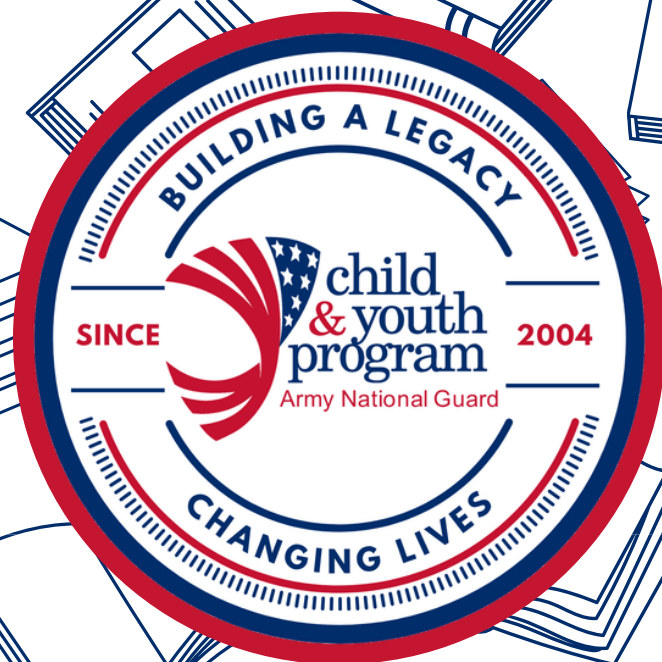




ARMY NATIONAL GUARD CHILD & YOUTH SERVICES

INFORMATION, LESSONS AND ACTIVITIES
FOR EDUCATORS

JUNE 2026

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OUR MISSION

The mission of Army National Guard (ARNG) Child & Youth Services (CYS) is to promote and sustain the quality of life and resilience of Army National Guard dependent children and youth by providing secure, timely, flexible, high-quality support services and enrichment programs.

OUR GOALS

Education: Provide developmentally-appropriate life skills education to National Guard youth

Access: Provide information on access to Federal and State/Territory benefits that support National Guard children and Families, including: counseling, education, child care, and other resources needed to foster a healthy, stable and secure family environment

Opportunity: Create partnerships for opportunities to participate in programs, events, and activities geared toward the behavioral and physical health and welfare of children and youth that are available across the spectrum of Government, community, and private sectors

Communication: Build a sense of belonging to the Army National Guard Community by creating secure opportunities to network with other youth, parents/legal guardians, and ARNG CYS Coordinators in one's community, state/territory, and across the nation

Resilience: Infuse resiliency and leadership skills and techniques into all Army National Guard child and youth programming

Outreach: Build and sustain contact with parents/legal guardians, and children of the National Guard in order to create awareness of available support services and programs, while being mindful of age, location, military and civilian mindsets

THANK YOU!

Dear Educators,

On behalf of the Army National Guard Child and Youth Services Program, **THANK YOU** for your dedication to supporting military-connected students in your classrooms and school communities. The commitment, compassion, and encouragement you provide play a vital role in the academic success, emotional well-being, and overall development of military youth. Your efforts help create stable, supportive learning environments where students can thrive despite the unique challenges that often accompany military life.

Military-connected children frequently experience transitions, including relocations, parental deployments, training obligations, and periods of separation from family members. During these times, educators serve as trusted mentors, advocates, and sources of consistency. The relationships you build with students and the support you provide can have a lasting impact on their confidence, resilience, and sense of belonging.

The purpose of this resource is to provide educators with additional tools and information to better support military-connected youth in the learning environment. By increasing awareness and understanding of military life, we hope to strengthen educators' ability to recognize the unique experiences of military students and respond to their needs effectively. This resource is designed to enhance existing support systems, foster meaningful connections, and promote student success both academically and socially.

Additionally, increasing understanding among educators helps create opportunities to build stronger connections between military-connected students and their peers. When students feel understood, valued, and included, they are more likely to develop positive relationships, engage in school activities, and establish a greater sense of community. These connections contribute significantly to student well-being and help ensure that military youth feel supported throughout their educational journey.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment to serving military-connected students and families. Your dedication makes a meaningful difference in the lives of those who serve our nation and the children who support them. We appreciate your partnership and your continued efforts to create welcoming, inclusive, and supportive learning environments for all students.

Sincerely,

Army National Guard
Child & Youth Services Team



IMPORTANT INFORMATION

DEPLOYMENT CYCLE OVERVIEW

Deployment is a process that military service members and their families experience before, during, and after a military mission. While every deployment is unique, military family support programs commonly describe the deployment cycle as consisting of five phases: Pre-Deployment, Deployment, Sustainment, Reunion, and Reintegration. Understanding these phases can help military families prepare for challenges, recognize common emotions, and build resilience throughout the experience (Department of Defense, 2023; Military OneSource, 2024).

1. Pre-Deployment: The pre-deployment phase begins when a service member learns about an upcoming deployment and continues until departure. During this time, families prepare for the changes that deployment will bring. Service members may attend training, complete administrative requirements, and prepare equipment, while families make plans for finances, childcare, household responsibilities, and communication. Emotions during this phase often include excitement, pride, uncertainty, anxiety, and sadness. Open communication, planning ahead, and connecting with support resources can help families feel more prepared (Military OneSource, 2024).

2. Deployment: The deployment phase begins when the service member leaves for their assigned mission. Family members may experience a range of emotions, including loneliness, worry, and stress as they adjust to daily life without their loved one at home. Service members are adapting to a new environment and mission requirements. Maintaining communication when possible through letters, emails, phone calls, or video chats can help families stay connected. Establishing routines and seeking support from friends, family, schools, and military programs can help both service members and families navigate this transition (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2023).

3. Sustainment: The sustainment phase occurs after families have adjusted to the deployment routine. During this period, both the service member and family members often develop confidence in managing their responsibilities and daily activities. Communication patterns become more established, and family members may feel more comfortable handling challenges independently. Although deployment-related stress can still occur, families often find a sense of stability and resilience. Staying engaged in school, work, community activities, and support networks can contribute to overall well-being during this phase (Pincus et al., 2001).

4. Reunion: The reunion phase begins when the service member returns home. This is often an exciting and highly anticipated time for military families. Family members may experience joy, relief, and excitement as they prepare to reconnect. However, reunions can also bring unexpected emotions and adjustments. Family routines may have changed during the deployment, and everyone may need time to reconnect and reestablish relationships. Setting realistic expectations and allowing flexibility can help make the reunion process smoother and more positive (Military OneSource, 2024).

5. Reintegration: The reintegration phase focuses on adjusting to life together after the service member returns home. Family roles and responsibilities that shifted during deployment may need to be renegotiated, and everyone must adapt to a new family routine. Reintegration can take time, as service members and family members work to reconnect, communicate, and understand each other's experiences during the separation. Patience, open communication, and support from military and community resources are important during this phase. Successful reintegration helps families strengthen relationships and build resilience for future challenges (Department of Defense, 2023; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2023).

Conclusion: The deployment cycle is a continuous, on-going journey that affects the entire military family. Each phase brings unique experiences, emotions, and opportunities for growth. By understanding the five phases—Pre-Deployment, Deployment, Sustainment, Reunion, and Reintegration—families can better prepare for transitions, access available resources, and support one another throughout the deployment experience.

EMOTIONAL CYCLE OF DEPLOYMENT FOR YOUTH

Military deployments can bring many changes for youth. Feelings may change over time, and that is a normal part of the emotional cycle of deployment. Understanding the different phases can help youth recognize their emotions and find healthy ways to cope. It can also help educators as they provide support for these youth.

1. Pre-Deployment: Preparing for Change: This phase begins when a deployment is announced and continues until the service member leaves.

Common feelings

- Worry or anxiety about the upcoming separation
- Sadness, anger, or frustration
- Confusion about what deployment means
- Pride in the service member's mission

What youth can do

- Ask questions: Talk with parents or trusted adults about what to expect
- Share feelings: It is okay to feel excited, nervous, sad, or all at once
- Make a connection plan: Create ways to stay connected, such as letters, drawings, emails, or video calls
- Keep routines: Continue school, sports, hobbies, and family traditions to build stability

Helpful reminder: The goal of this phase is to prepare youth emotionally and practically for the separation ahead.

2. Deployment & Sustainment: Adjusting and Staying Connected: This phase begins after the service member leaves and continues throughout the deployment.

Common feelings

- Loneliness or missing the deployed parent
- Stress from new responsibilities or routines
- Worry about the service member's safety
- Periods of feeling "okay" and then suddenly emotional again

What youth can do

- Stay connected: Use agreed-upon ways to communicate when possible
- Build support: Talk with friends, teachers, counselors, or military youth groups
- Express emotions: Journaling, art, music, sports, and conversations can help process feelings
- Focus on what you can control: Schoolwork, chores, self-care, and positive activities can create a sense of stability

Helpful reminder: Emotions may go up and down during deployment. Youth need to remember that feeling better for a while does not mean you have forgotten the deployed family member.

EMOTIONAL CYCLE OF DEPLOYMENT FOR YOUTH

3. Reunion and Reintegration: Adjusting to Being Together Again: This phase starts when the service member returns home and the family adjusts to life together again.

Common feelings

- Excitement and relief
- Nervousness about changes in routines and relationships
- Frustration or awkwardness during the adjustment period
- Happiness mixed with unexpected emotions

What youth can do

- Take it slow: Reconnecting may take time for everyone
- Communicate openly: Share feelings respectfully and listen to others' experiences
- Be flexible: Family routines and roles may need adjustments
- Celebrate together: Enjoy family activities and create new memories

Helpful reminder: Reunion is a joyful time, but it is also a period of change. Families often need patience and teamwork as they settle into new routines. Educators can provide support by encouraging family connectedness, communication and understanding.

Every youth experiences deployment differently. Some feelings may be strong, while others may come and go. The most important thing to remember is that these reactions are normal, and support is available. Talking with trusted adults, staying connected, and maintaining healthy routines can help throughout each phase of the deployment cycle.

FUN FACTS ABOUT THE MILITARY

Did you know the National Guard is the oldest branch of the military? It was established in 1636, making it older than our country!!

While the military seems large, that is actually not the case. Less than 1% of the U. S. population actually serves in the military!

The United States currently has service members stationed in nearly 150 different countries around the world.

While the National Guard may be the oldest branch of the military, the Space Force is the youngest, having started in 2019!

There are approximately 2.5 million service members currently serving across all branches of the United States military!

STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING YOUTH GOING THROUGH A DEPLOYMENT CYCLE

Before Deployment (Pre-Deployment):

- Create a welcoming and supportive classroom environment
- Check in regularly with the student and family
- Be patient with changes in behavior, mood, or attention
- Encourage students to share feelings through writing, art, or conversation
- Help students identify trusted adults they can talk to at school
- Maintain consistent classroom routines to provide stability
- Learn about military life and the deployment cycle

During Deployment (Deployment & Sustainment):

- Continue regular check-ins with the student
- Provide opportunities for emotional expression through journals, drawing, or creative projects
- Be flexible when appropriate with assignments and deadlines during difficult periods
- Watch for signs of stress, anxiety, withdrawal, or academic struggles
- Encourage positive peer relationships and inclusion
- Celebrate the student's strengths, accomplishments, and resilience
- Support communication activities such as letter writing or creating care packages when appropriate
- Connect families with school counselors or support services if needed

During Reunion & Reintegration:

- Recognize that reunions can bring both excitement and challenges
- Understand that family routines and roles may change as the service member returns home
- Continue providing structure and consistency in the classroom
- Allow students time to adjust to changes at home
- Be patient if the student experiences emotional ups and downs
- Encourage healthy coping skills and problem-solving strategies
- Maintain communication with parents or caregivers regarding any concerns
- Celebrate the student's resilience and growth throughout the deployment cycle

Every Day Classroom Support Strategies:

- Listen without judgment.
- Respect the family's privacy and experiences
- Avoid making assumptions about military families
- Foster a sense of belonging and connection at school
- Recognize and celebrate military-connected students during appropriate school activities
- Partner with school counselors, military family support programs, and community resources
- Focus on the student's strengths and resilience
- Remind students that it is okay to ask for help when they need it

THREE KEYS TO HELPING MILITARY YOUTH THRIVE AT SCHOOL

Military-connected youth bring unique strengths to the classroom, including resilience, adaptability, and a strong sense of responsibility. At the same time, frequent moves, parental deployments, family separations, and transitions can create challenges that impact academic success, social connections, and emotional well-being. Educators play an important role in helping military youth thrive by advocating for their needs, building a strong support team, and increasing understanding of military life within the school community.

1. ADVOCATE FOR MILITARY-CONNECTED YOUTH

Advocacy begins with recognizing and supporting the unique experiences of military students. Educators can help ensure that military youth receive the resources and opportunities they need to succeed by:

- Identifying military-connected students and learning about their individual circumstances
- Monitoring academic, social, and emotional adjustment during transitions, deployments, and reunions
- Connecting families with available school and community resources
- Communicating regularly with parents or caregivers to understand changing family needs.
- Speaking up for students when additional support, flexibility, or accommodations may be beneficial

When educators advocate for military youth, they help create a school environment where students feel seen, valued, and supported.

2. BUILD A STRONG SUPPORT TEAM

No single educator can meet all of a student's needs alone. Creating a team of supportive adults helps military youth develop a strong network of care and encouragement. This team may include:

- Classroom teachers
- School counselors
- Administrators
- School nurses
- Coaches and activity leaders
- Military Child Education Coalition representatives
- Child and Youth Program staff
- Parents and caregivers
- School Liaison Officer (SLO)
 - <https://www.dodea.edu/education/partnership-and-resources/departments/war-school-liaison-program>

Collaboration among these individuals helps ensure that students receive consistent support. Regular communication allows team members to share concerns, celebrate successes, and coordinate strategies that promote student well-being and academic achievement.

3. INCREASE UNDERSTANDING OF MILITARY LIFE

Many military youth feel more connected when their peers and educators understand the realities of military life. Schools can foster understanding by:

- Learning about military culture, terminology, and the deployment cycle
- Incorporating military-connected perspectives into lessons and discussions when appropriate
- Recognizing Month of the Military Child and other military-related observances
- Providing professional development opportunities focused on military-connected students
- Creating classroom environments where students can share their experiences if they choose

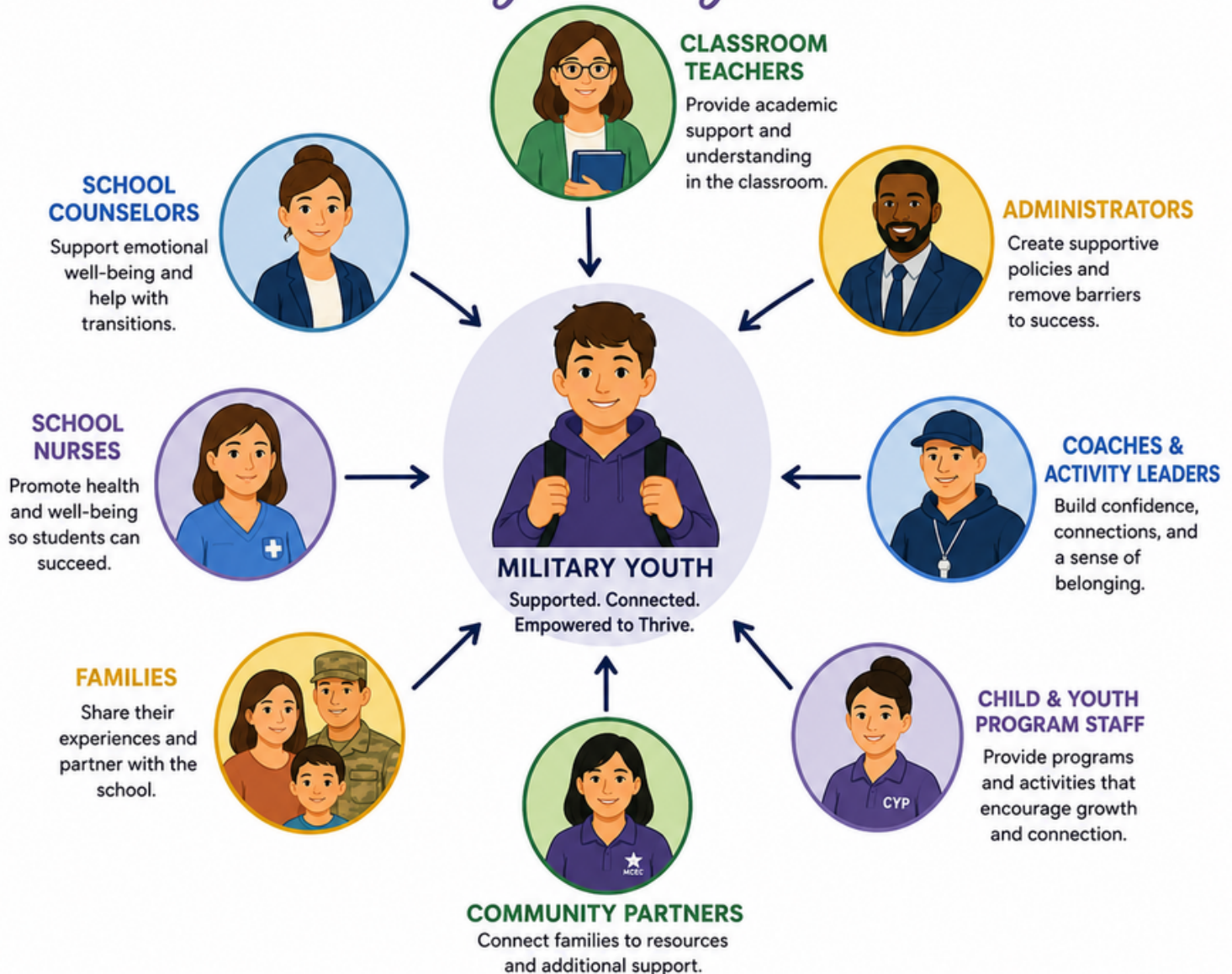
Greater understanding helps reduce misconceptions, strengthens relationships, and promotes a sense of belonging for military youth.

THREE KEYS TO HELPING MILITARY YOUTH THRIVE AT SCHOOL

EVERY EDUCATOR MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Military youth thrive when they feel connected, supported, and understood. By advocating for students, building a strong support team, and increasing awareness of military life, educators can create positive learning environments where military-connected youth are empowered to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. Even small actions—listening, encouraging, and connecting students with resources—can make a lasting difference in a military child's educational journey.

A TEAM AROUND THEM. *Stronger Together.*

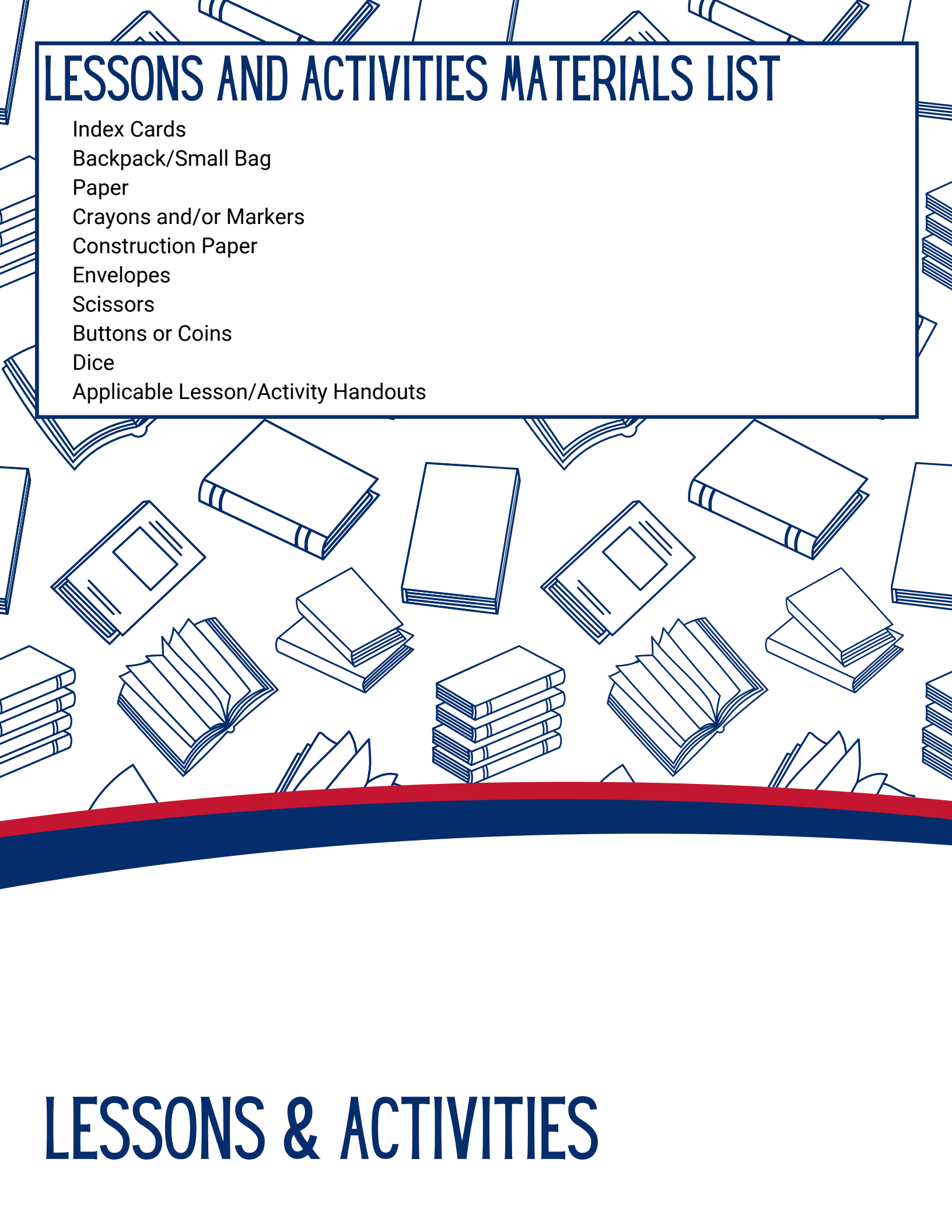


When we work together, military youth thrive!



LESSONS AND ACTIVITIES MATERIALS LIST

Index Cards
Backpack/Small Bag
Paper
Crayons and/or Markers
Construction Paper
Envelopes
Scissors
Buttons or Coins
Dice
Applicable Lesson/Activity Handouts



LESSONS & ACTIVITIES

WALKING IN A MILITARY KID'S SHOES

Ages: 6-12

Duration: Approximately 30-45 minutes

Lesson Theme: Understanding the Military Community and the Experience of Military Children; Building Empathy and Understanding

Learning Objectives: By the end of this lesson, youth will be better able to...

- Learn what the military community is
- Understand some of the unique experiences military-connected children may have
- Build empathy and appreciation for military kids
- Identify ways they can support friends from military families

Materials: Index cards/slips of paper, "Military Kid Experience" scenario cards, backpack/small bag, paper, crayons and/or markers & "My Support Shield" handout

Introduction (5 minutes): Ask youth the following questions:

- What does the word community mean?
- Who are the people that make up a military community?
- Do you know anyone who is a military kid?

Explain that a military community includes service members, their families, and others who support them. Military children may experience things like moving to new places, making new friends, missing a parent during deployments, and learning to be flexible and resilient.

Activity 1: Military Kid Journey Walk (15-20 minutes): Place all scenario cards in a backpack or bag. Have youth take turns drawing one card and reading it aloud (or have a volunteer read the card aloud).

After each card is drawn, ask youth the following questions:

- How might you feel?
- What would be challenging?
- What could help you through that situation?

Discuss how military life can bring both challenges and exciting opportunities - it is not always good or bad - there are both positives and challenges in being a military youth.

Activity Extension

Create additional scenario cards for youth to reflect upon. Some cards could be unrelated to military life but still touch on topics such as extended separations from loved ones, moving/relocating and having to make friends.

Create "Wild Cards" for Military Kid Superpowers: Being a military youth is not all negative experiences. Military youth learn skills their civilian peers may not, have positive experiences civilian peers do not, and opportunities for unique travel and training civilian peers do not.

Ideas for Military Kid Superpower cards include:

- Courage
- Flexibility
- Resilience
- Kindness
- Problem-solving
- Making new friends

Pick one superpower and share how it could help you in everyday life!

Scenario Card 1

New School Adventure

Your family is moving to a new state because of military orders. You will be starting at a new school where you do not know anyone.

Think About:

- How would you feel?
- What would help you make new friends?

Scenario Card 2

Deployment Goodbye

Your military parent is leaving for several months to help with an important mission.

Think About:

- What emotions might you have?
- How could you stay connected?

Scenario Card 3

Meeting New Friends

You arrive at a new school and have lunch by yourself on the first day.

Think About:

- How might you feel?
- What could another student do to help you feel welcome?

Scenario Card 4

Missing a Special Event

Your parent is deployed and cannot attend your school concert or sports game.

Think About:

- How might you feel?
- What could help you celebrate your accomplishment?

Scenario Card 5

Homecoming Celebration

After being away for many months, your parent is finally coming home.

Think About:

- How would you feel?
- What would you want to do together?

Scenario Card 6

Learning Something New

Your family moves to a place with different weather, traditions, and activities.

Think About:

- What exciting opportunities might there be?
- What could be challenging?

Scenario Card 7

Keeping in Touch

You cannot see your deployed parent in person, but you can send letters, drawings, or video messages.

Think About:

- What would you send?
- How would staying connected help?

Scenario Card 8

Being the New Kid Again

This is the third school you have attended in four years.

Think About:

- What skills might you have learned from moving?
- What challenges might you still face?

WALKING IN A MILITARY KID'S SHOES

Activity 2: My Support Shield (10-15 minutes): Either have the youth draw the outline of a shield on a blank piece of paper, or utilize the handout provided.

After youth have the outline of a shield, have them label each of the four sections as follows:

1. People Who Help Me
2. Things That Make Me Brave
3. Ways I Stay Connected
4. Ways I Can Help Others

After each section has been labeled, have the youth draw or write their responses in each section. Explain that military kids often rely on supportive people and healthy coping skills when facing challenges. When all youth have completed their shield, encourage them to present their shield to the group and talk about why they identified the individuals and/or items they did.

Reflection Discussion (5–10 Minutes): Ask youth the following reflective questions to close out the lesson:

- What did you learn about military kids today?
- What challenges might military children face?
- What strengths do military kids develop?
- How can classmates help a military-connected friend feel welcome?
- What does it mean to be resilient?

Military Youth Connection: Military children often demonstrate courage, adaptability, and resilience as they navigate moves, new schools, and family separations. While every military family's experience is unique, military kids learn valuable skills such as making new friends, solving problems, and supporting one another. By understanding military life, we can create classrooms and communities where all children feel welcomed, supported, and valued.

Closing Activity (5 minutes): Invite youth to complete the following sentence...

- "One way I can support a military kid is to..."

Allow volunteers to share their ideas with the group. This helps reinforce empathy, inclusion, and appreciation for military-connected youth.



Scenario Card 9

Helping at Home

While a parent is away, everyone in the family helps out with extra responsibilities.

Think About:

- What jobs could you help with?
- How does helping make a difference?

Scenario Card 10

A New Neighbor

A military family moves into your neighborhood and their child does not know anyone.

Think About:

- How can you help them feel welcome?
- What would you do first?

Scenario Card 11

Making a Long-Distance Friendship

One of your best friends moved away because of military orders.

Think About:

- How can you stay friends?
- What would you miss most?

Scenario Card 12

Military Family Pride

Your school is celebrating Month of the Military Child and asks students to share something special about military families.

Think About:

- What strengths do military kids have?
- What would you share?

Scenario Card 13

Unexpected Change

Your family learns that a move will happen sooner than expected.

Think About:

- How might you react?
- What could help you adjust?

Scenario Card 14

Welcome Team

A new military-connected student joins your class in the middle of the school year.

Think About:

- How might they be feeling?
- What could your class do to make them feel included?

Scenario Card 15

Feeling Proud and Nervous

Your parent is leaving for an important mission. You are proud of them, but you also feel worried.

Think About:

- Can you feel more than one emotion at a time?
- Who could you talk to about your feelings?

Scenario Card 16

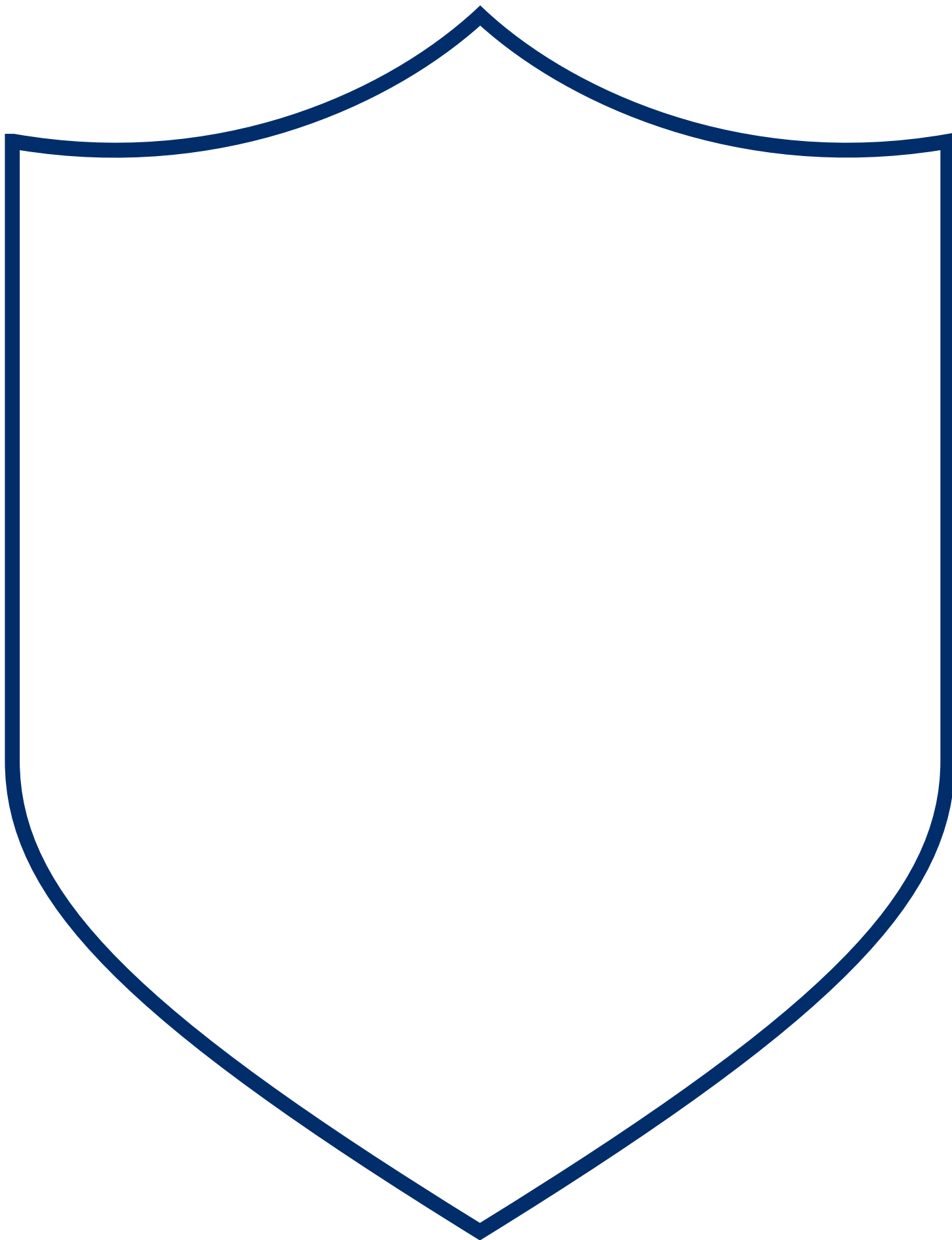
Finding Your Strength

You have moved several times and learned how to introduce yourself to new people.

Think About:

- What strengths have you developed?
- How could those strengths help others?

MY SUPPORT SHIELD



A GOOD DAY

Book: A Good Day

Author: Kevin Henkes

Ages: 6-12

Duration: Approximately 30-45 minutes

Lesson Theme: Overcoming Challenges, Resilience and "Hunting the Good Stuff"



Learning Objectives: By the end of this lesson, youth will be better able to...

- Identify challenges faced by the characters in the story
- Describe how the characters overcame disappointment or difficult situations
- Practice "hunting the good stuff" by finding positive outcomes in challenging situations
- Recognize how resilience helps military children navigate changes and challenges
- Reflect on personal experiences and identify strategies for maintaining a positive outlook

Materials: A Good Day by Kevin Henkes, paper, crayons and/or markers

Military Youth Connection: Military children often face unique challenges, such as moving to a new community, changing schools, making new friends, having a parent deployed, or adjusting to changes in family routines. These experiences can sometimes feel difficult or disappointing, much like the challenges faced by the characters in *A Good Day*. However, military youth also develop strengths such as resilience, adaptability, courage, and optimism.

This lesson helps military-connected youth understand that while challenges are a normal part of life, they can learn to identify positive opportunities, supportive relationships, and personal growth that emerge from difficult situations. By "hunting the good stuff," military youth can build resilience and maintain a positive outlook during times of change.

Introduction (5 minutes): Ask youth the following questions:

- Have you ever had a day where nothing seemed to go right?
- Have you ever had to move, change schools, or spend time away from a parent because of military service?
- What helped make those situations easier?

Explain that everyone faces challenges, and military children often experience changes that can be difficult. Today's story shows how a bad day can become a good day when we look for positive things and keep moving forward.

Read Aloud (10-15 minutes): Read A Good Day aloud to the group. As you read, pause and discuss:

- What challenge is each character facing?
- How do they feel?
- What helps their situation improve?
- How might a military child feel in a similar situation?

Group Discussion (10 minutes): Pose the following questions to the youth:

- How did each character respond to their challenge?
- Did the challenge last forever?
- What positive outcome came from the experience?

Connect to military life:

- Moving can be difficult, but it can also lead to new friendships.
- Deployments can be challenging, but families often find new ways to stay connected.
- Changing schools can be scary, but it can create opportunities to learn new things and meet new people.

A GOOD DAY

Introduce the phrase "Hunt the Good Stuff": When something difficult happens, we intentionally look for positive experiences, lessons learned, people who support us, and things we can still be thankful for.

Activity (10 minutes): Ask participants to draw or write about:

1. A challenge they have experienced
2. How they felt during that challenge
3. Something positive that came from the experience
4. A person who helped them through it
5. One strength they used (courage, flexibility, kindness, patience, etc.)

Encourage military youth to think about experiences such as:

- Moving to a new duty station
- Making new friends
- Parent deployment or training
- Joining a new school or activity

Reflective Questions: Build understanding by asking the following questions:

Understanding the Story

1. Which character did you relate to most? Why?
2. How did the characters handle their challenges?
3. What made their day better?
4. What lesson did the characters learn?

Military Youth Connection

1. Have you ever experienced a challenge because of military life?
2. What helped you through that experience?
3. What strengths have you developed as a military child?
4. How has military life helped you become more resilient?

Hunting the Good Stuff

1. What does "hunting the good stuff" mean?
2. Can you think of something positive that came from a difficult situation?
3. What are three good things happening in your life right now?
4. Who are the people you can turn to when things get tough?
5. What is one thing you are grateful for today?

Closing Activity (5 minutes): Ask each participant to complete the sentence:

- "One good thing I found today is _____."

Remind Youth:

Military children are strong, adaptable, and resilient. Just like the characters in A Good Day, challenges may happen, but by hunting the good stuff and leaning on supportive people, we can find hope and opportunities even during difficult times.

I'M A HERO TOO

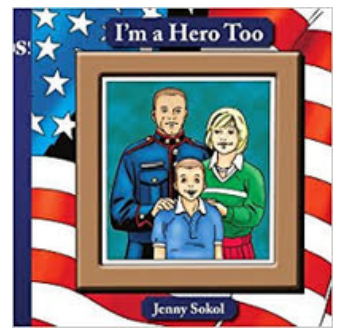
Book: I'm a Hero Too

Author: Jenny Sokol

Ages: 6-12

Duration: Approximately 45-60 minutes

Lesson Theme: Recognizing Heroes in Our Community and Understanding the Strength of Military Youth



Learning Objectives: By the end of this lesson, youth will be better able to...

- Identify characteristics of a hero
- Recognize heroes who serve in their community, including military service members and military families
- Understand that military youth demonstrate strength, resilience, adaptability, and courage in their daily lives
- Explain how acts of kindness and service can positively impact others
- Participate in a community service activity that honors and supports community heroes

Materials: I'm a Hero Too by Jenny Sokol, paper, crayons and/or markers, and construction paper

Military Youth Connection: Military-connected children often face unique challenges, including frequent moves, changing schools, long separations from loved ones during deployments, and adapting to new communities. Just like the heroes in I'm a Hero Too, military youth show courage, resilience, flexibility, and perseverance every day. While they may not wear a uniform, military children play an important role in supporting their families and communities. This lesson helps children recognize that heroism can be found in both large and small acts of service, kindness, and strength.

Introduction (5 minutes): Ask youth the following questions:

- What does it mean to be a hero?
- Who are some heroes in your life?
- Can children be heroes? Why or why not?
- What are some ways military children show courage and strength?
- Record responses on the board and discuss how heroes come in many forms.

Read Aloud (10-15 minutes): Read I'm a Hero Too aloud to the group. As you read, pause and discuss:

- Examples of courage
- Ways people help others
- How heroes support their families and communities
- Connections they notice to military families and military youth

Group Discussion (10 minutes): Pose the following questions to the youth:

- Who were the heroes in the book?
- What actions made them heroes?
- How did they help others?
- What qualities did they demonstrate?

Heroes Around Us Reflection Questions

- Who are the heroes in our community?
- How do military members help our country and communities?
- How do military families support service members?
- What challenges might military children face?
- How do military youth demonstrate courage and resilience?
- Can helping a friend or supporting a family member be heroic? Why?

I'M A HERO TOO

What Does It Mean to Be a Hero?

- Does a hero always wear a uniform?
- What qualities do heroes have?
- How can children be heroes at home, at school, and in their communities?
- What are some ways military youth act as heroes in their everyday lives?

Community Service Activity (15-20 minutes): Thank-You Cards for Community Heroes
Explain that one way to be a hero is to show appreciation and support for others.

Have youth create thank-you cards for:

- Military service members
- Veterans
- Teachers
- First responders
- Healthcare workers
- Community volunteers

Encourage children to include:

- A drawing
- A positive message
- Why they believe the recipient is a hero

Extension Activity:

Create a "Kindness Mission" challenge where youth identify one way they can help someone in their home, school, or community during the week and report back on their experience.

Closing Reflection (5 minutes): Invite youth to complete the following statements:

- "A hero is someone who..."
- "Military youth are heroes because..."
- "I can be a hero by..."
- "One way I will help my community this week is..."

Allow volunteers to share their responses.

Take-Home Challenge (optional): Ask each youth to complete one act of service during the week, such as:

- Helping a sibling with homework
- Welcoming a new student
- Writing a note of encouragement to a military child
- Helping a neighbor
- Participating in a community cleanup
- Thanking a community helper

Throughout the following week, discuss how these acts of service helped others and how they demonstrated heroic qualities.

Remind Youth: Heroes are all around us. Military service members, military families, community helpers, and military youth all contribute to making our communities stronger. Through kindness, courage, resilience, and service to others, every child can be a hero too.



LOVE, LIZZIE

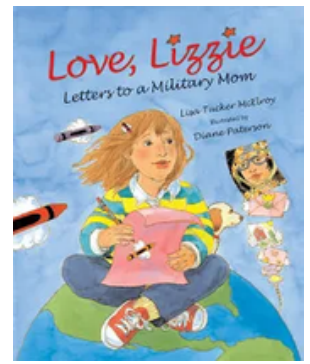
Book: Love, Lizzie: Letters to a Military Mom

Author: Lisa Tucker McElroy

Ages: 6-12

Duration: Approximately 45-60 minutes

Lesson Theme: Connecting with Others, Overcoming Challenges and Loneliness, and Showing Appreciation



Learning Objectives: By the end of this lesson, youth will be better able to...

- Identify ways people connect with and support one another
- Recognize feelings of loneliness and challenges that people may experience
- Describe healthy ways to overcome loneliness and build connections
- Express appreciation to people who make a positive difference in their lives
- Understand how military youth may experience challenges related to moves, deployments, and changing friendships, and how connections can provide support

Materials: Love, Lizzie by Lisa Tucker McElroy, paper, crayons and/or markers, construction paper & envelopes (optional)

Introduction (5-10 minutes): Ask youth the following questions:

- What does it mean to be a good friend?
- Have you ever missed someone you care about?
- How does it feel when someone reaches out to you or shows they care?

Additional Reflection Questions:

- What helps you feel connected to others?
- Who are the people you can talk to when you're having a difficult day?

Explain that today's story is about friendship, staying connected, and remembering that even small acts of kindness can make a big difference.

Read Aloud (10-15 minutes): Read Love, Lizzie aloud to the group. As you read, pause and discuss:

- How do you think Lizzie is feeling right now?
- What challenges is she facing?
- What helps her feel less alone?
- How do her connections with others help her overcome difficulties?
- What would you say to encourage Lizzie?

Group Discussion (10 minutes): Engage youth in discussing the following statements:

- Everyone experiences lonely moments sometimes
- Challenges can feel easier when we have supportive people around us
- Reaching out to others can strengthen friendships and relationships

Understanding Connection and Loneliness Reflection Questions

- Why is it important to let people know we care about them?
- How can a letter, note, text, or conversation brighten someone's day?
- What are some ways we can support someone who may be feeling lonely?

LOVE, LIZZIE

Military Youth Connections (5-10 minutes - optional): Explain the following to all youth: Military-connected youth often face unique challenges such as:

- Moving to new communities
- Changing schools
- Missing friends and family members
- Having a parent deployed or away for training

Just like Lizzie, military youth may need extra support and connection during times of change.

Reflection Questions:

- How might moving to a new school feel?
- What can you do to help a new student feel welcome?
- How can we stay connected with friends who live far away?
- What are ways we can support military-connected friends in our community?

Emphasize that letters, messages, phone calls, and acts of kindness help maintain important relationships, even across long distances.

Activity: “You Matter to Me” Appreciation Letters (15-20 minutes): Have youth choose one or more people who are important in their lives.

Examples:

- Parent or caregiver
- Grandparent
- Teacher
- Military parent
- Friend
- Neighbor
- Coach

Youth create a card or letter sharing:

- Why the person is important to them
- Something the person has done that made a difference
- A thank-you message
- A positive memory they share

Additional Prompts:

- I appreciate you because...
- You make my life better by...
- One thing I will always remember is...
- Thank you for helping me...

Closing Reflection (5 minutes): Ask youth to complete one of the following statements:

- One person I want to thank is...
- One way I can help someone feel connected is...
- One thing I learned about friendship today is...
- One way I can support military youth is...
- What does Love, Lizzie teach us about friendship?
- How can we overcome feelings of loneliness?
- Why is staying connected to others important?
- What is one act of kindness you will do this week?

Take-Home Challenge (optional): Challenge youth to complete one or more of the following tasks:

- Deliver their appreciation letter or card
- Reach out to someone they have not talked to recently
- Perform one act of kindness for a friend, family member, neighbor, or military-connected youth

Remind Youth: Small acts of kindness, gratitude, and connection can help others feel valued, supported, and never alone.

MY MANY COLORED DAYS

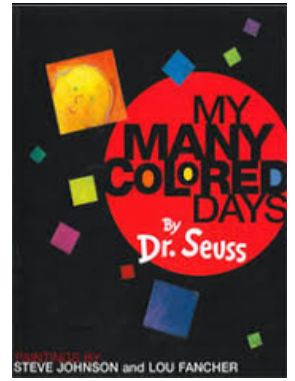
Book: My Many Colored Days

Author: Dr. Seuss

Ages: 6-12

Duration: Approximately 45-60 minutes

Lesson Theme: Understanding Feelings and Emotions



Learning Objectives: By the end of this lesson, youth will be better able to...

- Identify different emotions and feelings
- Understand that everyone experiences a variety of emotions
- Learn healthy ways to express feelings
- Recognize how military life can create many different emotions for military-connected youth

Materials: My Many Colored Days by Dr. Seuss, paper, crayons and/or markers

Introduction (5-10 minutes): Ask youth the following questions:

- How are you feeling today?
- If your feeling was a color, what color would it be?
- Can someone feel more than one emotion in a day?

Read Aloud (10 minutes): Read My Many Colored Days aloud to the group. As you read, pause and discuss:

- What feeling do you think this color represents?
- Have you ever felt like this?
- What helps you when you feel this way?

Group Discussion (10 minutes): Engage youth in discussing the following statements:

- There are no "good" or "bad" feelings—feelings give us information
- Everyone experiences many emotions
- Feelings can change throughout the day

Building Understanding Reflection Questions

- Which color from the book describes you today?
- Which color do you feel most often?
- What do you do when you have a difficult day?
- Who can you talk to when you are feeling sad, worried, or frustrated?

Activity: My Many Colored Days Feelings Portrait (15-20 minutes): Give each youth a piece of paper. On the paper, have them draw a large outline of themselves or create a self-portrait.

Inside the outline, youth use colors to represent different feelings they experience:

- Yellow = happy
- Blue = calm or sad
- Red = excited or angry
- Green = peaceful
- Purple = creative
- Any colors they choose

Ask youth to label or write a short sentence about each color and feeling.

Optional Extension Activity:

Youth can create a "Feelings Rainbow" showing emotions they may experience during a typical week.

MY MANY COLORED DAYS

Military Youth Connection: Explain to youth that military children often experience many different emotions because of military life. They may feel:

- Proud when a parent serves their country
- Excited about making new friends
- Nervous when moving to a new school
- Sad during a deployment
- Happy during reunions and homecomings

Just like in My Many Colored Days, military youth may have many different colors and feelings throughout their journey. All of these feelings are normal and important.

Ask:

- How might a military child feel when moving to a new community?
- What color might represent being proud of a family member's service?
- How can we support a friend who is experiencing a difficult emotion?

Closing Reflection (5 minutes): Go around the group and have each youth share:

"Today I feel _____ because _____."

Remind youth that feelings change, and it is okay to have many different colors in your day. Talking about emotions and asking for support are important ways to stay healthy and resilient.

Remind Youth: Just like Dr. Seuss's colorful animals, each of us experiences many different feelings. Understanding our emotions helps us grow, build resilience, and support ourselves and others—especially during life's changes and challenges.



NIGHT CATCH

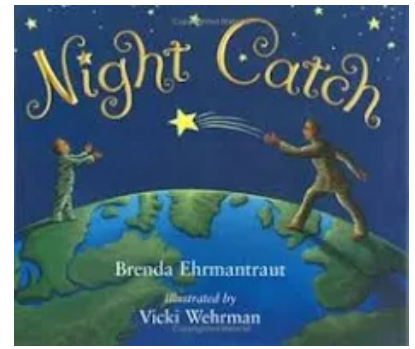
Book: Night Catch

Author: Brenda Ehrmantraut

Ages: 6-12

Duration: Approximately 30-45 minutes

Lesson Theme: Staying Connected, Overcoming Challenges and Loneliness, Military Family Connections



Learning Objectives: By the end of this lesson, youth will be better able to...

- Identify ways people can stay connected even when they are far apart
- Recognize feelings of loneliness and discuss healthy ways to cope with them
- Understand the symbolism of the North Star in Night Catch and how it represents connection and hope
- Explore how military youth and families stay connected during separations
- Practice expressing appreciation and care for important people in their lives

Materials: Night Catch by Brenda Ehrmantraut, paper, crayons and/or markers, star cutouts or construction paper & map or image of the North Star (optional)

Introduction (5-10 minutes): Ask youth the following questions:

- Have you ever missed someone who was far away?
- How did you stay connected with them?
- What helps you feel better when you are lonely?

Explain that today's story is about a father and son who find a special way to stay connected even when they cannot be together.

Read Aloud (10-15 minutes): Read Night Catch aloud to the group. As you read, pause and discuss the following questions:

- How do you think the boy feels knowing his father is leaving?
- What challenges might families face when someone is away?
- Why do you think the father chose the stars as a way to stay connected?
- How would you feel if you had a special connection like this with someone you love?
- What does the North Star represent in the story?

Discussion: The North Star and Staying Connected (10 minutes): Explain that the North Star has been used for centuries to help people find their way. In Night Catch, it becomes a symbol of connection, comfort, and hope.

Discussion Questions

- Why is it comforting to know someone else can look at the same star?
- What are other ways people can stay connected when they are apart?
- How can staying connected help us when we feel lonely?
- What people help you feel supported when you are having a hard day?

Military Youth Connection

Explain that many military youth experience times when a parent or loved one is deployed, training, or stationed somewhere else. Even though they may be separated by distance, families find creative ways to stay connected through letters, phone calls, video chats, shared traditions, and special reminders like the stars in Night Catch. Ask the following questions:

- What are some ways military families stay connected?
- Why is it important to remember that we are never alone, even when someone we love is far away?

NIGHT CATCH

Activity 1: My Connection Star (15 minutes): Provide each child with a star-shaped cutout.

Have them write or draw:

- Someone they care about
- Ways they stay connected with that person
- Things they can do when they miss that person

Encourage youth to decorate their stars.

Reflection Questions

- Who helps you feel loved and supported?
- What can you do when you miss someone?
- How does remembering special people help us through challenges?

Activity 2: North Star Connection Plan (10-15 minutes): Ask youth to think about someone they may not see every day.

On a sheet of paper, have them create a "Connection Plan" including:

- A person they want to stay connected with
- Three ways they can connect when apart
- One encouraging message they would like to share

Examples:

- Write a letter
- Send a drawing
- Schedule a video call
- Share a special tradition
- Look at the stars and think of each other

Reflection Questions

- Which way of staying connected do you think works best?
- How can reaching out to someone help both of you?
- What would you want someone to tell you when you are feeling lonely?

Closing Activity (5 minutes): Gather youth in a circle. Invite each youth to complete one of the following statements:

- "One person who helps me feel connected is..."
- "When I feel lonely, I can..."
- "One thing I learned from Night Catch is..."

Emphasize that just like the North Star helps people find their way, the people who care about us can help guide and support us through challenges, even when they are far away.

Remind Youth: No matter how far apart we may be, caring relationships, shared memories, and special ways of connecting can help us feel loved, supported, and never truly alone.



THE KISSING HAND

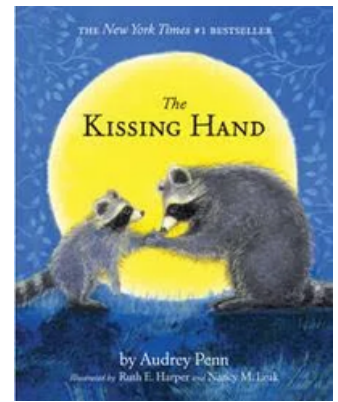
Book: The Kissing Hand

Author: Audrey Penn

Ages: 6-12

Duration: Approximately 45-60 minutes

Lesson Theme: Overcoming Fears, Building Connections and Being Brave



Learning Objectives: By the end of this lesson, youth will be better able to...

- Identify common fears and challenges they may experience
- Recognize trusted adults and peers they can talk to when they feel afraid or worried
- Understand that bravery means facing fears even when something feels difficult
- Practice ways to stay connected with loved ones when they are apart
- Explore how military-connected youth may experience unique fears and challenges during moves, deployments, or school transitions

Materials: The Kissing Hand by Audrey Penn, paper, crayons and/or markers, scissors, construction paper & heart stickers (optional)

Introduction (5-10 minutes): Ask youth the following questions:

- Have you ever felt nervous about trying something new?
- What are some things that make children feel scared or worried?
- Who do you talk to when you are feeling afraid?
- What helps you feel better when you miss someone you care about?

Explain that today's story is about a young raccoon who is nervous about a new experience and learns that love and connection can help him feel brave.

Read Aloud (10-15 minutes): Read The Kissing Hand aloud to the group. As you read, pause and discuss the following questions:

- Why do you think Chester feels nervous?
- Have you ever felt the same way?
- What did Chester's mother do to help him feel safe?
- How can a small reminder of someone's love help us when we feel afraid?
- What are some ways people show they care about us?

Activity 1: My Bravery Hand (10-15 minutes): Provide each youth with a hand outline (or have them trace their own hand on a piece of paper). Inside the hand, have youth write or draw the following:

- One thing that makes them feel afraid or nervous
- One way they can be brave when facing that fear
- Three people they can talk to when they need help
 - Examples: Parents/Guardians, Grandparents, Teacher, School Counselor, Friends or Coach

Discussion: Explain that being brave does not mean never being scared. Bravery means asking for help, trying again, and facing challenges even when they feel difficult.

Discussion Questions

- What does bravery look like?
- Is it okay to ask for help when you're scared?
- How can trusted people help us overcome fears?

THE KISSING HAND

Activity 2: Connection Hearts (10 minutes): Give each youth a paper heart. Then, ask them to decorate it and write:

- The name of someone who helps them feel loved and supported
- One way they stay connected with that person
 - Examples; Phone Calls, Video Chats, Letters, Text Messages, Spending Time Together or Sharing Special Traditions

Discussion: Encourage youth to keep the heart somewhere special as a reminder that they are connected to people who care about them.

Discussion Questions

- How does it feel to know someone cares about you?
- What can you do when you miss someone?
- How can you help a friend feel included and connected?

Military Youth Connection (5 minutes): Explain to the youth that military youth often experience changes such as moving to a new school, making new friends, or having a parent away for training or deployment. These situations can feel scary, just like Chester felt nervous about going to school.

Just as Chester carried the love from his mother's kissing hand, military youth can carry reminders of the people who care about them wherever they go.

Discussion Questions

- What challenges might military-connected youth face?
- How can staying connected with family and friends help during a deployment or move?
- What are some ways we can welcome and support new students in our school or program?

Closing Activity (5 minutes): Gather youth in a circle. Invite each youth to complete the following statements:

- "I can be brave when..."
- "One person I can talk to when I am worried is..."
- "One way I can help someone else feel connected is..."

Celebrate each response and remind youth that everyone experiences fears sometimes, and no one has to face them alone.

Remind Youth: Like Chester's kissing hand, the love and support of family, friends, and trusted adults stay with us wherever we go. We can be brave, ask for help when we need it, and stay connected to the people who care about us.



THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Book: The Pledge of Allegiance

Author: Scholastic

Ages: 6-12

Duration: Approximately 30-45 minutes

Lesson Theme: Keeping Promises and Responsibility



Learning Objectives: By the end of this lesson, youth will be better able to...

- Explain what “allegiance” means in simple terms (loyalty, support, and standing by something or someone)
- Understand the importance of keeping promises
- Identify ways to show responsibility at school, home, and in their community

Materials: The Pledge of Allegiance by Scholastic, paper, crayons and/or markers, scissors, construction paper, My Personal Pledge worksheet, Soldier’s Creed and worksheet

Introduction (5-10 minutes): Ask youth the following questions:

- “What do you think the word pledge means?”
- “Have you ever made a promise? What was it?”

Explain that a pledge is a serious promise we make to ourselves and others. An allegiance means staying loyal and true to something you believe in or care about.

Discussion Question:

- “Why do you think people make pledges together, like the Pledge of Allegiance?”

Read Aloud (10-15 minutes): Read When Duty Calls aloud to the group. As you read, pause and discuss the following questions:

- “What do you think this part of the pledge means?”
- “Why do people stand together when they say a pledge?”
- “What does it mean to show respect when making a promise?”

The key idea to reinforce is that a pledge is not just words - it is a promise shown through actions.

Activity 1: My Personal Pledge (10-15 minutes): Provide each youth with the My Personal Pledge worksheet. Encourage youth to include ideas such as being responsible, keeping promises, helping others, being kind and respectful and doing their best at school and home.

Prompt ideas:

- “I pledge to be responsible by...”
- “I pledge to help others...”
- “I pledge to make my community and the world a better place by...”

Allow students to decorate their pledge if time allows (optional).

THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Activity 2: My Creed (10 minutes): Give each youth a copy of the Soldier's Creed worksheet. Then, read through the Soldier's Creed together as a group. Explain that a creed is similar to a promise or a pledge... it is an agreement we make to be responsible, help others and demonstrate good citizenship. After a discussion, give the youth time to write their own personal creed. They can use the Soldier's Creed as an example. If time permits, youth can decorate their My Creed worksheet.

Discussion: Encourage youth to really think about those things that mean the most to them in their life. Challenge them to demonstrate in their personal creed how they will be a champion for themselves and those around them. Remind them that this is a promise they are making to themselves.

Discussion Questions

- What was the most challenging part of writing a personal creed? Why?
- What items did you include that mean the most to you?
- How can you use your personal creed in your everyday life?

Military Youth Connection (5 minutes): Explain to the youth that military youth often hear and see pledges and oaths because their families serve the country. Service members make promises to protect and support others. Military youth also show responsibility by adapting, supporting their families, and helping new friends when they move.

Discussion Questions

- How do military families show responsibility and teamwork?
- What can we learn from military families about keeping promises?

Closing Activity (5 minutes): Gather youth in a circle. Invite each youth to respond to the following questions:

- "What does allegiance mean to you now?"
- "How can you show responsibility this week?"
- "What is one promise you want to keep starting today?"

Celebrate each response and remind youth that our words matter in life, but our actions show who we are and what means the most to us.



THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE - MY PERSONAL PLEDGE

I pledge to demonstrate responsibility at home and school by...

I pledge to help others by...

I pledge to help make my community and the world a better place by...

My Signature



SOLDIER'S CREED

I am an American Soldier.

I am a warrior and a member of a team.

I serve the people of the United States, and live the Army Values.

I will always place the mission first.

I will never accept defeat.

I will never quit.

I will never leave a fallen comrade.

I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my warrior tasks and drills.

I always maintain my arms, my equipment and myself.

I am an expert and I am a professional.

I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy, the enemies of the United States of America in close combat.

I am a guardian of freedom and the American way of life.

I am an American Soldier.



U.S. ARMY

ARMY VALUES

WWW.ARMY.MIL/VALUES

MY CREED

Use the space below to write your own personal creed. Remember...this is a promise you are making to yourself about how you want to live your life, what you most value and how you will demonstrate responsibility and bravery.

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WHEN DUTY CALLS

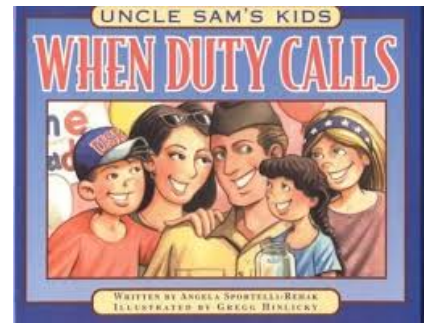
Book: When Duty Calls

Author: Angela Sportelli-Rehak

Ages: 6-12

Duration: Approximately 45-60 minutes

Lesson Theme: Serving Others, Responsibility and Giving Back



Learning Objectives: By the end of this lesson, youth will be better able to...

- Identify ways people serve and help others in their communities
- Describe what it means to be responsible and dependable
- Recognize how acts of service can make a positive difference
- Explore ways they can give back to others at home, school, and in their community
- Understand how military families demonstrate service and responsibility

Materials: When Duty Calls by Angela Sportelli-Rehak, paper, crayons and/or markers, scissors, construction paper & Helping Hand worksheet

Introduction (5-10 minutes): Ask youth the following questions:

- What does it mean to help someone?
- Can you think of a time when someone helped you?
- What responsibilities do you have at home or school?
- Why is it important to do our part?

Explain that today's story is about people who answer a call to serve others and how everyone can make a difference through responsibility and service.

Read Aloud (10-15 minutes): Read When Duty Calls aloud to the group. As you read, pause and discuss the following questions:

- How are the characters helping others?
- What responsibilities do the characters have?
- How do you think it feels to serve your community?
- Why is it important to help even when it is difficult?
- What can happen when people work together to help others?

Activity 1: Helping Hands (10-15 minutes): Provide each youth with the Helping Hand worksheet. Have the youth write or draw ways they can help those around them.

- Finger 1: A way I can help at home
- Finger 2: A way I can help a friend
- Finger 3: A way I can help at school
- Finger 4: A way I can help my community
- Finger 5: A way I can support someone who may need encouragement

Create a Helping Hands Wall by displaying all the hands together.

Discussion Questions

- Which act of service would be easiest for you?
- Which one might be challenging?
- How does helping others make you feel?
- How do small acts of kindness make a big difference?

WHEN DUTY CALLS

Activity 2: Responsibility Relay (10 minutes): Create responsibility cards using the examples provided. Youth then take turns drawing a card and explaining what a responsible person would do. You can scale the responsibilities up or down based on the ages of the youth.

Discussion Questions

- What makes someone responsible?
- Why is it important to keep promises?
- How can being responsible help others?

Military Youth Connection (5-10 minutes): Explain to the youth that military service is one example of serving others. Service members often help protect and support communities, sometimes far from home. Military children and families also demonstrate responsibility by adapting to changes, supporting one another, and helping their communities.

Discussion Questions

- What are some ways military families serve others?
- How do military youth show responsibility at home or school?
- How can we support friends whose family members serve in the military?
- What can we learn from military families about helping others?

Activity 3: My Service Challenge (5 minutes): Ask each youth to choose one act of service they will complete during the next week.

- Examples:
 - Help with a household chore without being asked
 - Write a thank-you note
 - Help a classmate
 - Pick up litter in a community space
 - Help a family member with a task

Have youth write or draw their service goal on an index card and then provide time for youth to share with the group.

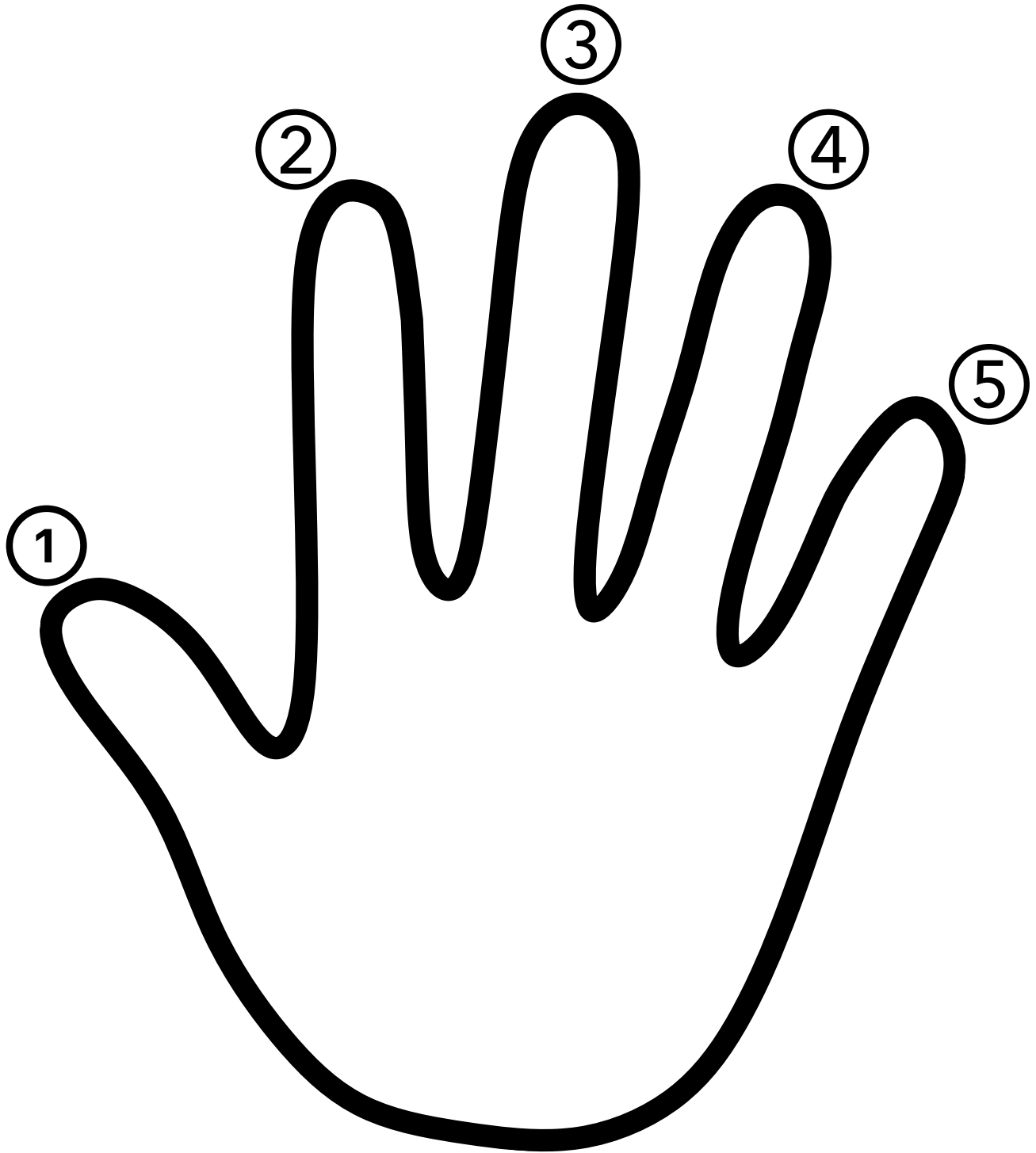
Closing Reflection (5 minutes): Gather youth in a circle. Invite each youth to answer the following reflective questions:

- What did you learn about serving others today?
- Why is responsibility important?
- How can one person make a difference?
- What is one way you will help someone this week?
- How can helping others strengthen a community?

Celebrate each response and remind youth that everyone has a responsibility to help those around them and make the world a better place for everyone.

Remind Youth: No matter our age, we can all answer the call to help others. Through responsibility, kindness, and service, we make our homes, schools, and communities stronger.

WHEN DUTY CALLS - HELPING HAND WORKSHEET



Write or Draw:

Finger 1: A way I can help at home

Finger 2: A way I can help a friend

Finger 3: A way I can help at school

Finger 4: A way I can help my community

Finger 5: A way I can support someone who may need encouragement

WHEN DUTY CALLS - RESPONSIBILITY RELAY

RESPONSIBILITY RELAY EXAMPLES

YOU PROMISED TO FEED THE FAMILY PET	A TEACHER ASKS FOR VOLUNTEERS TO HELP CLEAN UP AFTER AN ACTIVITY
A FRIEND DROPS THEIR BOOK	A YOUNG CHILD NEEDS HELP FINDING AN ADULT
A TEACHER ASSIGNS YOU HOMEWORK BUT YOU WANT TO PLAY GAMES INSTEAD	YOU PROMISED A NEIGHBOR YOU WOULD HELP THEM PULL WEEDS IN THEIR GARDEN
YOU PROMISED TO DO DISHES AFTER DINNER	YOU KNOW YOU HAVE TO GET UP EARLY IN THE MORNING FOR PRACTICE
YOU PROMISED A FRIEND YOU WOULD HELP THEM WITH THEIR MATH ASSIGNMENT AFTER SCHOOL	A FRIEND LET YOU BORROW ONE OF THEIR VIDEO GAMES FOR THE WEEKEND
YOU PROMISED YOU WOULD TAKE OUT THE TRASH BEFORE GOING TO SCHOOL	YOU SEE A TEACHER CARRYING A LOT OF ITEMS AND TRYING TO OPEN THE DOOR TO THE SCHOOL
YOU SEE ANOTHER STUDENT SITTING BY THEMSELVES AT LUNCH	YOU OVERHEAR KIDS MAKING FUN OF ANOTHER KID AT SCHOOL
YOU ACCIDENTALLY LOST YOUR FRIEND'S BOOK THEY LET YOU BORROW	YOU PROMISED YOU WOULD CLEAN YOUR ROOM BEFORE RIDING YOUR BIKE
YOU SEE SOMEONE DROP A \$5.00 BILL IN THE HALLWAY AT SCHOOL	YOUR FRIEND CHALLENGED YOU TO ACT UP DURING CLASS
YOU HAVE A BIG MATH TEST IN THE MORNING	YOU TOLD YOUR SCIENCE GROUP YOU WOULD FINISH PART OF THE GROUP'S PROJECT
MAKE UP A SCENARIO AND TELL WHAT A RESPONSIBLE PERSON SHOULD DO	MAKE UP A SCENARIO AND TELL WHAT A RESPONSIBLE PERSON SHOULD DO

RESILIENCE CHUTES AND LADDERS CHALLENGE

Ages: 6-12

Duration: Approximately 45-60 minutes

Lesson Theme: Resilience and Overcoming Challenges

Learning Objectives: By the end of this lesson, youth will be better able to...

- Define resilience as the ability to keep going when facing challenges
- Identify healthy ways to cope with difficult situations
- Recognize examples of resilience in themselves and others
- Create a customized Chutes and Ladders-style game that highlights resilient choices and setbacks

Materials: Chutes and Ladders template, markers, crayons, colored pencils, game pieces (buttons or coins) and dice

Introduction (10 minutes): Explain to the youth that resilience means bouncing back when something is difficult, disappointing, or unexpected. It doesn't mean we never feel sad, frustrated, or worried. It means we keep trying, ask for help when needed, and find positive ways to move forward.

Ask youth the following questions:

- What is something difficult you have learned to do?
- How did you feel when you first struggled?
- What helped you keep going?
- Who helps you when things are hard?

Military Youth Connection: Many military youth show resilience when:

- Moving to a new school
- Making new friends after relocating
- Adjusting during a parent's deployment
- Being separated from loved ones
- Learning new routines and adapting to change

Discuss how military-connected youth often practice resilience by staying connected with family, building friendships, and finding support from trusted adults.

Activity 1: Create Your Own Resilience Chutes and Ladders Game (30-40 minutes):

Step 1: Create the Game Board

Have youth draw a game board with 30–50 numbered squares or use the template provided.

Step 2: Add Ladders (Resilient Choices)

Youth create positive situations that help players move forward.

Examples:

- "I asked a teacher for help when I was confused. Climb up 4 spaces!"
- "I made a new friend at a new school. Climb up 5 spaces!"
- "I practiced until I learned a new skill. Climb up 3 spaces!"
- "I wrote a letter to a deployed family member. Climb up 4 spaces!"

RESILIENCE CHUTES AND LADDERS CHALLENGE

Step 3: Add Chutes (Challenges)

Youth create setbacks that may slow progress.

Examples:

- "I gave up after one try. Slide down 3 spaces."
- "I stayed upset and didn't talk about my feelings. Slide down 4 spaces."
- "I forgot to ask for help when I needed it. Slide down 2 spaces."

Remind youth that everyone faces challenges. Chutes represent obstacles, not failures.

Step 4: Decorate

Encourage youth to include:

- Positive coping skills
- Family support
- Friendship
- School success
- Military life experiences
- Community helpers

Step 5: Play the Game

Youth exchange boards and play each other's games.

Reflection Questions (10 Minutes):

Individual Reflection

- What does resilience mean to you?
- Which ladder on your board was most important?
- Which challenge would be hardest for you?
- Who can help you when you face a challenge?

Military Youth Reflection

- How might resilience help during a deployment?
- How can military youth stay connected with friends and family during changes?
- What strengths do military children develop through their experiences?
- How can classmates support military-connected youth?

Group Reflection

- What did you learn about overcoming challenges?
- What are some healthy ways to handle disappointment?
- What is one resilient choice you can make this week?

Closing Activity (5 minutes):

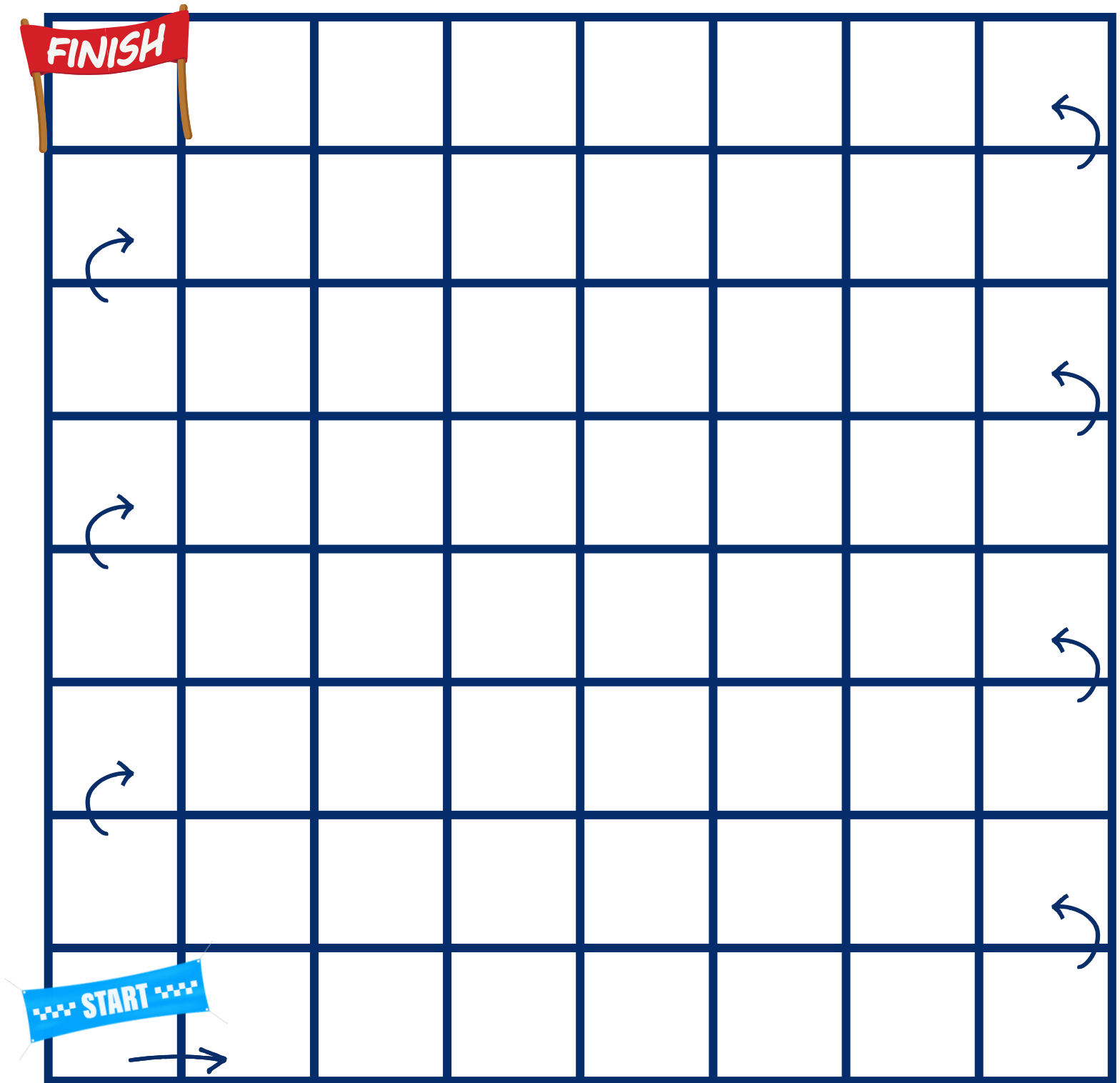
Explain: Everyone faces challenges, but resilience helps us keep moving forward. Just like in our game, there may be chutes that slow us down, but there are also ladders that help us climb higher. Every time we ask for help, try again, stay connected, or learn from mistakes, we are building resilience.

Take-Home Challenge:

Ask youth to identify one "ladder choice" they can practice during the week and share it at the next meeting or class.

RESILIENCE CHUTES & LADDERS

Have some fun and create your own game board. Add chutes and ladders to the squares below. Next to each chute and ladder, write what makes it a chute (challenge) or a ladder (a resilient choice). Have some fun and get creative!



After you have added your chutes and ladders, play your game with a friend!



BOOKLIST & RESOURCES

MILITARY-THEMED BOOKLIST

The books listed below contain themes related to various aspect of the military and military life - specific to the lives of military youth. We encourage you to add some of these books to your classroom or school library.

- A Good Day By Kevin Henkes; Published by Greenwillow Books
- A Very Long Time By Jeri Timperley and Nikki Arro; Published by Interface Media Partners
- A Year Without Dad By Jodi Brunson; Published by Ithaca Press
- America's White Table By Margot Theis Raven; Published by Sleeping Bear Press
- Countdown 'til Daddy Comes Home By Kristin Ayyar; Published by Elva Resa Publishing
- Daddy Got His Orders By Kathy Mitchell; Published by T.J. Publishing Company
- Daddy You're My Hero By Michelle Ferguson-Cohen; Published by Little Redhaired Girl Publishing
- Deployment: One of Our Pieces is Missing By Julia Cook; Published by the National Center for Youth Issues
- Heroes By Ken Mochizuki; Published by Lee & Low Books
- I Miss You By Beth Andrews; Published by Prometheus
- I'll Lend You My Daddy By Becky King; Published by Starts With Us
- I'm Still Scared By Tomie DePaola; Published by Putnam Juvenile
- Love, Lizzie: Letters to a Military Mom By Lisa Tucker McElroy; Published by Albert Whitman & Co.
- Mommy You're My Hero By Michelle Ferguson-Cohen; Published by Little Redhaired Girl Publishing
- My Daddy is a Soldier By Kally Mayer; Published by CreateSpace Ind. Publishing
- My Hero: Military Kids Write About Deployment Edited by Alan Appel and Mike Rothmiller; Published by St. Martin's Press
- My Mommy Wears Combat Boots By Sharon G. McBride; Published by Author House
- My Red Balloon By Eve Bunting; Published by Astra Young Readers
- My Story By Michelle D. Sherman, PhD, DeAnne M. Sherman; Published by Beaver's Pond Press, Inc.
- Never "Goodbye." Always "See You Later!" by Valerie McNulty; Published by Silent Rank Press
- Night Catch By Brenda Ehrmantraut; Published by Elva Resa Publishing

MILITARY-THEMED BOOKLIST

- On The Wings of Heroes By Richard Peck; Published by Puffin Books
- Soldier Mom By Alice Meadn Published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux
- Sometimes Apart, Always in my Heart By Tish Raben, Published by Silver Dolphin Books
- Star's Purpose: A Military Mission By Krista Betcher; Published by Elva Resa Publishing
- Tear Soup By Pat Schwiebert and Chuck DeKlyen; Published by Grief Watch
- The Bravest of the Brave By Shutta Crum; Published by Knoph Books for Young Readers
- The Hero in My Pocket By Mariene Lee; Published by Early Light Press, LLC
- The Impossible Patriotism Project By Linda Skeers; Published by Puffin Books
- The Invisible String By Patrice Karst; Published by Little, Brown Books for Young Readers
- The Kissing Hand By Audrey Penn; Published by Child Welfare League of America
- The Next Place By Warren Hanson; Published by Waldman House Press
- The Soldier's Night Before Christmas By Trish Holland and Christine Ford; Published by Golden Books
- The Soldier's Tree By Stephanie Pickup; Published by T A O Army Kids Pub.
- The Wishing Tree By Mary Redman; Published by Elva Resa Publishing
- Thumbs up to RED, WHITE & BLUE! By Michelle Bain; Published by Pixie Stuff™ L.L.C.
- To Keep Me SAFE! By Sarah R. Jones, M.S.; Published by State of Growth Publishing
- We Serve Too By Kathleen Edick and Paula Johnson; Published by Wee the People Publishing
- What Will I Do If I Miss You? By Melissa Shultz; Published by Familius
- When Dad's at Sea By Mindy Pelton & Robert Gantt Steele; Published by Albert Whitman & Co.
- While You Are Away By Eileen Spinelli; Published by Hyperion Book CH
- You and Your Military Hero By Sara Jensen-Fritz, Paula Jones-Johnson, and Thea L. Zitzow; Published by Beaver's Pond Press

RESOURCES

The following websites provide reliable information, professional development resources, lesson materials, and tools to help educators better understand military culture, military-connected students, and the deployment cycle.

1. ARMY NATIONAL GUARD CHILD & YOUTH SERVICES – RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS

Best for: Educator guides and classroom resources.

The Army National Guard Child & Youth Services program offers educator packets, deployment-cycle information, book lists, classroom activities, and guides designed to increase understanding of military-connected youth.

LINK: <https://arngcys.com/resources-for-educators>

2. MILITARY CHILD EDUCATION COALITION (MCEC)

Best for: Understanding military-connected students and classroom support strategies.

MCEC offers professional development, webinars, toolkits, and resources focused on school transitions, deployment and reintegration, resilience, and supporting military children in educational settings. Educators can also access the Military Student Consultant program and a variety of evidence-based resources.

LINK: <https://militarychild.org/for-education-professionals/>

3. MILITARY ONESOURCE

Best for: Learning about military life, family challenges, and the deployment cycle.

Military OneSource provides comprehensive information about military culture, deployment, relocation, family readiness, and the unique experiences of military families. Their deployment resources explain what families experience before, during, and after deployment.

LINK: <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/deployment/>

4. MILITARY ONESOURCE – CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION RESOURCES

Best for: Research-based information on child development and resilience.

Educators can access resources on child development, school readiness, resilience, and strategies for helping children cope with parental deployment, relocation, and other military-related transitions.

LINK: <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/leaders-service-providers/children-youth-and-teens/child-development-and-education/>

5. SESAME STREET FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

Best for: Supporting young children through deployment and reintegration.

Provides age-appropriate videos, activities, storybooks, and caregiver resources that help children understand deployments, reunions, relocations, and military family life. These resources are widely used by educators and youth professionals working with military-connected children.

LINK: <https://sesamestreetformilitaryfamilies.org/>

6. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE EDUCATION ACTIVITY (DODEA)

Best for: Learning about military-connected education systems.

DoDEA provides information about military student education, school transition supports, educational policies, and resources that can help civilian educators better understand the educational experiences of military-connected students.

LINK: <https://www.dodea.edu/education/curriculum> or <https://www.dodea.edu/>

RECOMMENDED STARTING RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS

If you're new to learning about military-connected students, start with:

- [ARMY NATIONAL GUARD EDUCATOR RESOURCE GUIDE](#)
- [MILITARY CHILD EDUCATION COALITION \(MCEC\)](#)
- [MILITARY ONESOURCE DEPLOYMENT RESOURCES](#)
- [SESAME STREET FOR MILITARY FAMILIES](#)

Together, these resources provide a strong foundation for understanding military culture, the deployment cycle, and effective ways to support military-connected youth in the classroom.

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