



DoDEA Celebrates Military Children



Frequent transitions, new schools, and parents’ deployments all combine to make life for military children fairly unpredictable. Yet, one thing is predictable. Since 1986, the month of April has presented adults in military (and civilian) communities around the world with an opportunity to celebrate military children for all the contributions and personal sacrifices they make while their parents serve our nation.

Schools across DoDEA are planning a range of activities to celebrate the Month of the Military Child. Renee La Fata, Ph.D., Instructional Systems Specialist for the Pacific Area Office, says that this year many Pacific area schools will continue long-held traditions of inviting guest speakers from the local military community to offer

demonstrations and speak with the children about their work. These exciting visitors include K-9 units, Browntree Snake Handlers, pilots, firefighters, and Global Hawk helicopter crews. In addition, some schools have set aside specific days for fun-filled spirit activities, such as:

- ◆ Advisory challenges. These vary from Frisbee challenges to door decorating contests to skits produced by students.
- ◆ School Spirit Week. Some students will wear red, white, and blue. Others are donning camouflage.
- ◆ Volleyball challenge. Teachers will compete with students for year-long bragging rights at one school.
- ◆ School-wide writing activities. Many schools across the Pacific are partnering with *Stars and Stripes* to use Month of the Military Child as an opportunity to boost student writing and communication skills through personal essays and artwork for publication.
- ◆ A school dance. This is a fun way to reward students for their hard work.

While planning these events takes time, Dr. La Fata points out that such effort reflects the profound commitment DoDEA administrators have to ensuring the emotional and social well-being of their students. “Our counselors and school psychologists shine in the enthusiasm that they put into making sure that the Month of the Military Child is a month to honor our students and families,” said Dr. La Fata. For more information about the Month of the Military Child activities, visit www.monthofthemilitarychild.com. ■



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Converting Stress into Strength



Between recent fiscal uncertainties, increased computer security requirements, and new deployment alerts, DoDEA educators and parents/sponsors have plenty of reasons for psychological stress. Fortunately, an abundance

of resources are available to help individuals convert this stress into personal resilience and psychological strength.

Everyone benefits from “naturally occurring support systems” such as friends and family. Sharing news of the stressful situation with others brings reassurance that no one confronts these problems alone; others have confronted similar situations and survived. Staying connected through social media extends this reassuring support to staff members and parents/sponsors stationed anywhere in the world.

In addition, the military services provide several resources to help individuals learn to manage stressful situations including the Family Assistance Center, Family Readiness Group, and military service community services (i.e., Army Community Services or Marine Corps Community Services). Community services offer classes on topics such as: communication, personal time management, stress management, and financial planning. Refining these skills can help individuals directly address the situations generating stress.

Family Assistance Centers are established during lengthy deployments to provide information and referral

on matters such as ID cards, health care, legal matters, financial counseling, and family psychological support. A typical service involves establishing a video teleconferencing link to help families stay connected.

Family Readiness Groups are associated with a specific military unit and provide support to the families of personnel in that unit. Family Readiness Groups serve as a source of inspiration, training, and support to help families increase their self-reliance. Family Readiness Groups also sponsor activities that help individuals connect with other families adjusting to parenting and managing households with a loved one deployed.

Military Family Life Consultants (MFLCs) are certified mental health professionals sent to an installation to supplement the existing mental health resources. All MFLC personnel have access to a library of over 150 courses that include modules on topics such as Coping with Job Uncertainty, Goal Setting, Discipline for Teens, Stress Management, and Relaxation Techniques.

Strategies for managing psychological stress usually include physical exercise, meditation/prayer, gaining perspective, and talking to a trusted advisor. Each time one successfully manages psychological stress from financial uncertainty, security requirements, or military deployment, one gains confidence. That strengthens resiliency and enhances one’s ability to manage future challenges. ■



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Bomb Threat Leads to Exemplary Response

Quick. Think Fast. If you suddenly received a bomb threat, would you know what to do? Critical actions include taking a bomb threat seriously, reporting it, and responding as directed.

On February 13, Dr. Carolyn Carr, principal of Shughart Elementary School, received a bomb threat that was considered credible. Shughart Elementary is colocated with Shughart Middle School so both schools evacuated. Within four minutes all elementary and middle school students were outside and assembling in their designated areas. Within 10 minutes, principals had accountability for students and staff so they knew that everyone was safe.

Buses were scrambled and arrived within 20 minutes. Less than 30 minutes from the time the alert was received, students were being transported to the alternate evacuation sites. When the Shughart students arrived at the evacuation site, Gordon Elementary School, Principal Joel Grimm and his staff were ready and ushered the students straight into the cafeteria where food and restrooms were available.



Parent-child reunification proceeded smoothly. The MPs and local police worked together to secure the perimeter at both the school and the parent-child reunification site. Police directed arriving parents to present identification and sign for their child. Principal Grimm observed later that despite receiving approximately 800 additional students, the students at Gordon Elementary School finished out a normal educational day and were dismissed as usual.

Meanwhile, the District Superintendent’s Office and Fort Bragg Public Affairs Office coordinated release of information via DoDEA’s “One Call Now” reverse 911 system and school and installation Web sites. As a result, parents were reassured that all children were safe and told where they could pick up their child. That evening Superintendent Emily Marsh thanked parents for their support, noting: “All students are accounted for and safely home. Our school administrators did a great job, children were cooperative, and teachers went the extra mile.”

For assistance establishing specific evacuation routes, holding areas, and contingency plans, contact your Area/District Safety and Security Officer. The tips below can help staff members report and respond appropriately. ■

Bomb Threat Warning Signs, Actions, and Resources

Security is not always convenient, but when a bomb threat is received, or suspicious package discovered, the situation needs to be taken seriously and acted on promptly. Warning signs that a package could be a bomb include specific information about the time of the threat, excess postage, lack of return address, strange odors, or oily stains on the package.

Actions administrators can take today include:

- ◆ Ensure school staff know that any person identifying a suspicious package should immediately notify an administrator or the school secretary who will then notify emergency responders by dialing 911.
- ◆ Post “bomb threat report forms” near phones and in the main office so it is easy for an individual who receives a telephonic bomb threat to note voice characteristics and background noises.

Resources to assist schools with bomb threat response plans and awareness include the:

- ◆ DoDEA Student Antiterrorism Awareness video www.dodea.edu/Offices/Safety/videos.cfm.
- ◆ DoDEA Crisis Management Guide, www.dodea.edu/crisis/upload/DoDEA_Crisis_Manag_Guide_07.pdf, page 32 provides a bomb threat report form.
- ◆ Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Bomb Threats in Schools Guide: www.cops.usdoj.gov/Publications/e061120371_POP_BombThreatsinSchools.pdf. ■

Tips for Parents: How to Choose a New School from a Distance



Military students have a mobility rate of about 31 percent annually. Source: www.DoDEA.edu/aboutDoDEA.today.cfm

Frequent moves and new schools are something almost all military children have in common. Finding housing, packing up the household goods, and figuring out employment options for the spouse are some of the most common stressors of families after they receive “orders” to a new location. For families with school-aged children, however, these concerns usually come second to the difficult task of selecting new schools from a distance.

The Office of Military Community and Family Policy recommends families begin searching for new schools several months in advance by “thinking about what you want a school to do for your child.” By drawing up a wish list of preferences, families can come to a clear understanding of which features matter most in a school.

After the family ranks their needs and preferences, they can begin researching schools in the area to which they are moving. The National Center for Education Statistics Website (<http://nces.ed.gov/>) offers information about all U.S. public schools. DoDEA offers information about its schools on the DoDEA website (www.dodea.edu). In addition, families with special needs children can access information about DoDEA and public schools in military communities through Specialized Training Of Military Parents (STOMP) at <http://www.stompproject.org/>. Resources include a listserv which many parents use to post queries about medical, educational, and housing options in the military community to which they are moving.

Several commercial school ranking lists exist. These have varying degrees of reliability. It is always best to choose a school based on the needs of the child, rather than a ranking system. Issues to consider: available services, recent standardized test scores, school safety and security, and proximity to good housing options. Parents of high school students should also consider their child’s talents and interests when narrowing down choices of schools.

The next step is to visit and observe schools. While most DoDEA schools welcome prospective families, some civilian schools will not offer tours until the family is eligible to attend that school (i.e., has signed a lease within the school district). Inquire whether there may be a parent or student, who would be willing to talk about the school. Perhaps, the school would be able to accommodate a shadowing tour during the school day. Remember to ask if the school has a crisis management plan in place and how they foster and maintain a positive school climate.



Finally, after selecting a school, parents should apply, if necessary, or register immediately. This helps the school plan and prepare for the upcoming school year. Some schools offer back-to-school events in the summer to help younger children meet their teachers and make friends before the school year begins. In high school, practice for fall sports and band typically start during the summer months and registering early provides students an opportunity to get involved, which in turn can relieve summer boredom, help them make friends, and ease the transition process for the entire family. ■

Internet Memes Explained

Cell phones, texting, emailing, Internet based social and professional networking sites, webcams, Smartphone applications (apps) have all contributed to, and changed, the way people communicate. Joining the club now is something called a “meme.”

The word “meme” derives from the Greek for “imitated thing.” The term was coined by a British evolutionary biologist in the 1970s and is defined as the vehicle that transports an idea, style, or behavior from one person to another. But how does this “meme” thing fit into the cyber communications world of 2013?

An “Internet meme” is a concept that spreads via the Internet and becomes so popular that it is replicated over and over again. In Internet-speak, this would be described as something “going viral.” A meme can take many forms: short phrases, jokes, songs, images, videos – anything can become a meme. One popular meme of 2012 was the “Texts from Hillary” meme. “Texts from Hillary” consists of one captioned picture of an individual(s) texting on a cell phone, followed by a second captioned picture of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton texting on her phone. The implication is that the two parties are exchanging text messages. The captions are fictional, but nonetheless, the humorous and witty captioned images took the Internet by storm.



Memos are not just reserved for images of political figures tagged with clever punchlines, however. “Harlem Shake” is an example of a recent meme gone viral across the world on every form of mass media imaginable, from major news outlets to Internet forums to cell phones. The “Harlem Shake” meme is a video featuring a group of individuals bursting out in spontaneous dance in unlikely environments, such as a classroom, office, or library. In early 2013, thousands of “Harlem Shake” videos were replicated and uploaded daily onto the Web. One video, featuring Norwegian soldiers breaking formation to jump about in colorful costumes registered 80 million views in the past month alone.

The point of a meme is mostly “just for fun,” but public relations and marketing professionals have also used this phenomenon as an advertising tool for their products and messages. The nature of memes, much like the Internet itself, is in a state of metamorphosis. How memes are used today, might be outdated by next week.

Unfortunately, some individuals have harnessed the power of “Internet buzz” to do harm. Reports of teens bullying their peers via Internet memes are becoming more frequent. Incidents involve students posting pictures of classmates tagged with captions that include harsh criticisms and hurtful language. Girls have posted images and messages mocking peers’ body types and physical traits. The hurtful pictures and comments may not make the national news, but these “mini memes” can spread through a school community like a virus. This meme-based form of cyber bullying is a serious issue facing children, parents, and schools and has already been implicated in several suicides within the United States.

The novelty of this form of bullying makes it particularly difficult to address. Most educators, counselors, and parents were not raised in an era with memes and did not study Internet behavior. For information regarding available resources, contact safeschools@csc.com. Meanwhile, one approach is to stay informed about what students are doing online, and constantly reinforce the importance of compassion, kindness, and ethical behavior in real life and when interacting online. ■



Patterns of Grief in Children



Most adults share a common understanding of the “five stages of grief” outlined by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in her 1969 book *On Death and Dying*. While these stages apply to children, it can be helpful for educators to know the typical responses exhibited by children when they lose a loved one. This enables them to stay alert for signs that a grieving child may need additional intervention and support as they move through the painful process of healing.

Bereavement experts note that there are certain common emotions that are part of the grief process for everyone; fear, anger, guilt, and sadness. Because young children do not have the ability to verbalize their feelings after a death, their behavior usually provides the best information about what they are experiencing. Following are the typical short-term childhood responses to the death of a friend, parent, sibling, or classmate. They may:

- ▶ Act fearful and seek out reassurance from adults. This can include asking if their bodies still work properly, asking if parents still love them, and showing signs of separation anxiety.
- ▶ Show anger towards peers, adults, and even inanimate objects. This can include aggressive behavior on the playground, kicking desks, and purposely breaking toys.
- ▶ Ask if they are to blame for the death. It is important to reassure children that any angry words or thoughts they might have expressed did not cause the death of their loved one.
- ▶ Regress behaviorally. Some children revert to thumb-sucking, bed wetting, and wanting to sleep with parents. These behavioral patterns are normal and usually resolve with encouragement and loving support over time.
- ▶ Experience from physical responses to grief such as headaches, stomachaches, poor sleep, and lack of appetite. Some children seem listless and complain of bodily weakness.
- ▶ Become quiet and introspective for a period of time after a death. They are not interested in playing and they cry more often.
- ▶ Show no emotion or behavioral changes at all. Some children experience such profound shock after a death that they appear unmoved. It is important for adults to remember that these children are actively grieving, even if they appear composed on the surface.

Research recently published by the American Medical Association has shown that for most children, grief begins to resolve naturally between the nine and twenty-one month mark. For a small percentage of children, however, this is the time when grief actually intensifies and can lead to psychiatric and social problems. The children who were most at risk for prolonged grief were those with a history of depression or other mental illnesses and those who lived with a parent who was not coping well with the recent loss.

Teachers can monitor children who are grieving and watch for signs near the one year anniversary of the loss to help determine whether the child’s grief has become debilitating. Classroom teachers may share observations with the counselor or school psychologist who can check with the student to see if those students require additional support.



To learn more about how to support the needs of bereaved children visit www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/deathgrief.pdf. For information that specifically addresses the death of a sibling, visit www.dsf.health.state.pa.us/health/lib/health/familyhealth/grief_of_children_after_loss.pdf. ■