



# Supporting Military Kids During Deployment

When military parents are mobilized, their kids are in need of and deserve special support from local schools and communities. During the emotional cycle of deployment, their lives are literally turned upside down! A significant portion of stability in their family system has temporarily been disrupted resulting in increased levels of stress and potential separation anxiety.

As a result, these military kids are in need of heightened understanding and support from professionals in local school buildings where they spend a large portion of their day. To help educators more thoroughly understand their experience, the 5 stages of deployment are described below:

## Stages of Deployment

### Stage 1:

**Pre-Deployment** – Begins with the warning order to soldier for deployment from home through their actual departure.

- ▶ Anticipation of loss vs. denial
- ▶ Train up and long hours away
- ▶ Getting affairs in order
- ▶ Mental/physical distance
- ▶ Tension builds

### Stage 2:

**Deployment** – Period immediately following soldier's departure from home through first month of deployment.

- ▶ Mixed emotions/relief
- ▶ Disoriented/overwhelmed
- ▶ Family numb, sad, alone
- ▶ Sleep difficulties
- ▶ Security and safety issues

### Stage 5:

**Post-Deployment** – Begins with the arrival of the soldier back home and typically lasts 3-6 months (or more) after return.

- ▶ Soldier re-integrating into family
- ▶ Family "honeymoon" period
- ▶ Independence developed in sustainment stage redefined
- ▶ Need for "own" space
- ▶ Renegotiating routines

### Stage 3:

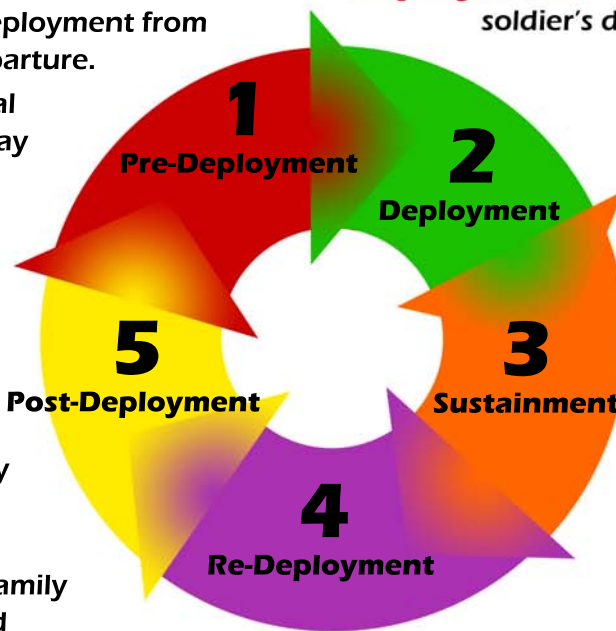
**Sustainment** – Lasts from first month through the end of deployment.

- ▶ New family routines established
- ▶ New sources of support developed
- ▶ Feel more in control of day to day life
- ▶ Sense of independence
- ▶ Family Confidence—"We can do this"

### Stage 4

**Re-Deployment** – Defined as the month before the soldier is scheduled to return home.

- ▶ Anticipation of homecoming
- ▶ Excitement
- ▶ Apprehension
- ▶ Burst of energy/"nesting"
- ▶ Difficulty making decisions



# Symptoms of Deployment Related Stress in the Classroom

- ▶ Difficulty concentrating in school
- ▶ Unable to resume normal classroom assignments and activities
- ▶ Continued high levels of emotional response such as crying and intense sadness
- ▶ Appearing depressed, withdrawn and non-communicative
- ▶ Expressing sad or violent feelings in conversation, writings or drawings
- ▶ Intentionally hurting self or at risk for hurting others
- ▶ Gain or lose a significant amount of weight in a short period of time
- ▶ Discontinue taking care of personal appearance
- ▶ Exhibit possible drug or alcohol use/abuse

## Teacher Intervention Strategies

**Focus on students and the classroom learning environment** – Retain routines and emphasis on the importance of learning while always leaving room to tend to student needs.

**Provide structure** – Maintain predictable schedule with clear behavioral guidelines and consequences. If student is distressed about circumstances of deployment, find appropriate time for them to share feelings, needs and fears.

**Maintain objectivity** – Respond in a calm and caring manner, answer questions in simple, direct terms. Regardless of political beliefs, refrain from expressing personal opinions.

**Reinforce safety and security** – After classroom discussions, end with a focus on student safety and the safety measures being taken on behalf of their loved one and others.

**Be patient and reduce student workload as needed** – Expect temporary slow downs or disruptions in learning when a deployment occurs.

**Listen** – Be approachable, attentive and sensitive to the unique needs of students coping with deployment and family separations. Take time to acknowledge the deployment and answer student questions in a factual manner.

**Be sensitive to language and cultural needs** – Be aware of, knowledgeable about, and sensitive to the language, values, and beliefs of other cultures. Inquire about school, community, and military resources available to assist.

**Acknowledge and validate feelings** – Help students develop a realistic understanding of deployment. Provide reassurance that the feelings of loss, anger, frustration and grief are normal and all individuals adjust at a different pace.

## Strengths resulting from deployment

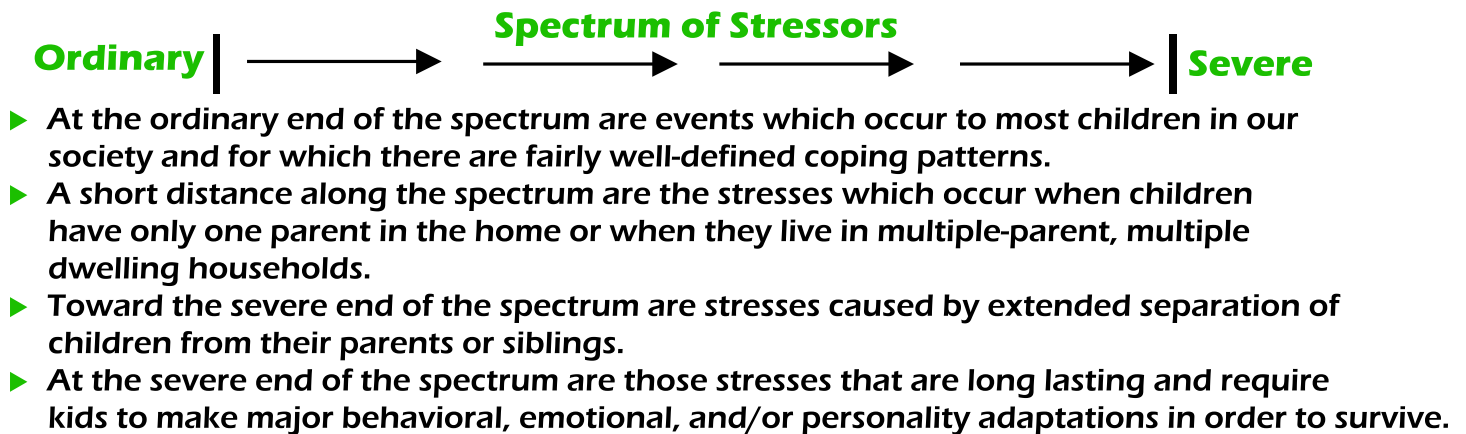
- ▶ Fosters maturity
- ▶ Emotional growth and insight
- ▶ Encourages independence, flexibility, and adapting to change
- ▶ Builds skills for adjusting to separations and losses faced later in life
- ▶ Strengthens family bonds
- ▶ Promotes awareness and understanding of importance of civic duty

For more information: <http://www.k12.wa.us/OperationMilitaryKids/>



## Helping Kids Cope with Stress

While some stress in life is normal and even healthy, kids today seem to be confronted with a myriad of experiences that can create tension and make coping with life a challenge. Common examples of these stressors include: lack of basic needs (food, clothing, and shelter), divorce, death, illness, incarceration, foster care placement, family substance abuse, domestic violence, extended separation from a parent or loved one, or physical, sexual, emotional abuse.



## Signs of Stress

	Behaviors	Reactions	Communications	Interaction
<b>Infants to 5 years</b>	Fussiness; uncharacteristic crying; neediness; generalized fear; heightened arousal and confusion	Helplessness; passivity; avoidance of stress related reminders; exaggerated startle response; regressive symptoms; somatic symptoms; sleep disturbances; nightmares	Cognitive confusion; difficulty talking about stressors; lack of verbalization; trouble identifying feelings; unable to understand events; anxieties about change/loss	Clinging; separation fears; grief related to abandonment by caregivers
<b>6-11 Years</b>	Spacey; distracted; changes in behavior, moody, personality; regressive behavior; aggressive behavior; angry outbursts	Reminders trigger disturbing feelings; responsibility; guilt; safety concerns; preoccupation; obvious anxiety; general fearfulness; somatic symptoms; sleep disturbances; nightmares	Confusion and inadequate understanding of events; magical explanations to fill in gaps of understanding; withdrawn; quiet	Worry and concern for others; separation anxiety; repetitious traumatic play and retelling of events; loss of ability to concentrate; school avoidance; loss of interest in activities
<b>12-18 Years</b>	Self conscious; sadness; depression; stress driven risk-taking and acting out; recklessness; substance use/abuse	Efforts to distance from feelings; wish for revenge and action-oriented responses; life threatening re-enactment; decline in school performance; sleep and eating disturbances	Increased self-focus; social withdrawal; avoidance	Flight into driven activity/involvement with others OR retreat in order to manage inner turmoil; rebellion at home and school; abrupt shift in relationships



## Age Specific Strategies to Help Kids Cope with Stress

### Infant to 2 ½ Years

Maintain calm atmosphere; keep familiar routines; avoid unnecessary separations; minimize exposure to reminders of stress; expect temporary behavior regression; help give simple names to big feelings; talk briefly and openly about stressful event; provide soothing activities.

### 2 ½ to 5 Years

Maintain familiar routines; do not introduce new and challenging experiences; avoid nonessential separations; tolerate retelling of stressful events; help name strong feelings during brief conversations; respect fears; expect regressive behavior; protect from re-exposure to stressful events; provide opportunities and props for play; if nightmares, explain they aren't real to help subside.

### 6-11 Years

Listen and tolerate re-telling of events; respect fears; give time to cope; increase awareness and monitor play; set and enforce limits; permit to try new ideas to deal with fears and feel safe; reassure that all feelings are normal after stressful events.

### 12-18 Years

Encourage discussions with peers and trusted adults; reassure that strong feelings (guilt, shame, embarrassment, desire for revenge) are normal; provide healthy outlets for emotions; encourage spending time with supportive friends/peers; help find activities that offer opportunities to experience mastery, control, and self-esteem.

## Tips for Educators

Educators are often faced with the challenge of supporting kids who are coping with stressful life circumstances. The guidance provided by an educator can make the difference in whether or not kids feel completely overwhelmed by their stressors or are able to develop healthy emotional behavioral and psychological coping skills. The following are helpful strategies to assist educators in supporting kids coping with stress:

**Be a role model** – Set an example and keep in mind that kids learn from watching the adults in their lives.

**Connect with kids** – Pay attention to their fears; respect their wish to not talk until ready; help them keep stressors in perspective.

**Foster open communication** – Speak in terms that are easy to understand; reassure and provide opportunities for them to express their thoughts and concerns in safe ways; answer questions as openly and honestly as possible.

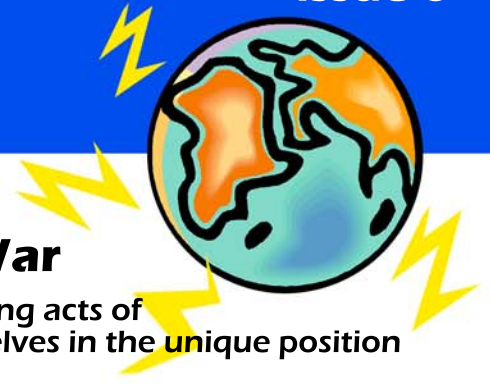
**Maintain consistency** – Expect and respond to changes in behavior; maintain consistent academic and behavioral expectations.

**Foster resilience** – Help kids interpret what has happened and make sense of it; help them explore positive ways of coping with fears and anxieties.

**Be alert to special needs** – Spend extra time with kids if necessary; make referral to school or community counseling for additional support if needed.

**Open lines of communication with parents and caregivers** – Coordinate information between school and home; provide parents with helpful suggestions and information about available school and community resources.

For more information: <http://www.k12.wa.us/OperationMilitaryKids/>



## Talking to Kids About Violence, Terrorism, and War

Kids ask tough questions particularly when it comes to understanding acts of violence, terrorism, and war. Given this, educators may find themselves in the unique position of engaging with kids about these very important issues.

In their day-to-day interactions, educators have the unique opportunity to help kids understand current world events factually, to facilitate open and healthy discussions about how these events impact kids' lives, and to help kids take action to identify their own emotional and behavioral reactions to these events.

### How Educators Can Offer Support



#### Listen to Kids

- Find out what kids are worried about, what information they have or don't have, and how they are interpreting what is being said.
- Encourage them to take the first step in sharing.
- Offer information, clarification, and reassurance as needed.
- Don't overwhelm kids by explaining what you know.
- Listen, listen and listen some more!



#### Ask questions

- Ask thoughtful open-ended questions, ones which can't be answered with "yes" or "no," as a good way to get a conversation started, particularly with an older child.
- Specific questions such as, "What are you afraid of?" "What bothers you most about what you are hearing?" and "How does this make you feel?" are appropriate for discussion.
- Ask clarifying questions to find out what kids mean. Remember their ideas of violence and war may be very different from yours.
- And remember to answer kids' question(s) after they have answered yours.



#### Acknowledge kids' feelings

- Knowing what to say is sometimes difficult. When no words come to mind, saying "This is really hard," will work.
- Try to recognize feelings underlying kids' reactions and help them identify these feelings in healthy ways through play, drawing, or words.
- When kids are upset, don't deny the seriousness of the situation. Saying "Don't cry, everything will be okay," does not reflect how they feel or make them feel any better.
- Be honest with kids. When appropriate, share your fears and concerns while at the same time reassuring them things will be alright/okay.



#### Help kids to feel physically safe

- Help them differentiate between acts of violence, terrorism, and war and understand that precautions are being taken to keep their environment safe.
- Maintain normal routines and schedules to provide a sense of stability and security.
- Stop kids from stereotyping people from specific backgrounds, cultures, or countries.
- Add tolerance lessons to school curriculum to prevent harassment and improve a sense of safety.
- Let those who are worried about a parent/loved one's deployment talk and share their feelings as needed. *(See Tough Topics Issue #1: Supporting Military Kids During Deployment for more information)*



#### Help kids maintain a sense of hope by taking action

- Help kids find their own unique ways to offer support to their schools and communities in response to incidents of violence, terrorism, and war.
- Send letters, cookies, magazines, or care packages to those in the military or local public safety positions/jobs.
- Encourage kids to write or dictate letters to legislators about their concerns and feelings.

## How Educators Can Offer Support (cont.)



### Expect and respond to changes in behavior

- Kids will most likely display signs of stress. Immature, aggressive, and oppositional behaviors are normal reactions to uncertainty.
- Remember it is important to maintain consistent expectations for behavior and hold kids accountable.
- Kids may pretend play or use drawing/art to express their varied emotions. Encourage positive expressions for these healthy behavioral and emotional outlets.
- Day-to-day support, consistency, and patience will help kids return to routines and their usual behavior patterns.
- For kids exhibiting signs of severe stress it is important to refer them for additional professional school/community assistance to help them cope effectively.



### Coordinate between school and home

- Create a sense of collective security between school and home. This will help kids feel safe and provide a sense of protection.
- Teachers should let parents know if kids are exhibiting stress in school. Provide helpful suggestions or information on school and community resources available for support.
- Parents and/or caregivers need to let school personnel know if a family member is called to active duty so schools can provide needed understanding and support.
- Invite parents or caregivers with relevant professional experience to come to school and talk about their jobs, in age-appropriate terms, and how their skills contribute to safety at home.

## Tips for talking to kids about tough stuff . . .

**Be aware of time and place** – Kids need time, attention, and a safe environment to discuss their perceptions, understanding, fears, worries, and concerns.

**Take the first step** – It's often necessary for adults to initiate dialogue themselves. A good starting point is to ask kids how they think and feel about what they have heard.

**Look for opportunities to start a discussion** – Adults/caregivers should not be afraid to look for opportunities to discuss issues as they arise.

**Focus on kids feelings and thoughts** – It is important to provide kids opportunities to openly talk about their thoughts and feelings without judgment, suggestion, or lecturing about issues.

**Listen to and address kids feelings** – You may be surprised by kids' concerns so addressing personal fears may be necessary.

**Reassure kids** – Explore issues together and maintain routines and structure. Avoid "what if" fears by offering reliable, honest information.

**Provide facts and information** – Provide kids with facts and basic information consistent with age and maturity and don't misinform them or provide a false sense of safety.

**Model open discussion** – Caring adults can help kids open up about their own thoughts and feelings by taking the lead and appropriately sharing their own thoughts and feelings. Be careful to monitor your own communications and avoid making generalizations which dehumanize the situation.

**Provide an ongoing forum for kids to initiate discussion and ask questions** – Answering questions and addressing fears doesn't happen all at once. New issues arise over time and discussions should occur on an ongoing basis as needed.

**Emphasize that challenges are opportunities** – Discussions about controversial issues are a good time to remind kids that challenges can also provide opportunities to learn, grow, and contribute to our world in healthy ways.

**For additional copies of this publication visit:** <http://www.k12.wa.us/OperationMilitaryKids/>

**For more information on this topic visit:** New York University Child Study Center - <http://www.aboutourkids.org>  
Educators for Social Responsibility - <http://www.esrnational.org/home.htm>  
Military One Source - <http://www.militaryonesource.com>

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Information for this article adapted from: *Caring for Kids After Trauma, Disaster and Death: A Guide for Parents and Professionals* (Second Edition), by New York University Child Study Center; *Talking to Children About War and Violence In The World*, by Sheldon Berman, Sam Diener, Larry Dieringer, and Linda Lantieri, Educators for Social Responsibility; *Children and Fear of War and Terrorism* by National Association of School Psychologists; and *Talking With Children About Violence and War*, Military One Source.



# Military children build and bond

By GENE STOWE SBT Correspondent | Posted: Saturday, October 5, 2013 11:45 pm

SOUTH BEND -- Eighth-grade classmates Samantha Blanchard and Gracie Blair came from Fort Wayne to South Bend on Sept. 21 to build Lego robots with other youngsters who share a common circumstance: at least one of their parents is in military service.

They were also looking for fun.

“We’re both into building,” Gracie said, and Samantha added: “It sounded like fun.”

The friends were among eight youngsters from northern Indiana, including Goshen and Plymouth, who participated in a 4-H Robotics and Operation Military Kids program at Purdue Technology–South Bend on the Indiana University South Bend campus.

Dawn Nielsen, of Mishawaka, the coordinator of Operation Military Kids for northern Indiana, said such connections are important for children whose friends may not understand the stresses that military families face, especially those who do not live on a military base surrounded by support.

Nielsen, whose husband was in the Navy, knows the stresses: her oldest son, Jeremy, was sworn into the Air Force on Sept. 10, 2001, and her second son, Adam, is stationed at Fort Campbell, Ky.

“What we’re trying to do is keep these kids together and give them a place where they can be with kids like themselves,” she says. “On base, it’s incredible the services for the kids. Reserve and National Guard service people and families don’t get that.”

Matt Bellina, a 4-H worker with Purdue Extension, organized the Lego Mindstorm construction event and recruited John Piller, a professor at the Purdue College of Technology, to help participants program the creations.



Zane and Coy Seegers, 11-year-old twins from Goshen whose father, Warren, is serving in Djibouti in Africa, were ready to try theirs out.

“It should turn at an angle, go forward eight seconds, stop and go back 10 seconds, so it should go back farther than it went forward,” Coy explained.

Veteran Steve Leapman, who volunteered to help with the program and has a son in the Army National Guard, said such events help gather otherwise scattered families.

“There’s a lot of patriotic people in this town, but they’re all spread out into different organizations or groups,” he said. “Anything that brings them together is great. Especially for the Guard and Reserve, they don’t have a community to go back to the way people do on a base.

“Anything we can do that builds community support is not just helping these kids and their families — it’s helping the whole community. It’s kind of what we owe.”

Fourth-grader Morgan Keller, of Fort Wayne, and seventh-grader Drake Anderson, of West Lafayette, Ind., were working together on one robot, and siblings Owen and Aubrey DeLee, of Plymouth, whose parents, Bob and Kandi, are both in the military, were building another.

“My dad usually gets deployed and my mom goes over for the weekend sometimes,” Owen said. “I haven’t really been with any other kids that their mom and dad both are.”

Samantha and Gracie said they’re happy to have each other for support.

“If one’s having a bad day and the other one’s not,” Samantha said, “they can cheer the other person up because they know exactly what they’re going through.”

## **Learn more about the South Bend Operation: Military Kids Team and how you can get involved:**

[www.four-h.purdue.edu/omk/southbend.html](http://www.four-h.purdue.edu/omk/southbend.html)



# Indiana 4-H Military Partnership



## Fast Facts

20,000 Indiana youth have a parent serving in the military.



Nearly 400 Indiana 4-H members are military youth.



Indiana is the 4th largest National Guard state in the nation.



All five branches of the military are represented in Indiana.



There are no military installations in Indiana where families live.



Military youth often mention they feel alone in their schools and communities.



Active duty military youth can move every 2-3 years.



Deployments change family routines. Reintegration can be as complicated as deployment.



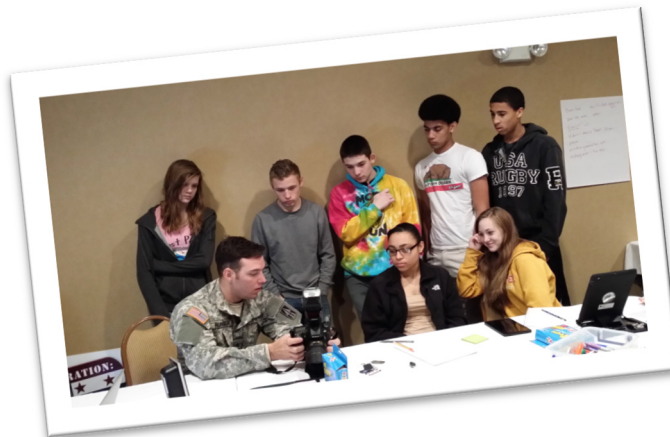
As military families move frequently and experience the difficulties surrounding lengthy and frequent deployments, 4-H provides predictable

programming and a safe and nurturing environment for military kids.

4-H National Headquarters relies upon the Land Grant University Extension System across the country to build strong partnerships with Army, Air Force, Navy, National Guard and Reserve entities in order to provide technical assistance and training for military staff and to establish 4-H Clubs for Military youth living on and off installation. In addition, through a program called Operation: Military Kids, 4-H seeks to serve those children whose parents are serving in the National



Guard and Reserve and live in communities with little or no military presence.



# Indiana Operation: Military Kids



**In 2013**

**1,104**

**Military youth directly supported**

**348**

**Number of community volunteers who supported OMK**

**2,478**

**Hours of service to OMK from those volunteers**

**66**

**Number of programs that supported military youth or raised awareness**

**626**

**Number of Family Hero Packs distributed**

## Program Highlights



### Support

OMK partners with the Dunes Learning Center in Chesterton to host 60 military youth for summer camp. OMK Camp connects military youth and provides opportunities to learn about the environment. Grant funds weren't received to host camp in 2013, but a successful fundraising effort brought in over \$20,000 to make sure camp continued.

### Connections

OMK organizes activities throughout Indiana to connect military youth and provide opportunities to gain new skills. Past activities include:

- Geocaching and computer science at Purdue
- Biotechnology in Johnson County
- Robotics in St. Joseph County
- Science activities in Vigo County

### Awareness

OMK raises awareness of military youth by celebrating the Month of the Military Child each April. Hoosiers learn about the 20,000 youth living in our state through buttons, local government proclamations and community events. We encourage Indiana to celebrate **Purple Up! Day for Military Kids** each year on April 15th.

## Contact

**Steve McKinley**  
State 4-H Military Liaison

**Ryan Wynkoop**  
Indiana OMK Coordinator

[www.four-h.purdue.edu/omk](http://www.four-h.purdue.edu/omk)  
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765-494-9516



## Partnerships

Operation: Military Kids provides opportunities for Indiana's military youth to connect with each other and gain life skills that will benefit them before, during and after the deployment of a loved one. These opportunities are conducted or supported by our many partners that serve military service members or youth.

American Red Cross  
Purdue Extension  
American Legion  
American Legion Auxiliary  
Boys & Girls Clubs of America

Indiana National Guard Family Programs  
Army Reserve Family Programs  
Military Family Research Institute at Purdue  
Indiana Association for Child Care Resource & Referral  
Dunes Learning Center

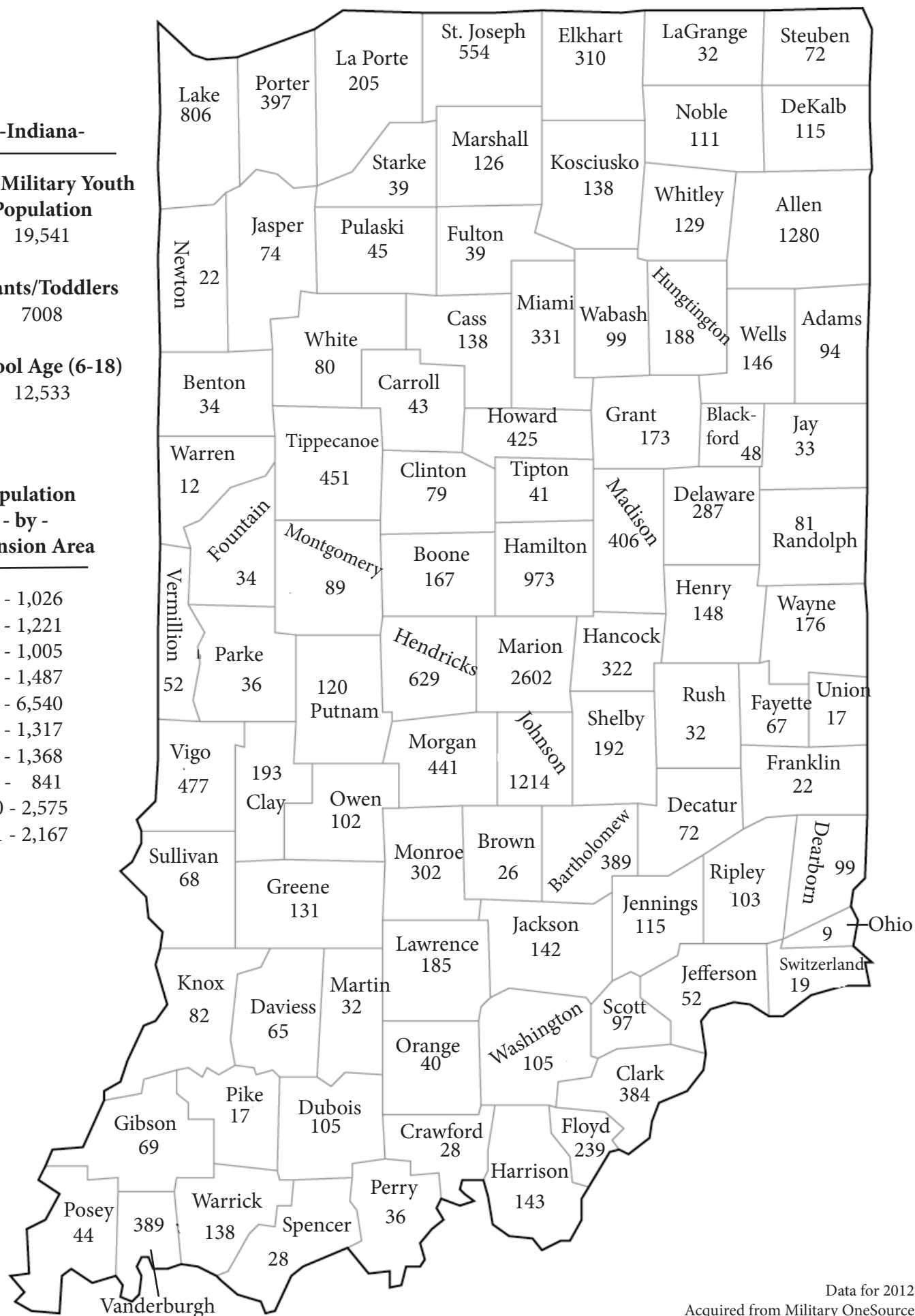
The Indiana Operation: Military Kids partnership is a shared initiative of the Army Child, Youth & School (CYS) Services and funded by the Army National Guard and Army Reserve in collaboration with the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service.

**Total Military Youth  
Population**  
19,541

**School Age (6-18)**  
12,533

**Population  
- by -  
Extension Area**

- 1 - 1,026  
2 - 1,221  
3 - 1,005  
5 - 1,487  
6 - 6,540  
7 - 1,317  
8 - 1,368  
9 - 841  
10 - 2,575  
11 - 2,167



# Operation: Military Kids (OMK)



## OMK School-Age & Youth Program Delivery System

### Off-Post Partnerships

(e.g., 4-H Clubs, Boys & Girls Clubs, the American Legion, Schools, Child Care Aware® of America, the American Red Cross, YMCAs, etc. )

## OMK School-Age & Youth Program Framework (The Four Service Areas)

### Sports, Fitness & Health Options

Baseline-Programming Requirements:

- **Get Fit-Be STRONG**
- **7 Habits of Healthy Teens**
- **Up for the Challenge**
- **Fitness & Health Skills**

### Life Skills, Citizenship & Leadership Opportunities

Baseline-Programming Requirements (Non-Bolded=Optional):

- **Youth Sponsorship**
- **Resiliency Skills**
- **Leadership & Citizenship Development**
- **Workforce/Career Preparation**
- **Teen Councils (i.e., YLEAD & ANGTP)**
- **Mobile Technology Labs**
- Babysitter Training
- Ready, Set, Go! Community Awareness
- Speak Out for Military Kids (SOMK)

### Arts, Recreation & Leisure Activities

Baseline-Programming Requirements (Non-Bolded=Optional):

- **Camps**
- **Month of the Military Child**
- Operation: Boots ON
- Operation: Boots OFF
- Family Hero Packs
- Deployment: it's not a Game

### Academic Support, Mentoring & Intervention Services

Baseline-Programming Requirements:

- **Homework Assistance**
- **Tutoring & Credit Recovery**
- **Risk-Management & Prevention**
- **Bullying Prevention**
- **Science, Technology, Engineering & Math (STEM)**

## Applied throughout the OMK School-Age & Youth Program Framework

Directed & Self-Directed  
Programming  
Individual, Small- & Large-  
Group Programming

Intentional Programming  
Youth/Adult Partnerships  
Character Education  
Selected 4-H & BGCA Resources

Service-Learning  
Experiential Learning  
High-Yield Learning  
Technology Integration