

INTRODUCTION TO HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL HANDOUTS



Military families in your practice may be experiencing significant challenges including multiple and extended deployments, injuries to body and/or mind, or loss of a service member. At the same time, the cycle of deployment continues to move forward, yet many Service members have young children for whom they must care.

Many parents and caregivers believe babies and toddlers are “too little” to understand what’s going on around them. As professionals, you recognize that even the youngest children are deeply affected by the people close to them and pick up on and react to these adults’ feelings and actions. Although they may not understand the details, babies and toddlers are affected by stressful family events.

You are one of the most highly valued and respected resources for parents regarding the optimization of growth and development of their child. What you communicate to parents significantly impacts how they cope and, ultimately, how they help their children through stressful situations. Each clinical encounter is an opportunity for you to positively influence families at a time when they need all the support they can get.

Asking parents how they are doing can help them feel less alone. When you point out ways they are taking good care of their child, especially under stressful circumstances, they feel more competent and strong. As you build trust with family members, they are more likely to share important information with you and are more likely to implement your suggestions for the care of their child.

This new resource is intended to enhance your ability to care for military families, as well as to share additional resources in a manner that we hope will be easily integrated into your daily practice.

Included are two sets of materials: one for the parents you serve and one for you. Each set has a handout on the following topics:

- Separation/Deployment
- Reunification
- Parental Injury
- Parental Loss/Bereavement

The parent handouts provide key information on each topic, as well as charts that describe what parents can expect from their child’s behavior and what they can do to support their child during challenging times.

The complimentary resource for health care professionals is designed to help you assess a family’s needs that will become evident during your visit and provide appropriate resources.

Reading both sets of resources in advance will enable you to make the best use of

them. At each visit, ask military families what they have been experiencing. That is, whether a family member:

- is about to be or has just been deployed,
- is soon returning or has recently returned,
- has been physically or psychologically injured, or
- has died.

You can then choose the parent handout(s) most relevant to the family’s current reality and integrate it into your visit.

We recognize that raising these issues may elicit strong feelings for some families. The expectation is not that you address and treat all these very complex issues, but that you recognize, validate, and empathize with the families’ experience. In turn, this will then help you connect them to other services that may be warranted. We encourage you to consider personnel training as an opportunity to introduce these materials and discuss how they might be used in varied circumstances. Engaging support staff—from front office staff to nurses and medical assistants—can promote a shared investment in the health and well-being of the families and children under your care.



You can access ZERO TO THREE’s *Coming Together Around Military Families*[®] materials that were developed for interdisciplinary professionals as part of a coordinated community response to the unique needs and interests of military families and their young children. These materials, which include parent flyers, posters, and board books, are available at no cost through Military OneSource (www.militaryonesource.org). These materials can be displayed in waiting areas, exam rooms, or any other area in which families with young children convene.

We hope that all of these family resources will enhance your ability to support families during these challenging times and that you refer them to other professionals who are available to provide more intensive support when necessary.

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National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families