

SUBSTANCE USE PREVENTION, TREATMENT AND RECOVERY RESOURCES TO ASSIST A MILITARY CHILD

Partnership to End Addiction and SAFE Project

1. Who Are Military Families

a. Brief review of military family demographics

The term “military families” often refers to the spouses, children, and adult dependents of active duty, National Guard, and reserve service members. According to the most recent U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) [Demographics Report](#)¹, there are ~2.6 million military family members and almost 39% of military personnel have minor children (age less than 20 or less than 22 and full-time student). There are over 1.6 million military children with most (38%) younger than 5 years old. Children ages 6 to 11 years old are the second largest age group (32%) followed by 12 to 18-year-olds (24%). Sometimes the term military family and youth can also refer to the children of military veterans. [Military Child Educational Coalition](#)² estimates when including veteran-connected children, there are around 4 million children whose parent or caregiver served at some point.

Military families can also include other relatives of service members including siblings, grandparents, and aunts/uncles. Military families can refer to those of all shapes and sizes – dual service parents, married parents, divorced, single parents, child and grandparent, etc. – and across all U.S. military branches – Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, Reserve, and National Guard. These differences make each military youth’s experiences different.

¹<https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2018-demographics-report.pdf>

²<https://www.militarychild.org/news/press-releases/2019/april-designated-month-of-the-military-child>

b. Important ways military families differ from civilian families

Military families are as unique and diverse as civilian families. But military families face common challenges and hardships that bond them together as a community. Military families and youth share common cultural values of leadership, responsibility, and a belief in sacrifice for the common good. Children in military families often have very different childhood experiences than their civilian peers. They are likely to experience separations from parents or siblings for trainings and deployments, frequent moves, awareness of military conflicts and violence, and may experience a family service member’s injury, disability, or death¹. Military families are most often living in civilian communities. If that is your family, you and your child may have to navigate schools and healthcare settings that have little understanding of military culture or the influence of military life on your child. There are aspects of substance use that are common to all youth and aspects that are unique to children in military families. The substance use prevention and education you and your

child receive through these civilian settings may not fully address substance use risk within military life.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328790007_A_systematic_review_of_wellbeing_in_children_A_comparison_of_military_and_civilian_families

c. Military children, substance use and mental health – brief review of prevalence data

Adolescence is a time of particular risk for military youth to begin using substances like alcohol, tobacco, marijuana or other drugs. From mood swings to rebellion, many types of challenging behavior are normal during adolescence, but you should not consider experimenting with substance use one of them. It's not true that "everyone vapes" or "everyone drinks." The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration ([SAMHSA](#)) data for military youth ages 12 to 17 shows some of the following statistics:

- 9.3% reported using alcohol and 5% reported binge drinking in the past 30 days
- 3.2% reported smoking cigarettes in the past 30 days
- 10.7% reported using marijuana in the past year

For a more comprehensive look at these numbers, take a look at the SAMHSA report here.

<https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-MilitaryFamily-2015/NSDUH-MilitaryFamily-2015.htm>

Vaping is a form of substance use that is on the rise among all youth and according to the U.S Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](#))²:

- 27.5% of high school students reported vaping in the past 30 days
- 10.5% of middle school students reported vaping in the past 30 days

While the good news is most military youth are not using substances, any use during this time can be harmful to your child's health and increase their risk of a developing substance use disorder.

https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/youth_data/tobacco_use/index.htm

2. Youth substance use – What military parents/caregivers need to know

a. Brain Development, Youth Behavior and Preventing Drug Use

- i. Adolescent brain development
- ii. Effects of substance use on a developing brain

As your military child transitions from childhood to adulthood, they are undergoing enormous growth in their social, emotional, and cognitive development. Adolescence, or what we think of as the “teen” years, is when youth are forming their own identities, testing their boundaries, and establishing their independence. Military youth are going through all these normal adolescent milestones while also dealing with the unique challenges of military life such as relocations and separations from service member parents or caregivers. As children in military families get older, they may be more likely than other teens to take on additional roles and responsibilities within the home. They may feel increased stress and pressure to ‘grow up’ sooner than non-military youth. While most military youth handle these extra responsibilities with resilience, they are still adolescents dealing with a lot of changes. It is important to acknowledge how their brain development impacts their emotions and behaviors.

The teen years are a period of great promise, but also of potential risk, especially for substance use problems. That’s why preventing and delaying substance use during this time is so important to their long-term health. Learn more about the science of adolescent brain development and the effects substance use can have on your military child’s developing brain here:

<https://drugfree.org/article/brain-development-teen-behavior/>

<https://teens.drugabuse.gov/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fasd/features/teen-substance-use.html>

<https://www.adolescenthealth.org/Resources/Clinical-Care-Resources/Substance-Use/Substance-Use-Resources-For-Adolesc.aspx>

b. Substance Use and Military Children

Alcohol, marijuana, prescription drugs, and vaping products are the substances military youth are most likely to try. Military youth, like their civilian peers, are most likely to use what they have access to either at home, through peers, or in the community. If you can, keep substances out of the home or secured so that your child cannot access them. When moving to a new geographic location or community, try and learn about what substances are common in that area. For example, you may be moving to a state with decriminalized or legal marijuana from a state where it was illegal. This could result in more exposure to marijuana for your military child, especially if you are living in the community and not on a military installation. Knowing the basics about different substances can help you protect your military child and address any issues that arise.

i. Alcohol

Alcohol is the most common drug among U.S. teenagers, probably because it is the easiest to access. Though all states have strict laws against the selling or giving of alcohol to someone under the age of 21, teens may be able to get alcohol from multiple sources. Children who drink are at

risk for school and social problems, injuries, and even death from alcohol poisoning or accidents. For more information, consider these sources. <https://drugfree.org/drugs/alcohol/>

<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/make-a-difference-child-alcohol>

ii. Marijuana

Marijuana is the second most common drug among U.S. teenagers. It is illegal at the federal level and remains strictly prohibited among military personnel. All states who have legalized marijuana have prohibited its use for those under 21. <https://drugfree.org/drugs/marijuana/>

iii. Vaping and E-cigarettes

Vaping is one of the most popular substance use trends among teens. Vaping is the act of inhaling and exhaling an aerosol, or vapor, produced by an e-cigarette, vape pen, or similar device. According to the CDC's National Youth Tobacco Survey, 1 in 5 high school students reported vaping in the past month. <https://drugfree.org/drugs/e-cigarettes-vaping/>

iv. Prescription and Over-the-Counter Medication

Whether prescribed or obtained elsewhere, roughly one in five teens report having misused or abused prescription drugs intended as medicine. In recent years there has been a dramatic increase in overdoses attributed to prescription drugs. Progression from prescription pain reliever addiction to heroin use often occurs when the pain relievers become too expensive or difficult to obtain. <https://drugfree.org/prescription-over-the-counter-medicine/>, <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/opioids-facts-parents-need-to-know/letter-to-parents>

v. Other substances less frequently used by youth <https://drugfree.org/drugs/>

vi. Additional resources https://drugfree.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Center-on-Addiction-Nicotine-Alcohol-Other-Drugs-A-Parent-Companion_July-2019.pdf

c. Risk and protective factors for addiction

As a military family, you are probably no stranger to risk and uncertainty. Unfortunately, we have no way of knowing for certain which military youth will try substances, who will experience harm from using them, or who will end up developing a substance use disorder. What we do know is that there are characteristics and experiences, known as risk factors, that increase the chances that a military child will develop a problem with substance use. Keep in mind that risk factors do not determine one's destiny — rather, they are useful in gauging the potential for a problem to develop.

Preventing and delaying substance use for as long as possible, along with addressing any underlying risk factors, are important ways to reduce the likelihood of problem substance use. Fostering your military child's coping skills, mental health and relationships, along with keeping them safe, can serve as protective factors.

As a military parent or caregiver, it is helpful to be aware of risk factors that affect all youth as well as certain risks your child experiences as a part of their military connection.

i. Risk and protective factors for all youth <https://drugfree.org/article/risk-factors-problem-use-addiction/>, <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/risk-and-protective-factors>

ii. Unique risk-factors factors military children and families

1. Risk Factors

Military youth are at an increased risk of using substances in adolescence¹. Research shows that compared to their civilian peers, military-connected youth are about 50% more likely to report using alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana, and other drugs¹. While being from a military family alone does not increase your child's risk for substance use, certain experiences common to military life (i.e. multiple deployments, frequent moves, physical injuries and/or mental health difficulties of a parent or caregiver) can create stress for your child^{2,3}. Coping with these stressors in turn can make your military child more vulnerable to substance use and its problems. Most military families and youth respond to these stressors with resilience and strength¹. However, military-related risk factors can be difficult to cope with and youth may need extra support.

¹<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26280338/>

²<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23332331/>

³<https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/follmer/bpmh/2018/00000014/00000001/art00007>
<https://www.childtrends.org/publications/5-risks-facing-young-children-in-our-military-families>
<https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/populations-at-risk/military-and-veteran-families>

a. Frequent relocation

The risk of substance use increases greatly during times of transition. For youth this can include moving or changing schools. If you have been associated with the military for a while, you probably have packing up and moving your family down to science. According to the [National Military Family Association](#), military families move 2.4 times as often as civilian families and can transition between schools as much as nine times in their K-12 school years. When your military child is facing a move, it can help to ramp up monitoring and communication.

As a military parent or caregiver, you may find it more difficult to monitor negative peer influences with your child's peers and friend group changing with each move. Try to get to know who your child is spending time with when you move to a new location. Help your child cope with the stress and sadness of leaving a familiar place behind and keep an open dialogue with them about how they are doing. Having a good support system can help. Be proactive in helping get your family connected to the community in your new location. Take advantage of [moving support services](#) available through the military and your community.

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/moving-housing>

b. Parent/sibling deployment

Research shows that deployment of a military family member significantly increases a child's risk of substance use as compared civilian and non-deployed military peers¹. If you have been through a deployment, you know what an extremely challenging time it can be for the family. Each phase of the deployment cycle (before deployment, deployment and post-deployment/reintegration) present unique challenges for the family and are times of increased risk for your child. Your child's risk of substance use also increases the longer deployments last and the more deployments they experience². For a military child, a deployment cycle can be one of the most stressful events they will experience. It may be that military youth experiencing deployment are more likely to use substances to cope with their distress¹. If you are the non-deployed parent or caregiver, you may also feel stressed and overwhelmed. You might find yourself suddenly dealing with more household, childcare, and financial responsibilities. With more demands on your time it may be easier for your military child to find opportunities to use substances without your knowledge¹.

Military children dealing with deployment are at even greater risk for substance use when their living arrangements are disrupted³. Particularly when your child cannot stay with a parent or relative during a deployment³.

When experiencing a current or recent deployment, pay close attention to how your child is coping and get your family the support you need. One of the best ways to take care of your military child during a deployment cycle, is to take care of yourself. Military children cope better with deployment when their caregiver also taking care of their mental health. Take advantage of [family support services](#) available to you through the military or your community. Military families that reach out or feel supported by those around them experience less deployment stress².

During deployments it may be a good idea for the remaining parent or caregiver to ramp up monitoring and communication with your military child. Encourage an open dialogue with your military youth and check-in with them about how they are coping. If possible, work to set aside regular one-on-one time with your military child to bond and have fun together.

For more information on parenting and deployment, visit:

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/family-relationships/parenting-and-children/parenting-through-deployment>

¹https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328790007_A_systematic_review_of_wellbeing_in_children_A_comparison_of_military_and_civilian_families

²https://www.nccp.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/text_938.pdf

³<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23441867/>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0029655415001827>

c. Parental/sibling injury/disability/MH

When your family is reunited after a deployment, there is often happiness but also new challenges. Service members, especially those who have experienced combat deployments, may return to their

families and children with physical injuries, trauma, and mental health symptoms. The stress placed on the family as well as the interruption these conditions cause to the parent-child relationship and can lead to an increased risk of substance use for your military youth¹. Returning service members have high rates of PTSD, TBI, depression, pain, and substance use disorders. If your family is dealing with any of these physical or psychological injuries, it is important to get the affected family member any care or treatment they need and to take care of [yourself](#). If your returning service member is prescribed medications for their injuries, pain, or mental health, make sure to keep them secured and out of the hands of your child. Visit Partnership to End Addiction to learn more about [securing and disposing medications](#).

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/health-wellness/caregivers>

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/health-wellness/mental-health/mental-health-support/how-to-cope-with-a-traumatic-event>

<https://drugfree.org/article/safeguard-against-medicine-abuse-securing-and-disposing-medications/>

¹https://www.nccp.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/text_938.pdf

d. Parental/sibling death

Youth who have lost a parent, caregiver, or family member are at an increased risk for substance use. You can help a child cope with the death of a parent by being there as ongoing support and taking care of yourself. How well a child will cope can depend on how their family responds.

<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/helping-military-children-traumatic-grief-tips-parents>

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/family-relationships/survivor-casualty-assistance>

¹<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1067828X.2019.1580234>

e. Older Military Sibling

Military youth with a sibling in the military are at an increased risk of substance use compared to their civilian peers as well as compared to youth with a parent in the military. In fact, youth with military-connected siblings report the highest rates of lifetime use of alcohol and marijuana¹. Older siblings may be a source of exposure to substances that accounts for this increased risk. It may also be, that having an older sibling in the military creates a unique sort of stress and disruption to the family unit that increases a military child's risk for substance use.

¹<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0749379712007581>

iii. Unique protective factors and resilience in military children and families

Culture of Resilience

Military youth are raised in a culture of courage, strength and resiliency. Military youth often meet the challenges of military family life with flexibility and adapt successfully to the stressors they face¹⁰.

Sense of Community and Shared Values

Military youth share common experiences which can create a bond and connection with their peers. Military youth often have shared values of leadership, responsibility, and working towards the greater good that can be protective. This sense of community can help military youth feel connected and supported as they face challenges and hardships.

Financial Stability and Healthcare Access

Military families and youth are more likely than their civilian peers to have at least one parent in employment, stable family income, and access to healthcare and support resources. All of these benefits of military life may be protective against substance use risk for military youth.

3. Preventing substance use in military children – Tips and Tools for families

a. Starting the Conversation with your military child.

As a military parent or caregiver, you are the biggest influence in your military child's life. Having open, honest conversations is one of the most powerful ways to connect with your kids and help them develop into healthy adults. When addressing challenging topics – like nicotine, alcohol or drugs – it's not about having a one-time "drug talk," but rather tackling the subject through more frequent, organic conversations that evolve as your child gets older. As a military family, your child will also experience more transitions – such as moves, changing schools, and deployment - than civilian youths. It is a good idea to consider revisiting conversations about substance use and healthy ways to cope with stress during these transition periods. Some things to keep in mind:

- Keep lines of communication open and make sure you come from a place of love and compassion – even when you're having tough conversations.
- Balance any consequences with positive encouragement.
- Frequent touch points and teachable moments come up all the time — use these as natural opportunities to discuss substance use.
- Draw on your military family values as a way to frame the conversation and set your expectations for behavior.

b. Preventing Drug Use: Tips for Every Age/Parent Talk Kit

Military youth are strong and resilient but face unique challenges that may increase their risk of substance use. As a military parent or caregiver, you are the biggest influence in your child's life. Building and maintaining a strong bond with your military children, especially as they move from childhood into adulthood, can help reduce their chances of substance use. The following resources and tools can help you prepare to talk with them about substance use and offer research-based strategies for your military family.

Partnership to End Addiction has information and resources that can help you prevent substance use and take early action: <https://drugfree.org/prevention-and-taking-action-early/>

For help on what to say to prevent substance use in your military child, download Partnership to End Addiction's [Parent Talk Kit](#) which includes:

- How to start the conversation with your child
- What to include in the conversation
- How to answer the questions "Did you do drugs?"
- Everyday teachable moments to help you bring up the topic of substance use.
- Ways you can teach kids to turn down drugs

Talk. They Hear You. SAMHSA campaign that is a great resource for parents on how to talk to your child about alcohol and other substances. It includes an app, PSAs, and resources. There is material which showcases military families. <https://www.samhsa.gov/underage-drinking>

To get tips for talking with your military child about substance at every age. Visit Partnership to End Addiction's [Prevention Tips for Every Age](#).

<https://drugfree.org/parent-e-books-guides/>

<https://drugfree.org/article/prevention-tips-for-every-age/>

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/family-relationships/parenting-and-children/parenting-youth-and-teens/talking-to-your-teen-about-substance-abuse>

c. Parenting Tips and Strategies

When raising a military child, especially in the teen years, it is natural to feel that there is little you can do to change their behavior. But there is scientific evidence showing which parenting behaviors are most effective (and which are not). Parents and caregivers often think that friends are more important to their teenager than they are. But studies and clinical experience suggest that parents can influence their teens in important ways. As a military parent or caregiver, your child's friends might change and shift with relocations. Your military child will rely on your guidance and influence as they face moves, deployments, and other military life challenges.

Below are parenting strategies and behaviors that are important in preventing your military child from using substances based scientific research. However, there are no guarantees — even the smartest, best-skilled, most caring parents can have children who experience problems. But knowing what helps and getting reliable information is an important first step for prevention.

i. Research-supports parenting practices to prevent substance use

Visit Partnership to End Addiction for [6 Parenting Practices](#) that research shows help prevent substance use in youth.

<https://drugfree.org/parent-e-books-guides/>

ii. Connecting and talking with your military child

As your military child transitions from childhood to adulthood, you may feel them pulling away, eager for more independence. But deep down they still want you involved. A strong bond with your military child, especially during the teen years, helps them cope with the stressors the military lifestyle, reduces the chances of them engaging in unhealthy behavior, and helps set the stage for preventing substance use. Here are ways to build and keep connections to your military child:

<https://drugfree.org/article/connecting-with-your-teen/>

iii. How to encourage healthy risk taking

Military families know more than most what it means to deal with uncertainty and risk. You also know that there are times when risks come with benefits as military service members risk safety and security to serve the greater good. For substance use risk, we are talking about an unhealthy risk we want youth to avoid. But guiding your military youth toward healthy challenges, can help them satisfy a desire for risk-taking, avoid negative consequences and bolster their confidence and leadership skills. Here are ways you can help encourage healthy risk taking in your military child:

<https://drugfree.org/article/healthy-risk-taking/>

iv. Setting limits and monitoring your military child's behavior

Military parents and caregivers, just like all parents, often find it challenging to set rules and boundaries. Or to not let those limits and rules slip or relax when your family is going through a move, deployment cycle, or other stressor. But rules and effective limits for your military child can protect you both and may be even more important during times of uncertainty. Find a balance between your need to protect your military child with their need for independence. Here are ways to set limits and monitor your

military child's behavior: <https://drugfree.org/article/set-limits-monitor-your-teens-behavior/>

v. How other adults can help – friends, family, the military family community

As a parent or caregiver in a military family, you should be proud of the way you shoulder so much responsibility. But remember that “it takes a village to raise a child” - you don't need to take on everything by yourself. Whether you realize it or not, you and your child have a great support system surrounding you. Members of your military and civilian community such as chaplains, sports coaches, guidance counselors, school nurses and even near-by relatives can all help guide a child toward healthy choices at every stage of life. And remember, when a parent is deployed, it is more important than ever to ask one or more of these caring adults to step in and offer help and love.

For ways family, friends, or other caring adults can support a military child, visit Military OneSource's [4 Ways You Can Support the Children You Love During Their Parent's Deployment](#).

For more ways grandparents can better communicate with their grandchildren and keep them healthy, download The Partnership to End Addiction's free guide [The Power of Grandparents](#).

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/military-life-cycle/friends-extended-family/support-military-children-during-deployment>

<https://drugfree.org/parent-e-books-guides/>

d. Talking with your military child about different substances

Military families can have a lot on their plate and as a parent or caregiver for a military child you are doing the best you can to protect your child. For most parents, we might not think about how to prevent substance use in our child until we have some reason to be worried. Maybe your military child is being exposed to new friends who you find out drink or vape. Or maybe you suspect your child is curious about marijuana and you are relocating to a state where it might be more available. The following Partnership to End Addiction resources can help you learn more about how to talk with your military child about the substances you may have concerns about. Remember, starting the conversation before you have a reason to worry is best, but it is never too late.

Partnership to End Addiction's Resources for Different Substances	
Alcohol	
<u>How to Address Alcohol & Underage Drinking</u>	Learn how to start a conversation with your military child if you have concerns about them drinking
<u>What Parents Need to Know About College Binge Drinking</u>	If your military child is in college or preparing to start, learn more about what college binge drinking is and why it's important to talk about it with your child.

Marijuana	
<u>Marijuana Talk Kit</u>	Learn why military teen use is risky and what you should and shouldn't say when talking with your teen about it.
Vaping	
<u>Vaping: A Guide for Parents</u>	Learn what the research says, the concerns about use, and how to have difficult conversations
Opioids and Prescription Medicine	
<u>Talking With Your Kids About Medicine Abuse</u>	Learn how having frequent conversations with the military teens and young adults in your life about the dangers of medicine abuse can help prevent problems.
<u>Medication Disposal Guide</u>	Learn how to get rid of medications you are not using. Ridding your home of unused or expired medication can help create a healthier and safer environment for yourself and your military child.
<u>When Opioid Pain Relievers Are Prescribed For Your Child: What You Should Know</u>	The overprescribing of prescription pain relievers has been a major cause of the opioid epidemic. Know what to ask when your military child is prescribed opioids.
<u>Heroin, Fentanyl & Other Opioids</u>	Get a comprehensive overview of the opioid epidemic with this e-book— how opioids affect the body, the risks involved and how you can help your family stay safe.

e. Importance of treating other mental health symptoms

Along with substance use, military children are at risk for other behavioral health problems and mental health symptoms including anxiety, depression, sleep problems, and thoughts of suicide^{1,2}. When a family experiences a deployment cycle, a military child can experience new or increased mental health symptoms. In a recent study, researchers found that school-age military children will visit a healthcare provider for mental health or substance use more frequently during deployment cycles¹³.

Mental health disorders and substance use are tightly linked. Often, when a mental health is not addressed, a young person will attempt to self-medicate or self-treat with drugs or alcohol. Studies show that ADHD, anxiety disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder and depression increase risk of substance use in adolescents. If your military child has a mental health disorder it is important to get them treatment and talk to them about the way's substance use could make things worse.

If your child is prescribed medication, it is important to ask their healthcare provider about all potential side effects and consider ways it could interact with your child's mental health concerns. Opioids prescribed for pain can be a particular concern for risk. For information about opioid pain relievers and questions you can ask if they are recommended to for you child, visit Partnership to

End Addiction's free article: [When Opioid Pain Relievers Are Prescribed For Your Child: What You Should Know.](#)

To learn more about what to do if your military child is struggling with mental health issues at the same time as substance use, download Partnership to End Addiction's free guide: [Substance Use + Mental Health: Your Guide to Addressing Co-occurring Disorders.](#)

¹<https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/follmer/bpmh/2018/00000014/00000001/art00007>

²<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11414-018-09646-0>

<https://drugfree.org/parent-e-books-guides/>

<https://childmind.org/article/mental-health-disorders-and-substance-use/>

<https://drugfree.org/article/parents-know-opioids-pain-relievers-prescribed-child/>

4. Addressing Substance Use in Military Children

When it comes to substance use prevention, there are no guarantees. You can talk with your military child about the dangers of substance use and practice prevention strategies like setting limits and monitoring your child. Your military child could have very few risk factors and lots of protective factors. Even then, your military child might end up choosing to use substances. But if you suspect or discover your child is using, it is not a time to lose hope or feel defeated. Addressing substance use as it happens and as early as possible can help protect your military child from further harm.

a. Military child might be using substances

Knowing whether your military child is using substances is not always easy. Many of the signs and symptoms are typical teen or young adult behavior. Many are also symptoms of mental health issues, including depression or anxiety.

Military youth experience a lot of transitions and deployment cycles are a particularly risky time for substance use. Checking in with your military youth during difficult times like deployments is always worth it. It lets them know you care and that you are noticing any changes in their behavior. So, if you have reason to suspect use, don't be afraid to err on the side of caution. Prepare to take action and have a conversation during which you can ask direct questions like "Have you been drinking, vaping or using drugs?" No parent wants to hear "yes," but being prepared for how you would respond can be the starting point for a more positive outcome.

We all want to believe the best about our children. It can be easy to miss or dismiss signs of potential substance use. Do not let this get in the way of what is best for your military child. There is no shame in seeking answers or finding and joining a support group.

Visit Partnership to End Addiction to learn [How to Spot The Signs of Teen or Young Adult Substance Use](#).

To learn more about the first signs of substance use, visit SAFE Project at: <https://www.safeproject.us/resources/at-the-first-signs-of-substance-abuse/>

b. Military child is using substances

If you know military, your child has used substances it is important to take action. Any use during adolescence can be harmful to your military child’s development. The following resources can help guide your response to your child’s drug use at any time — even if you just want to assess whether it’s a problem in the first place.

Partnership to End Addiction’s Resources	
How Worried Should I Be About My Child’s Drug Use?	Learn about the risks of any drug use, how to know if your child is vulnerable to addiction, and why it’s important to talk with your child about their use.
If You Discover Your Child is Using Drugs: Start Talking	Discovering that your military child could be using substances stirs up a lot of emotion. The best way to find out what’s going on, and to begin helping, is to start talking. Learn how to have a conversation instead of a confrontation.
Prepare to Take Action if You Suspect Teen or Young Adult Drug Use	Learn how to prepare for the important conversation with your military child about their substance use. Learn how lay a foundation for a more positive outcome.
What If My Spouse and I Don’t Agree on How to Handle Our Child’s Substance Use?	Learn how to navigate disagreements over how to handle your military child’s substance use.

c. Military child might have a substance use disorder problem

As a military parent or caregiver, you may wonder when substance use gets to a point where it is a medical disorder. Visit Partnership to End Addiction to learn [How to Identify Substance Use Disorder & Addiction](#). You can also visit <https://www.safeproject.us/resource/when-things-get-rough/> to access lessons learned from this phase of substance use.

You know your military child better than anyone and if you suspect they are struggling with substance use it is best to take action. If you think your military child has a substance use problem,

they most likely do, and it could very well be much worse than you think. You should immediately seek professional help to get an evaluation and get connected with the proper care. Note that as a member of the military community, your child has access to inpatient or outpatient treatment through TRICARE.

If treatment is required, finding the most appropriate treatment facility for your military child can be enormously frustrating. Not every treatment facility takes TRICARE. To help you find a facility that will work for your family, you can access SAFE Project's Treatment Locator at:

<https://safelocator.org/en/search>

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) also has a treatment locator at:

<https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>

You can also visit [Partnership to End Addiction](#) or SAFEProject.us to get support and help to address your military child's substance use. Trained and caring specialists are ready to listen, help you find answers and make an action plan. You can also connect to support through the [Help & Hope by Text](#) to receive daily messages customized to address your specific concerns.

d. Navigating your military child's treatment and transition to recovery

Should your military child enter treatment, there are key resources and lessons learned to guide you through the process during treatment and as they transition into recovery:

<https://www.safeproject.us/resource/science-of-addiction/>

<https://www.safeproject.us/resource/medication-assisted-treatment-explained/>

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/principles-adolescent-substance-use-disorder-treatment-research-based-guide/evidence-based-approaches-to-treating-adolescent-substance-use-disorders>

<https://www.safeproject.us/resource/when-your-loved-one-is-in-treatment/>

<https://www.safeproject.us/resource/how-to-support-your-childs-transition-out-of-treatment/>

<https://www.safeproject.us/resource/what-to-do-when-you-transition-out-of-treatment/>

http://www.williamwhitepapers.com/pr/dlm_uploads/Multiple-Pathways-of-Recovery-Guide-2018.pdf

<https://www.safeproject.us/resource/how-to-thrive-in-recovery/>

5. Military-Specific Resources

a. General Assistance

i. Military OneSource

This web site offers valuable assistance and advice on a host of topics related to military life, including information on local military installations. While they do not have resources tied directly to substance use, they offer many resources that can assist with issues unique to military life that, properly managed, can help avoid the substance use factors that are unique to military children. Topics that are particularly relevant are sections on Health and Wellness, Family and Relationships, and Confidential Help. They have a 24/7 hotline for assistance at 800-342-9647.

www.militaryonesource.mil

ii. SAMHSA Service Members, Veterans and Families Technical Assistance
SAMHSA is the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Their Technical Assistance Center serves as a national resource to support states, territories, and local communities in strengthening their capacity to address the behavioral health needs of military and veteran families.

<https://www.samhsa.gov/smvf-ta-center>

iii. Military and Family Life Counselors
MFLCs are licensed counselors and Social Workers who provide non-medical counseling services to military service members and their families. It is available to the Active component and the Guard and Reserve. MFLCs can provide short term therapy and do not keep records. They have mandatory reporting obligations and are required to report situations where you could be a danger to yourself or to others, situations involving domestic violence or violence against another person, child abuse or neglect, and any present or future illegal activity. To reach an MFLC, contact your Military and Family Support Center at your nearest installation.

iv. Military Crisis Line
This website offers a crisis hotline via phone, internet chat, or text. The hotline number is 800-273-8255, <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/military-crisis-line>

v. Military Kids Connect (MKC)

Life for military kids is full of ups and downs. From adventure and unique experiences, to frequent moves and family adjustments - you may face challenges that your friends at school don't know anything about. Making connections with other military kids can help you build resilience and find friends who understand your life. <https://militarykidsconnect.health.mil/>

vi. Military Child Education Coalition

This site provides a wealth of resources under their mission of ensuring inclusive, quality educational opportunities for all military-connected children affected by mobility, transition, deployments and family separation. <https://www.militarychild.org>

vii. Child Mind Institute

While it is not military-specific, this valuable site addresses a host of children's health issues, including alcohol and substance use, that will be useful for military families. The latter may be found at <https://childmind.org/topics/concerns/drugs-and-alcohol/>

viii. Military and Veteran Caregivers – Elizabeth Dole Foundation Hidden Heroes

A major campaign of the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, Hidden Heroes is a multi-year, multi-faceted campaign that brings vital attention to the untold stories of military caregivers and seeks solutions for the tremendous challenges and long-term needs they face.

<https://www.elizabethdolefoundation.org/hidden-heroes/>

ix. Sesame Street for Military Families

This site provides a wide range of resources for military kids.

<https://sesamestreetformilitaryfamilies.org>

x. Chaplains

Chaplains are the military's religious leaders with many different roles, specifically, for providing confidential counseling. Although the conversations are absolutely confidential, they are not licensed clinical therapists and their experience with substance use matters may vary. They are easy to find and are able to provide detailed information on resources available in your local area.

b. Health Care

i. Useful TRICARE Websites

These sites outline the Prime and Select Families plans. <https://www.tricare.mil/Plans>,
<https://www.tricare.mil/FindDoctor/ChangePCM>

ii. Mental Health

TRICARE Mental Health Care: <https://www.tricare.mil/CoveredServices/Mental>

TRICARE covers medically and psychologically necessary mental health and substance use disorder care. This includes both inpatient and outpatient care. This site provides links to mental health care resources available under the TRICARE program. The site states that you do not require a referral for outpatient mental health care but do require one for substance use disorder care.

The Cohen Veterans Network:

<https://www.cohenveteransnetwork.org>

The Steven A. Cohen Military Veterans Network is a national network of mental health clinics. Active duty military, Veterans, and their families, including children, are eligible for personalized, evidence-based mental health care along with access to comprehensive case management support and referrals to deal with other stresses like intensive outpatient programs for substance use. When insurance is not available, the service is provided at no cost.

The Barry Robinson Center:

https://www.barryrobinson.org/residential-treatment/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwzbv7BRDIARIsAM-A6-2ZaLy757hsseVSJHZe-ih-_VhDPrWWas90BWz8iLIZKIMJbJJU9nsaAoYSEALw_wcB

The Barry Robinson Center is a premier non-profit behavioral health system with residential treatment programs for boys and girls, ages 6-17, from military-connected families. We also offer a residential dual diagnosis program for teens with co-occurring substance use and mental health issues.

6) Sustained Care/Recovery

a. Insurance Options Tricare is a health insurance program for military members, their dependents, retirees, and some survivors & former spouses. To use Tricare, you must be listed in DEERS as being eligible for military health care benefits.

i. Tricare options- (<https://www.tricare.mil/Plans>)

1. “Prime” Families TRICARE Prime offers fewer out-of-pocket costs than TRICARE Select, but less freedom of choice for providers.

2. “Select” Families: A preferred provider network available to all non-active duty beneficiaries. Most freedom of choice.

3. Reserve/Guard options during and immediately following Active Duty, title 10 status

For more information on Healthcare options go to:

<https://www.tricare.mil/Plans/SpecialPrograms/TAMP>

ii. Outside Insurance/Out of Pocket Options (<https://www.healthcare.gov/quick-guide/>)
Healthcare Marketplace.

b. Inpatient vs. Outpatient (*resources, check list, or “information sheet” to identify correct action to take*)

i. Military sponsored Intensive Inpatient/Outpatient and transitional care/counseling- All Marketplace insurance plans cover mental health and substance use services as an essential health benefit. For more information on Substance Use coverage go to: <https://www.healthcare.gov/coverage/mental-health-substance-abuse-coverage/>

c. Military PCS options

i. EFMP (Exceptional Family Member Program): Joint program that provides community support, housing, medical, educational, and personnel services to military Families with an EFM (Exceptional Family Member)

Each military service branch has EFMP resources. Here are links by branch:

- [Army Exceptional Family Member Program](#)
- [Navy Exceptional Family Member Program](#)
- [Marine Corps Exceptional Family Member Program](#)
- [Air Force Exceptional Family Member Program](#)

ii. Military Leadership Involvement if issues persist (Military relocation could hinder treatment for dependents. Leadership and Healthcare Providers must communicate to determine if the family member will suffer setbacks or additional difficulties because of the change of station. Treatment team meetings should include members of Command and the Leaders should be made aware that

all previous risks could be amplified when Permanent Change of Station {PCS} happens during certain phases of the treatment cycle).

d. Continuity of Care

i. Behavioral Health Counseling (On Post Medical Treatment Facility and Off Post appointments-TRICARE) For more information on TRICARE coverage go to: <https://www.tricare.mil/CoveredServices/Mental>

ii. Medication Treatment- Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) - such as methadone, buprenorphine or Suboxone to address withdrawal symptoms and cravings For more information on MAT Treatment go to: <https://www.samhsa.gov/medication-assisted-treatment>, <https://www.safeproject.us/resource/medication-assisted-treatment-explained/>

iii. Long term Follow-up to address/prevent relapse

Peer reviewed research associated with long term care with SUD (Substance Use Disorders)

For an article on Substance Use Disorders go to:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6487766/>

iv. Identification of possible triggers *learning physiological and psychological triggers H-A-L-T: hungry, angry, lonely, or tired which triggers drive your use*). For more information on Triggers go to : <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/treatment-approaches-drug-addiction>

v. Recovery: Lifelong process, may require outside assistance for duration of life. For more information on Recovery go to: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/recovery>

vi. Aftercare Support from Community based agencies can be extremely helpful. For more information on Aftercare go to: <https://sbtreatment.com/aftercare/>

vii. Drug testing Most programs require regular and often random testing. For more information on Drug testing go to: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/drug-testing>

viii. Family therapy -a modality that involves all members of the family as participants and reporters for Behaviors. For more information on Family Therapy go to: <https://www.recovery.org/treatment-therapy/family/>

ix. Coordinated communication with schools/law enforcement when family members are addicted to substances, management will require multiple sources. Recovery High Schools: For information on Recovery High schools: <https://districtadministration.com/recovery-high-schools-dent-teen-substance-abuse/>

e. Therapies Associated with Treating Drug Addiction

i. Cognitive-behavioral therapy a short-term, goal-oriented psychotherapy treatment that takes a hands-on, practical approach to problem-solving.

ii. Contingency management

iii. Motivational enhancement

iv. Family therapy is a type of psychological counseling (psychotherapy) that can help family members improve communication and resolve conflicts. For more information on MFLCS go to: <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/confidential-help/non-medical-counseling/military-and-family-life-counseling>

v. Twelve-step facilitation (TSF)

- (Narcotics Anonymous <https://www.na.org/>)
- Alcoholics Anonymous <https://www.aa.org/>)
- AL-ANON-AL-ATEEN <https://al-anon.org/>)

For more information on evidence-based approaches, go to: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/principles-adolescent-substance-use-disorder-treatment-research-based-guide/evidence-based-approaches-to-treating-adolescent-substance-use-disorders>

f. Relapse/Recurrence:

Relapses are common. There are many reasons for that, and scientists call these reasons “triggers.” The triggers include being in withdrawal from drug use, experiencing stressful life events, and/or seeing people, places, or things that remind a person of drugs, such as returning to a place connected to past drug use or seeing a stranger sell drugs. Relapses need to be treated the same as a chronic illness. They may call for a renewed, modified, or new treatment plan. The team will need to continually monitor the plan with the aim being the success of the outlined treatment goals. It is good to note that 60 percent of teens relapse within the first year and recovery is a slow process. Specifically, for military teens coming out of intensive treatment, the support will continually be needed with relocations.

Tip Sheet for Relapse: <https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/tips-for-avoiding-relapse.pdf>

Creating a Relapse Prevention Plan to Help Teens. For information on Relapse prevention go to: <http://www.anthonylouiscenter.com/relapse-prevention-plan-creating-a-guide-for-teens/>

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g. Changing the Perception of Substance Use

For information on the No Shame Project go to: <https://www.safeproject.us/noshame-mental-health-addiction/>

i. Addiction is a complex but treatable disease that affects brain function and behavior. For more information on Addictions go to: <https://www.safeproject.us/resource/science-of-addiction/>

or:

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/drug-addiction/symptoms-causes/syc-20365112>

ii. There is no confirmed cure for addiction but it can be managed

For more information on this topic go to:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2797101/>