



Department of Defense: Supporting Military Youth

In September 1998, DoD sponsored a Strategic Youth Action Planning Conference to identify strategies to better support military youth. Stakeholders from virtually every sector of the community, including youth, attended the conference to discuss youth issues and needs. They identified several areas for change, including standardizing policies and programs, maximizing internal and external partnerships, and ensuring command support for youth and youth programs. Together, the participants agreed that their goal was "a common ground for the future" and developed the Strategic Youth Action Plan to achieve it.

The Strategic Youth Action Plan consists of ten objectives. The first eight focus on the unique challenges military youth face, including frequent relocations and family separations. The other two objectives address health services specific to adolescent growth and development and the needs of at-risk youth. These objectives will serve as a framework for youth, commanders, parents, and communities in their effort to provide comprehensive and responsive youth programs.

STRATEGIC YOUTH ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES

- Provide comprehensive Youth Programs
- Ensure command support and involvement
- Promote youth involvement
- Recognize and support family involvement
- Develop standard policies
- Expand partnerships and collaborations
- Ensure adequate resources
- Ensure qualified enthusiastic adults work with youth
- Promote health services for adolescent growth and development
- Address the needs of at-risk youth

Pressures on Military Youth

Families of service members have always grappled with the effects of deployment. With the drawdown of U.S. forces, for many families both the frequency and length of deployments has increased. Preparing youth for these separations is therefore a growing need.

Youth Experiencing Family Separations (N = 6,382 youth ages 10-18)				
Length of Separation	Army	Navy	Air Force	Marine Corps
None	29.4%	40.9%	34%	35.3%
Less than 3 months	35.9%	23.8%	41.1%	27.1%
Between 3-6 months	25.1%	23.5%	19.5%	23.9%
More than 6 months	9.6%	11.8%	5.4%	13.7%

Source: Military Family Institute (1996)

Youth also experience the consequences of periodic family relocations, including the inability to establish long-term peer relationships and differences in installation services and school district requirements (Jowers, 1998). In response, the military community has made a strong commitment to provide positive activities and environments for youth. Currently, there are over 490 youth facilities located at military installations worldwide.

Many studies, such as a 1992 Carnegie study, have shown that the amount of "free time" youth have is correlated with their engaging in "misbehaviors" (Coordinating Council of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention). Approximately three of every five youth report being home alone two or more hours per day (Benson, 1997) with the majority of this unsupervised time occurring after school. Most crimes committed by youth occur within the four hours following the end of the school day (Sickmund, et.al. 1997). By decreasing the amount of unsupervised time and providing positive opportunities for youth to engage in alternative activities, there is less opportunity for them to engage in risk-taking behaviors.

STRATEGIC YOUTH ACTION PLAN

Developing Strategies for Supporting Healthy Military Youth Today and Tomorrow Through Collaboration of Those Who Care




Military Youth Profile and Family Structure

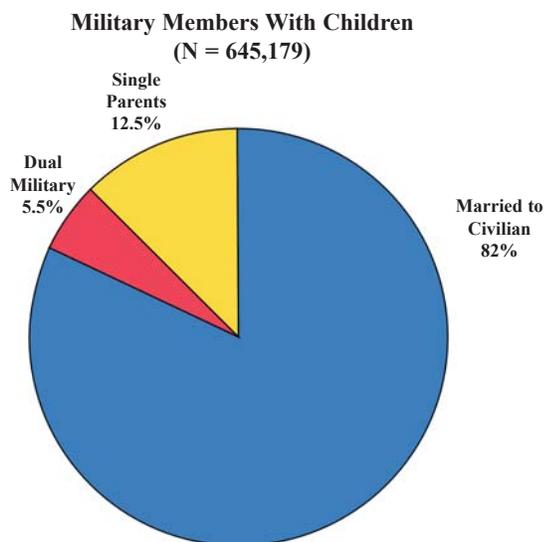
A large percentage of active duty military members have children: Air Force (50.9%), Army (49.1%), Navy (45.7%), and Marine Corps (33.0%). The following information, taken from the MFRC 1998 Demographic Report, shows the percentage of military children in each age group.

Youth Experiencing Family Separations (N = 6,382 youth ages 10-18)			
Age	Gender		
	Males	Females	Total
0-2	10.3%	9.8%	20.1%
3-5	10.6%	10.2%	20.8%
6-11	18.0%	17.4%	35.4%
12-14	6.5%	6.3%	12.8%
15-18	5.5%	5.4%	10.9%
Total	50.9%	49.1%	100%

Source: MFRC 1998 Demographic Report

Among the 1.2 million military children in 1998, the youth population (age 12-18) accounted for approximately 25 percent, of which over 270,000 lived stateside and over 27,000 lived overseas.

Over the past three decades, the traditional family, both military and civilian, has undergone significant changes. There are more dual working parents, higher divorce rates, more single parents, and more blended families.



Source: DMDC (Dec. 1998)

Effective deployment and relocation support to youth and families will require flexibility to meet the needs of this broad range of family structures.

Looking to the Future

The number of risks faced by youth today has motivated the military community to identify new strategies to overcome these risks. The Department of Defense has undertaken an aggressive plan, based on the state of the art in youth development theory and research, to meet the needs of military youth and their families. As we look to the future, the military community's focus on serving youth will emphasize consistent, coordinated efforts. The Strategic Youth Action Plan provides a roadmap that will ensure youth programs and services effectively support military youth in the 21st century.

References

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Resources

- The Strategic Youth Action Plan is available on the Military Children and Youth Web site at <http://mfrc.calib.com/mcy>.
- Tips for youth on military life issues are available on MTOM (Military Teens on the Move) at <http://dticaw.dtic.mil/mtom/>.
- Military family and youth program information is available on MAP (Military Assistance Program) at <http://dticaw.dtic.mil/mapsite>.
- General information and research on military family and youth is available from MFRC (Military Family Resource Center) at <http://mfrc.calib.com> or by contacting the MFRC at:

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