

# PARENTING



*With*

INDEPENDENT



# Parenting And Military Life

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According to the DoD, in 2020 there were about 1.3 million active-duty personnel, and 36% of them have children.

Military life constantly presents them with change - new homes, new friends, and new experiences. Did they recently move across the country or the world? Are they starting in a completely new school? Is one of their parents currently deployed and missing important events? Maybe they are too young for school, but they still experience transitions and change.

And it isn't just the children dealing with all these changes throughout military life - their parents are too! As military spouses, you are usually the one in charge of the day-to-day aspect of parenting while your service member is serving. Military life adds an extra layer of everything to parenting and can make it even easier to lose yourself in the process.

Besides your children, and even if you do not have children, we all have parents, in-laws, and extended family who are a part of the equation. Parenting affects us all!

We hope you find tips and resources inside this book to help you on your parenting journey!

InDependent

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*Helping children learn to name their feelings and assuring them it is okay to feel different things all at once helps them build resilience, navigate the transitions in military life, and builds healthy coping mechanisms for life.*

# Two Things Are True

Here are seven tangible ways to help your kids navigate transitions, giving them some control and connection in a situation that might otherwise feel uncertain:

1. Bring something special with them in their backpack that symbolizes, for them, something about you or your family.
2. Create a secret handshake (for us this typically ends with a hug) that you can do when it is time for them to say goodbye.
3. Make photo books of memories from the places you've lived or of pictures with a deployed parent.
4. Have rituals when beginning new routines (for example getting ice cream after the first day of school) that give them something to look forward to with an otherwise uncertain day ahead.
5. Establish traditions and special moments you can continue no matter where you live. In particular, ones that you can begin soon after arriving at your next home.
6. Let them pack a box themselves that they can look forward to opening when you arrive at your new home.
7. Role play the event or situation that could lead to distress. For example, going over the sequence of events for a new school drop-off.



# Thoughts and Advice

"The focus of meals together should be building relationships with your family members. Not the food. Not the location. Not even the table manners. Instead, use meals together as a time to intentionally invest in relationships with the people you love most."

-Heather Campbell MS, RD  
[Glory Nutrition](#)



"As my husband leaves on a mission, I can't imagine trying to manage the emotions of missing a parent as a toddler. Managing those emotions as an adult is overwhelming + I just hate that I can't absorb that overwhelm for my kids.

**BUT...instead of obsessing over what I can't control, I'm going to focus on what I can.** We love our Daddy Dolls in this house, so that's my first order of business. Second, lots and lots of limited distraction playtime with my little girlie to let her play through some of those big emotions. She can show me what she's feeling in hopes that I can help her label those emotions and remind her I'm here to keep her safe + loved while she processes them.

**Processing through play is so big for littles!**

-Kirst, [Wives of the Air Force](#)

"Cultivate your interests, too. Many parents have a sense of "losing themselves," especially with the demands of military life. This is necessary in some ways because parenthood calls for a great amount of unselfishness, but unhealthy in others. How can you tell if this is happening to you?

- Are you the one taking all the photos, but appearing in none of them?
- Do you feel guilty if you're away from your kids doing something wholly unexciting like running to the grocery store, even if they're with the other parent or a trusted caregiver?
- When was the last time you bought yourself something? You, yourself. Not something for the kitchen or the house. YOU.

Aside from that, what are your interests? Is it something as simple as reading a library book? Learning to decorate cakes? Do you have a desire to start your own business? For me, it was writing. Give yourself permission to do that thing. It's not only healthy for you, it's healthy for your kids to see you look after yourself."

Jen McDonald

Author and [Milspouse Matters Podcast](#) Host



# 01

## *The first Key ingredient is HUMILITY*

"Friends, you and I have lived through a lot and have wise words to share with our middle school students, but during this time the most important thing you can do is humbly listen. We have lived our own experience of middle school and can sometimes react to our child's experience through our own lens, but what we want to do is be open minded to their perspective and to new information. Now the pressure is off us to say all the right things or do all the right things and allows the creative brain of the adolescent to develop.

What is the pay off for being a humble listener? *'When we meet people who radiate humility our shoulders relax, our heartbeat slows because we know we are being fully accepted, seen and heard.'*

When we shift away from judgment to recognize that we don't know everything and are open to a new perspective, then your preteen will feel safe in your presence. I think this is probably most important for military families because your home changes, your location changes, school and friends change, but you are the constant presence in their lives."

## *Gaining Clarity:*

*3 Key  
Ingredients  
that will  
help you  
and your  
child thrive  
and survive  
the pre-  
teen years*

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*from our  
interview with  
Rev. Dr. Amber  
Mattingly.*

*Watch it [here](#).*

# 02

## The second Key ingredient is *CURIOSITY*

"Let's be curious about who our pre-teens are becoming. But before we can get there, we have to start exercising the muscle of curiosity with what is going on inside us. Why do we fear parenting during this time of life? Why are there not many resources dedicated to this specific age group? I think it is because most of us had a terrible experience.

Here is what I was noticing happening to me. As my daughter entered middle school, I felt an internal resistance to the drama, tears, and maturation of her body. It was like my body was bracing for impact. So, I had to get curious about why I felt this resistance in my body. I spoke with counselors and a medical doctor who both pointed out something very interesting. The counselor said that my body was remembering this time in my own life and was inviting me to heal some of the unhealthy perspectives and habits I created during this time of life. So, I had the choice to accept the invitation or to resist it.

What is the payoff for curiosity? *I create a safe space for my child to feel the full emotions of the complex human experience."*

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# 03

## The third Key ingredient is to **SET AN INTENTION**

"My intention was that in everything I do that I set the stage for celebrating who each child is. **Now, intentions are different from goals.** A goal is like I want to hike the incline in Colorado springs. So, you break that goal down into smaller parts until you reach the full goal. But Intention is how you want to be as you reach your goal of hiking the incline. An intention might be to appreciate that my body can move or I intend to enjoy nature. **Intention is about how you want to be in the moment** and can be connected to a goal or not.

One of my professors during my doctoral work offered a suggestion on setting an intention. He said that in order to keep an intention, we must be able to connect to it throughout the day. So, he invited us to put a small rock in our pocket so that whenever we needed to connect back to our intention all we had to do was touch the rock in our pocket. Some people make vision boards and put them in their office. Others make crafty little things that they can hang somewhere where they spend most of their time. **I invite you to take some time to reflect on how you want to be as a parent during these preteen years.** Write it down, draw it out, or put a rock in your pocket every morning so that you remember your intention."

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3 Key ingredients:  
**Humility** or put a sock in it, **Curiosity** that opens our mouth to ask open ended questions, and **Intention** that sets the stage for who we want to be in the moment.

So, **Gaining Clarity** is really about deep listening to hear the perspective of your teen, understanding what is going on with you in the moment, and putting words to who you want to be during these years!

## **Gaining Clarity:**

**3 Key Ingredients that will help you and your child thrive and survive the pre-teen years**

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*from our interview with Rev. Dr. Amber Mattingly.*

Watch it [here](#).

# Resiliency and Military Kids

*"Labeling military kids as **resilient** doesn't automatically make them **resilient**. I'm not saying they aren't or can't be inherently tough-minded **BUT resiliency is a skill crafted over time** and kids need help/direction building those skills. Resiliency is developed and learned through experience, it's not automatic. **We are doing kids a disservice when we label them as resilient without teaching them to work through hard first**. We must teach them how to face challenges and how to see difficult situations as opportunities to learn and grow. We need to prepare them by helping them develop the skills they will need to handle military life. **We need to raise resilience, not just assume or expect it.**"*

*-Mallory, DITY Mama*

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*"I think this is the recipe for developing resilient and gritty children - **Kids need to be challenged**. They need to be doing things that they don't know that they can do, but Mom and Dad maybe know that they can do. **Kids need to be pushed to do things, within reason, that they can't yet do**. But the thing that makes them able to take those risks and learn lessons is that foundation - knowing that they are loved, knowing that someone always has their back. **In the context of love and support, things that can feel really hard will help you grow grit and other capabilities.**"*

*~ Angela Duckworth, Speaker IWS20*



# 6 Tips for Parenting a Military Teen - from a Military Teen



## 01

### Treat Your Children As Individuals

"Every child is a different, unique person with different strengths, sensitivities, and expectations. While your children might have the same parents, they are different people. Recognizing that will make all the difference."

The idea of raising two children differently glows especially bright in the military atmosphere when we need different tools, support, and outlets in order to acclimate."



## 02

### Empower Your Teenager

"Putting genuine time, effort, and focus into developing your teen's confidence from a young age is incredibly important. This can be as simple as practicing affirmations around the household or having your entire family cheer each other on."

**Read the full article [here.](#)**



## 03

### Travel With Your Teen

"Make sure you take advantage of the constant moving and travel and see new places. As one military teen put it, 'My parents have taken me on adventures and almost forced me to have fun in new places. They made sure I experienced something positive.'"

Any traveling is better than none, but the age at which you take your military child or teen to see some sights is worth considering." **11**

# 6 Tips for Parenting a Military Teen - from a Military Teen (continued)



## 04

### Don't Pretend To Understand, But Embrace The Differences From Your Childhood

"We all had a childhood and most of us are lucky enough to have parental figures around. So, when it is your turn to parent, you will probably reflect upon your own childhood in preparing to do so.

Do not overlook the fact that your child is going to live a very different life than many civilian children do.

We ask that you empathize with us, but do not pretend to understand or sugarcoat every aspect of our family's military life."



## 05

### Check In With Your Military Teen

"Just because military teens are "resilient" and familiar with change, doesn't make life as a military teen any less difficult.

They may seem like they are balancing the world on the tip of their pinkie and not even breaking a sweat; they may beam and tell everyone how much they love moving... but just check in.

Establish a safe and supportive relationship in which you can talk about emotions, and then keep that thread open as they grow."



## 06

### Don't Expect 100% During A PCS

"Parents, it's important to remember that each new environment is just that - new. Your military teen may struggle more or less with different moves and in different ways. Please give them time to adjust and offer resources rather than criticism if they are struggling. Do not expect every move - whether it's the third or the eleventh - to be easy, smooth, or "normal."

"What we strive for with our kids is to keep the lines of communication open. We try to refrain from heightened voices and use a different approach to keep them from shutting down or not coming to us in the future. We also consider everything (within reason) that they present to us- even if it's unconventional."

-Melanie Simon  
InDependent Volunteer



"Teach kids how to use a credit card/bank account, start investing, and encourage a fitness/sports/physical movement routine. Encouraging healthy spending habits and fitness habits early in life will only compound their benefits as they get older!"  
-Evie King, InDependent Volunteer.

"Spend time together doing whatever you all enjoy as a family- the years go so fast. Volunteering as a family is a great way to learn, grow, and serve together. And teaching skills like budgeting, the basics of cooking, household chores, and having balance will help them throughout life!"

-Elizabeth Fought  
InDependent Volunteer



# Managing Expectations and Communication with Your Parents and In-Laws

## Why is this important?

Military life is not just affecting you and your immediate family (spouse and children), but also those on the outside.

Think of the relationship as a "Bullseye"



- You and your spouse are at the center
- Your parents are the next circle around
- Your friends and extended family are on the outside.

Watch our interview with Elaine [here](#).





## Expectations and Education

Understand that your parents and your in-laws may not have a background to prepare them for different aspects of military life. Know that you can help educate them and help provide them with appropriate expectations in regards to communication, visiting, deployments etc. "Think of your parents as adults and not just "mom" and you can better communicate" Similarly, if parents remember that their children are now grown adults and not children, then the expectations will change and be more appropriate.

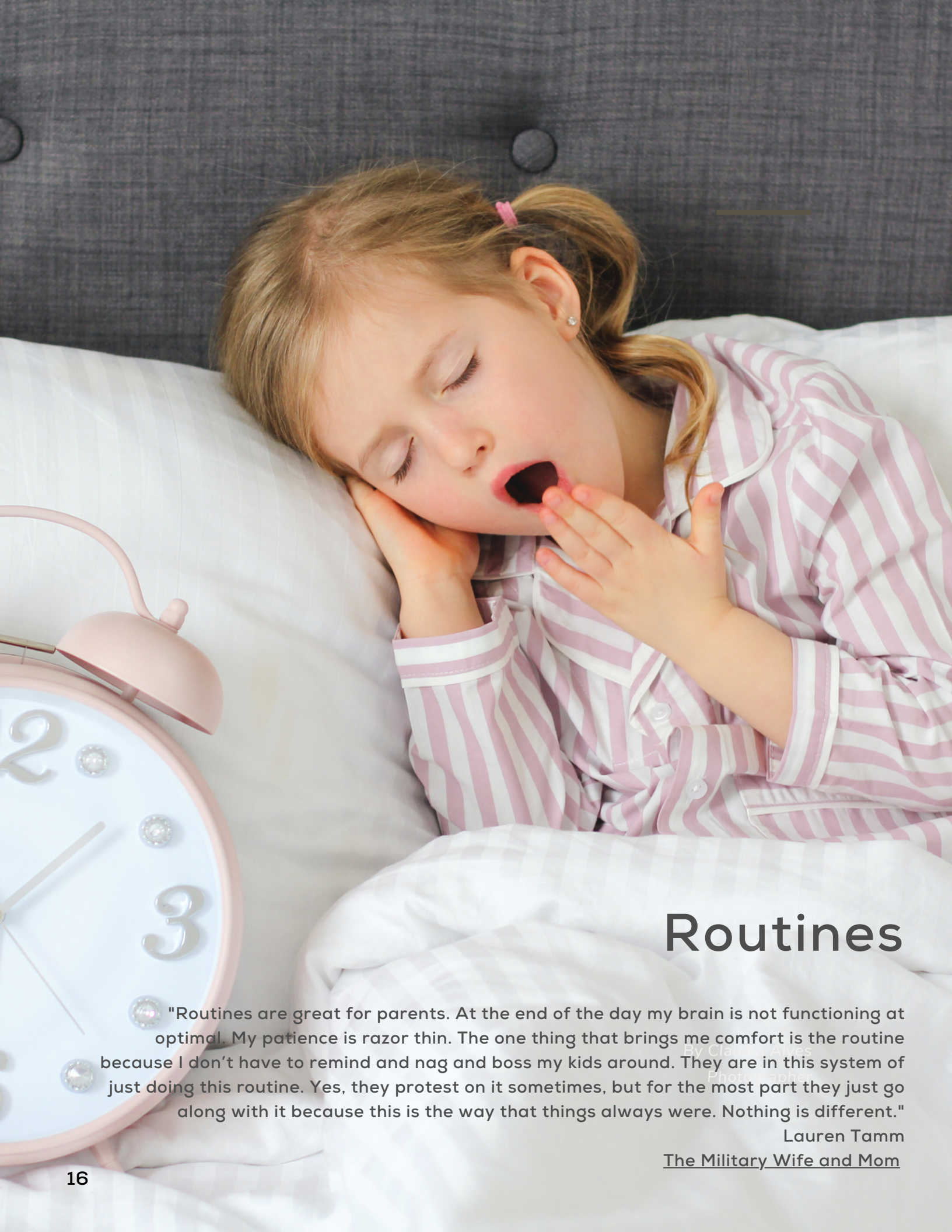
## Boundaries And Deployments

"I'm not going to a homecoming without being invited." ~[Elaine Lowry Brye](#)

Prior to any sort of deployment, it is important to have an open and honest discussion with your service member about how you want to manage homecoming and family visiting during those times away. You must be on the same page with them and be a united front. Present the information to the parents openly and firmly.

## Distance and Maintaining Relationships

Due to the distance away from their family that many military families face, it is fortunate that technology allows for us to have more connections. There will be times when you will miss "events" and that is hard. Your family may not understand the lack of control that you have in regards to schedule, or distance from family. Use technology to your advantage! Schedule regular check in times, take lots of photos and emails and take advantage of video conferencing options to stay in touch and to keep up with events when possible. Most importantly, give yourself grace when you miss things.



# Routines

"Routines are great for parents. At the end of the day my brain is not functioning at optimal. My patience is razor thin. The one thing that brings me comfort is the routine because I don't have to remind and nag and boss my kids around. They are in this system of just doing this routine. Yes, they protest on it sometimes, but for the most part they just go along with it because this is the way that things always were. Nothing is different."

By Claire Alves  
Photographer  
Lauren Tamm

The Military Wife and Mom