



## **Coming Together Around Military Families<sup>®</sup>**

*Providing support to parents and professionals to help very young children cope with the stressors of trauma, grief and loss due to deployment.*

### **The Need**

With the operational tempo high and continued deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, military families are experiencing significant challenges. For many this may include multiple and extended deployments, and for others it may involve psychological or physical injuries of their Service member. An environment experiencing uncertainty, separation, and sometimes loss can create high levels of stress for families, but its effects on the youngest family members are easily overlooked.

The physical separation from a parent due to deployment can be a significant loss; for very young children, feelings of trust and security may be compromised. Trauma, grief and loss experienced by families of Service members who have been injured or killed, or are experiencing combat-related illness, may further challenge the ability to maintain the healthy parental relationships, which are essential to young children's development. Young children and their families need support to strengthen their resilience and to promote positive health and development during the course of these stressful experiences.

According to a U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) 2007 demographics report, there are 332,771 children ages 0–3 of Active Duty members. The largest percent of children of Active Duty members are between birth and five years of age, constituting 41.0% of minor dependents. Additionally, there are 104,505 children ages 0–3 of Selected Reserve members. Of the total number of children of Selected Reserve, 24.7% are between the ages of 0 and 5.<sup>1</sup>

As of 21 October, 2009, 5233 U.S. Service members had been reported killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. As of February 2009, 31,102 Americans had been wounded in Iraq.<sup>2</sup> A 2008 RAND Study indicated that, within their survey of military personnel who had been previously deployed for OEF/OIF, 14 percent met the screening criteria for probable posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and 14 percent met the screening criteria for probable major depression. Moreover, there was a co-occurrence in the two conditions,

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<sup>1</sup> The Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, Military Community and Family Policy (2007). *2007 Demographics: Profile of the military community*. Retrieved from [http://www.militaryonesource.com/Portals/0/Content/Service\\_Provider\\_Tools/2007\\_Demographics/2007\\_Demographics.pdf](http://www.militaryonesource.com/Portals/0/Content/Service_Provider_Tools/2007_Demographics/2007_Demographics.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>Retrieved from <http://icasualties.org/>

with approximately two-thirds of those meeting the criteria for PTSD also meeting the criteria for major depression. Additionally, the study found that 19 percent met the screening criteria for having experienced a probable traumatic brain injury (TBI). The research suggests that, within the population of personnel previously deployed as part of OEF/OIF, approximately 300,000 had experienced TBI.<sup>3</sup>

While the families of those Service members deployed to combat areas in Iraq and Afghanistan are most directly affected, the current operational tempo has stressed the entire military community, potentially placing all babies and toddlers in these families at higher risk.

Particularly concerning are the families of the Ready Reserve. As of fiscal year 2007, the Ready Reserve, consisting of the Selected Reserve, the individual Ready Reserve, and the Inactive National Guard, constituted 31% of the total military force.<sup>4</sup> Of the Ready Reserve, over 64% have experienced recent deployments.<sup>5</sup> The families of the Ready Reserve are particularly vulnerable because of their distance from military bases and lack of access to the typical services on which military families may draw.

### **A Response: Coming Together Around Military Families**

This initiative, *Coming Together Around Military Families (CTAMF)*, works to strengthen the resilience of young children and families who are experiencing trauma, grief and loss as a result of a Service member's deployment to Iraq and/or Afghanistan. In support of this effort, ZERO TO THREE received private funding over three years to launch the *CTAMF* initiative and, with the Department of Defense (DoD), established a strong partnership through a Memorandum of Understanding in December 2006. DoD is now supporting the expansion of these efforts at 28 military installations and military medical centers (e.g., San Antonio Army Medical Center and Walter Reed Army Medical Center), representing all service branches.

*CTAMF* also address the needs of families with young children serving in the National Guard and the Reserves by providing support for Joint Family Support Assistance Programs (JFSAP) through material resources and training. Each JFSAP is tasked with supporting military members and their families who do not have access to services on major installations, with special emphasis on families from the National Guard and Reserves. As a result of the DoD-funded expansion, a total of 37 JFSAP sites will be eligible to receive *CTAMF* training.

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<sup>3</sup> Schell, T. L. & Marshall, G. N. (2008). Survey of individuals previously deployed for OEF/OIF. In T. Tanielian & L. H. Jaycox (Eds.), *Invisible wounds of war: Psychological and cognitive injuries, their consequences, and services to assist recovery* (pp. 87–115). Retrieved from [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND\\_MG720.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG720.pdf)

<sup>4</sup>The Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, Military Community and Family Policy (2007). *2007 Demographics: Profile of the military community*. Retrieved from [http://www.militaryonesource.com/Portals/0/Content/Service\\_Provider\\_Tools/2007\\_Demographics/2007\\_Demographics.pdf](http://www.militaryonesource.com/Portals/0/Content/Service_Provider_Tools/2007_Demographics/2007_Demographics.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.ng.mil/news/archives/2009/10/101909-Forces.aspx>

The *Coming Together Around Military Families* initiative utilizes an array of formats to provide information and support to parents on the best ways to help their young children through deployment and associated transitions. *By offering training to professionals and resources to help parents maintain a focus on the needs of their children, the overall family unit can be strengthened to more effectively surmount the special stresses that may come with separations due to deployment, injury, illness or death.*

The project is designed to:

- Reach thousands of parents with messages and materials about the implications of deployment, trauma, grief and loss on young children, and the important role parents can play in supporting resilience in their children;
- Increase awareness and collaboration throughout the military and civilian communities to serve more effectively young children and their families impacted by deployment, trauma, grief and loss; and
- Train professionals working across four areas of practice (child care, mental health, health care, and family support) on their important role in supporting families with very young children experiencing the emotional or physical loss of a parent due to deployment, illness, injury or death.

For more information about ZERO TO THREE and *Coming Together Around Military Families* please contact Siobhan K. Casey, Director of Military Projects at ZERO TO THREE ([scasey@zerotothree.org](mailto:scasey@zerotothree.org)).