

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Helping Military Families Who Have a Child With a Disability Cope With Stress

Russo, T. J., & Fallon, M. A. (2001). Helping military families who have a child with a disability cope with stress. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 29(1), 3-8. doi:10.1023/a:1011348620920

**SUMMARY:** The Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) is a program that offers resources to military families who have a child with special needs. This study investigated the interaction between military-related stress and the stress of having a young child with a disability and how effective EFMP is at addressing that interaction. Results suggest that military families who have a child with a disability experience more stress than their counterparts who do not have a child with a disability and that EFMP is effective in helping these families.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Families who participated in EFMP reported significantly less stress from military-related events such as deployment and separation from family than those who did not participate.
- Military families who have a young child with a disability have higher levels of stress than those without a young child with a disability.
- Participants enrolled in EFMP were more resilient to stressful events such as their job situation, poor health, and relocations than those who did not participate in the service.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Create events that allow for military parents who have children with a disability to connect with other parents with similar experiences and build a support system
- Offer workshops to military parents to improve interactions with their young children
- Educate military family members about practical strategies for common caregiving issues

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that strengthen families with children with special needs to ensure that these families are able to receive services regardless of where they are stationed
- Promote the development of programs that can help alleviate the burden of stressful events, such as relocation, for military families
- Encourage professionals to explore the sources of stress and the resources necessary to moderate the stress related to being military parents who have children with a disability

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## METHODS

- Participants were drawn from a larger study of health and nutrition of preschool children in military families, which recruited military parents who had a child born between 1990 and 1992. The specifics of their recruitment methods are unknown.
- A questionnaire assessing level of stress associated with military life and having a child with a disability was sent via mail to 10,691 parents, of which 253 self-identified as having a child with a disability.
- Data were analyzed by comparing parents whose child with a disability was enrolled in the EFMP to those not enrolled in the program.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Researchers selected 253 Active Duty military parents who had a child with a disability; the military branch was not specified.
- The gender of parent respondents were 69% female and 31% male, the ages and ethnic backgrounds were not specified.
- Parents reported about their children who were 3 years and under (25%) and 4-6 years old (75%). There was no further information on gender or ethnicity for the children.

## LIMITATIONS

- This study did not gather thorough information on participant demographics so it is impossible to know if findings can be generalized to all race or ethnicities and both genders of children.
- There were no data collected on what military branch the Service members were recruited from making it difficult to know what populations the results apply to.
- The data collected were from self-reported measures leaving room for biases.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the military parents' feelings about the demands of their lives
- Explore how different services and professionals help military families adjust to the demands of both military life and family life
- Include multiple military branches and specify the demographics used in participants to better be able to generalize findings to multiple populations

## 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>