

# Military Ministry Workshop 4

## Handout 1: Challenges Faced by Military Families

During the best of circumstances, relationships and caring for children and youth can be stressful. Add to that stress worrying about a parent or significant other who is in a war zone or stationed far from home and the load of stress and worry can push families to the breaking point. Dealing with everyday home maintenance, car repairs, and family scheduling along with keeping medical appointments can be overwhelming for someone learning to operate as a temporary single parent. Additionally, while many civilians are rooted in communities with family members within an hour drive or less, many military families undergo frequent relocations that require them to live far from immediate family who could be supportive during times of overwhelming stress and worry. One tragic result of this is the rising rate of child abuse in military families.

During the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, record numbers of National Guard and Reservist were called to active duty. Active duty families who live near or on military installations, live in communities with others experiencing similar family situations, challenges and have access to numerous resources. However, the families of National Guard and Reservists usually live in communities among many civilians who vaguely remember we are at war and can be indifferent or vocally anti-war. Additionally, many National Guard and Reservists take pay cuts when they are activated for active duty service and their families have the additional burden and stress of meeting financial responsibilities with less money.

The children of military personnel have life experiences that are vastly different from their civilian peers. For example, children and youth in military families have to process conflicted feelings when their deployed parent misses school activities, sporting and milestone events. There is the constant challenge of meeting and making new friends after relocating. One of the biggest burdens these children and youth have to contend with is meeting school requirements that differ from state to state. Consequently, they are sometimes left behind a grade. Furthermore, partners of military personnel experience difficulty transferring their professional licenses and certifications from state to state, which can hurt their ability to support their families and can add another layer of stress.

In 1993, President Clinton signed into law Don't Ask, Don't Tell. In 1996 Congress signed into law the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). Although today Don't Ask, Don't Tell is no longer military policy, DOMA is no longer law, and many states recognize equal marriage, military culture is not necessarily open and accepting to couples and families who are gay, lesbian or transgender. Many people in the military services suffer economic, social, emotional, or psychological stress because of having to hide or deny significant aspects of their selves, lives, and families or because family/partner benefits are not yet completely equal for servicepeople who are gay/lesbian.