

Module 9

Collaborations: Serving Those Who Serve Us

TRAINING NOTES

What you need to say/do

1. Display **PowerPoint Slide 9-1: Module 9** (title slide).
 2. Ask participants if there are any lingering questions from earlier modules. When there are no further questions, proceed to **Module 9**.
 3. Explain to participants that a number of state child support agencies have begun targeted outreach to military members – active duty, retired, Reserve, National Guard, and veterans – in recognition of their special child support needs. This module is an opportunity to brainstorm about ways the participants' local offices can better serve military parents.
 4. Review the module's goals and objectives with participants.
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What you need to know

1. It takes approximately one hour to complete this module.
2. Listed below are the equipment, handouts, and PowerPoint slides needed for the module.

Equipment/Supplies:

- Flipchart stand with two pads of paper or a whiteboard
- Markers (permanent, dry-erase, and wet erase)
- Masking tape
- Personal computer with PowerPoint program
- LCD projector and screen
- Trainer Guide
- Participant Guides (including Appendix with Handouts)

PowerPoint Slides:

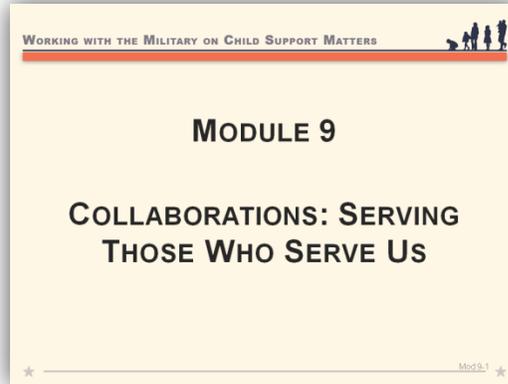
- 9-1: **Module 9** (title slide)
- 9-2: Family-Centered Child Support Program
- 9-3: Partnerships to Improve Child Support Services for Service Members and Veterans
- 9-4: Summary

Handouts:

- 9-1: Review Exercises

MODULE 9: COLLABORATIONS: SERVING THOSE WHO SERVE US

Time: 1 hour



9.1 COLLABORATIONS: SERVING THOSE WHO SERVE US

9.1.1 Learning Goals

- Each participant will learn why it is important for child support agencies to partner with military programs.
- Each participant will learn about partnership opportunities with military and veteran organizations.

9.1.2 Learning Objectives

- Given an interactive lecture, participants will identify what the military and the child support program have in common.
- Given an interactive lecture, participants will describe opportunities for partnership with installations serving active duty members.
- Given an interactive lecture, participants will describe opportunities for partnerships with the National Guard Family Readiness program, Yellow Ribbon events, Veteran Stand Down events, and other veteran-centered programs and organizations.
- Given a group discussion and scenario-based exercises, participants will identify possible partnership opportunities in their own community.

TRAINING NOTES

What you need to say/do

1. Display **PowerPoint Slide 9-2: Family-Centered Child Support Program**.
2. Explain to participants how the child support program and the military have similar goals of strengthening families and ensuring service members demonstrate personal responsibility and financial readiness.
3. Lead the group in a discussion of some of the complexities child support workers experience when working with military families on child support issues. The Participant Guide identifies some of those complexities but participants should feel free to identify additional ones.

What you need to know

9.2 WHY SHOULD CHILD SUPPORT AND THE MILITARY WORK TOGETHER?



The military services and the child support program share the common goal of strengthening military families. Both emphasize the importance of personal responsibility and financial readiness because they are invested in the economic stability of military fathers, mothers, and their children. The Department of Defense and the child support program are also two of the largest systems that have extensive contact with fathers.

To ensure that child support issues do not cause service members or their families unnecessary stress or hardship, especially during times of deployment, the child support program is working hard to be flexible and responsive to military and veteran parents.

9.3 WHAT ARE THE COMPLEXITIES IN WORKING WITH MILITARY FAMILIES IN THE CHILD SUPPORT PROGRAM?

The child support program and military services are far-reaching systems that have a presence in every state and internationally. Improving the child support process and experience for service families means taking their unique military circumstances and sacrifices into account. Some examples include:

TRAINING NOTES

What you need to say/do

1. Continue the group discussion on complexities the military face in dealing with child support issues.
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What you need to know

For more information, see *Military Services and Child Support Partnerships*, Child Support Fact Sheet Series, No. 8 at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css/resource/military-services-and-child-support-partnerships>.

- Paternity establishment and custody are complicated by deployments or other lengthy separations and a sense of urgency about setting up military benefits.
- Pay changes related to beginning military service, changes in an assignment or deployment, or a release from active military service do not result in automatic changes in child support order amounts. Service members must make a request to review and modify their support order(s) to assure that their obligations match their ability to pay support.
- Frequent moves between states or countries mean changes in the agencies or courts involved, and changes in the applicable child support laws. There can be considerable variation across state and tribal child support programs. When parents live in different jurisdictions, case processing becomes more complex.
- Military regulations for each service specify what is considered “adequate support” for a child when a service member is not living with the child’s parent and there is no support order. Service members may provide this amount through a voluntary allotment. There is no uniformity with regard to how courts view payment through a voluntary allotment. Some courts may consider the voluntary allotments a gift, since there is nothing in writing indicating its purpose as child support, and may not credit the allotment amount against any retroactive support award.

TRAINING NOTES

What you need to say/do

1. Display **PowerPoint Slide 9-3: Partnerships to Improve Child Support Services for Service Members and Veterans.**
2. Lead participants in a discussion of possible outreach activities they could hold for active duty service members in their jurisdiction. If the state or local agency is currently providing such outreach, ask the participants to identify the activities they think are most effective and areas in which they believe improvements can be made.

What you need to know

9.4 HOW CAN CHILD SUPPORT PROGRAMS AND MILITARY SERVICES PARTNER TO IMPROVE CHILD SUPPORT OUTCOMES FOR SERVICE MEMBERS AND VETERANS?



Across the country, important work is underway to improve child support enforcement for military and veteran families. For example, child support agencies in many states are providing services and conducting joint training events on military installations, working with the National Guard Family Readiness Program, participating in Yellow Ribbon Reintegration and Veteran Stand Down events, and partnering with local veteran outreach programs.

9.4.1 Services on Military Installations

State and local child support offices are participating in a number of outreach activities to improve services to active duty service members, including the following:

- Providing child support training to judge advocate general's corps (JAG) and legal assistance officials at local installations.
- Inviting military personnel to present training to child support caseworkers on topics such as post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury.
- Providing on-site assistance through weekly or monthly visits to the military post.

TRAINING NOTES

What you need to say/do

1. Continue to display **PowerPoint Slide 9-3: Partnerships to Improve Child Support Services for Service Members and Veterans** as you discuss possible outreach activities for active duty service members.
2. Point out that an installation's Family Community Center, Family Readiness Center, or some other Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Center is an important partner for the child support agency. It is also important to outreach to the military legal assistance office.

What you need to know

- Identifying cases in the state child support system that involve military members. Once the cases are identified, caseworkers determine whether there are Servicemembers Civil Relief Act issues or modification concerns. Where a member is exiting the service, they try to identify whether there is a need to refer the person to the Veterans Integrated Services Network.
- Developing a military parent checklist that identifies child support and access/custody/parenting time issues that the member may want to address.
- Conducting joint legal clinics monthly at military installations on such topics as parenting, access, child support, and paternity. Such clinics often include a IV-D attorney, a military legal assistance officer, and a representative from the court. The panelists attempt to provide information in response to questions, but do not provide legal advice.
- An installation's Family Community Center, Family Readiness Center, or some other Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Center is an important partner for the child support agency. It is also important to outreach to the military legal assistance office.

TRAINING NOTES

What you need to say/do

1. Continue to display **PowerPoint Slide 9-3: Partnerships to Improve Child Support Services for Service Members and Veterans.**
 2. Explain the purpose and stages of the National Guard Family Readiness Program.
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What you need to know

More information about the National Guard Family Readiness Program is available at <http://www.jointservicessupport.org/FP/Readiness.aspx>

9.4.2 National Guard Family Readiness Program

The Department of Defense Joint Personnel Office oversees the National Guard's Family Readiness Program. The National Guard Family Readiness Program (<http://www.jointservicesupport.org/FP/Readiness.aspx>) strives to make sure that the Guard Members and their families are fully prepared for whatever challenges lie ahead, whether it is before, during, or after deployment. There are six steps within the Family Readiness Program:

- Step 1: In Processing
- Step 2: Welcome Briefing
- Step 3: Training
- Step 4: Pre-Deployment
- Step 5: Deployment
- Step 6: Reunion

From a child support perspective, Step 4: Pre-Deployment is particularly important. This is the time when the National Guard member and the member's family receive information about activities that need to take place prior to deployment and resources that are available. For example, the Guardsman receives information about paperwork that needs to be completed. One such document is the Family Care Plan (FCP) that is used to ensure the care and well being of children and dependent adults during mobilizations and deployments. The FCP also identifies the location of important family documents, such as insurance policies and wills.

During Step 4, the National Guard Family Readiness Program also operates Operation R.E.A.D.Y., which stands for "Resources for Educating About Deployment and You." Operation R.E.A.D.Y. offers Deployment Survival training events that help the Guardsmen and their families understand what to expect during the tour and offers a Readiness and Deployment checklist to ensure that everyone is more prepared for the upcoming separation as well as their new personal responsibilities. The checklist includes such areas as Auto, Finance, Legal, and Medical.

TRAINING NOTES

What you need to say/do

1. Continue to display **PowerPoint Slide 9-3: Partnerships to Improve Child Support Services for Service Members and Veterans.**
 2. Discuss with participants how child support programs can participate in Step 4 of the National Guard Family Readiness Program.
 3. Explain the purpose of the Yellow Ribbon program
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What you need to know

Child support agencies are encouraged to establish working relationships with their State Family Program Director for the National Guard. There may be opportunities for the child support agency to ensure that the Operation R.E.A.D.Y. program includes child support information. For example, in some states, the collaboration between the child support agency and the State Family Program director has resulted in child support and paternity establishment being included within the Readiness and Deployment checklist.

9.4.3 Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Events

National Guard and Reserve members differ from their Active Duty counterparts because many are geographically separated from other members of their units and lack convenient access to military family support groups in local communities. Recognizing that Guardsmen, Reservists, and their families face unique challenges in preparing for deployment and reintegrating after return, Congress mandated that the Yellow Ribbon Program be established to respond to those challenges.

The Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP) consists of a series of events at key stages in the deployment cycle such as:

- Phase 1: Pre-Deployment (service members and families) (30 – 60 days prior to the members' departure)
- Phase 2: During Deployment (just for families) (30 – 60 days after leaving and prior to returning home)
- Phase 3: Demobilization (just for service members) (30 – 60 days before and after returning home)
- Phase 4: Post-Deployment (30, 60, and 90 days after deployment) (service members and families).

TRAINING NOTES

What you need to say/do

1. Continue to display **PowerPoint Slide 9-3: Partnerships to Improve Child Support Services for Service Members and Veterans.**
 2. Lead participants in a discussion of how the child support program might participate in Yellow Ribbon reintegration events.
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What you need to know

Child support agencies in some states set up booths at the pre-deployment and 30-day reintegration events where they display information about the child support program, including child support checklists they have developed specifically for the military. By having a child support presence at these events, the child support agency's military liaison can respond to specific needs of military parents and answer questions about paternity establishment, access and visitation, and support obligations. The liaison can then conduct one-on-one follow up with military members, as needed. The 30-day reintegration event is also an opportunity for the child support military liaison to remind returning Guardsmen and Reservists of the importance of terminating the child support income withholding order from the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS), when appropriate, and of ensuring that income withholding is in effect at their civilian employer. A smooth transition from military income withholding to civilian income withholding is important to prevent any disruption of child support payments, and to help guard against the child support agency receiving child support payments from both DFAS and the civilian employer in error.

Commanders and leaders play a critical role because they can ensure that Reserve members attend and can encourage the members' families attend Yellow Ribbon events where they can access information on health care, education/training opportunities, financial responsibilities, and legal benefits. Yellow Ribbon events can provide an opportunity for family members to meet other unit members and their families and form community bonds that can help them through the deployment cycle as well. Many Yellow Ribbon events also provide activities for children and/or younger siblings of the member that can help them better understand what a deployment is and what is happening with their military parent or family member.

Service providers may participate in Yellow Ribbon Program events. Child support agencies can contact the service component program manager or state Yellow Ribbon point of contact in order to get involved.

TRAINING NOTES

What you need to say/do

1. Continue to display **PowerPoint Slide 9-3: Partnerships to Improve Child Support Services for Service Members and Veterans.**
 2. Based on 2010 data, discuss the case characteristics of veterans in the child support caseload.
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What you need to know

For more information, see *Veterans in the Child Support Caseload, The Story Behind the Numbers*, Child Support Fact Sheet Series, Number 1 (November 2011), available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css/resource/veterans-in-the-child-support-caseload>.

9.4.4 Outreach to Veterans

9.4.4.1 Veterans in the Child Support Caseload

To facilitate a better understanding of veterans in the child support caseload, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) conducted a data match in December 2010 to determine how many veterans were in the caseload and their case characteristics.

They learned that veterans comprise a small proportion of the noncustodial parent child support caseload. In 2010, out of 10.7 million noncustodial parents included in the match, veterans comprised just over five percent of the total. However, small percentages do not necessarily mean small numbers. The number of noncustodial parents who were veterans in the child support caseload ranged from about 600 in the Virgin Islands to almost 61,000 in Texas. About half the states had more than 10,000 veterans in their child support caseload.

In 2010, veterans owed over \$7 billion of the child support arrearages owed by noncustodial parents nationwide. This represents about seven percent of the total child support debt, slightly more than the veterans' share of the population. The per capita child support debt owed by those veterans with debt was on average 27 percent higher than the per capita child support debt owed by all noncustodial parents. The average debt owed by veterans with debt was about \$24,500, and the comparable per capita debt for all noncustodial parents with debt was \$19,200. Although the 2010 data reveals that average arrears are likely to be higher for veterans in the child support caseload, veterans are no more likely to have arrearages than are child support noncustodial parents overall. Sixty-one percent of veterans with child support orders and 61 percent of all noncustodial parents with child support orders have arrearages.

TRAINING NOTES

What you need to say/do

1. Continue to display **PowerPoint Slide 9-3: Partnerships to Improve Child Support Services for Service Members and Veterans.**
2. Explain Veteran Stand Down events.
3. Discuss how child support arrears can affect homeless veterans and lead participants in a discussion of how the child support program might participate in Veteran Stand Down events.

What you need to know

The veteran population in the caseload is substantially older than the noncustodial parent population in the child support caseload as a whole, which may be a reason for the higher per capita debt owed by veterans. Almost 50 percent of veterans in the child support caseload are over age 50, while for the caseload as a whole only, 14 percent of noncustodial parents are over age 50. This means that a veteran noncustodial parent is three times as likely to be older than the average noncustodial parent. Many of these veteran parents no longer have a current support obligation; they only owe arrears or interest, or a combination of the two.

9.4.4.2 Veteran Stand Down Events

The phrase “stand down” comes from a term used in times of war: exhausted combat units requiring time to rest and recover were removed from the battlefields to a place of relative safety. At these secure base camp areas, troops were able to take care of personal hygiene, get clean uniforms, enjoy warm meals, receive medical and dental care, mail and receive letters, and enjoy fellowship in a safe environment.

Today, Stand Down refers to a grassroots, community-based intervention program designed to help the nation’s estimated 107,000 homeless veterans “combat” life on the streets. Homeless veterans are brought together in a single location for one to three days. During that time, they receive services and information about community resources that will help them address their individual problems and rebuild their lives. San Diego held the first veteran Stand Down event in 1988. A list of Stand Down events is available at the following website: <http://www.va.gov/homeless/standdown.asp>.

TRAINING NOTES

What you need to say/do

1. Continue to display **PowerPoint Slide 9-3: Partnerships to Improve Child Support Services for Service Members and Veterans.**
2. Discuss how child support arrears can affect homeless veterans and lead participants in a discussion of how the child support program might participate in Veteran Stand Down events.
3. Explain the Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs).
4. Discuss how the child support program and VISNs can collaborate to provide services to veterans.

What you need to know

1. In 2009, homeless veterans identified child support legal issues as one of their main concerns. See *The Sixteenth Annual Progress Report, Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Group (CHALENG) for Veterans, Fiscal Year (FY) 2009, Services for Homeless Veterans Assessment and Coordination.*
2. In January 2010, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services through the Office of Child Support Enforcement, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and the American Bar Association, launched a project to work with homeless veterans and their families to address unresolved child support issues and other challenges to stable residence. The project launched in nine pilot sites. While the mix of services and volunteer resources available at each site was different, many vulnerable veterans had their drivers licenses restored, criminal processing averted, child support payments restarted, and arrearages renegotiated.
3. Homeless veterans and community service providers continue to identify child support as one of the top unmet legal needs. See *The Seventeenth Annual Progress Report, Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Group (CHALENG) for Veterans, Fiscal Year (FY) 2010, Services for Homeless Veterans Assessment and Coordination* at http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/chaleng/CHALENG_Report_Seventeenth_Annual.pdf.

Child support debt can make it more difficult for veterans to find employment and housing and can also be a psychological barrier to reestablishing family relationships. Homeless veterans have said resolving child support issues is one of their major concerns. Numerous local child support agencies participate in and even co-host Veterans Stand Down events to provide outreach and address individual veterans' child support issues as part of a larger effort to connect veterans with a range of services.

9.4.4.3 The Veterans Integrated Service Networks

In 1995, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), within the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, reorganized its medical centers into Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs). These 21 networks contain medical centers, veteran centers, and outpatient clinics offering primary and specialized care across a wider geographical area than can be offered by a single medical center. Each center or clinic refers individuals to the other entities in that network, as appropriate.

The Veteran Justice Outreach (VJO) initiative, which is part of the VISN, works to avoid the unnecessary criminalization of mental illness and extended incarceration among veterans. VJO specialists are great resources for veterans who are involved with the criminal court system. They try to help get them timely access to VHA mental health and substance abuse services, when clinically indicated, and other VA services and benefits as appropriate.

Child support agencies have found it very effective to partner with their regional VISN to ensure that network providers are aware of the child support program and that their child support caseworkers are aware of the services provided through the VISN, especially the VJO. Because of one state's collaboration between the VJO and the state child support agency, the VJO in that state has added a question to its veterans' checklist: "Do you have any child support issues?" If the response is "yes," VJO will refer the veteran to the child support agency. In turn, where appropriate, the child support caseworkers will refer veterans to their local specialist.

TRAINING NOTES

What you need to say/do

1. Direct participants to **Handout 9-1: Review Exercises**. Divide participants into groups of five. Have each group discuss the exercises. Allow 15 minutes for the discussion. After 15 minutes, ask one group to report on the issues they identified within Case Exercise #1. Ask if other groups have anything to add. Then ask each group to report on their ideas generated by Case Exercise # 2. Allow 15 minutes for this discussion.
 2. After completion of the exercises, display **PowerPoint Slide 9-4: Summary**.
 3. Respond to any remaining questions.
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What you need to know

The purpose of the exercises is to encourage participants to think about collaboration.

The VA provides contact information for local VJO specialists at <http://www.va.gov/homeless/vjo.asp#contacts>.

9.5 EXERCISES

The trainer will facilitate a discussion of **Handout 9-1: Review Exercises**.

9.6 SUMMARY



In this module, we discussed:

- the importance of collaboration between child support agencies and the military,
- examples of outreach activities to better serve active duty service members,
- opportunities for collaboration with the National Guard Family Readiness Program,
- opportunities for collaboration with Yellow Ribbon events,
- the profile of veterans in the child support caseload, and
- opportunities for collaboration with veterans organizations and events, such as Veterans Stand Down events.