

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Passport Toward Success: Description and Evaluation of a Program Designed to Help Children and Families Reconnect After a Military Deployment

Wilson, S. R., Wilkum, K., Chernicky, S. M., MacDermid Wadsworth, S. M., & Broniarczyk, K. M. (2011). Passport Toward Success: Description and evaluation of a program designed to help children and families reconnect after military deployment. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 39(3), 223-249. doi:10.1080/00909882.2011.585399

**SUMMARY:** Children and adolescents of National Guard members who recently returned from deployment participated in the Passport Towards Success (PTS) program, which teaches youth strategies for effective coping, problem-solving, and emotional expression. Adolescents of deployed parents experienced a range of emotional and behavioral problems. Program participation provided new strategies to effectively communicate, manage negative emotions, and solve problems.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Adolescents reported numerous difficulties associated with a parent's deployment and reunion.
- Most adolescent participants reported that they learned new strategies for relaxation, coping, problem-solving, and communication in the program.
- Adolescents who reported the most difficulties with a parent's deployment described the most benefit from the PTS program.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide opportunities for youth to talk with similar-age peers about the challenges of deployment and reunion
- Incorporate activities designed to increase family resilience
- Disseminate information regarding common behavioral or emotional problems military parents may see throughout the deployment cycle

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Support the expansion of programs to more communities to help prevent deployment-related negative outcomes for children in military families
- Recommend additional evaluation of these programs to target funding toward programs demonstrating superior effectiveness
- Continue to provide support for family reintegration programs

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## METHODS

- The PTS program was conducted at 10 reintegration events.
- Adolescents completed surveys evaluating positive and negative experiences related to a parent's deployment, self-esteem, and a program evaluation measure.
- Parents completed surveys evaluating their child's behavioral problems, pro-social behaviors, and family communication.

## PARTICIPANTS

- One hundred sixty-one children (3-17 years) of Indiana National Guard members who recently returned from deployment participated in this study.
- Most analyses were limited to 63 adolescents (9-17 years) who completed surveys, 54% of whom were male.
- The average age of participants was 11.6 years.

## LIMITATIONS

- Although the adolescents reported learning new strategies as a benefit of the program, analyses of the only measure included at both pre- and post-assessment (self-esteem) did not demonstrate any significant change.
- Data were obtained from only one parent, 40% of whom had been deployed and therefore, may not accurately represent children's behaviors.
- The sample is small and homogenous, raising concerns about the generalizability of the findings.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Include additional pre- and post-test measures to comprehensively evaluate the effectiveness of the program
- Utilize long-term follow up to assess maintenance of gains over time
- Develop content specific to the needs of 3-6 year old children and evaluate program effectiveness with this younger sample of military children

## 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>