

Reaching Military Families: A Safety Resource Guide

The purpose of this resource is to serve as a guide for Safe Kids coalitions to help cultivate relationships with U.S. military communities to raise awareness about child injury prevention in a meaningful and culturally sensitive way. It provides key military installation points of contact, child injury prevention areas of interest, and relevant cultural issues affecting military life.

Please keep in mind that each branch of the U.S. military (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard) have their own protocols and terminology. Additionally, each individual military base and larger community have their own culture. This guide is designed to provide you with a general overview of military populations so that you can have a starting point to reach out to these communities.

Why target military families?

There have been several research studies that examined child injury rates in military children compared to non-military children. In general, these studies have shown higher injury rates in military children compared to non-military children, especially concerning medication poisoning and firearms¹. It has also been found that there is poor compliance to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) car seat guidelines among military populations².

The most recent child injury statistics in military populations can be found using the **Kids Inpatient Database (KID)**. This database will allow you to search for hospital admittance rates based on diagnosis (injury) and insurance type. For military families, the most common insurance is TRICARE.

In addition to higher child injury rates, military installations often function as an isolated unit, rather than being incorporated in nearby towns. Not only do military installations have physical barriers that separate them from the general population, there is a unique structure and culture that dictate their operations, which can prevent their inclusion in surrounding communities and potentially limit the reach of local public health messaging.

It is also important to note that not all military families reside on a military installation. There is a significant portion of the military population that live in civilian neighborhoods located near an installation, however, the risk of injury in military children does not disappear simply because families live in a different neighborhood. These families' lives are influenced by the culture and lifestyle of the military, which contribute to heightened risk factors of child injury.



This guide is designed to help utilize U.S. military installation resources to address child injury prevention in their local military populations.

Getting Started with Your Outreach

In general, there are two things that are required to gain access to a military installation as a civilian guest. The first is a point of contact. This is a person with whom you have spoken to and arranged a meeting with. You may be asked to provide their name and contact information at the check-in gate. The second is a government-issued photo ID. You will present your ID at the gate. Of note, some installations have a visitor's center just past the gate where you may be required to sign in.

Who is the Point of Contact?

Each military installation has an organization designed to provide support and resources to military personnel and their families, regardless of the installation's service branch. The primary goal of these organizations is to promote readiness and resilience in military families so that they are successfully able to adjust to the demanding military lifestyle. Although the purpose of each organization remains similar across branches, the titles and organizational structures may differ. Several military installations have been reorganized into joint bases, which house Army, Navy and Air Force entities. This means that there may be multiple organizations on an installation that address the same areas because each branch is represented. These joint bases can present challenges with overlapping responsibilities, but can also offer cross-branch collaboration opportunities.

- Army: *Army Community Services (ACS)* and *Army Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR)*.
- Air Force: *Airman and Family Readiness Center*.
- Navy: *Fleet and Family Support Services*.
- Marine Corps: *Marine Corps Community Services (MCCCS)*.

Depending on the risk area that your coalition is trying to address in a military community, there are multiple programs that fall under the guidance of these family support organizations. Brief descriptions of the programs relevant to Safe Kids are provided below. You can find additional information about each military installation and points of contact for these programs using this search [tool](#).



- **Family Advocacy Program (FAP):** The primary role of the FAP is to prevent domestic violence and child abuse through educational programs as well as provide support services for survivors of abuse. However, their expertise spans wider than the areas of domestic and child abuse. One program that falls under FAP supervision is the **New Parent Support Program (NPSP)**. The NPSP is designed for active duty members and spouses who have or are expecting a baby. This program provides educational materials and home visitation so that parents can ensure a safe and nurturing environment for their child.
- **Child & Youth Services (CYS):** The purpose of CYS is to provide affordable child care to military personnel and their families to reduce conflict between work and parental responsibilities. CYS is considered to a job benefit in the military and therefore a mandatory service for all military installations to provide. There are multiple child care services available for military families which cover all ages of military dependents from birth to adolescence. *Child Development Centers (CDC)* are the primary facility for children up to age five, *School-Age Services (SAS)* are available for children ages six to twelve, and *Youth Services (YS)* are available for adolescents ages twelve to eighteen. Further information about CYS can be found [here](#).
- **Relocation Assistance Program (RAP):** The Relocation Assistance Program is available to all military families to receive support during their transition and relocation between military installations. This program helps families develop a moving plan, provides moving workshops and briefings, as well as referrals to online moving resources. More information about the services provided in this program can be found [here](#).
- **Family Readiness Groups (FRGs):** FRGs are designed to create a form of social support for soldiers within a unit and their family members. These groups are especially useful during a unit deployment and serve as an outlet for information to military families that supports the overall military mission and prepares them for anything the military lifestyle may bring.
- **Public Health:** Each branch of service has public health assets which function similar to a local Health Department. They may fall under the local Medical Command or be a separate entity. Though each has its own title, mission and organizational and reporting structure, these services typically address population health in order to preserve the health and wellness of the warfighter and his/her family. Health promotion and wellness are one aspect of military public health services which may be a good starting point for collaboration on childhood injury prevention work.



Additional Organizations:

- **Installation Schools:** Depending on the size of a military installation, there may be elementary, middle, and high schools available for military families. These schools are typically found on large installations that are home to hundreds of military families at a given time. If there is no school on an installation, then military children will attend school in their larger civilian community.
- **Police and Fire:** Each military installation maintains their own police force and fire department.

What is Safe Kids Worldwide's Role in this Partnership?

Keep in mind that these military installation services may already have some child injury prevention messaging and programming in place, so your Safe Kids coalition may not necessarily need to be the sole source of information for child injury prevention for this community. Therefore, the focus should be on relationship building. One or more of these military installation services could serve as a new partner to your coalition. Your Safe Kids coalition can bring a variety of assets to the partnership including subject matter expertise or providing volunteers for events. Depending on the need expressed during conversations with military installation contacts, the Safe Kids role in the partnership could change.

Risk Areas of Interest in Military Communities

Every risk area that is addressed by Safe Kids Worldwide is relevant to military families. However, there are a few risk areas that are unique to military communities due to the nature of the military lifestyle, which involves frequent relocations of military families. In each risk area, consider how frequent relocation might play a role.

- 1) Child Passenger Safety (CPS)
 - CPS laws vary between states and countries, which can be difficult to keep up with.
 - Military families may use car seats that were purchased while living in another country.
- 2) Home safety (Medication Safety, Safe Sleep, Falls)
 - Four- year- old Evan English, a military child living in Oahu, Hawaii fell to his death through a window in his home. This tragedy has sparked [legislative action](#)



from Rep. Mike Turner (R-Ohio) to increase window guard protection in military housing around the country.

- Prescription medicines are present in more than half of military personnel's homes who have experienced trauma injuries³.

3) Gun safety

- Guns and other weapons are present on military installations and may be kept in the homes of military families.
- Military families are more likely to own guns than non-military families⁴.

Please remember that these are just some examples of potential risk areas that might have a unique presence on military installations based on observations while working with military communities, and are a good place to start out. As part of building your relationship with the installation, it's important that you take into consideration what they consider to be a significant risk area based on their experience in a military community.

Military Culture

Messaging

There are a few common messages that are frequently used among military personnel. These themes can be used to tailor child injury prevention materials in a culturally appropriate manner.

- **Readiness and Risk Management:** The military promotes readiness and risk management in every facet of military life whether it be career or family life. This message is very applicable to child injury prevention, since we promote strategies for families to be prepared for any injury risk in the future.
- **Use of Installation Resources:** There is a big push to promote the use of installation resources when available to military personnel. This is especially true for mental health care post-deployment. There is also a push to reduce stigma associated with mental health care. However, the same theme can be applied to child injury prevention. There are resources available specifically for military families on child injury prevention and families should be encouraged to use them.
- **Take Care of Your Own:** There is a common mindset among military personnel that one should "take care of your own" and therefore have a responsibility to protect and take care of others in their community. This could also be applied to child injury prevention and taking care of military children to reduce the risk of unintentional injury.



Cultural Issues to Keep in Mind

- **Military Family Relocation:** Military families relocate frequently across both state and country lines. Often, a military family will not be living in their home state or country. When interacting with these families, they may follow different social norms and practices from their state or country of origin. This may become apparent during your conversations and interactions with families.
- **Stress:** Military life brings a fair amount of stress due to parental deployments and frequent deployments, which can add burden on top of daily parenting activities. It is also not uncommon for those returning from an overseas deployment to experience some mental health issues, which can also affect their interactions with their family members. Also, dealing with stressors in one's life will often take priority over other decisions, therefore any child injury messaging or programming targeting this population should consider the commitments needed by military families.
- **Community Sharing:** Military installations foster a strong sense of community among its residents whereby families support each other where they can. One form of support is sharing or giving away furniture, especially for newer or younger families. Some common items that are shared are cribs and car seats, which, depending on the age of these items could pose risks to a child in the home or in a car.

Mitigating Obstacles

Maintaining a strong relationship with community partners takes an investment of time and effort, and of course, there will be obstacles that need to be addressed to grow a partnership with your local military population. Below are some ideas for how to mitigate obstacles that may arise in working with a military community.

- Lack of funding for new programs targeting military families:
 - Use simple and inexpensive interventions
 - Apply for funding from the Department of Defense (DoD)
- Frequent personnel turnover:
 - Form relationships with multiple military contacts
 - Form relationships with civilian workers, who often have less turnover, and are well connected on the installations where they work
 - Maintain frequent communication with military contacts and partners
 - Invite new people to coalition meetings



Additional Information and Resources

- [Military OneSource](#)
- [Kids Inpatient Database \(KID\)](#)
- [Army Base Safety Plan](#)



Outreach Checklist

Below are several steps you can follow to help you start the outreach process with your local military installation or community. The main goal of this checklist is to provide the necessary steps to build a strong relationship with your local military population to expand the reach of your coalition and to enhance child injury messaging and programming for military families.

- Research your local military population. This can be a military installation or area where military families live.
- Use [search tool](#) for point of contact(s)
- Invite your military contact to a coalition meeting
- Talk to military installation contact about child injury prevalence and risk areas of interest
- Determine role of your coalition in partnership with military installation
- Develop action plan to address risk area(s) of interest
- Maintain frequent contact with military population to strengthen relationship between your coalition and your local military community



References

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Researched and written by [Ashley Hunt](#), Master of Public Health Candidate, George Washington University, Milken Institute School of Public Health (July 2017)

