

Finding Support When Your Family Member in the Guard or Reserve Is Called to Active Duty

Overview

How families can find support during Guard and Reserve activation.

- Gathering information
- Knowing where to go for military family support
- Finding support within your community
- Getting involved
- Taking care of yourself
- Resources

If you have a family member in the National Guard or Reserve, your experience with military life may be somewhat limited. Compared to relatives of active-duty service members, you may be less familiar with military family programs and unaccustomed to the support of a military community. But when your service member is called to active duty, you'll experience the same feelings about an upcoming deployment. Fortunately, more and more programs and services are available to help Guard and Reserve families through the activation, deployment, and return of their service members. The following information will help you understand what resources are available to you.

Gathering information

If you know how to find the right information when you need it, you'll be better prepared to manage on the homefront with strength and confidence. Here are some good ways to become well informed:

- *Use the Internet to learn about military resources for families.* Because Guard and Reserve families are scattered across thousands of communities throughout the U.S. and its territories, the military has introduced new ways to support them during deployments. These include Web portals provided by National Guard and Reserve family programs that give families critical information, points of contact for services, links to other sources of support, and opportunities to interact with other military families. Internet sites with extensive information specifically for Reserve Component families include:
 - National Guard Bureau Family Program Online Community at www.guardfamily.org
 - Army Reserve Family Programs (online) at www.arfp.org
 - Marine Forces Reserve MCCS at www.mfr.usmc.mil/hq/mccs
 - Lifelines Services Network (click on Reserve Families) at www.lifelines.navy.mil
- *Participate in family readiness briefings and activities.* When military units are preparing to deploy, spouses, children, parents, and other family members usually have an opportunity to attend at least one event designed to inform them about the deployment and mission of the service member's unit. These events include:
 - family readiness briefings

2 • Finding Support When Your Family Member in the Guard or Reserve Is Called to Active Duty

- town hall meetings
- commander's calls
- unit family days

At these events, you'll be able to:

- Find out how the unit supports families during the deployment
 - Learn about benefits that the service member's spouse or dependent child may be entitled to receive
 - Obtain information directly from the commanding officer
 - Meet family readiness staff and volunteers
 - Get to know the families of other service members in the unit
- *Learn about military culture and lifestyle.* Understanding military culture and the effects of military duty on family life can help you and your family cope when your service member is called up. You can learn about military structure, language, customs, benefits, and your role in accomplishing the mission by participating in classes and online educational opportunities offered by active and Reserve Components. Programs you might look into include:
 - Army Family Team Building
 - Guard Family Team Building
 - Marine Corps Family Team Building
 - Air Force Spouse Forum and Navy Compass programs
 - *Develop a Family Care Plan.* A Family Care Plan is a document that describes how a service member's family will be cared for in his or her absence. Single and dual-military service members with dependents are required to have a Family Care Plan, and it's a good idea for civilian spouses of military personnel as well. In addition to naming alternate care providers for your children, pets, and household, the Family Care Plan provides a single place to organize information such as family members' health care details; child care arrangements; financial obligations; educational needs; important addresses and phone numbers; and the location of wills, insurance papers, and other important documents.

Developing a Family Care Plan before your service member's deployment is a good way to identify information and resources you may need during the family separation. You should give copies of your plan to a trusted person for safekeeping and storage with other papers related to the activation, such as a copy of your service member's orders, information about military benefits, and unit contact names and numbers. Unit family support staff, your Legal Assistance Office, and Military OneSource (www.militaryonesource.com, by phone at 1-800-342-9647) can give you more detailed information about creating a Family Care Plan.

3 • Finding Support When Your Family Member in the Guard or Reserve Is Called to Active Duty

Knowing where to go for military family support

Whether you're dealing with financial or legal issues, needing more support for your children, concerned about your emotional well-being, or wanting to connect with other military families, a network of support is available to you. Knowing about and using these resources is an essential part of family readiness, and will help keep you confident and informed during your service member's deployment.

- *Get to know your unit family support staff and volunteer network.* Guard and Reserve commands have organized family support systems of staff and volunteers. Family Coordinators, Family Readiness Officers, or other designated family support specialists are your primary links to information and support services. Family Readiness Groups (Army), Key Volunteer Networks (Marine Corps), and Ombudsmen (Navy) work with unit leaders to strengthen their bonds with families and provide a way for families to share information and support.

If you make an effort to know key staff and volunteers before your service member deploys, it will be easier to ask for help should you need it. Call your service member's unit to connect with these resources, and be sure to stay in touch during the deployment. If you move or get a new phone number, be sure to notify the unit points of contact so you won't miss out on important information and activities.

- *Visit an installation Family Support Center or National Guard Family Assistance Center.* As an immediate family member of a Reserve Component service member on active duty, you're entitled to all the services available at military installations. Fleet and Family Support Centers, Marine Corps Community Services, Airman and Family Readiness Centers, or Army Community Service Centers offer a wide range of professional support services as well as information and referral to community resources. If you live near a military installation, a visit to the Family Support Center will give you an idea of the services available. And if the nearest installation isn't your service member's branch, don't let that keep you away. Installation family program professionals are accustomed to serving all activated personnel and their families without regard to service branch.
- *If you don't live near a military installation, find support at a National Guard Family Assistance Center.* States and territories have Joint Force (Army and Air National Guard) Headquarters that have established over 300 Family Assistance Centers (FACs) nationwide. FACs are strategically located to be available to geographically dispersed families, and they are staffed by people trained to provide critical information, outreach, and referrals to services in your community. You don't have to be a Guard family to be assisted at an FAC. They serve families and service members in all active and Reserve Components. To

4 • Finding Support When Your Family Member in the Guard or Reserve Is Called to Active Duty

find the nearest FAC, visit the Guard Family Program Web site, www.guardfamily.org, and follow links to the locator for your state.

- *Remember that Military OneSource is there for support 24/7.* This free service, provided by the Department of Defense, is available to all active duty, Guard, and Reserve members and their families. Consultants provide information and make referrals on a wide range of issues. In addition, Military OneSource is your source for professional, face-to-face counseling provided at no cost to you. You can reach the program by telephone at 1-800-342-9647 or through the Web site at www.militaryonesource.com.
- *Take advantage of support for military children and youth.* If you're a busy parent, you may be discovering that the most stressful part of your service member's absence is meeting the needs of your children by yourself. Many new initiatives are in place to give Guard and Reserve families access to quality child care and to provide support for school-age children. For example, you can get help finding child care and possibly assistance with the cost of care through Operation Military Child Care, a partnership program between the Department of Defense and the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies. Go to www.naccrra.org/militaryprograms for details.

For resources designed to help children cope with the emotional aspects of having a deployed parent, be sure to see:

- your active and Reserve Component family support programs
- the National Military Family Association (NMFA) at www.nmfa.org
- the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) at www.militarychild.org

If you'd like to help your local schools and community become more responsive to the needs of children with deployed parents, be sure to access Operation: Military Kids at www.operationmilitarykids.org.

Finding support within your community

Families of Reserve Component members deployed for the first time are often surprised to discover how many people in their communities have some connection to a deployed service member. If you're too far away to participate in family readiness group activities, you can find others with common experiences closer to home. Ask your neighbors, co-workers, school personnel, or leaders in your religious organization if they know someone with a spouse, child, or significant other on active duty, and get in touch.

Another option for mutual support is through an online community. When you search the Web sites shown in this article, you'll find opportunities for both adults and youths to join online military family discussion and support groups.

5 • Finding Support When Your Family Member in the Guard or Reserve Is Called to Active Duty

People without any connection to the military can be very understanding and caring, too. So don't be afraid to share your feelings with friends, relatives, and co-workers. Above all, don't try to go it alone. Having a support system at home helps families avoid the risk of burdening their service members with worries that might distract them from the mission.

Getting involved

It's a well-known fact that focusing on helping others can be an effective coping technique. Unit family support groups and volunteer networks rely on the voluntary efforts of family members to achieve their mission. Your group will have an important role for you to play in welcoming new members, planning social activities that bring families together, or being a source of support for someone else in need.

Whether you're a spouse, child, parent, or friend, or are related in another way to a service member or the unit, you can belong to the group and volunteer your services. These groups need volunteers before, during, and after the deployment, but especially during down times when it's more of a challenge to keep families interested and involved.

Taking care of yourself

No matter how much support is available, it's good to know how to be your own best friend when life presents challenges. As you focus on taking care of home and family during your loved one's deployment, try not to have unrealistic expectations of yourself. And keep in mind that family separations, difficult as they are, can offer unique opportunities to nurture your own physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

Resources

Branch-specific support

Air Force Crossroads

www.afcrossroads.com

The main Web portal for all Air Force families. Be sure to access the information under the Family Separations link. You can also register for the Spouse Forum.

My Army Life Too.com

www.myarmylifetoo.com

Information for active, Guard, and Reserve families, with links to the Army's Virtual Family Readiness Group, Army Family Team Building training, and information on managing deployment, family finances, and many other topics.

6 • Finding Support When Your Family Member in the Guard or Reserve Is Called to Active Duty

Marine Corps Community Services

www.usmc-mccs.org

Information about Marine Corps installation services. The Deployment Support section has a downloadable “Unit Deployment Guide for Families.”

Navy Fleet and Family Support Programs

www.ffsp.navy.mil

Provides an overview of programs available to military families through Fleet and Family Support Centers, plus links to a directory of centers and the Navy Family Ombudsman/Deployment Support program, including the Reserve Ombudsman Online.

Naval Services Familyline

www.lifelines.navy.mil/Familyline

A volunteer organization that provides information about the military lifestyle and support to sea service families. The Web site includes information on the Compass program, a course designed to educate spouses about Navy life.

General support

Military HOMEFRONT

www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil

The official DoD quality-of-life Web site, with extensive information for military families. Use the “Military Community Directory” link to locate your nearest installation Family Support Center.

MilitaryStudent.org

www.militarystudent.dod.mil

A DoD site with information for children, teenagers, and parents to help with deployments and transitions.

Your installation’s support services

Depending on your service branch, your Fleet and Family Support Center, Marine Corps Community Services, Airman and Family Readiness Center, or Army Community Service Center can provide you with information and support.

7 • Finding Support When Your Family Member in the Guard or Reserve Is Called to Active Duty

Military OneSource

This free 24-hour service, provided by the Department of Defense, is available to all active duty, Guard, and Reserve members and their families. Consultants provide information and make referrals on a wide range of issues. You can reach the program by telephone at 1-800-342-9647 or through the Web site at *www.militaryonesource.com*.

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