

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
National  
Guard

## Improving Child Peer Adjustment in Military Families Through Parent Training: The Mediation Role of Parental Locus of Control

Piehler, T. F., Ausherbauer, K., Gewirtz, A., & Gliske, K. (2016). Improving child peer adjustment in military families through parent training: The mediational role of parental locus of control. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 1(22). doi:10.1177/0272431616678990

**SUMMARY:** There are many approaches to parent training that can help improve parents' and children's functioning. This study explored the intervention of parent training focused on parental locus of control in relation to positive social adjustment in children. Locus of control is a personal belief that individuals have power over the events that happens in their lives. Over 300 military families with a history of deployment participated in a study to examine improved social adjustment in children after parents received parent training. Results showed positive social adjustments in children whose parents received the intervention compared to children whose parent did not receive the intervention.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Participation in ADAPT (After Deployment Adaptive Parenting Tools), a parenting program for deployed military parents, prompted a series of changes for the family. The intervention training demonstrated an increase of parental locus of control which led to improvements in children's positive social adjustment at six and twelve month posttests.
- Early locus of control improvements for mothers led to improvements in a child's positive social adjustment six months later; however, fathers did not have similar changes in their locus of control.
- Mothers' increased locus of control was associated with an increased ability to direct their child to act in prosocial ways, increased general social skills, improved prosocial connections with peers, and a reduction in the prospect of association with antisocial peers.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide parent education for Service members after deployment to strengthen positive social adjustment for their children
- Develop programs that emphasize improvements on the internal locus of control for parents, especially mothers (eg. parent believes that he or she can influence events and outcomes in their child's behavior)
- Provide additional parental support to fathers post deployment to foster positive social adjustment

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage programs that teach military parents how to foster positive social adjustment
- Develop and support programs that include a focus on the internal locus of control for parents
- Continue the development of research-based parenting classes for Service members who have spent time away from their children

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## METHODS

- Participants were recruited by word of mouth, print and local media, social media postings, reintegration events, mailings from Veterans Affairs Medical Center. Participants completed an online survey.
- Sixty percent of the eligible participants participated in the intervention group while 40% were the control group.
- The ADAPT intervention group received print and electronic parenting resources in addition to weekly two hour group intervention sessions over 14 weeks period.
- All participants completed online surveys at six months post-baseline, while both online surveys and in-home assessments were given 12 months after the baseline assessment.

## PARTICIPANTS

- The sample consisted of 336 families at the time of enrollment, which included 313 mothers, 294 fathers, and 336 children.
- Families were eligible for the trial if they had at least one child between the ages of 5 and 12 years and at least one parent deployed in a combat zone since 2001. Eighty-three percent of the families were married.
- Children in the study had an average age of 8.3 years. Seventy-nine percent of the children were White. Almost all children included in the study experienced at least one parent deployment (92%), with only 8% of children born post deployment.

## LIMITATIONS

- The data were dependent on parent self-reporting of their locus of control and child's social adjustment assessments. Parents reporting both variables could introduce bias among the results.
- The requirements to participate were limited to National Guard and Reserve Component families with school-age children; limiting the ability to generalize to Active Duty parents and those with younger children or older adolescents.
- Results of the study did not include the level of parental participation or other levels of intervention engagement, which limits the ability to understand other variables that may have influenced the results.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Gather data to include reports from children and children's teacher(s)
- Investigate more factors that may impact fathers levels of locus of control after parent training
- Continue to examine long-term effects of parenting interventions

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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