Helping Military-Connected Children and Teens Build Resilience

Moving to a new duty station, changing schools and having a parent deploy are common realities for military children. These experiences can bring uncertainty, unfamiliar surroundings and separation from loved ones.

Resilience skills can help children and teens manage difficult feelings, solve problems and adapt to new situations. Parents can teach and practice these skills with them.

Remember, resilience doesn't mean ignoring problems, being positive all the time or getting through tough times alone. It means knowing how to manage uncomfortable emotions, asking for help and deciding what steps to take when facing challenges.

This article will explain:

- How to use resilience strengths and skills in everyday situations.
- How to practice these skills at different ages.
- How parents can build resilience skills with their children.

Putting resilience strengths into practice

The Army's 7 C's of resilience for military kids are confidence, competence, connection, character, contribution, control and coping. People can develop these strengths over time. Here are examples of how children can put these strengths into practice:

Confidence: Recognize existing strengths and learn new skills with practice. For example, give children the opportunity to solve age-appropriate problems to build their confidence.

Competence: Learn from mistakes and setbacks. A student who gets a lower grade than expected can look back at the questions they missed, ask the teacher what to work on and set aside time to study before the next test.

Connection: Maintain old friendships and make new ones. After a PCS, children can set up video calls with friends from their previous school or ask a teacher about school clubs. Parents can help by loving their children for who they are, being a safe harbor for them and being present when they're at home.

- **Character:** Show kindness and make choices based on personal values. A child who sees someone being left out of a game can invite them to join.

- **Contribution:** Find ways to help others. Children can help a neighbor or volunteer in their community. These activities can help them connect with others and recognize what they have to offer.

- **Control:** Identify what can and can't be changed. Although children can't change whether a parent is deploying, children can help plan a special Family activity, have video calls with that parent during deployment and find someone they can talk to when they miss their parent.

- **Coping:** Find healthy ways to manage difficult feelings. A child nervous about starting a new school can take a few slow breaths to calm down, talk to a trusted adult or ask a teacher for help.

Another way to manage uncomfortable emotions is to learn to question assumptions. A teenager who sees a social media post showing classmates at a party they weren't invited to might think, "Nobody wants to be my friend."

But that post doesn't necessarily tell the whole story. Instead of assuming their classmates don't want to be friends with them, the teenager could try to think of other explanations that are possible.

Practicing resilience at different ages
Children and teens can learn the same skills, but the way you teach them will change as they grow:

- **Elementary school (ages 5–10):** Keep activities short and simple. Ask children to draw something they're worried about, such as moving to a new school. Talk about what they can't change, such as where the Family moves, and what they can choose, such as an after-school club or sport to join.

- **Middle school (ages 11–13):** Talk through problems such as finding someone to sit with at lunch, making friends or adjusting to a new school. Ask, "What could you try?" Let children share their ideas before helping them decide what might work.

- **High school (ages 14–18):** Give teens more freedom to make decisions, but let them know you're available. If they're upset about a grade or something they saw online, ask, "Do you want advice, or do you just want me to listen?" Let them decide how to respond to what's bothering them.

Don't wait until your child is upset to practice these skills. Talk through everyday decisions and small problems together so they're better prepared to handle bigger challenges.

Resources
Changing Schools www.militaryonesource.mil/resources/millife-guides/changing-schools

Making the Move Easier for Military-Connected Children www.militaryonesource.mil/moving-pcs/plan-to-move/making-the-move-easier-for-military-kids

The 7 C's of Resilience for Military Kids www.armyresilience.army.mil/Newsroom/Blog/Blog-Display/Article/4378797/the-7cs-of-resilience-for-military-kids