# OMK Camps Help Youth Develop Self-Efficacy to Deal with the Challenges of Military Deployments

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#### Introduction

Military youth have unique challenges that set them apart from their peers.

When a parent is deployed, they may experience the following situations:

- More responsibilities at home, changes to everyday activities, and disruption of family routines
- More stress, greater anxiety, and emotional difficulties
- Increased behavior problems and problems at school Attending a summer camp has been linked to many positive outcomes that align with suggestions made to help military youth cope with the negative outcomes of deployment





#### The Ohio State University

#### **Methods**

As part of a camping initiative through Operation: Military Kids (OMK) that was funded by grants from the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), four specific skills were identified as a focus in 2012: (1) self-efficacy, (2) communication, (3) coping, and (4) social skills. Camp programming was designed to target these skill areas.

#### **Research Questions**

To what extent do military youth who attended an OMK/OSD-funded camp feel more efficacious about their ability to:

- 1. Communicate about being a military child?
- 2. Cope with obstacles related to being in a military family?
- 3. Handle the social aspects of their life?

**Participants:** 35 military youth ages 9 to 17 from the Indiana and Ohio 2012 OMK/OSD-funded camps and 48 parents

**Instrument**: Retrospective post-then-pre format with communication (11 items), coping (17 items), and social skills (11 items) using an 11-point scale; open-ended questions; and demographic questions

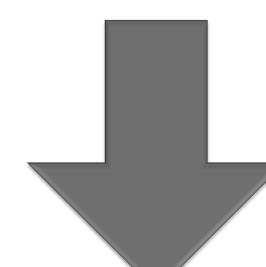
**Data Collection:** Internet-based survey completed 3 months after camp **Data Analysis:** *t*-tests and thematic analysis of open-ended responses

# **Results**Increased Confidence

Confidence increased the most in the following areas: Mean increase of 2 or more points (11-point scale)

### Campers

- Telling others about pride in being from a military family (COMMUNICATION)
- Explaining to community members what it means to be a military youth (COMMUNICATION)
- Staying friends with other military youth (SOCIAL)
- Making friends with other military youth (SOCIAL)



#### **Areas of Most Confidence**

- Having pride in being part of a military family (COMMUNICATION)
- Working well with those in their age group (SOCIAL)
- Making friends with other military youth (SOCIAL)
- Handling added responsibilities at home (COPING)
- Accepting that family member will miss important activities during deployed (COPING)

#### Parents

- Making friends with other military youth (SOCIAL)
- Staying friends with other military youth (SOCIAL)
- Talking with friends about being part of a military family (SOCIAL)

## Areas of Least Confidence

- Talking with someone they don't know well (SOCIAL)
- Asking for help when feeling stressed about deployment (COPING)
- Giving themselves a pep talk when feeling low (COPING)
- Talking with community members or someone they've just met about what it's like to be a military youth (COMMUNICATION)
- Preventing arguments with those in their age group (SOCIAL)
- Talking with teachers about deployment (COMMUNICATION)

#### **Lessons to Share**

- 1. Continue offering camps for military youth, paying particular attention to the areas where youth feel less confident.
- 2. Include both informal and structured discussion about aspects of military culture.
  - Allow time each day for introducing a topic related to military culture to prompt discussion among campers.
  - Provide staff with talking points they can use to talk to campers.

- 3. Include a variety of activities geared toward targeted outcomes.
  - Encourage youth to practice decision making, and also introduce them to activities they may not otherwise try.
  - Use challenging, novel activities when possible.
- 4. Use trained counselors and adult staff.
  - Consider 4-H camp counselors and young alumni.
  - Use military youth who have aged out of attending camp as campers

Scan the QR code to find more information on this study.



#### Reference List Available Upon Request

Research conducted in partnership with Purdue University Department of Youth Development and Agricultural Education



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