

Quick Reference Guide

for Health Care Practitioners Caring for Military Families



Photo courtesy of CFMWS

Canadian military families

In Canada, there are 40,000 families of full-time Regular Force Canadian Armed Forces personnel. They must access services through provincial and territorial health care systems.

Every year about 10,000 families are posted, meaning they must find and establish relationships with new health care providers. This challenges the continuity of their individual and family's health care.

In addition to frequent relocations, military families may also face unique challenges to their physical and mental health because of the military lifestyle, including dealing with repeated operationally required absences from the family, as well as operational injuries and risk of death.

Military families come in different shapes and sizes and may or may not include children. Some military families may be caregivers to aging parents or family members with disabilities. Encouraging families to share their life situation and experiences with you, the health care provider, will go a long way in helping develop a relationship that will benefit everyone.

Better understand their unique needs by asking questions

General questions to ask about the possible impacts of military service on the family

- Have you recently moved into this community?
- Do you need assistance with the transfer of your family's health records/ medical record?
- Is your military loved one frequently away from you and your family for operational duties? Are they or have they been deployed either overseas or domestically?
- Are you worried about the risk to your loved one's safety while they are serving?
- Do you have any family supports or social supports in this community?

Unique needs of adults in military families

Adults respond differently to the unique challenges of the military lifestyle. Operationally required absences can impact the at-home adult, emotionally and physically. Even the health and well-being of parents of military members can be impacted. Family relocations due to military postings can disrupt continuity of care, and routine screenings may have been missed. It is important to check in on their health and their care plan regularly, even if they are not presenting major symptoms.

Health of the entire military family

It is important to consider the health of all individuals within military families. When asking a patient about how they feel, they might be indirect. Women in particular may minimize their own symptoms compared to those of their children or other members of their family. Children may also be evasive, and if that is the case, try asking the parent if they have observed any changes in their child's behaviour.

Questions to ask about the military family member's physical health

- What is your clinical history?
- Are your screenings (e.g. Pap smears, cancer screenings, etc.) up to date?
- Were you or any of your family members on any waiting lists for health services in your previous community, or are you/they on any now?
- Have relocations impacted your or your family's health care negatively, and how can we help address any of these continuity of care challenges?
- Is there a current or past experience that is impacting you or any of your family now?

Questions to ask about the military family member's mental health

- If you are experiencing absences, are you or anyone in your family struggling with the changing roles and transitions?
- If you've moved recently, or your loved one is away for operational requirements, how are you adapting to these changes?
- Has your military member been injured while serving?
- If there has been an operational injury, including mental health impacts, how are the members of your family adapting?
- If you are caring for your injured military family member, how are you coping? Are you getting the support you need?
- Are you or any of your family experiencing symptoms that could suggest significant difficulties (e.g. social avoidance, sleep changes, mood changes, anxiety or depressive symptoms, etc.)?
- Is there a current or past experience that is impacting you or any of your family now?

Unique needs of children in military families

Children may respond differently to the unique experiences of the military lifestyle, even within the same family. Younger children may struggle more because of the frequent absences of their military parent. Adolescents may struggle more because of posting-related relocations. It is important to check in on their health and their care plan on a regular basis, even if they are not presenting major symptoms.

Questions to ask about the child's health

- Are your child's vaccinations up to date? Provide information on your province's childhood vaccination schedule.
- Are your child's well-baby/well-child checks up to date? Provide information on your province's schedule for well-baby check-ups.
- If you've moved recently, or moved a lot, how has your child adapted to the relocations? Has s/he been able to make friends? Has s/he transitioned academically at the new school? Has s/he transitioned to extra-curricular activities? Is s/he showing any adjustment difficulties?
- If the military parent is away frequently, or been deployed, how has your child dealt with these? Children can experience challenges differently before, during and after parental absences. Does s/he react differently before, during or after the absence?
- If there has been a military injury, how has your child been affected by the injury?
- What kinds of resources and supports have been helpful in previous communities?

Additional support

It may be helpful to inquire whether the family is aware of additional supports available to them:

Military Family Resource Centres (MFRCs)

Places like Military Family Resource Centres can help families establish social support networks for stability and security. Military Family Resource Centres can also provide or connect you with additional mental health supports: <https://www.cafconnection.ca/>

Canadian Forces Member Assistance Program (CFMAP)

CAF personnel and their families have access to services through the Canadian Forces Member Assistance Program (CFMAP), a bilingual telephone and face to face counselling service that is voluntary and confidential, and is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week: 1-800-268-7708.

Family Information Line (FIL)

The Family Information Line is a confidential, personal, bilingual and free service offering information, support, referrals, reassurance and crisis management to the military community: 1-800-866-4546.



For additional resources visit
the Military Family Health
Portal: www.calian.com/mfhp

Additional health insurance

Military families may have access to additional health insurance that may cover health services above what is covered by the province.

It may be helpful to prompt the family to look into the kinds of services their additional health insurance covers.

*Brought to you by the Innovation
to Impact working group*