches in other states, to evaluate if the program has similar outcomes with these different populations
- Include deployed Service members and their young children to see if the program serves that population's needs

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:  
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>