

“Take Care of the People Who Care for Me”

Supporting Military Families Experiencing
Parental Mental Health Challenges



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

**Unlocking every child's
potential from the start**

**Our Mission is to ensure
that every infant and toddler
is given the strongest
possible
start to life—through
education, advocacy, and
parental support.**



Science-backed
support for critical
early development



Influencing policy
to drive change for
infants and toddlers



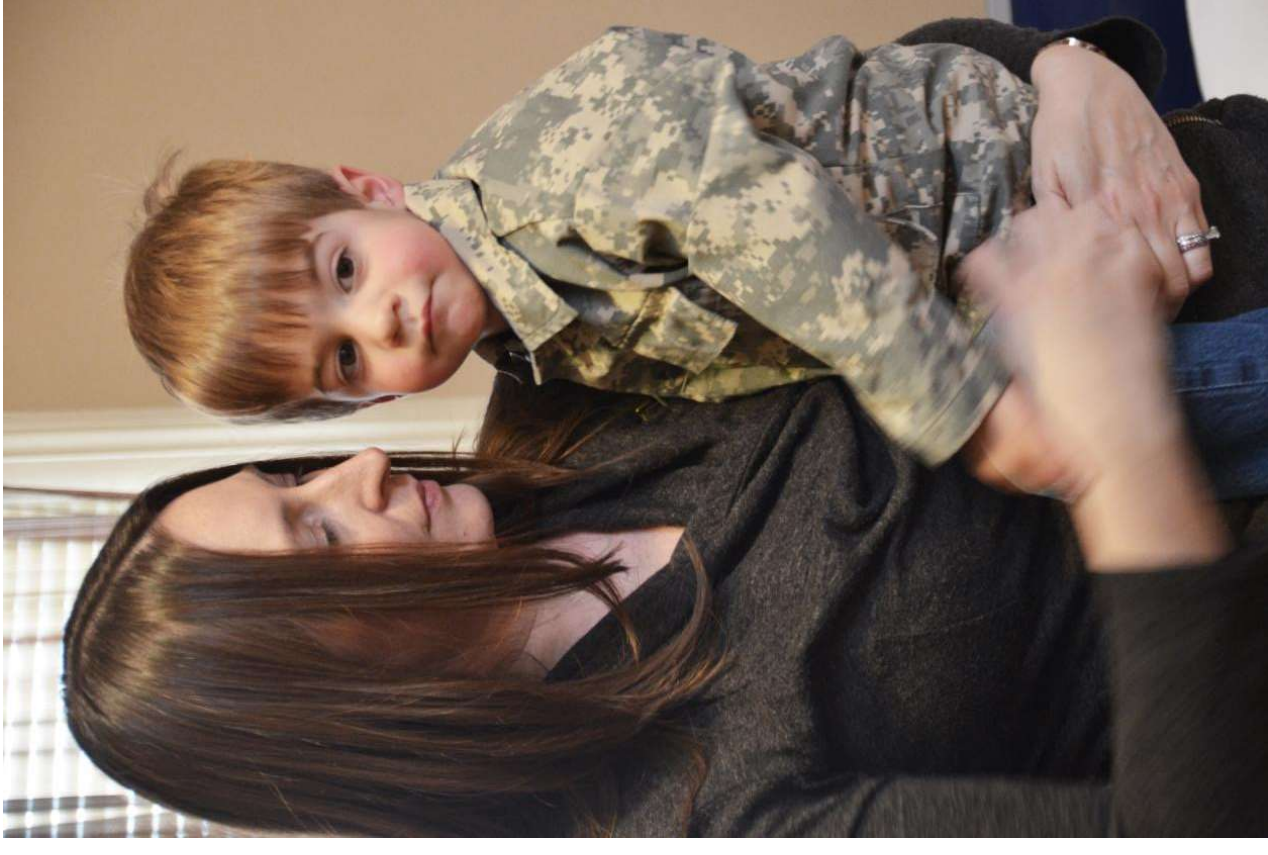
Actionable resources
for parents and
professionals



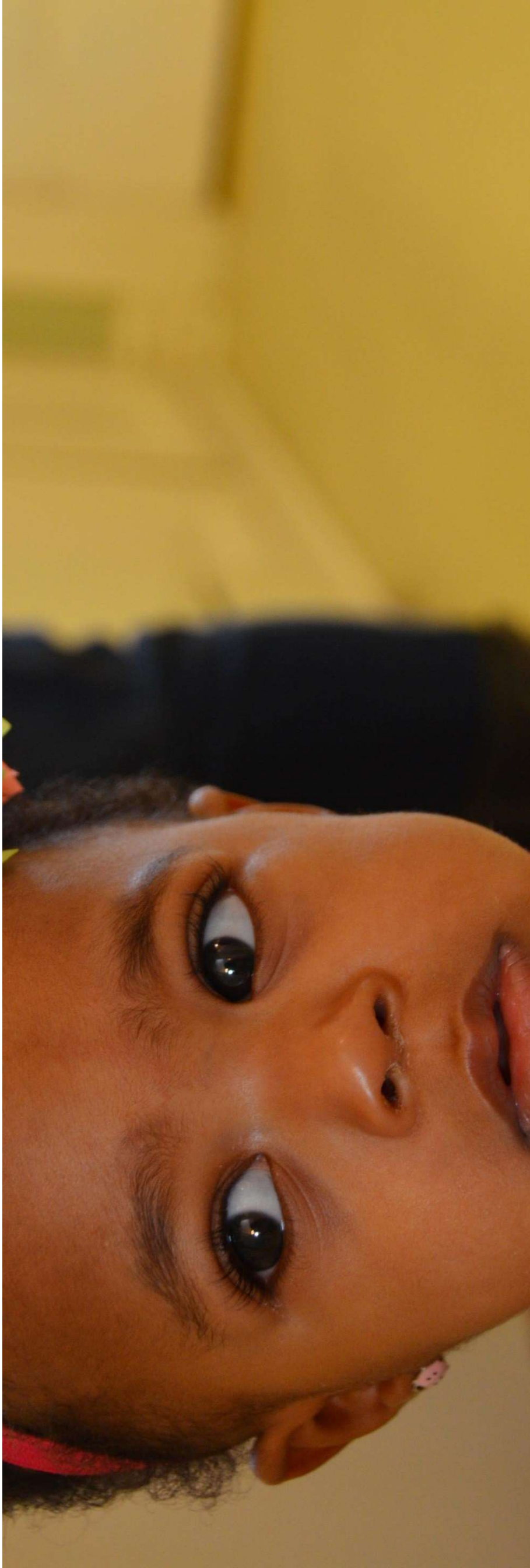
ZERO TO THREE

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1 **Learn the risks and prevalence of mental health problems among military connected parents/caregivers**
- 2 **Understand the specific circumstances of military family life that contribute to both risk and protective factors for families with infants/young children**
- 3 **Consider how the baby/young child might experience parental mental health problems**
- 4 **Become familiar with resources to support military families with young children who experience parental mental health issues.**



I SEE YOU...





Special Circumstances in Military Families

Who are these Military Families?

- A significant portion of the population, are not always “visible,” especially when seeking services from civilian providers.
- Many also have very young children (age 0 – 5 years old).
- Live in all 50 states, US territories and in international (OCONUS) locations. Some live on installations and others live in communities near installations.
- May use healthcare and child care services outside of the military installation.
- National Guard and Reserve Families are civilians who are activated as active duty periodically.



Parental Stressors in Military Families

- Isolation- distance from friends and family
- Frequent moves (PCS)
- Long hours/ unpredictable and demanding work schedules
- Deployment and temporary duty travel (TDY)
- Dangerous work assignments
- Lack of:
 - transportation
 - available/affordable housing
 - available/affordable child care
- Navigating resources on and off installation





Every family is unique and will write its own story

We must always be mindful that, in addition to what the event brings to the family, it is what the family brings to the event.

Prevalence of Mental Health Issues in Military Families



Mental Health Disorder and Mental Health



1 in 5 adults experience a diagnosed mental health disorder.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, rates of clinically significant levels of anxiety and depression have skyrocketed from 10–25% to now 37–57% of pregnant women and mothers with newborns.

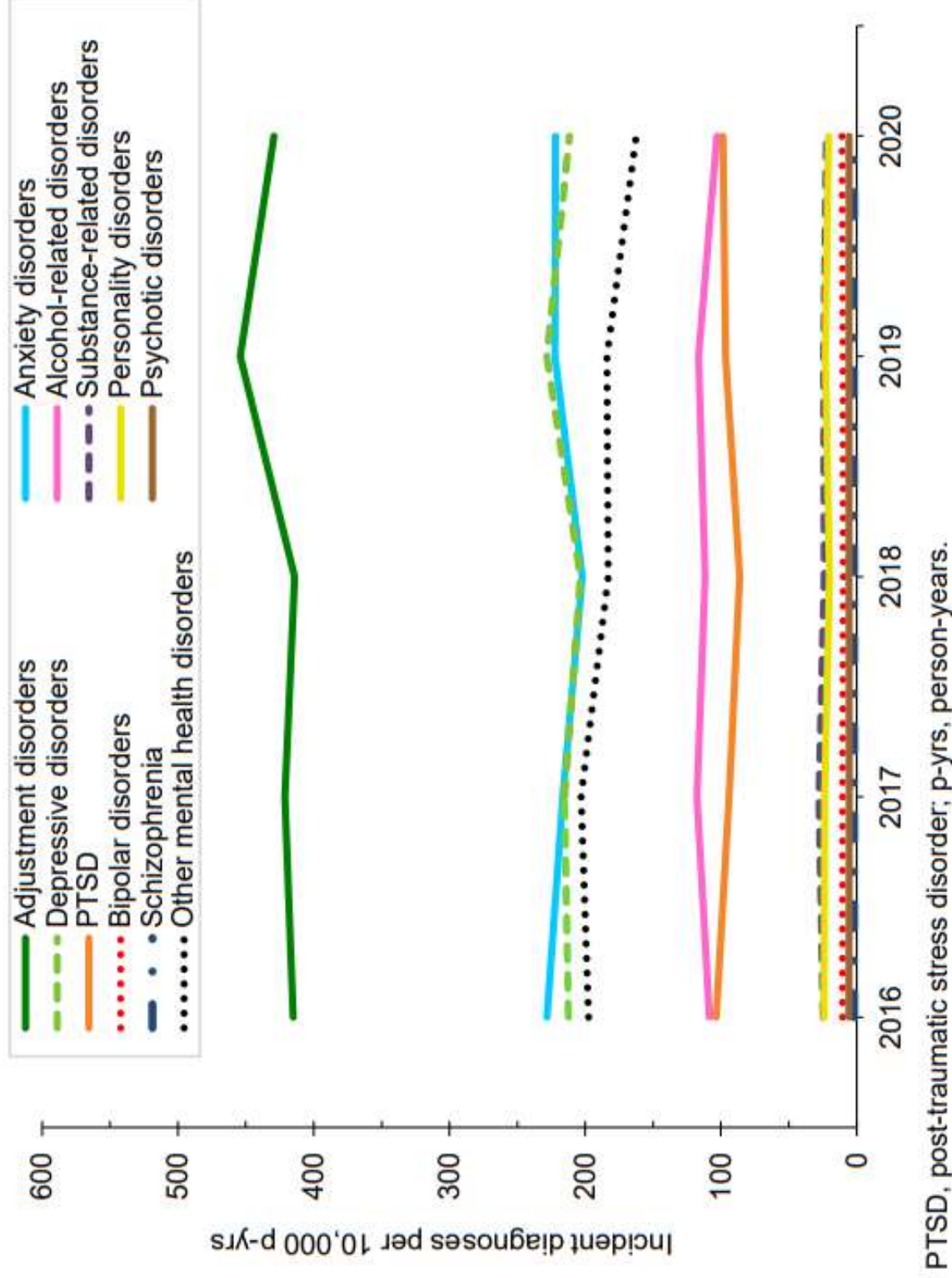




Common Diagnostic Categories in Military Families

- Adjustment Disorders
- Depression/Mood Disorders
- Anxiety Disorders
- Substance Abuse Disorders
- PTSD
- Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders

FIGURE 1. Annual incidence rates of mental health disorder diagnoses, active component, U.S. Armed Forces 2016–2020



Other Lifestyle Behavioral Health Problems (V- or Z- Coded disorders)

- Family/support group problems
- Maltreatment (including domestic violence, child abuse, emotional abuse, sexual assault/abuse)
- Social Environmental Problems

Department of Defense. Defense Health Agency. (August, 2021)
Medical Surveillance Monthly Report, Volume 28 Number 08
<https://www.health.mil/Reference-Center/Reports/2021/08/01/Medical-Surveillance-Monthly-Report-Volume-28-Number-08>



Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders (PMADs)



15 to 20% of women and 10 to 20% of men experience more significant symptoms of depression or anxiety during pregnancy or after the birth of a child.

(Postpartum Support International, n.d.)

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PMADS

Perinatal Depression:
~15% of women

Perinatal Anxiety:
~6% of pregnant
women, ~10% of
postpartum women

**Postpartum Post-
Traumatic Stress
Disorder:** ~9% of
postpartum women

**Perinatal Obsessive-
Compulsive Disorder
(OCD):** ~3-5% of
postpartum women

**Bipolar Mood
Disorders**

**Postpartum
Psychosis:** ~0.1–0.2%
of postpartum women



Research with Military Partners/Spouses

Military Spouse, Deployment, and Perinatal Depression:

Rates of Post-Partum Depression (PPD) are higher for women when spouses were deployed during or after pregnancy

Possible Mitigating Factors:

Length of deployment

Intervention at pregnancy

Support programs offered through different installations

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The Active Duty Mother

- 9.2% to 19.5% of Active Duty mothers reported with PPD symptoms
- Postpartum period of PPD symptoms among service women was higher in the Army (12.0%) and lower in the Air Force (7.3%)
- Service women with PPD have higher odds for suicidality compared to those without PPD

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(Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center, 2013; Appolonio & Fingerhut, 2008)



Through the Eyes of the Child

JANINA'S STORY

The Baby's Experience

- Needs may be unmet or inconsistently met
- Unpredictability of routines
- Lack of co-regulation
- Ruptures with fewer experiences of repair
- Secure base is compromised
- Challenges in meeting developmental milestones or experiencing regressions
- Emotional chaos or flatness



A young child with dark hair is looking up at an adult's hands. The adult's hands are positioned near the child's face, possibly holding a small object or interacting with the child. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a classroom or play area with colorful elements.

Connecting with Babies: The Power of Parent/Child Interaction

Strategies for Supporting the Caregiver and Caregiver-Child Relationship

- Helping parents to gain awareness of their own emotional state
- Use active listening to help parents “talk out” the thoughts and judgments they have about themselves and their child
- Engaging in non-judgmental observation of child's behavior and modeling "I wonder..." Statements
- Model, encourage and celebrate serve-and-return during everyday routines and experiences



Let's Talk About Mental Health

Conversations

- Introduce topic early
- Power of empathy and unconditional positive regard
- Notice and validate how a parent is feeling (or may be feeling)
- Ask direct questions
- Help identify and build social connections

Screening

- Use as a tool for conversation!
- Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS)
- PHQ-9
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7)
- Others?

Referrals

- Behavioral health, Military and Family Life Counseling
- PCP
- OB/GYN

Resources

- Post-Partum Support International – online support groups; call or text helpline
- 988 Crisis and Suicide Hotline
- In-person support groups at hospitals



Together, we have
the power to create
transformative
change in every
child's journey

Thank you for being a part of our
mission to improve the lives of all children

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MILITARY FAMILY PROJECTS, ZERO TO THREE

