



Needs of Children in Military Families

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Texas Children's Mental Health Forum

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Welcome Home, service
members.

Thank you, military
families!

Thank you, military youth!
Thank you ALL for serving
our country.



Outline

1. Review the basics on the “military family”
2. Three key needs of military youth:
We NEED TO:
 - a. **Identify and understand** military youth
 - b. **Educate and support** those that surround military youth
 - c. **Thank** military youth
3. Introduce some resources for youth/families
 - Additional speakers will present on School-based Services and Community Supports



First Lady, Ms. Michelle Obama

March 3, 2009

“...service doesn't end with the person wearing the uniform. You all know that...Military families have done their duty and we, as a grateful nation, must do ours. We must do everything in our power to honor them by supporting them, not just by words but by deeds”

**Women in Military Service for America Memorial
Center at Arlington National Cemetery**

Military Families

- Over 1.64 million service members have been deployed in support of the Global War on Terrorism
 - Average length of deployment = 12-15 months
 - Average number of deployments = 2.2
- As of February 1, 2009 (per the DoD):
 - 4,868 American troops have died in OEF/OIF
 - 42,650 have been injured during these conflicts





Military Families

- Over half of service members are married
 - At least 1.8 million children have one or both parents in the military
 - 1.2 million with Active Duty parents and 650,000 with parents in reserves
- Ages of children affected by deployment:
 - 0-5: 40%
 - 6-11: 33%
 - 12-18: 25%



Military Families

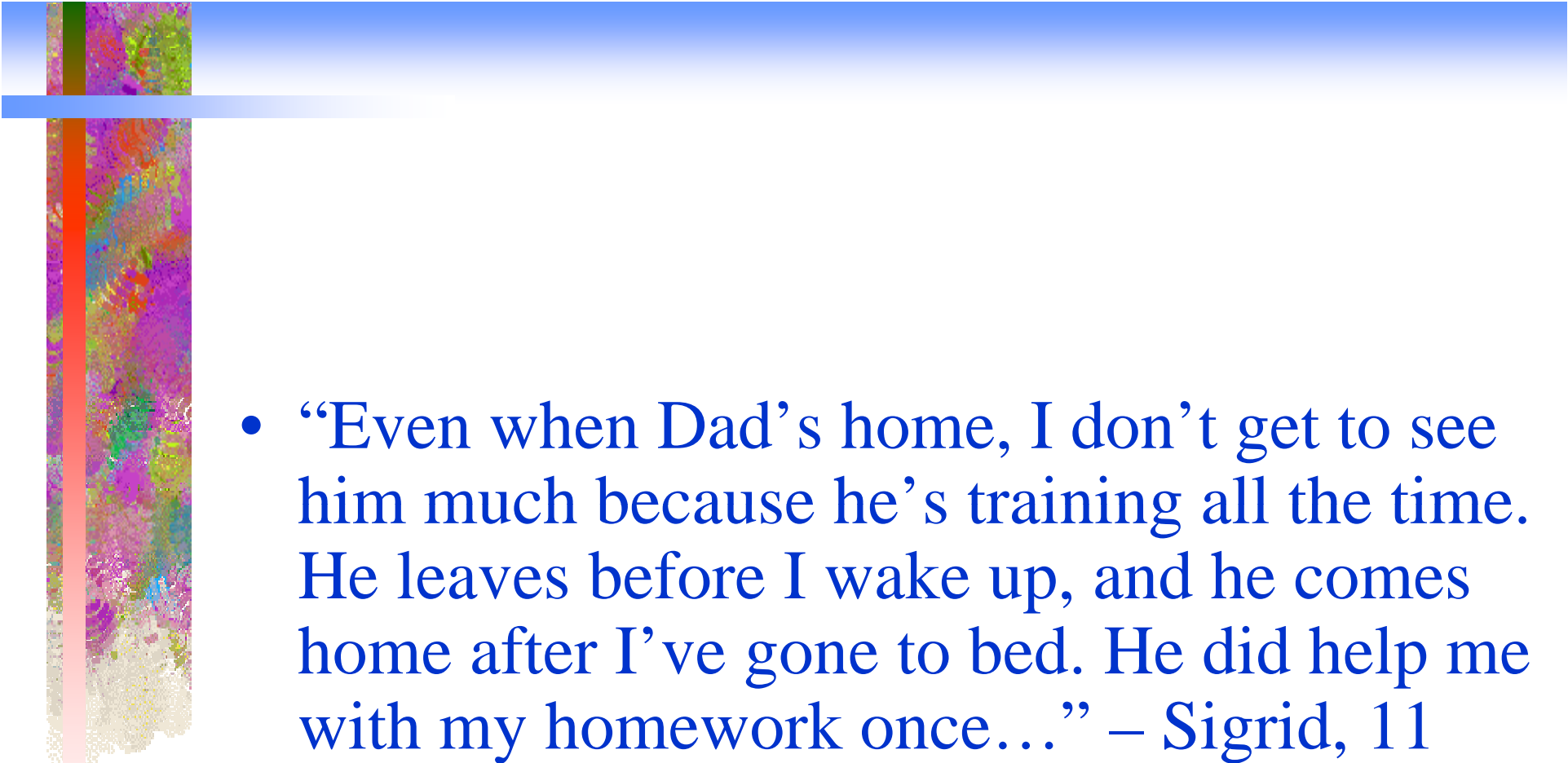
- Special populations affected by deployment
 - Dual military families (6.9%)
 - Single active duty parents (5.4%)
 - Families with special health care needs (7.3%)



NEED #1: Identify and understand military youth

Being a military kid has unique challenges

- Frequent moves
- Changing schools, friends, activities, etc.
- Parent working long hours and away for long periods of time
- Unprecedented combat deployments
- Many parents returning home with physical and/or emotional wounds

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- “Even when Dad’s home, I don’t get to see him much because he’s training all the time. He leaves before I wake up, and he comes home after I’ve gone to bed. He did help me with my homework once...” – Sigrid, 11

Ellis (2008)



NEED #1: Identify and understand military youth

- Deployment and homecoming can be hard on everyone

“...it’s hard to have fun when at that same moment he might be in the middle of a battle. I could be laughing and singing and right at that moment, he could be getting shot or bombed, or maybe he’s hurt or scared. Why should I have fun when he’s not?”
Erika, 17

“When my dad gets back from Iraq for the third time, I’ll be 12 going on 13. He’ll hardly know me. He’ll hardly know any of us...” Dylan, 11

“I don’t know if he killed anybody or not...he certainly wouldn’t tell me, and I don’t think I’d want to know” Cherilyn, 10



Research by RAND interviewing military youth

- 53% “worry about my military parent while he/she is deployed”
- 38% “worry about the person who takes care of me while my parent is deployed”
- 57% of interviewed youth said that getting to know their parent again (upon homecoming) was difficult.

Chandra et al 2008



Remember that reintegration is a journey...

“The journey home marks the beginning of an internal war for the Marines. Give them the space they require to slowly turn the switch. The switch from violence to gentle. The switch from tension to relaxation. The switch from suspicion to trust. The switch from anger to peace. The switch from hate to love...”


LT. Col. Mark Smith, WISHTV
Feb 18, 2005

Down Range to Iraq and Back (Cantrell & Dean)



NEED #1: Identify and understand military youth

- High levels of stress for at-home parent / caregiver and increased risk for child abuse

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- “She (Mom) was so stressed out so she’d yell a lot, and I was stressed and I’d yell back, and the whole thing was really a mess. What was going on was that we were both worried about Dad, and there was nothing we could do about that. We couldn’t go over to Afghanistan and make him come home with us. So we didn’t have any power to make our worry go away. We were scared and frustrated and angry, and we yelled at each other because we didn’t know what else to do.”

– Matthew, 11



Child Abuse

- Rates of abuse and neglect of young children in military families in Texas have doubled since October 2002
- “Among soldiers with at least one dependent, for every 1% increase in the number of active duty soldiers departing or returning, we saw an ~30% increase in substantiated maltreatment cases.”

Danielle Rentz: American Journal of Epidemiology, May 15, 2007

Child Abuse

- Nationally, rate of child maltreatment in families of enlisted soldiers was 42 percent higher **when military spouses were off at war** than when they were at home
- Female civilian parents were **twice as likely to abuse a child physically** and almost **four times more likely to neglect** a child when male soldiers were deployed than at other times.

Gibbs (2007): Studied U.S. Army families worldwide 2001 - 2004 using Army human-resource data and Army Central Registry

NEED #1: Identify and understand military youth

- Research has documented that many of these children are struggling





Madigan Army Medical Center Research

- 101 Army caregivers with a deployed service member and child ages 5-12
- Over ½ said their child had **trouble sleeping**
- 1/3 of the children were categorized as “high risk” for psychosocial problems (which is 2.5x the national norm)
- **Parenting stress** levels were double that of normative data
- **Parental stress was most significant predictor of child’s mental health**

(Flake et al., 2008)



Other Research on Military Youth

- **ACADEMIC PROBLEMS:** Parental deployments may be related to modest decreases in test scores across most subjects – effects may be long-term (Engel et al., 2006)
- **PHYSIOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES:** Teens whose parents had been deployed to Iraq had significantly higher levels of systolic blood pressure, heart rate, and perceived stress than a civilian comparison group (Barnes et al., 2007).



EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS:

- **Military tweens and teens** at camp showed: heightened anxiety, attention difficulties, and emotional/behavioral problems (Chandra et al., 2008).
 - **Preschoolers:** 1 in 5 children ages 3-5 (whose parent was deployed) from a large Marine base daycare showed significantly more distress than military kids whose parent was not overseas. Behaviors included:
 - Disrupted eating and sleeping
 - Increased anxiety or sadness
 - Acting out
 - Inability to concentrate
- (Chartrand et al, 2008)



NEED #1: Identify and understand military youth

All returning service members are “changed.”

Many returning troops have physical and/or emotional wounds which can significantly affect the family / children



Exposure to Trauma in the Global War on Terrorism

- Survey of 894 Army soldiers from Operation Iraqi Freedom:
 - * 95% observed dead bodies or human remains
 - * 93% were shot at or received small-arms fire
 - * 89% were attacked or ambushed
 - * 65% observed injured or dead Americans
 - * 48% were responsible for the death of an enemy combatant

Charles Hoge et al., 2004



Psychological Toll

- ~1 in 5 US troops deployed to Iraq/Afghanistan now suffers from Major Depression or PTSD
- Further, according to longitudinal research, many of these difficulties worsen with time (PDHA at homecoming → PDHRA at 90-120 days)
- 24-35% of soldiers admit to using more alcohol than they meant to

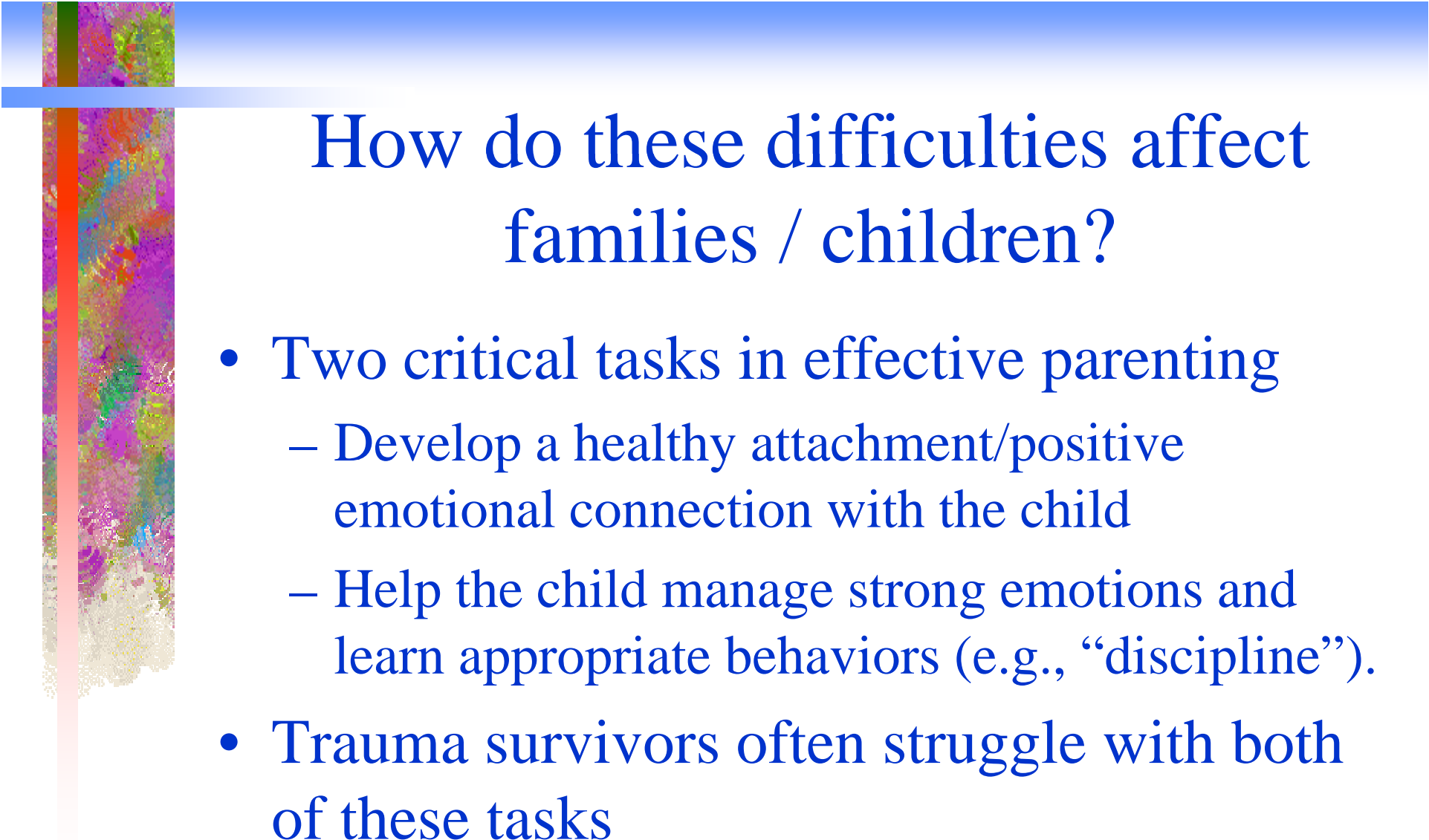
Hoge et al. 2004, 2006;
RAND “Invisible Wounds of War” Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008;
Bliese, Wright, Adler, Thomas & Hoge, 2007



Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

- 10-20% of all returning troops may have suffered a mild brain injury (mild concussions to severe head wounds) in combat -- a higher rate than from previous wars
- May involve cyclical depression, coordination problems, affective instability, memory problems, and decreased concentration

(Hoge et al., 2008)



How do these difficulties affect families / children?

- Two critical tasks in effective parenting
 - Develop a healthy attachment/positive emotional connection with the child
 - Help the child manage strong emotions and learn appropriate behaviors (e.g., “discipline”).
- Trauma survivors often struggle with both of these tasks



A paratrooper home from Iraq:

“Before I deployed down range I was different about my wife and kids. Now that I’m back I can only let them get so close before I have to get away from them. I used to have fun letting my boys jump and crawl all over me. We would spend hours playing like that. Now I can only take a couple of minutes of it before I have to get out. I usually get in my truck and drive back to the base to be with my platoon.”

(Cantrell & Dean)

Kids may experience parent as unavailable, distant, or aloof AND/OR hostile, scary, unpredictable, and overprotective

Children may blame themselves, and feel anxious, ashamed, sad, confused, and angry...





Tell me Daddy, Please Why

Tell me Daddy, please why?
Is it because you have seen friends die?
Is it because we're poor?
Please Daddy, I need to know more.

Is it because you know you can do more than you do?
Is it because you had to kill people you never knew?
Do you suffer extreme guilt? Guilt that has made your hopes wilt?

Daddy, Daddy, can you ever quit? Could you make it bit by bit?
Don't you know that it hurts when you get on the phone
And my friends hear that nasty, drunken tone?
Can't you get help from me?
Is there anything I can do to make you see?

Can I help to make you stronger?
Or must I always see you cry?
And always be until we die?

Jennifer Miller



NEED #2: Educate and support those that surround military youth

- Many people WANT to help and be supportive, but do not know how...



An example...

After Deployment Ministry

Care Ministries at Church XXX wants to help you...we want to invite you and your family to a special event - ***Faith and Fireworks Night*** - at the Ballpark. Come join us for a special night baseball, fun, and fireworks



Do military youth feel understood?

Research on 192 kids in 2007 at five summer camps (60% AD, 40% NG/Reserves):

- 35% said “Teachers understand what it is like for me to be a military kid”
- 30% indicated that “My military parent talked to me about deployment”



Need to think BROADLY

- **Pediatricians** (Remember the elevated blood pressure research? Children frequently present with somatic complaints and insomnia)
- **Churches / clergy** (Remember the 4th of July fireworks? Youth ministers can be wonderful sources of support..)
- **Mental health professionals** (We don't learn about military family issues in grad school...and for some, school was a long time ago!)
- **DHS workers** (Remember the research on elevated risk for child abuse?)



Thinking Broadly...

- **School personnel** (Day care through higher education)
- **Coaches**
- **Businesses** – EAP Programs, “brown bag lunch” series, etc.

Remember that it “takes a village”!



Need to support both parents / caregivers

- Recall the research that the best predictor of the child's wellbeing is the PARENT'S level of stress? This is consistent across domains.
- Therefore, we can help the children by simultaneously providing support and services for their parents!



How about Texas?

- Texas has the 2nd largest population of military service members and their families in the USA. (California is the largest)
- There are approximately 4.7 million children enrolled in Texas schools across 1,228 districts

What resources are available in Texas?



- **Military Child Education Coalition**
 - Living in the New Normal (LINN) workshop for school personnel
 - **HOWEVER**, only ~300 education and support services professionals have received this excellent training to date! This is about 1% of all TX school districts.
- **Military OneSource**
- **Operation Purple Camp**
 - In 2008, there were 100 weeks of FREE camp held in 62 locations in 37 states and territories.
 - National Military Family Association (NMFA)



Resources in Texas

- 2-1-1
 - Tex Vet: Partners Across Texas
www.texvet.com
- “A collaborative effort of federal, state and local organizations, that focuses on bringing our military members and those that care about them a wealth of resources”



Videos (See Resource List)

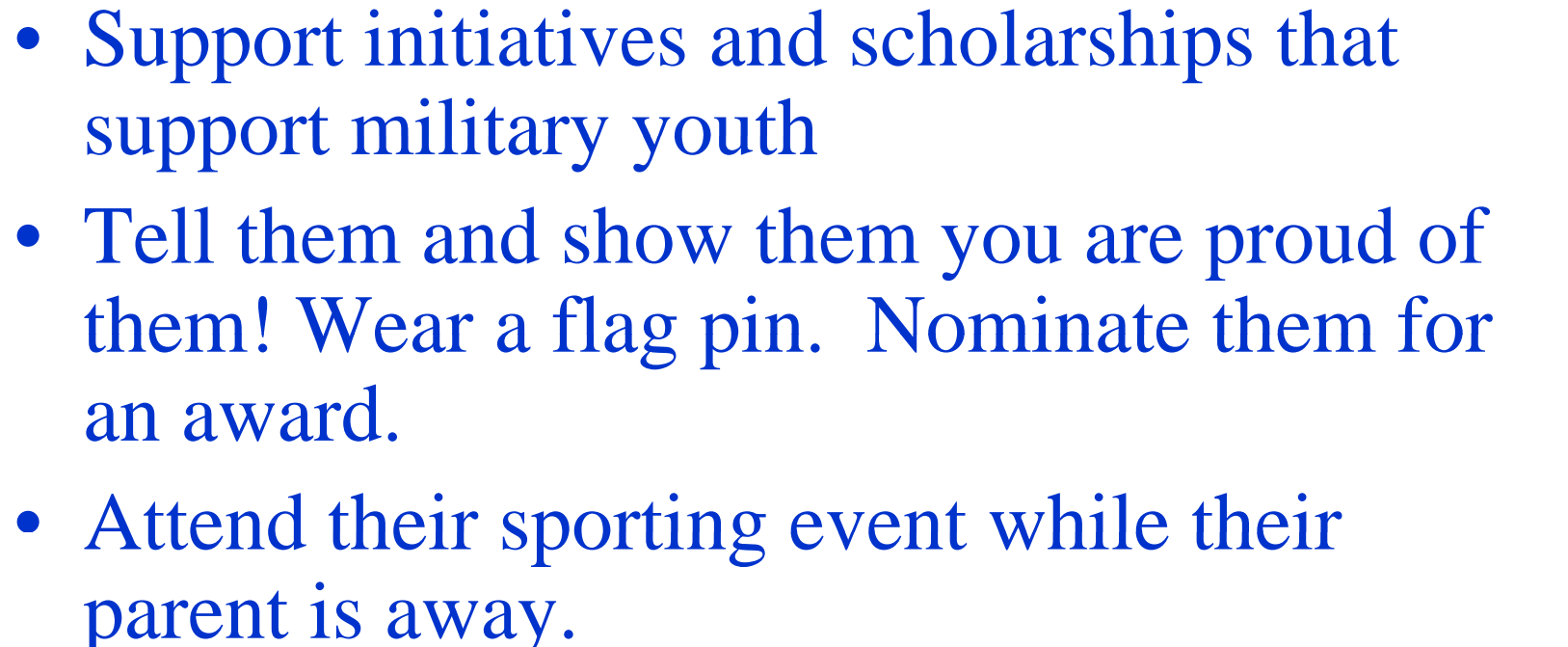
- ***Young Children on the Home front, ZERO TO THREE.***
- ***Talk, Listen, Connect: Deployments, Homecomings, Changes.*** Sesame Street DVDs for families with youth ages 2-5. Free through Military OneSource
- Youth Coping With Military Deployment: ***"Promoting Resilience in Your Family"*** and ***"Mr. Poe and Friends."*** American Academy of Pediatrics

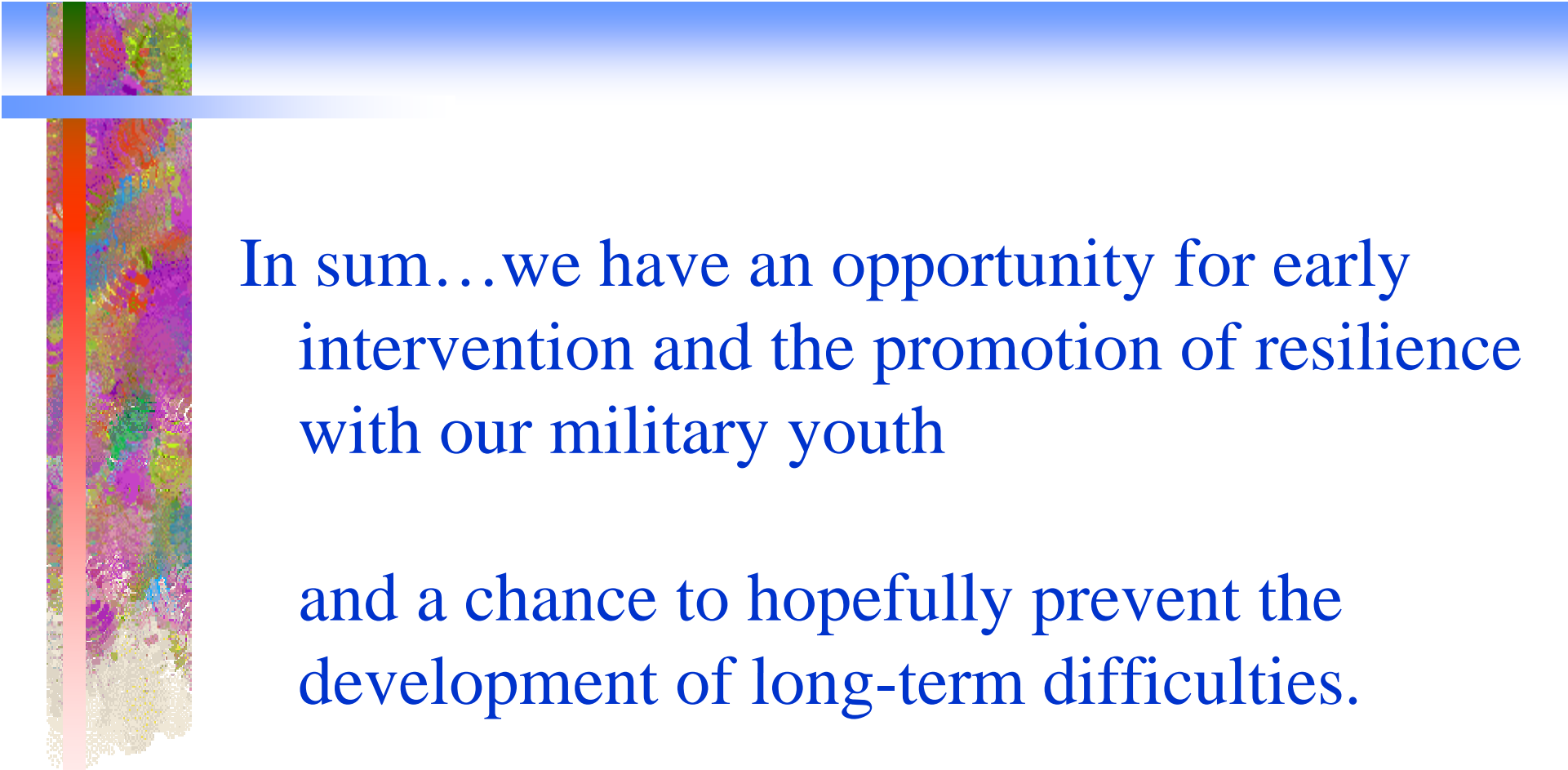
NEED #3: Thank military youth!

Sometimes it's as simple as saying

THANK YOU!



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- Support initiatives and scholarships that support military youth
 - Tell them and show them you are proud of them! Wear a flag pin. Nominate them for an award.
 - Attend their sporting event while their parent is away.
 - Post photos and short stories in public places (e.g., doctor's offices, schools, places of worship) thanking military families



In sum...we have an opportunity for early intervention and the promotion of resilience with our military youth

and a chance to hopefully prevent the development of long-term difficulties.

May we embrace this challenge!



Price of Peace Gaddis/Steen 08

**Sung by sisters Cassy (16) and Alyssa (12) Gaddis;
Their father, CW5 Jim Gaddis, is the command chief
warrant officer of the Illinois Army National Guard**

Standing at the gate knowing I couldn't wave enough

No matter what...

It's gonna be tough

For a girl to say goodbye to her Daddy's smile

It's rough...can't cover it up...

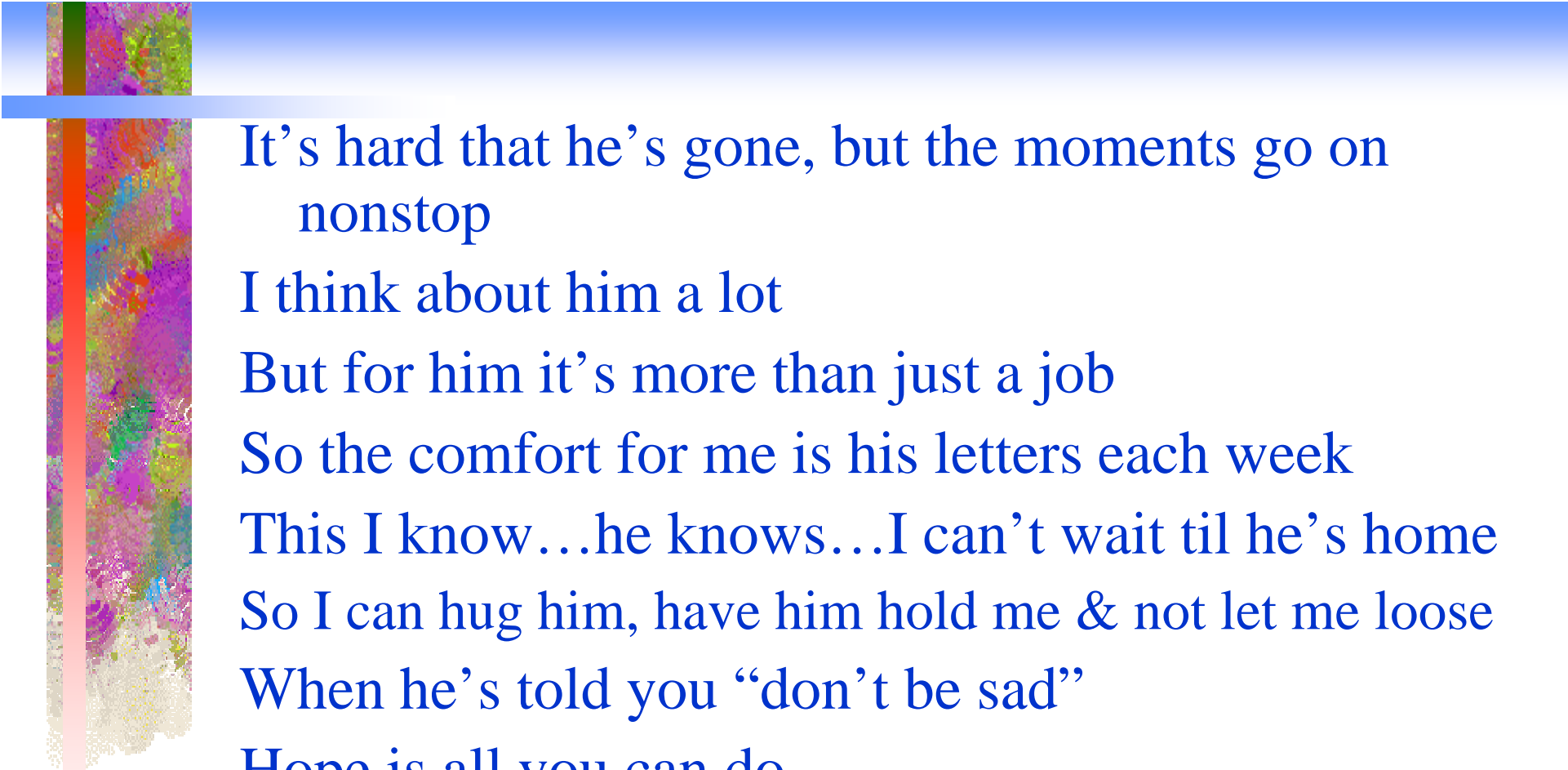
That's how much you love

Having him there for dances, dinners, for you

When you're off fighting Dad, we're fighting to see you soon

The price of piece is paid by the families on
their knees praying tonight
By the soldiers' feet on some foreign street
just trying to save a life
By a daughter's tears as she
sees her hero do what he
thinks is right
The loss may run deep, but if
it's love we leave
Well that's the price of peace





It's hard that he's gone, but the moments go on
nonstop

I think about him a lot

But for him it's more than just a job

So the comfort for me is his letters each week

This I know...he knows...I can't wait til he's home

So I can hug him, have him hold me & not let me loose

When he's told you "don't be sad"

Hope is all you can do

The countdown goes from months to weeks to days

Time stands still the longer we have to wait

Please God show me how to be patient

I can't wait til "then" turns to "now!"



Questions and Reactions?

Thank you for inviting me to join
you today.