

# America's Unsung Heroes

## Finding Better Ways To Support Military Families

(NAPSA)—Americans know it's important to support military personnel deployed overseas. But a new RAND Corporation study shows just how important it is to support military *families* as well.

It found that children from these families can have significantly higher levels of emotional difficulties than children in the general population. About one-third of the military children surveyed reported symptoms of anxiety. Additionally, as the months of parental deployment increased, so did the child's challenges. In fact, the total number of months away mattered more than the number of deployments.

"These findings back up what we have been hearing from parents about the impacts of parental deployments on children," says Joyce Raezer, the executive director for the National Military Family Association, the group that commissioned the research. "And as more troops are deployed, more youngsters are affected." Additional study findings include:

- Older children experienced more difficulties during deployment.
- There is a strong relationship between the mental health of the caregiver and the well-being of the child.
- Girls experienced more difficulty readjusting after a service member's homecoming.

### A Brighter Future

Raezer has called on groups—including the Department of



### A study shows the importance of supporting families of military personnel.

Defense—to use the study's findings to better help families. Her association is now gathering key nonprofit and military leaders as well as the heads of other groups to form an expert task force and lead a national conversation on how to do just that.

Currently, the association is the only nonprofit organization that serves all military families, including those with a deployed, fallen or injured loved one. The group also serves families of all branches of the military, including the reserves and National Guard.

"We owe it to these families to better understand and address the challenges they are facing now and may be facing later," Raezer explains. The association offers these tips to help Americans everywhere lend support to military families:

- **Connect And Invite**—"Military families are like the rest of

us—you may not understand all the things military families face in a time of war, but you do understand the way friendships and community enrich their lives," says Raezer. "Reach out, connect to a military family and invite them to coffee or dinner."

- **Ask, "How Can I Help?"**—A simple offer of help can mean a lot to a single soldier or a "suddenly single" mom or dad whose spouse is serving overseas. If you're a neighbor, a friend or connected in some way to a military family, offer to help.

- **Lend An Ear**—The study showed that deployments are often especially difficult on teenagers. "Military teens shoulder a lot of additional responsibilities and are faced with some strong emotions at a pivotal time in their lives," says Raezer. "But remember, they are like other teens. They want to fit in, make friends and have fun." She suggests listening to what they have to say and being a role model.

- **Provide Encouragement**—"Although service can be tough, military families are proud of the difference they make," says Raezer. "Encourage our military families with gratitude and camaraderie. Military families are serving you, too."

- **Get Involved**—You can visit [www.MilitaryFamily.org/study](http://www.MilitaryFamily.org/study) to learn more about the study and to find ways to support and advocate for military families in the area.