

# **Military Teens Coping with the Stress of War are Given a Voice in MY STORY: BLOGS BY FOUR MILITARY TEENS**

As the U.S. considers deploying up to 40,000 additional troops to Afghanistan, thousands of military children at home are waging a hidden, often silent battle filled with high stress, worry, loneliness and loss.

Oklahoma City, OK (PRWEB) October 29, 2009

Military life can be tough on kids - many will change schools nine times before high school graduation. But stress levels often soar for military youth when a parent is deployed to a war zone, according to Michelle D. Sherman, Ph.D., co-author of the new book MY STORY: BLOGS BY MILITARY TEENS (Beavers Pond Press).

"Military kids live in nearly every community in our country, but their struggles often go unnoticed and unappreciated" said Dr. Michelle Sherman, clinical psychologist, director of the Family Mental Health Program at Oklahoma City Veterans Affairs Medical Center and clinical associate professor at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center.

About two million U.S. children have a parent in the military, and one in four is a teenager. Deployments can last for 15 months or longer, and many military personnel are deployed more than once. Deployment can be especially difficult for National Guard families who become "suddenly military" when a parent is deployed to a dangerous war zone.

"Only a small fraction of military kids attends Department of Defense schools where they have access to support programs," Dr. Sherman said. "The rest, more than 95 percent, go to schools in our local communities, and their civilian peers just don't understand the unique military culture and lifestyle. Even well-intentioned teachers, healthcare providers and community leaders are often unaware of the challenges these young people face, or how to support them."

Studies show that teens are at increased risk for drug and alcohol use during times of transition, and that military youth also are at higher risk for abuse and neglect by the overwhelmed at-home caregiver.

"These kids are under a lot of pressure," said Dr. Sherman, who co-authored the book with her mother DeAnne Sherman, a St. Paul, Minnesota teacher and public speaker who mentors junior high and high school students. "During deployment, they lose those simple, everyday interactions with their parents. Plus, military teens often take on more responsibilities at home with chores and siblings."

MY STORY: BLOGS BY MILITARY TEENS is a series of blogs by four military teens describing their thoughts and feelings before, during and after parental deployment. The characters are fictional but the teens' stories are authentic - the blogs are a compilation of real life experiences of military kids the authors have met and interviewed. Although excellent summer camps and support services for military youth have been developed, this is the first book written specifically for teens of the Global War on Terrorism.

MY STORY explores how parental deployment impacts teens' lives and addresses their unique and sometimes confusing feelings of joy, frustration, sacrifice, hope and fear. The blogs bring to light the teens' pride in their parents' military service; sadness, anger and confusion regarding deployment; excitement of homecoming; challenges in reconnecting with their parents; struggles in creating a "new normal"; reactions to their parents' emotional and physical challenges (PTSD, substance abuse or injury); and their own personal sacrifices and resilience.

"My Story tells it like it is for teens whose parents have been deployed," said long-time member of the U.S. House Representatives Jim Ramstad of Minnesota. "The riveting accounts from the hearts of four military teens will make you cry and make you laugh. This book brings home the costs of war in a way that can't be measured in dollars and cents. The mental health problems, sorrows and family turmoil are described in unvarnished terms, and so is the pride and joy of being a military teen."

Military youth are two-and-a-half times more likely to develop psychological problems than their civilian counterparts, according to a recent study published in the Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics. Further, the Pentagon reports that military children sought outpatient mental health care two million times last year, double the number at the start of the Iraq war. Inpatient psychiatric hospitalizations among military children have increased 50 percent in the same time period.

"Research shows that many of today's military youth--from preschoolers to high school students--are experiencing worry, insomnia, academic problems, depression, anxiety, and difficulty reconnecting with their military parents," said Dr. Sherman. "Support and understanding from friends, compassionate adults and a caring circle of supporters in the community can go a long way toward helping these children navigate the challenges of parental deployment and reintegration."

According to a research study co-authored by Dr. Sherman and published in Psychiatric Annals (August 2009), children whose parents are deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan benefit from finding meaning and purpose in their situation. Many said they were proud of their parents and considered them heroes, and they craved opportunities to talk to "other kids who go through the same thing." But when classmates, media, and even teachers made negative comments about the war and our troops, the children suffered.

MY STORY offers coping tools to help military kids through tough times, tips on how to reconnect with a parent upon homecoming, information about the symptoms of PTSD, an explanation of teen depression, and a list of military youth Web sites. At the end of the book, readers are encouraged to blog or journal about their own experiences in a section titled "And Now It's Your Turn...Your Story."

"Our hope is that MY STORY will honor and support these young people, and help them realize they are not alone," said DeAnne Sherman. "We also wrote MY STORY to educate civilian youth and adults about the military family experience. We hope that increased awareness will stimulate civilians to extend much-needed support, compassion, and appreciation to the military youth in their communities."

Michelle and DeAnne Sherman have written two other award-winning books for teenagers, including FINDING MY WAY: A TEEN'S GUIDE TO LIVING WITH A PARENT WHO HAS EXPERIENCED TRAUMA, which is being distributed nationally as part of the National Guard's "Beyond the Yellow Ribbon" program. The authors present workshops and training programs on how to support families affected by deployment, trauma, and mental illness. Their books and information on their training opportunities are available at <http://www.SeedsofHopeBooks.com> or by calling (800) 901-3480.