



School Counsellors

WORKING WITH

Military and Veteran Families

MILITARY AND VETERAN FAMILIES IN CANADA PROUDLY CONTRIBUTE ON THE HOME FRONT AND ARE THE STRENGTH BEHIND THE UNIFORM.



SCHOOL COUNSELLORS ADVOCATE FOR AND SUPPORT STUDENTS OF MILITARY AND VETERAN FAMILIES WITH THEIR COMPREHENSIVE AND DEVELOPMENTAL GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING PROGRAMS ACROSS CANADA.

THE MILITARY COMMUNITY DEFENDS CANADA'S VALUES, INTERESTS AND SOVEREIGNTY AT HOME AND ABROAD.



CANADIAN COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY ASSOCIATION
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DE COUNSELLING ET DE PSYCHOTHERAPIE



Canadian Military and Veteran Families Leadership Circle
Cercle canadien du leadership pour les familles des militaires et des vétérans

MILITARY AND VETERAN FAMILIES

Canada's military and Veteran families are diverse, resilient and strong; they are a source of great pride. They engage with – and play important roles in – their workplaces, communities and country.

85%



Approximately 85% of military and Veteran families live off-base and their children attend neighbourhood schools.

Like all families, military and Veteran families access a variety of programs and services in their communities. Historically, in Canada, children and youth in military families lived and attended schools on military bases or navy installations. Over the past several decades, more families have chosen to live off base, military-run schools have been closed and most children and youth now attend public schools in neighbourhoods across the country. Children and youth in military and Veteran families live in communities across Canada from coast to coast to coast in urban, suburban, exurban, rural, remote, isolated and Northern communities, attending area schools and participating in activities with their peers, who may have no experience or understanding of military life.

Education and counselling services offered by professionals and practitioners benefit from military literacy and an understanding of the unique lifestyle characteristics of military and Veteran families. Building our awareness and enhancing our understanding with military literacy makes it possible for us to appreciate the military and Veteran families' unique circumstances, identify strengths and challenges, facilitate integration, help navigate different learning landscapes and guide them to success.

As school counsellors, we are part of a global community that is interconnected and constantly changing. Our guidance and counselling programs are designed for full-spectrum support of all students in Canada. As students mature and develop, we support and advocate for their well-being in terms of emotional, social, behavioural, educational and career-based growth. We understand the importance of establishing a relationship of trust and care. We help students develop strategies and coping mechanisms to minimize stresses and strains that families experience as a result of the many disruptions and relocations. The compassionate and client-centred care we deliver can mitigate stress, strengthen military and Veteran families and build resilience.

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CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN MILITARY AND VETERAN FAMILIES IN CANADA

Children and youth in military families appreciate having friends in different places, finding common ground with new people they meet and sharing their skills, sports and other interests in new communities.

School counsellors report that high levels of mobility and experiences with multiple cultures and geographic locations are often an added strength for military children and youth; they are typically highly adaptable and resilient. There are, of course, stressors in any lifestyle; the military is no exception. As school counsellors, our strength-based approaches to wellness; mental health; positive social, career, and educational outcomes; and human development are keys to success for all students. When we combine our professional knowledge and skills with increased military literacy and connection to educators in the school system, we are better able to support, encourage, and enhance the lives of young people and their military and Veteran families, particularly when a parent is on an operational deployment.



More than 462,000 children and youth are growing up in military and Veteran families in Canada.



MOBILITY

Relocations occur at the discretion of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) in response to its organizational and operational needs; these create many opportunities for enhanced learning, but they may also disrupt a school year or result in a change in schools mid-term.

Military children and youth are continually adapting to new programs and curricula. In some instances, this means advancing quickly through curricula. In other cases, it means taking a semester or full academic year to address differing curricular learning outcomes between one school system and another. Some students may use individualized programming to enrich their studies; others may require individualized programming to compensate for moving from one school system to another. Other children and youth may find duplication in learning outcomes that leaves them less than inspired.

Geographic mobility can affect graduation credits. Always check for equivalencies and alignments across provinces/territories and countries rather than specific course requirements for a particular jurisdiction. The granting of course credits is the responsibility of the educational leader of the institution in which the student is housed; flexibility and an understanding of multiple educational systems is helpful.

23%



23% of military families report relocating geographically more than 4 times due to military postings.

ADAPTING TO CHANGE

School counsellors are a valuable resource for military families adapting to a new normal.

Helping children, youth and their families understand, anticipate and respond to common reactions to stressors that occur before, during and after moving to a new community and school, and providing supports that enhance resiliency, positive problem solving and open communication are just some of the essential skills of school counsellors working with military families. These skills are particularly important when parents return from an assignment and reunite with the family.

“When Mom is away,
it’s harder on my little
brother and sister.”

A CHILD IN A
MILITARY FAMILY

“When Dad is away,
I have to step up.”

A CHILD IN A
MILITARY FAMILY

Counsellors are a valuable resource for the whole family: they help by building family resilience; providing guidance; and helping individuals and families anticipate and prepare, respond and react, problem solve and resolve issues, communicate and relate, and adjust and adapt to *the new normal*.

Separation, especially when parental deployments are to volatile, high-risk or high-profile locations, impacts children in important ways. Deployment can alter relationships with the departing parent, sometimes with long-term or permanent consequences. When a parent is preparing for or away on a deployment, children and youth may assume increased levels of responsibility at home, such as helping with siblings and taking on additional household tasks.

Deployment of a parent can also result in behavioural, emotional and disciplinary problems among children who showed no such inclination prior to deployment. Children of Veteran families also are affected by separations caused by deployment or training. They have experienced the military lifestyle and, once their parents are released from the military, they experience the loss of their military family (friends, military community) and, like all students, they may also be living with a parent who is struggling with mental health challenges. In these situations, there are many variables that are separation-related, which can contribute to increased risk to well-being.



14% of military families
report experiencing
3 or more deployments;
8% reported 7 or more.

RISKS

By its very nature, a career in the Armed Forces comes with risks, including the possibility of permanent injury, illness or even death.

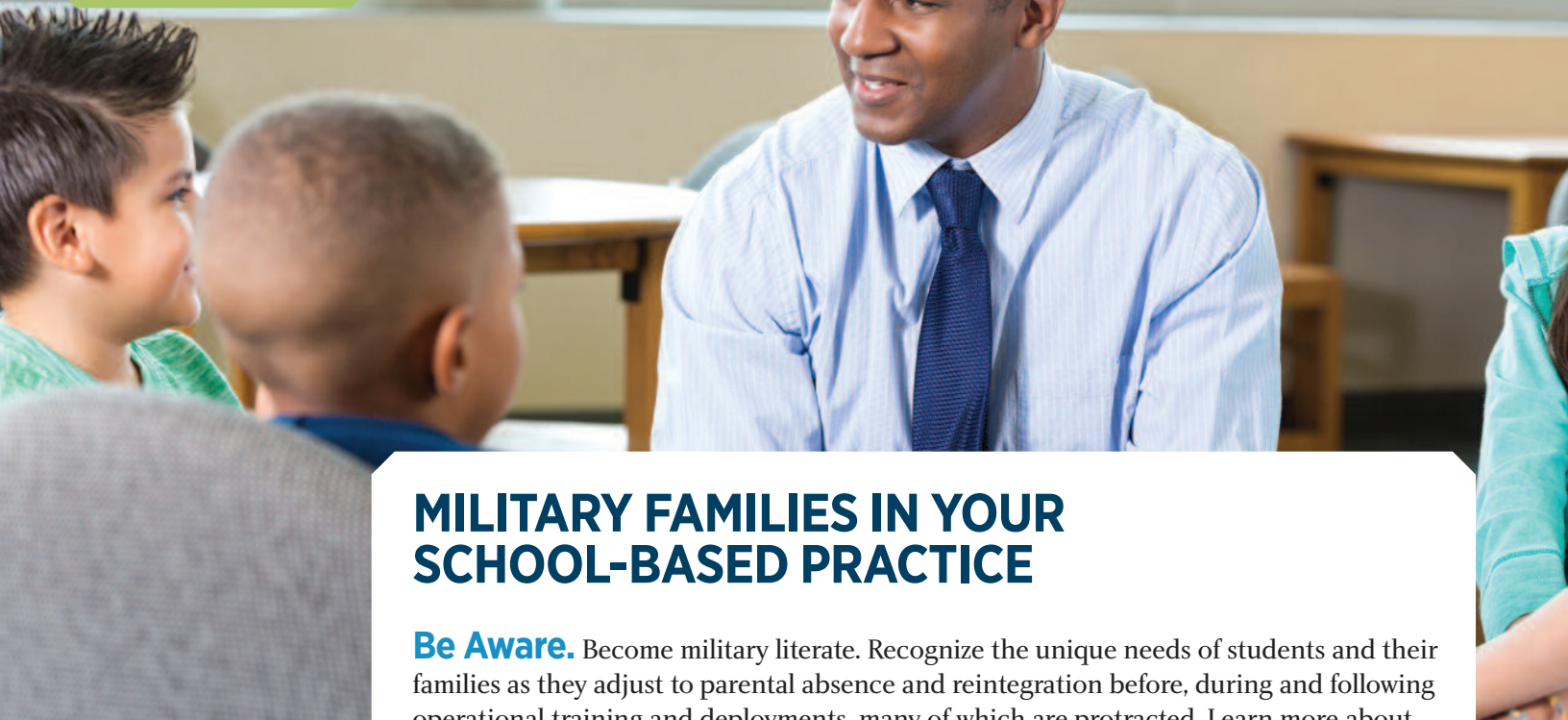
A parent returning home ill or injured can be extremely difficult on even the most resilient of families.

Outside of the military, few occupations or professions expose individuals to recurring geographic relocations, frequent separations *and* high levels of risk throughout much of their careers.

STRENGTHS

Most military and Veteran spouses/partners demonstrate a high degree of resiliency.

The majority of military spouses report that they have successfully met the challenges associated with military life, are physically and mentally healthy, satisfied with their marriage and/or relationship, and very supportive of their military partners’ career and service. Similarly, most students living in military and Veteran families also tend to be resilient, physically and mentally healthy, and living in supportive homes.



MILITARY FAMILIES IN YOUR SCHOOL-BASED PRACTICE

Be Aware. Become military literate. Recognize the unique needs of students and their families as they adjust to parental absence and reintegration before, during and following operational training and deployments, many of which are protracted. Learn more about working with military and Veteran families by accessing CIMVHR's journal at <http://jmvfh.utpjournals.press>.

Be Inclusive. Enhance your comprehensive and developmental guidance and counselling program by including military and Veteran contexts to group guidance lessons; recognition aids in developing a sense of safety and belongingness. Add military and Veteran family experiences to regular curriculum topics, including: managing stress and dislocation, building and sustaining friendships, conflict resolution and career development and planning. Assist school faculty in learning more about the developmental and learning strengths and issues related to deployment and other military life factors.

Leverage Strengths. An educational history that includes multiple geographic regions and systems often includes disruptions that may create areas of deficit as well as areas of strength. Use areas of strength (e.g., personal knowledge of multiple histories, cultures, languages, resilience) to bolster areas of deficit.

“Service to your country comes in all forms: it might be military service, public service or supporting the next generation. Happy, healthy kids make happy, healthy families; happy, healthy families make happy, healthy communities; and happy, healthy communities make a happy, healthy nation!”

A SCHOOL COUNSELLOR

Be Available. Gaps and disruptions in education, cultural unawareness and social isolation may contribute to school-based situations that superficially appear to be bullying, precocious or below age/stage development.

Investigate with the student (and family, if appropriate) any previous history of similar occurrences and work together to fill the gaps.

Reach Out. Military and Veteran families may not be aware of the guidance and counselling program at your school. Share your service delivery model, your scope of practice, your boundaries of competence and your role as an educational partner for their child. Maintain open communication; make connections with other military and Veteran service providers in your community, including the Military Family Resource Centres where they exist. Refer to these services as required.

SUPPORTING CLASSROOM TEACHERS

Share. Connect with teachers before students from military and Veteran families arrive at the classroom. Share information you may have received from the sending school that is relevant to the education, social integration and personal growth of the student. Some students may have an educational history that includes supports related to special needs or gifted education, or leadership roles in mentoring and peer-helping. During the intake process, ensure any previous supports or opportunities are openly discussed and considered.

Connect. Connect with support staff, teacher leaders and others who may be of assistance in making a smooth transition for incoming and outgoing students. Share resources, including Military Family Services, to aid in increasing military literacy and locating culturally safe and appropriate support systems.

Support. Provide support and share concerns with the classroom teacher(s). Work with teachers and other educators to appropriately share with students and their parents/guardians.

Be Part of a Team. For students with unique or special needs, attend team meetings to provide perspectives related to mental health and wellness in the context of change and the military and Veteran family lifestyle.

Raise Awareness. Remember: students from military and Veteran families often have culturally unique stressors, including depression, anxiety and internalizing and externalizing behaviours that may affect learning. It is important to note that not all issues that students have are associated with their military or Veteran lifestyle. Support classroom teachers in detecting the differences between adjustment issues and personal learning styles, and between learning disabilities and distractedness. Work together to get to quickly know individual students and their school/family history.

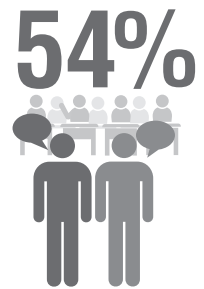
Educate. Allow time at staff meetings for faculty to discuss deployment issues and the effects on student learning and engagement in the classroom. Remind teachers to be flexible during transition times, particularly with homework assignments and small group work. It takes time to adjust to new surroundings, new communities, new educational systems and new social structures.

Increase Inclusion. Work with teachers to create opportunities for small support groups for military and Veteran students. Release time from class to attend such groups can support a sense of safety and belongingness. Regular leisure activities outside of class time also aid in support. Students of military families may arrive at your school after peak times for selecting courses for the upcoming semester, or for athletics teams' tryouts or for signing up for extracurricular activities. Include students in the full academic, athletic and social fabric of the school environment.

Recognize. A student's reaction to military and Veteran life is unique – a combination of experience, personality, family and social dynamics, and developmental age/stage/ pre-existing conditions or issues. Assist teachers in recognizing mood changes or physical complaints that may be associated with transitions to and from school and community. Declines in academic performance may be indicative of a difficult adjustment period; declines may also be indicative of gaps in knowledge or skill. Work with classroom teachers to assess each student in a supportive, friendly manner to determine the best route to success.

“Having a parent in the military has allowed me to live in three different cities and make new friends at each stop along the way. Getting used to a new school is never easy though, and it takes time to find friends you are close with.”

A TEEN IN A
MILITARY FAMILY



54% of military spouses agreed with the statement “Military children are at a disadvantage because civilian public schools do not understand military life.”

PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH

Military families experience frequent moves, which can negate the advantage of ongoing, uninterrupted preventative care by a primary physician (College of Family Physicians of Canada, 2016).

Military and Veteran families often experience a variety of waiting lists for health services. It is therefore important for school counsellors, as front-line professionals, to be attentive to changes in behaviour, academic performance and social activities that may be indicative of increased risk; referral processes are directly affected when families do not have the advantage of a regular family physician.

Like all students in Canadian schools, students of military and Veteran families are not immune to the mental health concerns that affect one in five students. The mental health continuum (Department of National Defence, 2008) provides a quick guide for school counsellors to recognize common symptoms indicative of a change in mental health status. The language of the continuum (red, orange, yellow, green) is often common language for students of military and Veteran families when describing mental health and wellness at home.

“It feels like an orange day at home – I feel on edge about it.”

A STUDENT IN A MILITARY FAMILY

These changes may be indicators of a student developing ill health, depression or anxiety. These behaviours could also be an expression of stresses occurring in the family that have become overwhelming for the student. Consider fast-tracking students (and their families) who require referrals. Follow up to ensure service has occurred. For mental health, educational and career-related issues that are within your scope of practice and boundaries of competence, consider fast-tracking students to meet with you to address their needs.

MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM			
HEALTHY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL
Calm and steady Normal fluctuations in mood Fit, fed, rested In control physically, mentally, emotionally Performing well Behaving ethically and morally Sense of humour Relaxing and recreating Socially active Confident in self and others	Easily agitated, angered, frustrated and tired Difficulty focusing Decreased interest in activities Nervous Impatient Unusual sadness Difficulty sleeping Vigilance Problems with daily functioning (home, work, school)	Persistent anxiety and sadness Angry reactions Noticeable fatigue Poor concentration Inability to enjoy activities Excessive distrust and resentment Sleep disturbances Hypervigilance Persistent physical symptoms (aches and pains) Severe deterioration in daily functioning (home, work, school)	Excessive anxiety, fatigue and sadness Regular panic attacks Angry outbursts Severe memory lapses Cannot concentrate Cannot perform daily routine Significant sleep disturbances Loss of control Avoiding or withdrawing Significant change in behaviour Indications of suicidal thoughts, intentions Symptoms get worse over time instead of getting better

Source: Department of National Defence, 2008.



CONTINUITY OF EDUCATION AND SUPPORT SERVICES

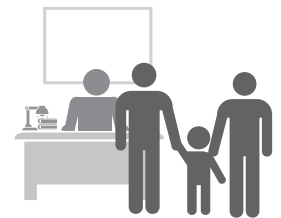
Harmonization. During the enrolment and intake interview with the family, match any support services from previous schools; align school-based options and grant credits for successful work previously undertaken. When students arrive mid-semester/term, recognize work already successfully completed; consider fast-tracking and/or challenge for credits.

Counselling. Leave adequate time to build a positive relationship with the student; frequent moves may make this more difficult. Complete an intake history and check for signs of change from the student's baseline. Wherever possible, assign a mentor and a peer to the incoming student to ease the transition to the new educational environment. Consider strength-based small group sessions for students of military and Veteran families to help with transitions, supports and making friends.

Facilitation. For students who are leaving the school setting: provide referrals; arrange for transcripts; obtain permission from the student (and/or family, depending on context) to share pertinent social, emotional or academic information with the receiving school; and refer to the new local Military Family Resource Centre.

Guidance. For students who are preparing for post-secondary studies: support the student and family with pertinent information related to scholarships and bursaries, application forms and post-secondary institutions with programs related to the student's area of interest.

Career Counselling. In addition to personal and educational preferences, skills and goals, ensure career development and career counselling work is attuned to the unique lifestyle of the student and his or her family: consider potential redeployment of the family and potential needs to live apart from the family, and locate housing, resource funding and so on.



Recognizing education from prior schools takes on particular importance for military children and their families following a move to a new location.



MILITARY AND VETERAN RESOURCES FOR SCHOOL COUNSELLORS

Add resources to your guidance and counselling program for military and Veteran families

Children's Education Management <https://www.cafconnection.ca/National/Programs-Services/Education-and-Training/Children-s-Education-Management.aspx>

For an overview of educational requirements for the different provinces and territories in Canada: <https://www.cafconnection.ca/National/Programs-Services/Education-and-Training/Graduation-Requirements-Map.aspx>

The services of Children's Education Management (CEM) support the educational needs of dependent children of currently serving Canadian Armed Forces members by assisting with educational planning and are available to help families access:

- Compensation and benefits entitlements for military children (including tutoring)
- Canadian Armed Forces Overseas schools or International Schools when military families are posted outside of Canada
- Guidance and counselling services to facilitate transitions between different school systems

24/7 Military Family Information Line 1-800-866-4546

24/7 Veterans Affairs Canada Assistance Service Line 1-800-268-7708

Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) <https://www.ccpa-accp.ca>

Canadian Institute for Military and Veterans Health Research <https://cimvhr.ca>

Military Family Services <https://www.cafconnection.ca/National/About-Us/Military-Family-Services.aspx>

Road to Mental Readiness <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/caf-community-health-services-r2mr/index.page>

TalkingCanHelp <http://www.talkingcanhelp.ca>

Vanier Institute of the Family <http://vanierinstitute.ca>

Veterans Affairs Canada <http://www.veterans.gc.ca>

You're Not Alone: Mental Health Resources for CAF Members and Families

<http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/caf-community-health-services/mental-health-resources.page>



Organizations and programs can help.

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CANADIAN COUNSELLING AND
PSYCHOTHERAPY ASSOCIATION
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DE
COUNSELING ET DE PSYCHOTHÉRAPIE

THE CANADIAN COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY ASSOCIATION

Representing more than 6,000 members across the country, the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) is a national bilingual association providing professional counsellors and psychotherapists with access to exclusive educational programs, certification, professional development and direct contact with professional peers and specialty groups. It houses a national Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for the profession, and provides a national certification for both practitioners and supervisors of the profession. CCPA promotes the profession of counselling and psychotherapy and its contribution to the mental health and well-being of all Canadians.



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familles des militaires et des vétérans

THE CANADIAN MILITARY AND VETERAN FAMILIES LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

The Canadian Military and Veteran Families Leadership Circle includes leaders from businesses and community, Department of National Defence, Veterans Affairs Canada, Military Family Services, Military Family Resource Centres and military and Veteran families. Members have an interest in the partner-based Leadership Circle to share information, mobilize knowledge, foster relationships and form collaborations. The **Working with Military and Veteran Families** series equips professionals and informs communities so they can equitably serve military members, Veterans and their families. Each publication in the series is customized to various professionals and practitioners in the community.

Special thanks to the following members of the Canadian Military and Veteran Families Leadership Circle who collaborated on this project:

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