

Helping Military Children with Traumatic Grief: Tips for Educators

Children who are grieving the loss of a military loved one can develop trauma and grief responses, or “childhood traumatic grief”. Here are some tips to help educators support these children.

I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT:	YOU CAN HELP ME WHEN YOU:
1. Certain military-related holidays, anniversaries, and events such as Veterans’ Day and Memorial Day—have special meaning for me.	1. Allow me to take time off to attend military-related ceremonies and celebrations, including those that are far away. Encourage me to show my pride in my loved one’s service.
2. War related class assignments, readings or graphic photos can upset me.	2. Understand that things about war can be really hard for me. Tell my parent ahead of time about assignments so she can prepare me. Avoid graphic imagery of war and consider giving me an alternate assignment.
3. I can be sensitive and anxious when we talk about politics and war because these topics are personal for me.	3. Teach others about the military culture. Use care when talking about political views and opinions.
4. I might be bullied or teased about being a military child.	4. Engage the class in an open discussion that teaches tolerance for different views and cultures. Discuss the honor in volunteering to serve one’s country.
5. I wish other students knew more about being in a military family. Some kids say mean things or just don’t know what it’s like to be a military kid.	5. Help my class to learn about military culture and teach them to respect different people and opinions, even those that are different from theirs.
6. I want you to know that military kids feel like we serve too. Others do not understand that my family and I made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. We are really proud of this sacrifice.	6. Consider ways to acknowledge my pride and thank the military such as with a wall of remembrance for service members. Allow me to participate in ceremonies honoring that sacrifice, if I want.
7. I can feel detached and isolated from my military background and different from peers.	7. Connect me to someone in the military, the community, or the school who can mentor me. (e.g., the guard or reserve) (e.g., a teacher, alumni, JROTC). Look for ways to connect my class and/or school with local military resources.
8. I may express thoughts and feelings about my deceased loved one or the military with direct words and images about war and military culture.	8. Understand that for military kids, familiar military culture (e.g. drawings of battles, guns, or explosions) may be appropriate/normal. Explore the meaning of these expressions with me rather than make assumptions or jump to conclusions.

General issues related to childhood traumatic grief also apply to military children. For more information about general childhood traumatic grief, go to www.NCTSN.org and www.taps.org