



A Parent's Guide to Education in the U.S. Armed Services

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Introduction

“As a parent, I know how difficult it is to let go, sit back, and watch as our children grow up and begin making adult decisions. The decision to join the military is usually one of the most difficult and emotional situations families encounter. My interest is in helping you positively support your child's growth through this experience. As a parent, we need to know that our children are making good decisions.”

- Gene Clark (Army Captain, Ret.)
Director of Veterans Affairs, Rochester Institute of Technology

Where to Start

Become your child's coach! Make the transition from being a parent to being a life coach. Don't just stand on the sidelines – ask questions!

Ask your son or daughter how going into the military “fits” with their life's goals. Don't be surprised if they tell you that they want to get an education and the military has offered them the opportunity to accomplish that. Remember, they probably heard that from their recruiter. Ask how it fits. And ask if they got it in writing. You know that they must “get it in writing” or it won't be enforceable. Remember, once they head off for active duty, their recruiter will still be in the neighborhood. Let your child know that it's OK if they just want to take a time out, travel, etc. If this is the case, you need to help them focus on what their long-term plan might be. After all, whether they stay on active duty for two, three or more years, at some point in the future, they will be leaving the military and will be competing with those they left behind for a civilian career.

Ask what are the things in life that will be important for them? Marriage? Kids? Home? Education? Retirement? Suggest that a successful life won't just happen – they need to sit down and make a plan. If your children want to be treated with respect, like adults, then they have to take control now or they will have to be satisfied with just holding on as life pushes them around! Use the time before they leave to help them create some specific short- and long-term goals.

Get them to think about their first year, second year and third year, etc. Once they arrive at their first duty station, ask them if they have started or are looking into taking college courses? Whatever you do, get involved! And stay involved!

What is Education in the Military?

The modern military places a great value on education, especially as defense systems become more sophisticated and interactive. As your child's coach, understanding the military education system is critical if you are to guide your son or daughter. For most parents, the experience is similar to learning a foreign language, complete with its unique words, titles, descriptions, acronyms, etc. And the system has two very different educational opportunities. A Military (Mandatory) Education System and a Voluntary Education System.

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Military (Mandatory) Education

Immediately following basic training, Service members are scheduled into military vocational schools that will teach them the individual skills necessary to function in their military occupational specialties. This phase is essential prior to arriving at their first duty station.

Upon reporting to their duty station, they will begin a second phase of learning. This phase is where they learn to interact as members of a group, team, or section. Throughout a service members' enlistment, he or she will attend schools that are of a military nature where they will be instructed in team work functions, equipment familiarization, leadership, and beginning-, intermediate- and advanced-level skill training. This instruction will provide all the necessary tasks that are required to do one's job as a team member and complete the mission. All of the mandatory training experiences will help prepare them for promotions and greater responsibility, as well as provide a stronger sense of satisfaction and feeling of belonging. Help them look for and apply to a quality "Yellow Ribbon" university. "Yellow Ribbon" agreements offer Post 9/11 students varying amounts that can often cover full-time tuition and fees. While the VA pays for books and a monthly housing allowance. The U.S. Army uses (AARTS) Transcripts, and the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps use SMART Transcripts. These systems were developed in conjunction with the American Council on Education (ACE) and are available for Service members and Veterans to present to colleges. These transcripts list everything learned on active duty and, where college credits are recommended, these transcripts tell colleges how, where, when and what was learned and the outcome. The ACE recommendations for college credits are now a normal part of the college application process.

The US Air Force has its own Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) and the US Coast Guard has the Coast Guard Institute (CGI). Both are regionally accredited Institutions and, when these transcripts are presented by college applicants, they are treated as any other accredited college transcript. All of these transcripts are of significant value.

Many members will complete at least two years of college while on active duty.

The Voluntary Education System

This is where I hope that most of your time and support will be spent. Voluntary Education is any college course work, classroom training or non-military education a service member volunteers to take. Simply put, it could be anything a member does on his or her personal time, usually on or near a military installation, and often paid for with military or veteran's funding. College level course work can even be counted towards promotions, as a point scale is used to determine who is best qualified.

College level studies can be completed often at no cost or reduced cost to the Service member. Education Centers, located on active duty installations, conduct testing and offer advising and study skills workshops along with a variety of other services. College Level Evaluation Program (CLEP) testing is offered to members at no cost and can save time, benefits and the effort of having to take a class in a subject with which one is already knowledgeable.

Community colleges and local universities, both public and private, welcome these students with a very high level of support. Today's campuses are extremely diverse and are familiar with the challenges these

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students may encounter as they try to do it all. Advisors, counselors and academic support services are immediately available for those seeking help. Help them look for and apply to a quality "Yellow Ribbon" university. "Yellow Ribbon" agreements offer Post 9/11 students varying amounts that can often cover full-time tuition and fees. While the VA pays for books and a monthly housing allowance.

The advice you should be giving your service member, is to make certain that "their plan" is in place for separation. Discuss their academic and career goals. Ask what colleges are located on or near their duty station. Inquire regarding their interests, help them establish short term goals; this month, this year, and next. Help them prepare to compete for the best paying jobs before they leave active duty. The advice you should consider giving your child is to make absolutely certain that a plan is in place. Discuss educational goals and ask what colleges are near or on the Post, Fort, Base or Installation. Ask what he or she hopes to accomplish this month, this year, or when discharged.

Get comfortable "Coach": Remain in the coaches' role and get your child motivated to check out the opportunities. You have to remain in their corner, even when others are busy with other priorities.

Your child will accomplish only what he or she plans to do, much less if they don't have written goals. Time will pass quickly and could leave them with very little to show for the time invested. KEEP THEM MOTIVATED!

Life will get in the way! It won't be easy for them, but I promise they will thank you for helping them achieve. Be proud, celebrate their success!

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