



My Next Steps: Transitioning from the Military with a Child with Special Needs



Question

What support and resources are available to help our family with a child with special needs as we transition from the military?



Answer

Many military families who are raising a child with special health or education needs state that relocation is one of the most challenging aspects of military life. In addition to the long list of tasks and strong emotions associated with a move, those with family members with special needs often face gaps in services, changes in the quality of care, and the re-establishment of routines and support networks. Stress may increase for all members of the family during a move. You may take comfort in knowing that leaving the military could mean fewer moves for your family. Nevertheless, you have been provided with support from the military along the way. There is an established system to make sure there are services available to address your family's needs. When assigning your family to a particular location, steps are taken to ensure that your family member with special needs is taken into consideration. Even at transition time, the Department of Defense recognizes the importance of considering an exceptional family member's needs as a service member prepares to leave the military. In fact, a section of the Individual Transition Plan Personal Assessment form is dedicated to identifying extenuating family circumstances .

Ensuring that your family member's special health care and education needs are met after transition from the military is now fully your family's responsibility. You and your service member may need to research civilian support agencies to safeguard the continuity of care for your family member with

special needs. Once you have services in place to replace the support your family receives while on active duty, the stability your family gains may lead to better outcomes for your child and lower your family's overall stress level. Help set your family up for success by planning for support for your special needs child before your family leaves the military. There are resources available to support you.

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Three Factors to Consider When Transitioning from the Military with a Child with Special Needs

1. Insurance Coverage. Some children with special health needs require a significant amount of specialty care. Do you know how your health insurance will change after transition from the military? It is possible that your family will no longer be eligible for military-sponsored health care and insurance coverage, such as the Extended Care Health Option offered through TRICARE. Families of service members who are separating from the military will most likely need to find coverage with an employer or through

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Resources at a Glance

- Military OneSource - [Special Needs Resources](#), [Special Needs Consultations](#) and [Education Directory for Children with Special Needs](#)
- Find and EFMP office on your [installation](#)
- [Military Child Education Coalition](#)



Answer (cont.)

a state health care marketplace. Circumstances, such as retirement, involuntary separation or certain military-connected disability ratings, may allow your family to continue with TRICARE or the Department of Veterans Affairs. Additionally, families with a child with special needs may be eligible for other health-coverage programs, such as Social Security Disability Insurance, Supplemental Security Income, Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program. Review the Military OneSource special needs resources page to learn about and connect with these programs.

When deciding on a new health care plan, gather a thorough understanding of what your new health care coverage provides. Know that it may not cover all of the services, therapies and equipment previously covered by TRICARE. Also, understand that different health insurance coverage may result in additional costs associated with premiums, co-pays and other out-of-pocket expenses. To learn more about insurance options after leaving the military, view the Health, Dental and Vision section of MySTeP Stepping Beyond to learn about your eligibility, coverage and timelines for enrollment.

2. Relocation. Now that your family will have a choice in where you live, be sure you are headed to a location that can accommodate your family's special needs. Begin by researching the services available in your prospective new community. Perhaps you are familiar with and enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program through your service member's branch of the military. Although the services offered from EMFP will not be extended to you after leaving the service, professionals with EFMP may be able to assist you as you plan your move. Another resource available to you is support from a Military OneSource special

needs consultant. These professionals can provide you with personalized assistance, information and additional resources to help your family.

For education related needs, the school liaison officer on your installation and resources from the Military Child Education Coalition can help. MCEC provides webinars and articles on exceptional family member topics related to education that can help you navigate resources and support for your family.

3. Stress. Change can be stressful for all members of your family and perhaps more so if a member of your family has special needs. If transition from the military also means a move for your family, stress levels can intensify. Planning early may help to alleviate some of that stress. Professional support is also available to you and your family. If you live near an installation while you are preparing to transition, you can contact the local Military and Family Support Center to find a military and family life counselor, or MFLC. In addition, Military OneSource can provide non-medical counseling for your family. To learn more about services provided by an MFLC, MOS and other services, view the MySTeP video and download the fact sheet entitled, *Managing Stress and Seeking Non-Medical Counseling Before, During and After Transition*.

Settling into new routines and building provider relationships take time. Developing new support networks takes time too. As a parent of a child with special needs, you know what works best for your family. Planning ahead, researching your insurance options, seeking assistance and ensuring that support is in place for your special needs child before transition will help you feel confident as you make the transition from military life.



Steps to Consider

These "Steps to Consider" are not meant as a checklist. Use the suggestions to facilitate a discussion with your service member.

- Plan ahead. It may be in your child's best interest to anticipate and limit delays in education, health and therapeutic services by having support in place prior to transition. You may need to place your family on a wait-list for some services. Seek personalized assistance to help you plan. Military OneSource [special needs consultants](#) can answer your questions and concerns about your child's special health care and education needs. The

consultants can also provide you with information about programs and community assistance available to you.

Health Care and Coverage Considerations

- Know how your health care insurance will change. Explore the Health, Dental and Vision section of MySTeP Stepping Beyond to learn where to find information about your health care eligibility, coverage and timelines for



Steps to Consider (cont.)

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- enrollment. You can also discover how to locate a health benefits advisor or health advocate on your installation for advice about health plans.
- Before enrolling in a new health coverage plan, be sure to fully investigate the support and services for your family member with special needs that will be covered. Pay particular attention to co-pays and the annual out-of-pocket maximum expenses since health care costs can add up quickly.
 - Review the [Military OneSource special needs resources](#) page to learn about and connect with government health care programs for special needs individuals, such as Social Security Disability Insurance, Supplemental Security Income, Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program.
 - If a move or change of insurance will require that you switch providers, promptly inform your current provider. They may be able to continue supporting your child, or your provider may be able to offer suggestions for a new provider. If you have to seek a new provider, you may want to consider the following questions:
 - Are the specialists you need in your new area? Assess the quality and accessibility of treatment and care prior to arriving to your new location.
 - Does a new provider give your family the ability to continue with previous treatment plans or therapeutic services if current services are working for your family? Ensuring continuity of care may lead to better outcomes for your child.
 - Do your best to support your child’s continuity of care by collecting records and documentation of your child’s diagnosis, current treatment or plan and all recorded progress. This can help your new provider understand how to best support your child. Seek support from your [local](#) Exceptional Family Member Program office.
 - Explore your options using the [Education Directory for Children with Special Needs](#) available from [Military OneSource](#). The directory consists of two components: The Early Intervention Directory, which focuses on early intervention services for children birth through 3 years old, and the School-Age Directory, which centers on education services for children with special needs who are 3 through 21 years old.
 - Reach out to your current network and begin building networks in your new community. Ask your friends, family, social media connections or colleagues if they have contacts or provider suggestions in your new area to help your family better adjust to the move. Make plans to meet with a local contact or provider once you arrive.
 - If your child is currently enrolled in school, inform the school of your upcoming move. Ensure you understand the policies regarding withdrawal from school and transferring records. For additional support, contact the school liaison officer on your [installation](#).
 - Begin communicating with the new school as soon as you know where you will be enrolling your children. Ensure you have the required records, immunizations, your child’s individualized education program if he or she has one and other documents required to enroll your child in school and in appropriate classes and course levels. Visit the [Military Child Education Coalition](#) website to find information, tips and training opportunities to help you support your special needs child with the upcoming transition from the military.
 - Feeling stressed? Contact an [MFLC](#) on your [installation](#) through the Military and Family Support Center, or call [Military OneSource](#) to assess your needs and connect with virtual support or get a referral to counseling support near you. To learn more about how these services can support your family, view the MySTeP video and download the fact sheet, *Managing Stress and Seeking Non-Medical Counseling Before, During and After Transition*.

Relocation Considerations

- Begin researching your new community to ensure you will have everything you need to meet your child’s needs. You may also benefit from calling providers and schools directly to get answers to your questions.



Resources

Military OneSource

- Military OneSource: <http://www.militaryonesource.mil/>; Phone: 800-342-9647
- Special Needs-Resources: <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/family-relationships/special-needs/special-needs-resources>
- Special Needs Consultations: <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/confidential-help/specialty-consultations/special-needs/special-needs-consultations>
- Education Directory for Children with Special Needs: <https://efmpeducationdirectory.militaryonesource.mil/>

Exceptional Family Member Programs (Virtual and Installation)

- EFMP Resources, Options and Consultations: <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/confidential-help/specialty-consultations/efmp-roc>

To locate the EFMP office nearest you, visit: <https://installations.militaryonesource.mil/>

- Select “Program or Service” from the drop down menu. Next, input “EFMP-Family Support” in the text field. Next, enter your desired installation or zip code.

To locate a School Liaison Officer: <https://installations.militaryonesource.mil/>

- Select “Program or Service” from the drop down menu. Next, input “School Liaison Office/Community Schools” in the text field. Next, enter your desired installation or zip code.
- Military Child Education Coalition: www.militarychild.org

Stress Relief/Counseling Resources (Virtual and Installation)

- Military OneSource: <http://www.militaryonesource.mil/>; Phone: 800-342-9647
- Non-medical counseling information: <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/confidential-help/non-medical-counseling>
- Military and Family Life Counselor: <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/confidential-help/non-medical-counseling/military-and-family-life-counseling/the-military-and-family-life-counseling-program>

To locate an MFLC: <https://installations.militaryonesource.mil/>

- Select “Program or Service” from the drop down menu. Next, input “Family Center” in the text field. Next, enter your desired installation or zip code.
- Call or visit the Military and Family Support Center and ask for contact information for an MFLC.



Notes

Related MySTeP Topics

Health, Dental and Vision Care

- Health Insurance Coverage Considerations for Transitioning Military Families

Emotional Health and Well-Being

- Managing Stress and Seeking Non-Medical Counseling Before, During and After Transition

Retirement and Separation Planning

- Relocation Considerations for Families Transitioning from the Military

Special Considerations

- Transitioning from the Military with a School-Age Child
- Preparing your Child for Transition from the Military