



“I Didn’t Know There Was a Military Kid Identity”



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Roadmap

Why
Military
Kids?

Examples
from
Practice

What's
Next?



Why Military Kids?



Defining identity, expanding understanding, and recognizing trends



Who is a military kid?

- A child of a veteran or service member of any age, although the current population considered is predominantly 18-26.
- There is no singular narrative of how the identity was gained, as the unique experiences of a service member or veteran result in unique experiences as a military kid.
 - However, consider the timing of events in the past two decades and how military-connected populations may have been affected due to strategic changes across branches and components [5].
 - Despite any commonalities, I caution against generalizations, particularly related to misleading narratives suggesting that a military kid's lasting impact from their family member's service results in trauma or mental health conditions, as the research shows an absence of a link [4].

Reflect: Can you identify a military kid you know? How do you think they understand their identity?





Who is a military kid?

- Military kids are a growing population in higher education.
 - In 2018, there were about **1.65 million dependents** of military personnel across active duty and reserve components [2].
 - About **70%** of the 1.65 million were **11 or under**.
 - In 2021, there were about **1.60 million dependents** of military personnel across active duty and reserve components [3].
 - About **69.4%** of the 1.6 million were **11 or under**.
 - The population of military kids does not simply disappear, they are just no longer tracked in the same manner.
- Being a military kid is a military-connected identity of its own, but students may hold multiple identities, as new service members are increasingly also military kids [7].



Why support military kids?

- It is important to make space for this identity.
 - Young adults form their understanding of their identity throughout adolescence [8].
 - Precollege socialization is a determining factor in how students develop identity in college settings [6].
 - The military kid identity may not be supported in the same way outside of a Campus Military and Veteran Services office.
- Supporting the military kid also supports the veteran or service member in their life.



What are ways in which supporting the military kid supports the veteran?





In Practice



Evidence-Based Ways University
Veteran Services connects with
Military Kids



Examples in Practice

- Opening existing military-connected student programming to military kids
 - To start to build a culture where military kids feel welcome, an explicit invitation may be needed
- New programming specific to military kids
 - Celebrating Month of the Military Kid
 - Military Kid Pen Pal Program



Welcoming to Existing Programming

- Drop-In Advising and Study Day events where University Veteran Services staff organize designated times at highly recognizable locations across campus.
- Providing military kids with the opportunity to be selected for football tickets in the Military-Connected Student Section.
- Invitation to meet with University Veteran Services during new student orientation prior to their first term on campus.

Welcoming to Existing Programming

- Invitation to ad hoc programming with learning support centers, like the Math Learning Center.
- Dedicating a flag on Bascom Hill on Veterans Day in honor of their family member.





Month of the Military Kid

- Inspired in part by the Department of Defense Month of the Military Child.
- Inaugural celebration held April 2022.
 - Ice Cream Social serving multiple flavors from Babcock Dairy, the signature ice cream produced on campus.
 - *“I didn’t know there was a military kid identity”*
 - Efforts to spotlight student stories resulted in highlights through communication channels with audiences of 60,000+ readers.
- Planning in place for April 2023, with a shift towards student informed and student led programming.



Month of the Military Kid - 2022





Military Kid Pen Pal Program Structure

- UW-Madison students who are military kids were paired with a child whose parent is currently deployed with a Wisconsin-based unit. Community participants were invited to participate after attending pre-deployment events supported by the Wisconsin National Guard Child and Youth Program.
- UW students wrote the first letter to their pen pal, and each mailing included all the materials needed for the family to send a letter in return.
- Piloted with a small group beginning in Fall 2022, with letters sent every 4-5 weeks.



Military Kid Pen Pal Program Outcomes

- UW students often cited **connection** as a key takeaway.

*“This [pen pal program] is one of the only things that has given me a positive association with being a military kid and experiencing deployments. Normally, I think more about the trauma involved. **It’s not about me right now, it’s about my pen pal.**”*

UW-Madison student participant, December 2022

- Pen pal programs directed at students in higher education can support developing reflective thinking skills and increase community engagement [1].



Military Kid Pen Pal Program Community Feedback

*“...for that pen pal to show empathy and “I know how you feel” is **something we simply don't have here at home**. In fact, when we met with my daughter’s teachers and counselors, they acknowledged in **all their years of teaching they never had a student with a deployed parent.**”*

*“The expression of **shared sacrifice** amongst current service members, their families, and the veteran community is what allows us to be as **resilient** as we are and continue to place the needs of others above our own.”*

*“...it allowed my kids to recognize that **they are not the only ones** with a parent who is deployed during important events (concerts, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, etc.). The ability for me as the parent at home to affirm that “mommy being away” for the holidays is a **shared experience for children across the country was psychologically powerful.**”*



What's next?



Potential growth areas to
serve military kids

What does the military kid population look like in your community? What ways are you considering to support them?





Questions & Thoughts





For more information on how UW-Madison University Veteran Services supports military-connected students, visit veterans.wisc.edu.

Presented on February 19, 2023, by Amanda Venske (venske@wisc.edu), Education Benefits Specialist, University Veteran Services, UW-Madison.



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