



Challenges military children may face

School sheet

Every situation is different but the following list gives a generalised overview of the more typical challenges faced by children with a parent in the military. The challenges listed below, which can be both positive and negative, are not conclusive and have been researched based upon teaching experiences, individual working with children, and case studies drawn from some of our little troopers who were happy to support our research.

Frequent movements:

Families can move every two years. This is called a 'posting' and can be in a different country, different county and often hundreds of miles from their current home, this transition brings lots challenges and changes for children; Schools, friends, clubs and home surroundings. One 14 year old included in this research is already in his 7th school!

Worry about impending separation:

There is an emotional cycle of separation and the anticipation of loss is the first stage often once a child knows a parent is going away 4-6 weeks prior they may enter denial "you aren't really going are you?" Clinginess and increased demand on time may also occur.

Separation:

Separation can come in all shapes and sizes a one month exercise in Wales, a three month training course in Canada, a 6 month operation in Iraq or maybe ten months on a submarine. All have an impact of equal importance to a child, it often doesn't matter whether a parent is away in Wales or in Iraq, they aren't at home, they aren't at school assemblies, they aren't there for their birthday and they miss them getting that all-important star of the week. The elongated absence of a parent wherever they are brings the same worries to children. Initially it may be emotions of despair, anger, pride, fear that they find tricky to process and understand

There is the obvious worry about safety, particularly if the parent is on active duty (working in an area of conflict) but combined with this is the worry about one parent coping, children can be very perceptive. A parent of a 7 year old has noted, "he is sensitive, closed and really subdued in school. This heightens when his Dad is away"

Milestones often missed:

Military children will have all experienced a birthday and Christmas with a parent absent and all will deal with this differently, it is very hard; especially the festive build up. Milestones can go further than just birthdays and Christmas for children, assemblies, parents evening, football matches, brownie promises the list is endless things that mean so much to children but are often missed by a parent. It is important reminders of these are kept and shared when the parent returns so the child can gain the feeling that they have been included.

Unaccompanied living:

If a posting isn't commutable some families request to remain in their home and the service person will stay at base during the week which brings a whole different set of challenges as the parent at home becomes a one parent family during the week, all have to deal with having to re adjust every weekend.

Dual serving families:

It is not uncommon for both parents to be serving in the British Armed Forces, sometimes the same force, sometimes different. Rarely are both parents sent away at the same time. Challenges may differ when Mummy is away or Daddy.

Single parent serving families:

Often single parent serving families have to be sent away and this can lead to challenges for the children when they have to go and live with other family members resulting in changes.

No sense of roots:

Military children are rarely 'from' anywhere, they may have been born overseas and lived in all four corners of the UK and this brings challenges and questions. Home is where the heart is for military children.

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Friendship issues:

Every situation is unique and even a child with little mobility will have said goodbye to many friends over time; any upset can manifest itself in a variety of ways and not always at the time of saying goodbye. One family decided that it was best to settle in one area to provide stability and as such live unaccompanied after several 2 year postings in England and abroad. This brought about a whole new set of challenges as the eldest child experienced some significant friendship issues. With more opportunity to discuss this it was realised that he was subconsciously disengaging as he approached the two year point, even though he knew he wasn't moving. In his words, he quite simply felt that "I don't belong anywhere".

No nearby extended family:

Many families have some distance to travel to see Grandparents, making wider family support very difficult

Dips in learning:

Schools do not all do the same thing at the time. Counties do not all work the same in education. Children moving schools frequently can experience different curriculums, different subjects available, variation in languages taught, different school tier systems all resulting in challenges for a military child and their education.

As an example a case study we spoke to followed the below journey over a few years due to postings, as a visual it shows a scenario many military children see themselves in;

- Year 5** - Surrey Junior School
Posted due to military requirements
- Year 6** - Dorset Primary School
- Year 7** - Dorset Secondary School
Posted due to military requirements
- Year 8** - Berkshire Middle School
- Year 9** - Berkshire Upper School

One head teacher has calculated that for every move there is potentially up to two terms of education time 'lost' or at least affected. This figure is based on a child mentally 'switching off' once they know they are leaving, which can be up to three months in advance. Once in a new school it is estimated that it can take a term to re settle. This is a lot of adjusting and self-esteem can (not always) take a knock.

On the positive side, children who move frequently can be incredibly confident - making friends quickly, perhaps with a stronger sense of self as they have lots of strategies for finding new friends, a common ground. Their experiences for welcoming new children can make for a very positive contribution for PSHE and circle times.

Reservist families:

You may find a reserve family within your school, reservists come from all walks of life and work part-time as soldiers/sailors or airpersons for the British Armed Forces alongside full-time Regular forces.

Reservists can be called up at any point to help with operations overseas and for the children this can be a huge challenge as they may not be used to elongated separation from a parent and will not live in the military community.