



How communities can  
**support the children and families**  
of those serving in the  
National Guard or Reserves

By Christopher, Pre-K, MCLB Child Development Center, California

# How communities can support the children and families of those serving in the National Guard or Reserves



The ideas in this booklet should be seen as flexible suggestions. Ideas can be easily adjusted for multiple uses.

For example, parents, families, or friends might use these suggestions to help a child through tough times of separation. Educators and community members might use these to gain further understanding of the unique challenges for the children of the Guard and Reserve. The most important messages are: caring communities, relationships, and partnerships with the military communities.

Please feel free to use these ideas as springboards...

This booklet has two main goals. The first is to provide general information about both the National Guard and the Reserves, two of the three components of the United States military. The second and more important goal is to introduce concerned citizens and educators to issues facing the children and families of those serving in these critical segments of the military and to assist communities in creating dynamic networks of support for these families.

This booklet is meant to give you a foundation for enacting considerate and thoughtful efforts in your own community that will augment the support provided by the military for its members. A few ideas are listed inside to get you started but the possibilities are endless. There are many ways to be good neighbors!

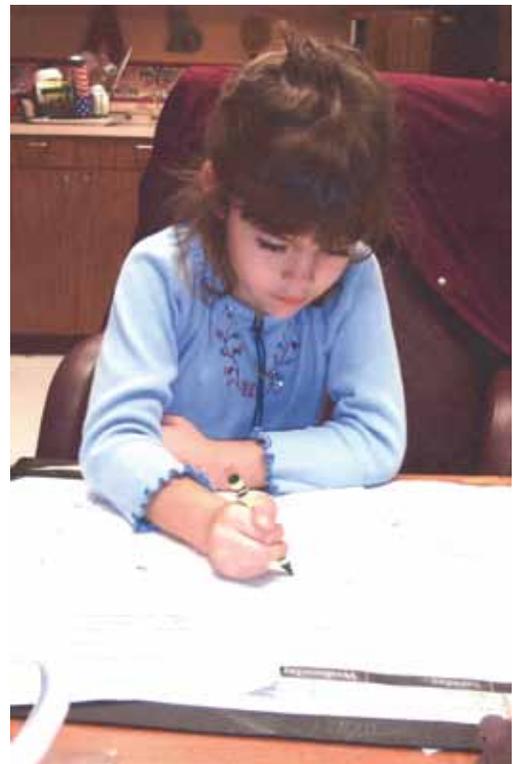


Photo of Kate  
(working on artwork shown at left)  
Pre-K, Fort Dix Child Development Center, New Jersey

# I. The Basics

While most Americans have heard of the National Guard and the Reserves, many do not know a great deal about the details of either organization. Besides providing relief and aid after disasters, what do members of the National Guard and Reserves do? The news runs stories about both groups being sent abroad, but how many people are there to send? And how are they connected to the rest of the military?

It is important to know the history of the National Guard, the oldest segment of America's military forces. During colonization there was no other source of protection, so groups of colonial men organized into defense units and became the first "Citizen Soldiers." This is the legacy of the National Guard; its dual purpose has been upheld with a unique assignment in the form of both state and federal missions. During times of peace, the Guard is under the command of each state's governor through the state's Adjutant General. Members are often called into action during disasters such as floods or earthquakes. However, the President can also call upon the Guard for federal missions. National Guard units fighting in the current war on terror illustrate this side of the Guard's mission. In fact, members of the National Guard have fought in every war since our country's very beginnings.

**"National Guardsmen are: citizens most of the time, soldiers some of the time, patriots all of the time."**  
 Brigadier General James Drain, 1928

On the Reserves side, what you already know about the active military comes in handy. Each branch of the military – the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard – has its own Reserves. The Reserves are exactly what the name implies, additional troops who can be called upon as needed. Many Reservists have specialized skills or training. Together the Guard and Reserves comprise almost half of the United States' military capability, with more than 800,000 serving in these two groups.

With so many members, it is not surprising to learn that many are parents. More than 500,000 children have one or both parents serving in the Guard or Reserves. The vast majority (72%) of these children are school-aged, while another 20% are five or younger. With more than 300,000 Guard and Reserves members called to action since September 11th, many children have been touched by deployment.

Which raises another question – what is deployment? Deployment occurs when a service member is assigned a military duty away from home and cannot be accompanied by family. An individual may be deployed with a group or sometimes separately. The amount of notice can vary greatly depending on the assignment. You may also hear families use the term "activated." This means that an order to deploy has been given but the deployment has not yet begun. The upcoming deployment may require special preparations or training so the service member may be stationed away from home (but in the United States) during this time.

## Tips for Educators



Educators can use deployments as multi-subject teaching opportunities. Subjects as varied as social studies, geography, and math can all be brought to life through discussions centering on deployments. For example, discuss the cultures of countries to which people have been deployed, show those locations on a globe, and then calculate the distance between and among the various locations. Talking about deployments from various angles will help children better understand what is happening around them.

The U.S. Department of Education has put together a helpful guidebook to aid educators in helping their students during this time. See <[www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/os/homefront/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/os/homefront/index.html)> for a link to the guidebook.

Sidebar icon by Joey, Yokota Middle School, Japan

## II. Issues & Insights

The families of National Guard and Reserves members may have strong connections to the military and its support systems. Or they may not. They may have deep roots in their local community. Or they may not. This brochure was developed to help you connect with any Guard or Reserves family but it is important to know that the circumstances and existing networks of the families may vary greatly.

Deployment of a family member brings with it many changes. For example, some families of National Guard and Reserves members did not consider themselves a “military family” prior to deployment. They may have felt that since Mom was only gone one weekend a month, the military simply wasn’t an integral part of their lives. Or maybe they believed that Dad’s unit was never going to be deployed. Whatever the reason, some families may find themselves facing a transition in their thinking about themselves and their “suddenly military” status.

A number of other transitions may also occur during this time. A family may have to relocate to be closer to extended family or friends. Children may have to move to live with grandparents or another caretaker, particularly if they have a single parent or if both parents are in the military. A family’s economic circumstances may change significantly as its income source changes from a civilian job to the military assignment. And simply being separated from a deployed parent for any length of time is its own transition for children.

Each of these issues may affect the family members of Guard or Reserves members. Children may react in a number of ways, including changing their academic performance or their behavior both in and out of school. For example, one student may spend more time on schoolwork and so improve course grades while another may be distracted and make lower grades. It is important to realize that both of these children may need extra support.



Community members can best provide assistance by being sensitive to the issues and pressures facing families of National Guard and Reserves members. Asking both children and adults thoughtful questions about what they might need and then listening to their answers is a great first step. Not asking about potentially painful subjects is also a wonderfully compassionate action. The families of military personnel are already keenly aware of the risks faced by their loved ones; they certainly do not need more reminders than they already receive on the nightly news. A little understanding and kindness goes a long way.

A rule of thumb you can use if you aren't sure what to say is to think about how hearing something would make you feel if your family was in a similar situation. If you think it may cause any discomfort, don't say it. There are plenty of other conversational topics from which to choose.

### Tips for Educators



For those who have not experienced a deployment, whether personally or close at hand, it may seem that homecoming brings the end of any issues tied to the separation. However, the deployment cycle is

best thought of as three separate phases: (1) pre-deployment, (2) deployment, and (3) reunion. Each phase has unique issues that may require time to sort through, particularly for children. In the classroom, you may see behavioral and emotional changes in children even after their parents arrive back home. Why? Everyone will have changed during the separation so being together again may require some adjustments. Don't be surprised if this is the case.



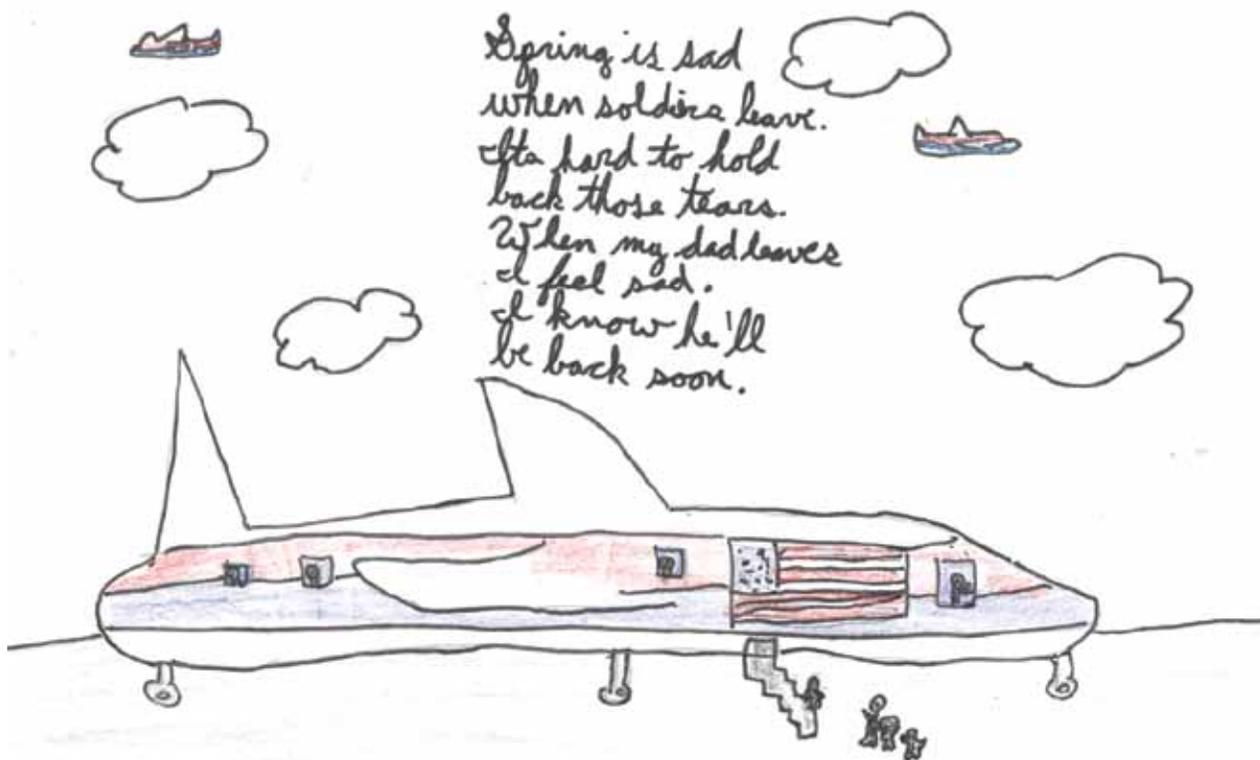
By Regina, 3rd Grade,  
Holbrook Elementary, North Carolina

### III. Response & Resilience

Children may be affected not only by the deployment of family members, but also by the deployment of others in their world. Teachers, coaches, police officers, or firefighters are just some of the individuals with whom children may have a connection; the parents of friends may be another link to deployment. The deployment of anyone close to a child may raise the same issues raised for children whose parents are deployed. If community members are being deployed, talk with kids about what it means, especially if those people are in positions highly visible to children.

Children are exposed to more now than they were even a few years ago. Media coverage of conflicts around the world allows for regular glimpses into situations faced by the military. This information is often inappropriate for children. The scenes they can see on television may themselves be a source of stress, as well as a trigger for new worries about the safety of their loved ones. Encourage adults to limit the television coverage children can see. Also encourage adults to read news articles prior to children to ensure they are appropriate for children. Both of these tips are for all of the adults in a child's life, not just a child's parent or guardian. If a child is exposed to something upsetting, talk about it. The news may have sparked or rekindled fears that need to be discussed.

Children may also need help dealing with anti-war sentiment. Sometimes the opinions people have about war or a particular war may cause the children of those serving distress or worry. While one would hope that people, particularly adults, would exercise forethought in discussions of such weighty topics around children, sometimes upsetting things are said around or even to children. If a child is disturbed or upset, encourage him or her to talk it through. Also encourage adults to be thoughtful of children and the situations they are facing before they speak in front of them. This suggestion is not meant to stifle free speech in any way – it is merely to encourage care around children. They are often more fragile than they appear.



By Abigail, 3rd Grade, Meadows Elementary, Texas

This suggestion is not meant to stifle free speech in any way – it is merely to encourage care around children. They are often more fragile than they appear.

Some families will face special circumstances during a deployment. Know that there are additional means of support available. If a family needs to get in touch with their service member, the American Red Cross provides emergency communication links. See the “Community Resources” foldout for more information about Armed Forces Emergency Services available through the Red Cross.

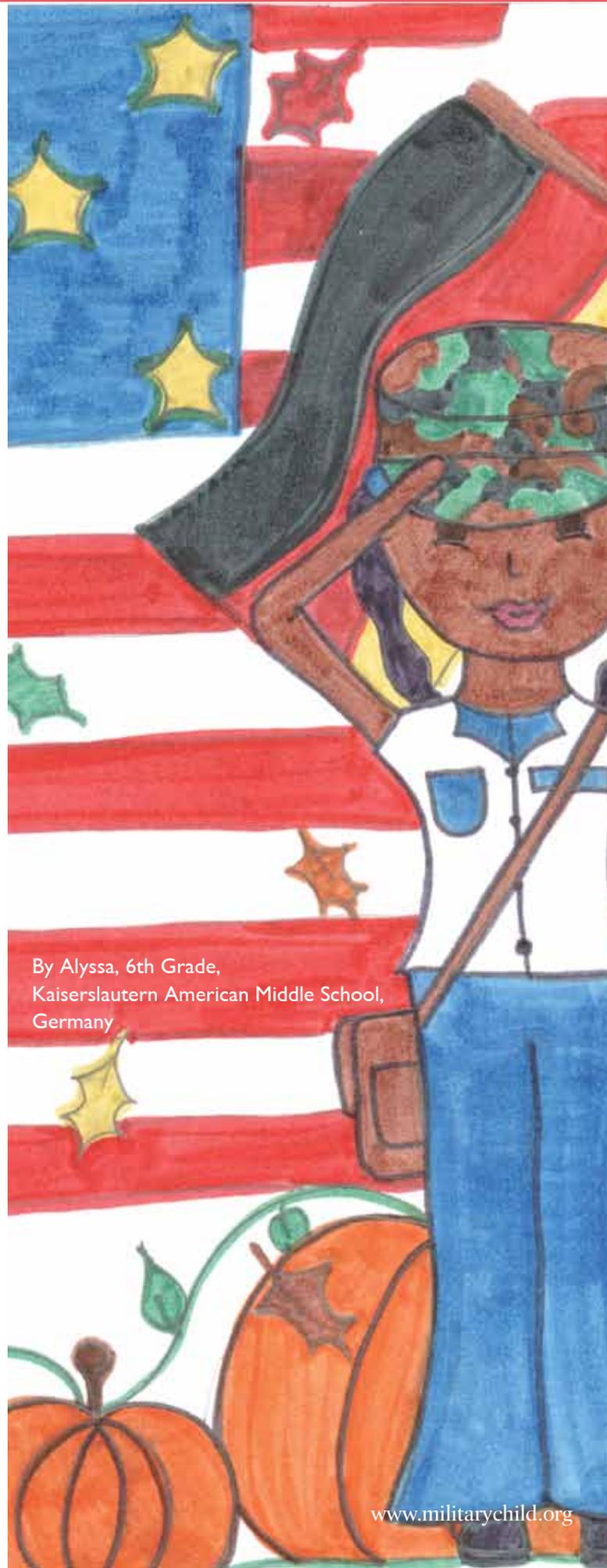
For families of children with special needs, the Exceptional Family Members Program can provide support. For an overview of the program and its offerings, see <[www.mshq.net/articles/efmp1.shtml](http://www.mshq.net/articles/efmp1.shtml)>. Each branch of the military, including the National Guard and Reserves, also has people assigned to assist military families. To see all the services that are available and sort them by service or geographic location, go to <[www.mfrc-dodqol.org/progDir](http://www.mfrc-dodqol.org/progDir)>. More links are available at the back of this booklet. Families who are not already connected with the military may be unaware of these services, so do not assume that they already have this information.

### Tips for Educators



Children are affected not only by the deployment of family members, but also by the deployments of community members. If teachers, coaches, or administrators in your

school system have been deployed, you may wish to initiate a class discussion about what this means for those serving and your students. Children may have questions about the process and logistics of deployment. They may also be concerned about the safety of those deployed. By providing children with solid information, you will help slow the rumor mill.



By Alyssa, 6th Grade,  
Kaiserslautern American Middle School,  
Germany

## IV. Actions & Reactions

Providing a strong network for children and families are what strong communities are all about. Checking in on a regular basis and ensuring that people are receiving help, if needed, is simply being a good neighbor. Sometimes it takes a little thought to see what would be best in certain situations, but when the underlying approach is one of caring, solutions often present themselves.

Communities can clearly signal their concern for the families of Guard and Reserves members by stating explicitly that the community wants to support them and will do the best they can to do so. That will signal, to both community members and families, that this issue is on the table.

Every community contains more resources than most citizens know. One way to help people learn about what is available in your community is to encourage the formation of networks. Each individual in your community has his or her own personal network. Community networks simply tap into those personal networks while fostering the formation of connections between local organizations. For example, an advocacy group for families of children with special needs may want to connect with the local bar association to see if no-cost legal assistance can be provided to military families with special needs children if needs arise during a deployment. Or SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives) counselors may join with local banks to host special sessions on helping small businesses survive the deployment of a principal member.

Schools can play a key role during this time. With so many other things changing in the lives of military children, schools can provide much needed stability for their students. Educators can consciously choose to make their schools “safe zones” for children by looking at their school through the eyes of a child. For example, are there any locations in the school that run television news? If so, how do you think scenes of the latest battle or attack might make a child with a parent serving there feel?

Schools are also a rich source of connections to children and families. Other community organizations may want to partner with local schools to ensure that families are aware of their services and know how to contact them.

The efforts enacted by a community will be most meaningful when the provided assistance matches the need. Organizations and groups should check with the people they wish to serve to make sure this is the case. Community assessments should also be performed to ensure that there

### My Dad

My Dad is in the Air Force  
That's why he's gone away  
Until four months have past,  
He is there to stay.

He's on a tiny island,  
Known as Masirah.  
But daddies shouldn't go away,  
that should be law.

Four months of torture,  
Four months alone.  
Wife and daughter waiting  
For this man to phone.

Every week there comes a time,  
You can hear his voice,  
But you can't talk face to face,  
Only within noise.

Every day seems the same,  
Teeth get brushed, hair gets combed,  
But every day I wait for the day,  
When he is safely home.

No one ever sees me cry,  
It's always in the dark,  
Or under the shadow of a tree,  
In the neighborhood park.

But my tears go somewhere,  
When I am torn apart,  
Down my face, down my neck,  
Into my broken heart.

By Courtney, 5th Grade,  
Maxwell AFB Elementary School,  
Alabama



is not a glut of services in one area while another area is lacking. Informal assessments can often be conducted by simply asking similar organizations and those whom you serve about existing services and needs, so don't worry that enormous amounts of time and resources are required. The key is to focus on the needs of those you are serving.

### Tips for Educators



One of the most helpful things educators can do for children is to keep their school a safe place. Whether that is achieved by maintaining regular routines so children have a sense of continuity or by encouraging all school personnel to be attuned to the needs children may have during this time, creating a safe place for children is enormously important.

### Fall:

Your Dad comes in the house looking sad,  
 You also have a feeling he's mad.  
 You go to him, say Daddy what's wrong?  
 He says, sweetie come here we have to talk...  
 I'm going to be gone for a year or two,  
 But I promise I'll be back to see you.

### Winter:

There your Dad goes to Iraq,  
 You see him carrying that big black sack.  
 You say your goodbye with a very big sigh.  
 There the plane goes, just like that.  
 You wave goodbye, while you hope he'll come back.

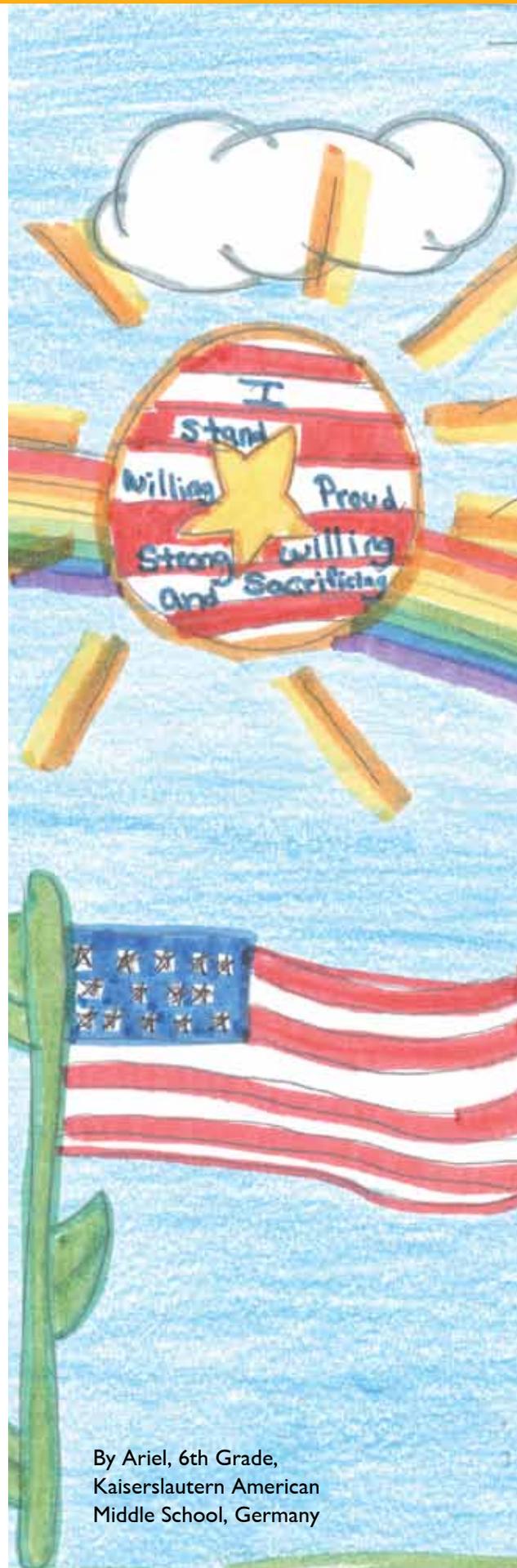
### Spring:

You see your Mom coming to talk to you,  
 She looks like she's in a good mood.  
 She says your Dad's coming back from Iraq.  
 You're so glad he's coming back.

### Summer:

You're at the airport waiting for your Dad.  
 You're so happy and also glad.  
 You see him walking through that hallway,  
 You're so glad he came back today.

By Ebony, 6th Grade,  
 Ansbach Elementary, Germany



By Ariel, 6th Grade,  
 Kaiserslautern American  
 Middle School, Germany

## V. Community Resources

Connecting people with helpful resources is a wonderful way to build communities. While each community has its own unique resources, many have access to some of the following national organizations. Use this list to help you start compiling information on resources your community has to offer the families of National Guard members or Reservists. Space is provided below for contact information for helpful local groups.

### American Red Cross

The American Red Cross provides special services for military members and their families, including communication links during important events. To learn more about these services or to find the nearest American Red Cross chapter, go to <[www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)>. From their home page, you can link to the “Military Members and their Families” section or search for local chapters by ZIP code.

### Boys & Girls Clubs of America

The Boys & Girls Clubs of America is a national network of more than 3,000 neighborhood-based facilities. Boys & Girls Clubs have opened their doors and hearts to military children in a special effort; some clubs even offer free memberships to military children. More information, including details about club locations, can be found at <[www.bgca.org](http://www.bgca.org)> or by calling 1-800-854-CLUB.

### Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts

With scouting opportunities available worldwide and fun activities tailored to multiple age groups and subject areas, both the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts are a great resource for military children. To learn more, visit the homepage for Girl Scouts of the USA at <[www.girlscouts.org](http://www.girlscouts.org)> or the Boy Scouts of America’s homepage at <[www.scouting.org](http://www.scouting.org)>.

### National 4-H

Another group providing support to military children is the National 4-H. Offered programs are for students from kindergarten through high school. In fact, 4-H is the largest youth development program in the country. For information about the 4-H Military Partnership and details about 4-H programs nationwide, go to <[www.national4-hheadquarters.gov](http://www.national4-hheadquarters.gov)>.

### Additional Resources in My Community

Organization Name

Contact Name Contact Information

# Military Resources

Reserve Affairs:  
[www.defenselink.mil/ra](http://www.defenselink.mil/ra)

Air National Guard:  
[www.ang.af.mil](http://www.ang.af.mil)

Army National Guard:  
[www.arng.army.mil](http://www.arng.army.mil)

Air Force Reserve:  
[www.afreserve.com/home4.asp](http://www.afreserve.com/home4.asp)

Army Reserve:  
[www4.army.mil/USAR/home/index.php](http://www4.army.mil/USAR/home/index.php)

Coast Guard Reserve:  
[www.uscg.mil/hq/reserve/reshmpg.html](http://www.uscg.mil/hq/reserve/reshmpg.html)

Marine Reserve:  
[www.marforres.usmc.mil](http://www.marforres.usmc.mil)

Naval Reserve:  
[www.navalreserve.com/ps](http://www.navalreserve.com/ps)

National Committee for Employer Support of the  
Guard and Reserves:  
[www.esgr.org](http://www.esgr.org)



By Leah, Kindergarten, Holbrook Elementary, North Carolina

