

Family Guidebook

Elementary School-Level Youth & Younger

Anchored  Life

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A Note From Anchored4Life...

We have been working with military and civilian youth for many years, speaking to them about issues they face, such as friendships, fears, deployment, and reintegration. Through our partnership with the The Comfort Crew and the Trevor Romain Company, we have combined our knowledge and experiences to bring you this comprehensive guidebook. We have literally spoken to and worked with thousands of youth near military bases around the world. The more we work with youth and establish Clubs around the world, the more we have realized the importance of the support they need with tough issues. Most importantly, we need to validate their feelings and listen to what they are asking for instead of telling them what we think they need to hear.

This guidebook has been created to help you support youth and to help them cope with the unique challenges families face during changes in their lives.

We are touched by the pain and hardships these youth are going through and are inspired by the families who have embraced the challenges and found ways to work through them. We are very proud and honored to be able to work with military and civilian youth. We're happy to share what we have learned with you. With that in mind, we believe that the contents of this guidebook will be extremely helpful to you as you provide love and support to your amazing youth.



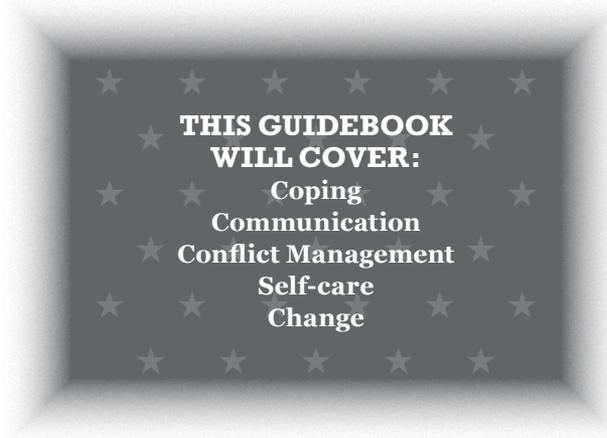
Stress is Normal

Change is inevitable for military and civilian youth. Every year, thousands of families deal with the difficulties of changes and learn to overcome these challenges. While it is a stressful time, and it is normal to feel overwhelmed, the best way to meet and overcome these challenges is to prepare and cope as a family.

Youth, especially, can have a hard time coping. They go through their own stress and worries during change and need your help. By learning what to expect and what difficulties youth may face, you can help them make it through this challenging time.

How to Use This Resource:

The goal of this resource is to support parents and caregivers in helping youth cope with change. Every situation is unique, but there are some common ways youth react. There are ways you can prepare them for the challenges ahead. While not everyone will experience the change process in the same way, a good first step is to be flexible and accept that things will be different.



THIS GUIDEBOOK WILL COVER:

Coping
Communication
Conflict Management
Self-care
Change

When you need a little extra love from your parent just ask for it. — High School Student, Ramstein Air Base

How Youth Handle Moves

A youth's sense of security and safety comes primarily from their connection to their caregivers, stability at home, and having a consistent routine. These can be hard to maintain during times of change.

- **Fearful of the unknown** — Youth may respond in different ways when told about the move, due to not having enough information. As a parent, it is important to share as much as possible about the upcoming move and answer questions.
- **Concerned about fitting in (new kid jitters)** — Youth will wonder about their new school and neighborhood. Will I fit in? What will it be like? As a parent, take time to point out their strengths and provide an area where they can improve. Remind them that it will take time and the family is there for support.
- **Sadness** — Some youth may feel sad. As a parent, it is important to acknowledge and normalize that sadness happens when change occurs.
- **Mad** — Anger is a natural reaction to loss. As a parent, help them find constructive ways to deal with anger. You can encourage them to use their words, be active, or make up a song. Remind them that it is okay to become angry. However, it is not okay to take anger out on others.
- **Regression** — Youth may become more dependent, clingy, and whiny. For younger youth, this may include forgetting a new skill that was previously learned. As a parent, take time to listen and help them complete the task.

- **Happy** — Some see a move as an opportunity to make changes and reinvent who they are. As a parent, encourage them to make a list of new things they would like to try or things they would like to change. Help them make these changes.
- **Optimistic** — As a parent, if you are excited about the move and can address positive views of change, they will be more inclined to follow your lead and be excited as well.
- **Time of growth** — Please give them jobs during the move. If they are being depended upon by the family, this offers them a new opportunity to grow and feel a sense of “belonging.”

**Youth can sometimes
bottle up their emotions.
Try to make sure they have
someone to talk to. Drawing,
journaling and active play
are also good ways to release
their repressed emotions.**

Helping Youth Cope

Be prepared to feel a lot of conflicting emotions when having to move or make changes. For youth, it can be overwhelming. Youth need stability and routine, especially when they are dealing with stress and anxiety. They look to you for comfort as well as guidance on how to act and feel. Keep in mind that in the beginning, you may not be able to devote as much time to them as you would like or they may need.

- ★ Learn as much as possible about the new location and what to expect, not only for yourself and your loved one, but also to answer their questions and explain what is going on.
- ★ Lean on family and friends for support. Accept offers of help. Choose a family member or trusted adult they can go to when you are not available. Having a plan and sharing it with them will help them feel safe.
- ★ Try to maintain daily routines and consistencies, such as normal mealtimes, bedtimes, and activities like reading a story. Doing chores or playing with friends gives youth the structure they need to feel safe.
- ★ Offer encouragement and give them hope. A reassuring hug or pat on the back, even just sitting close to them, can help when words sometimes can't.
- ★ Not everyone copes in the same ways. For some, quiet time is helpful. Others cope best through talking and being with people. For both youth and adults, it can be helpful to share what helps each person in the family.

Coping Tips for Infants and Toddlers

- ★ Don't hide your feelings. Young children learn how to cope from watching you.
- ★ Give plenty of hugs and affection. Physical contact reassures them and makes them feel safe.
- ★ Try as best as you can to maintain a routine.

Coping Tips for Preschoolers

- ★ Let them know it's still okay for them to play and have fun.
- ★ Try to keep a routine and let them know when plans change so they aren't surprised.
- ★ Plan for time together. If you have more than one child, make sure you plan one-on-one time with each of them.

Coping Tips for School-Age Youth

- ★ School-age youth respond to stress through their behavior rather than with words. You may need to relax some rules and exercise patience as they work through their feelings.
- ★ Help them deal with their emotions and identify negative behaviors. Give them healthy ways to express their feelings.
- ★ If they are angry, let them yell into a pillow. If they are stressed, have them exercise.
- ★ Allow them some time to be a kid. Encourage play time with friends.
- ★ Keep in mind that some youth, especially if they are the oldest, may want to take on more responsibility. Try to help them feel useful without being overwhelmed.

Taking Care of You!

When going through changes, it can be easy to get lost in the responsibilities and not take care of yourself. It's normal to feel overwhelmed. And while it can be hard to step away, taking care of you is extremely important! Don't feel guilty when you need time to recharge. If you don't take care of yourself, it's harder to help your family cope.

- ★ Ask for support from family and friends. The more help you have, the more time you'll have to focus on what you need.
- ★ Identify what helps you cope such as exercising, watching a movie, or being with friends. Even if it's only for a short time, make it a part of your routine. Do things that make you happy or relieve stress.
- ★ Send a note to school. Teachers can be there for your kids while they are at school, providing another layer of support. They can also let you know if there are any problems.
- ★ The military has services in place for families. Keep those numbers on hand in case you need them.
- ★ Stress can cause you to say and do things you may not mean. Especially with youth, if you raise your voice, blame them, or say something you don't mean, it is important to explain your actions. Tell them it's not their fault, apologize, and talk to them about why you are feeling stress.

Communication Strategies

Staying connected is so important during the change process. It is the time to learn about each other again.

How to stay connected:

- ★ Talk
- ★ Listen
- ★ Interact
- ★ Express your feelings

Tips on Talking

Plan things to talk about

Sometimes you have to plan on things to talk about. Make a list.

Schedule time to talk

Occasionally a lot of time can go by before you realize you have not talked. Schedule time to talk so that's it's not lost in the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

Quality can sometimes mean more than quantity

Quality conversations are those that involve feelings and ideas. They are more private and intimate, but they are rarer and take more time to achieve. Quantity conversations are quick statements usually focused on facts.

It's deep conversations versus chatter. Parents want to ask WHY questions rather than yes/no questions. Strive to have those deep conversations that allow your family to open up about their personal thoughts. Although there is nothing wrong with chatter, try to turn the conversations into quality conversations.

Talk during activities

Sometimes it is easier to talk when something else is going on, like working on the yard, watching TV, cooking, riding in the car, or cleaning the house.

Tips on Listening

Listening versus hearing

There is a big difference between listening and hearing. Hearing is simply the act of recognizing sounds, like hearing a dog bark. Listening is something you choose to do so that you can understand and make meaning out of the sounds. Meaning and learning come from listening, not hearing. When you hear your family members, try to listen carefully to what they are saying to gain better understanding.

Confirm the messages

When you are listening to conversations, check to make sure you understand exactly what was said. A lot of miscommunication can be made because the talker guessed that the listener understood everything perfectly. One way to avoid this is to double check the message. Say something like, “When you said _____, did you mean _____?” Ask questions throughout the conversations to make sure you understand what was said. Understanding takes the efforts of both the talker and the listener.

Empathy

Empathy means that the listener recognizes and feels the emotions of the talker. More understanding occurs when the listener can feel what the talker felt. You can say to the talker, “You must have felt _____ when _____” or “I would have felt _____ if that happened to me.”

Maintain eye contact

Eye contact means that both the talker and listener look into each others’ eyes. Eye contact quickly creates a sense of trust, respect, and security.

Tips on Interacting

Communication is more than talking and listening. It is about building relationships. The best way to bond with someone is to do things together. The more you do together, and the more fun you have, then the closer you can feel to your family. You should plan to interact with each family member, interact as small groups, or as a whole family together.

Think of things that the whole family can enjoy

Try to include everybody in your activities. If you can't include everybody, try to plan small activities between you and each family member.

Think back to previous location for ideas

Things may have changed, so you may not be able to do the exact same thing, but think back to a fun activity and try to identify something fun that feels right for this time and place.

Small is good

Interacting doesn't have to be a huge day-long production. It can be short, inexpensive, but meaningful. Think of quality versus quantity when it comes to activities. The same concept applies!

Unexpected things happen

Even with the best plans, things can go wrong or change. Don't expect everyone to have as much fun as you, or expect that everything will go smoothly. Keep in mind that just interacting together is an accomplishment, even if it doesn't go perfectly.

Ask for advice

Be sure to get your other family members' ideas when planning activities. This is a great time to find out their likes and dislikes. They may have an idea you never thought of!

Here are some things that families do to interact together:

- ★ Eat dinner
- ★ Go see a movie
- ★ Look at photo albums
- ★ Go to a local festival
- ★ Have a game night
- ★ Cook or bake something
- ★ Listen to music
- ★ Watch a favorite show
- ★ Clean the house
- ★ Help with homework
- ★ Plant flowers
- ★ Find a park to explore

Tips on Expressing Your Feelings

Remember that with change comes ups and downs. It's easy to get caught up in the excitement of interacting together. And it's hard to be happy if things aren't going right. But don't forget to express your feelings at any point during the changes, whether your emotions are happy or sad. Your family needs to know how you feel.

A lot of youth hide their emotions because they want to be tough. They hide them because they don't want to worry their family members, or they hide them because they might be embarrassed or think that nobody will understand. Their feelings are their feelings, and if this is truly how they feel, don't ever think that they aren't worthy.

Use I language, not YOU language

When you are telling someone how you feel, try to say "I" instead of "you". When you use the word "you", it sounds like blame. Don't say, "You are such a thief!" Instead, say, "I would appreciate it if you would ask me if you can borrow my things." Don't say, "You aren't obeying me." Instead say, "I don't understand why this rule isn't being followed. Can we talk about it?" Starting your sentences with "I" instead of "you" really helps express your point of view.

I feel _____ when _____ .
feeling *event*

Grown-ups, spouses, parents, siblings, youth, and your friends are not mind readers. They cannot know exactly how you are feeling unless you tell them. When you tell someone how you feel, you have to search to describe the correct feelings. Sometimes we use anger to mask deeper feelings (e.g., disappointment, fear, or embarrassment). We use happy to really mean thrilled, overjoyed, confident, and safe. Try finding that perfect word to honestly describe your emotion.

When you describe an event, you want to be specific. Say exactly what happened to make you feel this way. Instead of saying, “You make me so mad!” say, “I get really mad when I don’t know where you are going.”

Express feelings through actions

Maybe you aren’t ready to talk about your feelings. There are lots of ways to express your thoughts in other ways, like writing, journaling, doodling, or drawing. Find a craft or hobby that you really enjoy, and think about your feelings as you are doing it.

Tips on Conflict Management

When experiencing change, there can be lots of room for conflicts. Conflict is a disagreement between people with opposing opinions. Conflict happens in every family, so you have to expect that it will inevitably happen in your own.

Conflict is not always a bad thing

Conflict sounds bad, and sometimes it is. But a lot of good things can come out of it! It allows us to express our feelings and sometimes come to an understanding. Lots of problems are solved effectively with conflicts as the catalyst. The important thing is that you better understand each other once it has occurred.

Conflicts need flexibility

Sometimes it's hard to be flexible, which means that you let go of your expectations and become open to a solution. Some solutions may benefit someone else more than another. Be open to accepting a new way of thinking.

Don't avoid conflict

We often avoid conflict because we are afraid of hurting someone's feelings, making someone angry, worrying someone, or maybe if things are going good you don't want to be blamed for making them go bad. It takes a lot of courage to bring up a conflict. If you are hurting on the inside, then you should bring up what is bothering you, or you might continue hurting. Solving conflicts can really help a family heal and move forward.

Where to have conflict

Sometimes conflict just happens, especially at inopportune times. Other times a family member chooses when and where to conflict. If you choose to bring up something that is bothering you, choose a safe place where you feel comfortable. It's important to only include those directly involved in the conflict. Conflicts do not need an audience.

Be smart and be calm

Prepare for conflict if you can. Think of and talk about some solutions before it happens. Be very calm and confident when conflicting. Keeping your emotions in check allows for more logical solutions to come forth.

The relationship wins

When we conflict, we tend to think that there is one winner and one loser. Change your thinking to: out of every conflict, the relationship wins. Sometimes we have to sacrifice a little, and we might feel like a loser. If you have to give up something in order to find a solution, be sure that you are comfortable with any sacrifice. A happy and healthy relationship should be your goal.

Tips on Effective Arguments

There is a big difference between arguing and fighting. Arguing is when you present or defend a position on an issue. Fighting or verbal aggressiveness involves attacking somebody's self worth.

There is nothing wrong with arguing. In fact, arguing can be a really good thing! It allows us to find a solution to a problem. Not all arguments have a solution, but the fact that you can feel comfortable defending your viewpoints and that you listen to other opinions is great. Arguing uses a lot of thinking and logic!

Fighting, on the other hand, is never okay. Fighting includes name calling, yelling, hitting, screaming, slamming doors, and all those other negatives that come when people are angry. Nothing is ever solved when a fight happens because people are too emotional and aren't thinking clearly.

Tips on Fighting

Stop a fight before it happens

Usually you can tell when an argument is turning into a fight. People usually start raising their voice, get red in the face, stop smiling, and start moving their hands or bodies more. Try to recognize when your family members start to get too emotional. Fighting involves a lot of emotion, so you have to be alert before it starts.

Recognize when fighting is occurring

Fighting involves mean words and mean actions that can hurt someone's feelings, themselves, or an object. You will have to determine if the talk is an argument or a fight.

Avoid fights and walk away

If you are involved in a fight, walk away and avoid it. Fighting never solves problems, and sometimes it can make matters worse.

Talk about it later

Sometimes after each person cools down, you can go back and talk about what led to a fight. Be sure that everyone is calm. Maybe go to a different place than where the fight happened. Be sure to talk about what exactly happened. You need to talk about what caused the fight so that everyone understands the same things. Talking about it afterwards can really help it not happen again.

Tips on Roles

One of the hardest parts of change is uncertainty about jobs or roles. A role means how a person is identified (what responsibility someone has). Each family has a lot of roles for which different family members are responsible.

Who creates the roles?

Good question! Since people usually don't talk about roles, they often just happen when there is a need. Sometimes as parents you can tell when there is a role that needs to be filled. And sometimes a role can be discussed or negotiated.

Some roles are easy to identify, like father, mother, baby, sister, brother, etc. But some roles are harder to identify. Usually families have roles like these below:

- Nurse — takes care when you are sick or hurt
- Money earner — earns money at a job to support the family
- Joker — makes jokes and entertains
- Chauffeur — drives family members around
- Organizer — makes sure everything is easy to find
- Cleaner — makes sure everything is tidy
- Fix-it — repairs anything broken
- Cook — makes most of the meals
- Laundry — washes, folds, or puts away laundry
- Dishwasher — washes, dries, and puts away dishes
- Homework helper — helps with homework, answers questions
- Remote control boss — who gets to pick the shows

There are lots of family roles that aren't listed. What's interesting is that EACH family has their very own roles that help the family function.

Tips on Role Conflicts

The change process creates many role conflicts. The family functioned one way at the previous location. Now with the changes, roles have shifted again.

Why do job conflicts happen?

Conflicts (or disagreements) over roles happen a lot, especially when:

- A role is left empty
- When a family member doesn't know what their role is
- When a family member wants a different role that someone else has
- When a family member doesn't like his or her role
- When a family member doesn't do his or her role to the liking of the other family members
- Too many family members are responsible for one role
- When a family member feels like they are doing too many roles
- When a family member doesn't have enough roles

How do you fix role conflicts?

Every family has role conflicts. Sadly, few families fix role conflicts to make everyone happy. It is never a good idea to ignore role conflicts. Sometimes you might not want to bring up the fact that there is a role conflict, but if you are unhappy, then it needs to be addressed.

1. Identify the problem. Do this by filling this out:

_____	feels	_____	when	_____.
<i>Name</i>		<i>emotion</i>		<i>what happens</i>

2. List who is involved. What is the role conflict?

3. Negotiate a solution that each member can agree upon.

The only way to fix role conflict is to talk about it. Remember, the role will usually remain, but family members can change, share, trade, or alter roles in order to make everyone happy. Role conflict keeps a family from functioning, so the sooner it is fixed, the faster the family can heal.

Tips on Finding your Family Routine

A routine is a sequence of actions. It is important to create a routine now that your family is changing. To combat this, create a routine for typical weekdays, special event days, and stay at home days.

Talk to your family and come up with a routine that involves everyone's roles. Start at the beginning of the day and make a list of all the activities that go on during that day. Schedules change, but you should be able to have a list of all the things that generally happen.

Who does what? Who has what chores? When does everyone go to bed? When is homework time? Be sure to include each family member somewhere in the routine. Sitting down and having a plan creates stability.

More Resources

The Comfort Crew for Military Kids

www.ComfortCrew.org

Please visit www.ComfortCrew.org to learn more about their programs that comfort and support military kids.

Anchored4Life

www.anchored4life.com

Training for youth offering positive support, encouragement, and life skills.

Army Wife Network

www.armywifefnetwork.com

AWN is a grass-roots effort at interactive empowerment for Army wives. Tons of valuable resources, podcast, blog, columns, & social media galore are available.

Blue Star Families

www.bluestarfam.org

Blue Star Families was formed in April 2009 by a group of military spouses to raise the awareness of the challenges of military family life with our civilian communities and leaders. Blue Star Families includes spouses and families from all services and all walks of life, including National Guard and Reserve, as well as veterans and civilians.

Fred Rogers Company: The Legacy Lives On.

www.FredRogers.org

The Fred Rogers Company helps children and families develop values.

More Resources (cont'd.)

Military OneSource

www.MilitaryOneSource.com

This free 24-hour service is available to all active duty, Guard, and Reserve members (regardless of activation status) and their families.

National Military Family Association

www.militaryfamily.org

Not only do we support military families — we are military families.

Zero To Three

www.zerotothree.org

Zero To Three is proud to support military families. We work to increase awareness and collaboration throughout the military community so that parents and professionals can more effectively care for very young children and their families.



Supporting Military and Civilian Youth

This guidebook is meant to help families understand the challenges youth face when change occurs. The information in this guidebook can be a good starting point to discover ways for your family to cope during this challenging time. Our goal is to help you learn what to expect and what difficulties youth may face so that you can come together and grow stronger as a family.

Follow Anchored4Life's journey
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