It’s fairly common for military-connected children to stay with other family members or family friends when their parent’s military duties take them away for extended periods.  Parents will try to anticipate what the caregiver will need but life has a way of inserting the unexpected. Parent centers can use these resources to help:

* Military parents planning for their child’s time away
* Long- and short-term temporary caregivers

This article explains what documents temporary caregivers will need to use a child’s military benefits for school, extra-curricular activities, health care and supports and services needed for a child’s disability- and who temporary caregivers can contact for help with these needs. It also offers some civilian alternatives to military benefits for cases where the temporary caregiver is unable to use the child’s benefits, or if those benefits do not cover the child’s needs. Parent centers may be able to suggest state and local civilian community resources not listed here.

The handout for temporary caregivers has similar information in a shorter format. You can add your parent center's logo and contact information. Parent center staff can use the handout for holiday and vacation editions of e-newsletters!

Some reasons why a military-connected child may be living with someone other than their parents:

1. Both parents are in the service, and their respective duties make it very difficult to raise their child during a particular time period, or during their duration of service.
2. The service member is a single parent and his or her duties make it difficult or impossible to raise a child either temporarily or during their duration of service
3. The service member is deceased, and the other parent is not able to care for the child, or both parents are deceased
4. The parents wish the child to live where the relatives or caregivers live to attend school or be eligible for certain services or programs (Medicaid HCBS Waivers)
5. The grandparent(s) are military or retired military themselves and have their grandchildren for either service or non-service related reasons

This article and handout focuses on the first two situations; we’ll offer future resources for the other typical situations.

Handout: “A Guide for Grandparents and Other Temporary Caregivers of Military Children” -you can add your parent center’s logo and contact information to the handout.

**Two Essential Documents**

Whether the temporary caregiver lives close by the family’s current installation or far away, there are **two essential documents** that he or she will need:

1. **Military ID cards**: each child age 10 or older needs to be registered in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) and have a current ID card. Caregivers do not get their own ID cards and will need the child’s ID for installation access, medical benefits, and military-subsidized childcare.
2. **Power of Attorney**: a document giving an individual legal authority to act in certain situations on behalf of another individual. In these cases, the service member is giving a temporary authority to the designated relative or other caregiver for their child.
   * There is a [standard form for each branch of service](https://branchta.org/family-care-plans/). Service members are not required to use that particular form but may get legal advice to draft a Power of Attorney more specific to their family situation. It may be helpful for the military parents to note that the military form has language detailing how long the power of attorney will remain in effect if the service member is missing, missing in action, or becomes a prisoner of war.
   * The military parent may wish to send a draft of the military POA document to the proposed relative or other caregiver, to have them show it to the medical and dental providers and school officials where the child will be living to make certain that particular form of POA is acceptable.

**Documents for Installation Access**: If a temporary caregiver lives nearby, they may need installation access for a child’s school, medical care, child care, military-subsidized shopping, recreational programs, religious services, visits with friends, etc.

* The child’s military ID (needed for age 10 and above)
* Acceptable picture ID for temporary caregiver (contact Visitor Information at the installation for what is accepted)
* Power of Attorney giving them authorization to make decisions on behalf of the child in the absence of his or her parents (school, medical, child care, other situations requiring parental authority)
* Agent letter of authorization signed by the installation’s commanding officer. The military parent or parents can request this letter through the ID card office at their installation.

**Documents needed when temporary caregivers are distant from the family’s usual installation:**

* Power of Attorney giving them authorization to make decisions on behalf of the child in the absence of his or her parents (school, medical, child care, other situations requiring parental authority)
  + How a service member can get and send a Power of Attorney if they have already left for deployment: <http://wifeinthewildblueyonder.com/deployed-power-attorney/> (Note: this is a blog post written by a military spouse, not an “official” document—but it has clear directions.)
* The child’s birth certificate (to register the child in a new school)
  + How to request a birth certificate for a minor child: <https://traveltips.usatoday.com/copy-childs-birth-certificate-13276.html>
* Immunization records for school registration
* Letter or transcript from the child’s usual school showing attendance, academic information and grade placement
* Copies of IEP Plan, Section 504 plan, ADA Title II Plan, behavioral plan, medical plan, depending on what the child had in his or her usual school.
* Contact information for the current IEP team, so that if more information is needed, caregiver or new school personnel can go to the source.
* Copies of service agreements (such as for PT, OT, speech therapy, school-based ABA, etc.,), evaluations, progress reports
  + Getting copies of this information if not provided to the temporary caregiver: see EFMP and School Liaison, below.

**Temporary caregivers MAY need:**

* Copy of the service member’s military orders in order for the caregiver to use the Interstate Compact (below)
* Child’s military ID card, to use the Interstate Compact (below)
* Records from non-school sources that relate to child’s disability
* Interstate Compact handouts:
  + [“Step by Step Checklist: Resolve School Issues with the Interstate Compact”](https://branchta.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Step-by-Step-Checklist-%E2%80%93Resolve-School-Issues-with-the-Interstate-Compact.docx)
  + [“School Issues Covered by the Interstate Compact”](https://branchta.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/School-Issues-Covered-by-the-Interstate-Compact.docx)
    - The Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunities for Military Children is a legal agreement by all 50 States intended to help lessen the impact of the military’s high mobility on a child’s education. It also applies in situations where a child is living with a temporary caregiver. The Compact supports a child’s legal rights under IDEA, and covers situations involving registration and paperwork requirements, grade and course placements, kindergarten and first grade registration, graduation requirements, and extra-curricular activities.
  + Contact information for the School Liaison Officer at the parent or parents’ installation to help get information or paperwork from the child’s usual school
  + Contact information for EFMP Family Support at the parents’ installation. A child enrolled in EFMP will very likely have a **Case Management Plan**, which includes useful information such as:
    - EFMP enrollment information (may include diagnoses, PCM or PCP, specialty care providers, Tricare ECHO information),
    - community support needs (child care information, community recreation plans, state/local resources such as Medicaid or SSI),
    - special education needs (IEP or 504 Plan, teachers/SPED providers contact information),
    - respite care services

The plan can give the temporary caregiver information about supports and services the child was receiving and ideas about additional services that might be available in the caregiver’s area. EFMP will ask to see a copy of (or have emailed) the Power of Attorney to release any information.

Temporary caregivers may use the [interactive MAPS tool](https://branchta.org/maps/) on the Branch website to get contact information for School Liaison Officers and EFMP Family Support. Instructions for using the maps are on the website in both video and text formats. Page translation is available at the top of each page on the website.

**Resources:**

**Specifically for grandparents and other kinship caregivers and caregivers**

* [AARP.org](https://www.aarp.org/relationships/friends-family/info-08-2011/grandfamilies-guide-support.html)
* [Cooperative Extension System](https://articles.extension.org/category/family_caregiving_grandparents_raising_grandchildren)
* [Child Welfare Information Gateway](https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/promoting/parenting/relative/) (US Department of Health & Human Services)
* [Grandfamilies.org](http://www.grandfamilies.org/)
* [National Kinship Alliance for Children](http://kinshipalliance.org/)

**Child Care**

**Military-subsidized child care:**

Children whose parent or parents are active-duty or activated Reserve or National Guard are eligible for military-subsidized child care. Temporary caregivers who are remote from any military Child Development Center (usually found on or near installations) can use [Child Care Aware of America](http://usa.childcareaware.org/fee-assistancerespite/military-families/) to locate potential subsidized care near their own location.

**Lower-cost civilian child care or child care financial assistance possibilities:**

* [Child Care Aware](http://usa.childcareaware.org/fee-assistancerespite/military-families/) may also be used to locate non-military-subsidized care
* Call 2-1-1 to find out about local affordable child care options
* Local YMCA
* Before-and-after school programs through the local school district
* [Administration for Children and Families](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/archive/occ/occ/occ/parents) (US Dept. of Health and Human Services) -child care programs that use federal money to offer lower-cost child care (Head Start is one such program)
* [State programs](https://childcare.gov/state-resources-home)
* The child’s temporary caregiver may be eligible for tax credits such as the Child and Dependent Care Credit, Child Tax Credit, or Earned Income Credit depending on the arrangements made with the child’s parents.
* Employer Dependent Care Account -a temporary caregiver’s employer may offer this type of account which allows employees to set aside pre-tax dollars to pay for childcare expenses.

**Respite Care**

If a child’s parent normally gets respite care through TRICARE or TRICARE’s Extended Care Health Option, the temporary caregiver may also be eligible for TRICARE-paid respite care. Finding TRICARE-authorized and available providers may be the difficulty. Contact a [TRICARE Beneficiary Counseling and Assistance Coordinator](http://www.tricare.mil/bcacdcao/) in the temporary caregiver’s location for additional assistance.

Non-TRICARE respite care possibilities:

* [ARCH National Respite and Resource Center](https://archrespite.org/us-map), includes: (1) the [National Respite Locator](https://archrespite.org/respitelocator), a service to help caregivers and professionals locate respite (short break) services in their community; (2) the National Respite Coalition--a service that advocates for preserving and promoting respite in policy and programs at the national, state, and local levels; and (3) the Lifespan Respite Technical Assistance Center. Several states are affiliates of national respite funding through the Administration for Community Living in the US Department of Health and Human Services.
* [EasterSeals](http://www.easterseals.com/what-we-do/)

**Health Care:**

**Military medical benefits (TRICARE)**

If the temporary caregiver is not geographically close to a child’s current medical provider, certain steps must be followed to use the child’s TRICARE benefits for health coverage:

1. The child must have their military ID card
2. Medical care (and other TRICARE-paid services, such as ABA therapy, some types of respite care, occupational, physical, and speech therapy) need to be received from a TRICARE-authorized provider.
   * TRICARE providers can be located even in areas where there are no large military installations. The number and types of providers available may also depend on which type of TRICARE plan the child is enrolled in.
3. The temporary caregiver needs to know which TRICARE plan the child is enrolled in. TRICARE “SELECT” plans offer more provider options than TRICARE “PRIME” and it may be easier to locate a provider if the child is on a “SELECT” plan.
   * It is now complicated for a military dependent to change plans outside of the TRICARE Open Enrollment Period. Deployment does not count as a “Qualifying Life Event” allowing for plan changes. If it’s necessary for a child to be on a different plan to get an appropriate local medical or other provider, the temporary caregiver can go to <https://tricare.mil/LifeEvents/Moving>, select the child’s current plan, and follow the directions for “Active Duty Family Member”. The caregiver will need the military parent to change the child’s address in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS), which triggers a Qualifying Life Event so that the child’s plan can be changed.

[**Find a TRICARE-authorized provider**](https://tricare.mil/FindDoctor)

**Non-military resources and information for medical care and other services and supports:**

* [Family to Family Health Information Centers](http://www.familyvoices.org/)
* [HealthCare.gov](https://www.healthcare.gov/) (Affordable Care Act Marketplace)
* [Medicaid](https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid-and-you/index.html): frequently-asked questions and application information. When using TRICARE, children of active-duty and activated service members are **also eligible for Medicaid**. TRICARE pays first, and Medicaid pays remaining covered costs. It’s worth considering whether or not the child qualifies for Medicaid, CHIP, or a Medicaid waiver available in the caregiver’s location. Medicaid is state-based, and a child can be eligible for services based on their disability or illness, not on the parent or caregiver’s income.
* [MedicaidWaiver.org](http://medicaidwaiver.org/): non-government website with links and listings to Medicaid Waivers by state.
* [Autism resources by State (Easter Seals)](http://www.easterseals.com/explore-resources/living-with-autism/state-autism-profiles.html?referrer=https://www.google.com/)
* [State Agencies on Developmental or Intellectual Disabilities](http://www.nasddds.org/state-agencies/)
* [Parent Centers](http://www.parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center/)

Autism grants are listed here because a significant number of military-connected children have autism diagnoses. TRICARE pays for a number of autism supports including ABA therapy, and this means that military parents whose children have this diagnosis are likely to stay in the service to use these valuable benefits. As we noted above, however, it may be difficult for a temporary caregiver to locate TRICARE-authorized autism service providers, so these financial supports may help a child get services outside of TRICARE.

**Grants for autism services—This listing is not exhaustive and contains duplicates**

* [Autism Care Today](http://www.act-today.org/apply-for-grant/)
* [Outreach Autism Services Network](https://outreachautismservicesnetwork.com/charitable-grants-for-individuals-with-autism-and-their-families/)
* [American Autism Association grant locator](https://www.myautism.org/all-about-autism/grants-and-scholarships/)
* [Talk About Curing Autism](https://tacanow.org/family-resources/autism-grants/)
* [Autism Support Network](http://www.autismsupportnetwork.com/resources/autism-grants-united-states)
* [Autism Speaks](https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-grant-opportunities)
* [Verywell Health](https://www.verywellhealth.com/grants-for-families-living-with-autism-260283)

**Financial Support**

Military service members are paid with Direct Deposit. The service member can arrange several options:

* Prior to deployment, arrange for a split or full direct deposit of their paycheck into the grandparents’ account
* Make transfers as needed from the service member’s account to the grandparents’ account
* Write checks or money orders and send (not recommended)

Military regulations require service members to support their children, whether they live with them or not. If a service member is divorced or separated, a court order for child support or a settlement requiring child support will take precedence over a military order for child support. In practice, military orders for child support usually “fill in” before a civilian court order or settlement begins. Child support can be sent in the same way as money from a regular military paycheck.

If child support is not being sent, [these instructions from the Defense Finance and Accounting Service](https://www.dfas.mil/garnishment/childsupportalimony/faqs.html), an official Department of Defense website may help. When you go to the link, you may get a message that the link is not secure. You can go ahead anyway—some internet browsers can’t read the security information on official military websites.

**Government assistance for living expenses**

Even with financial support from the military parent or parents, temporary caregivers may need further financial support to care for military-connected children. These federal programs offer financial assistance based on family income:

* [Benefits.gov](https://benefits.gov/) is an official federal government website which can assist individuals to locate both federal and state programs for financial assistance, including healthcare, housing, public utilities, temporary cash and emergency disaster assistance
* [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)](https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap), previously known as food stamps
* [Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)-](https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/women-infants-and-children-wic)supplemental foods, health care referrals, nutrition education for infants and children up to age five who are found to be at nutritional risk

**Legal Help**

The Branch article “[Legal Resources for Highly-Mobile Military Families](https://branchta.org/legal-resources-for-highly-mobile-military-families/)” has information about low-cost, free, and fee-for-services legal help for situations involving military families and situations regarding disability issues. There is also a resource for locating the Bar Association in each State for other types of legal concerns.

**Financial Help for Children’s Activities**

[Activity Grants for Military-Connected Kids](https://branchta.org/activity-grants-military-connected-kids/)