



Music Together® Supports Resiliency in Military Families

As a parent-child music and movement program that views adult modeling and involvement as integral to the development of young children, Music Together supports and fosters healthy parent-child relationships. The chronic and acute stress faced by military families in all phases of service put both deployed and non-deployed parents at risk for emotional, physical, and psychological stress and trauma, potentially compromising their parenting. Therefore, military children are also at increased risk for emotional, physical, and psychological stress and trauma.

A Strength-Based Approach

Rather than focusing only on the risk factors faced by military families, successful interventions also focus on military families' resiliency.ⁱ As a curriculum that naturally supports resiliency in both children and parents at-risk, Music Together provides military families with a consistent, normalizing experience during a time where very little feels stable.

- The Music Together program employs a strength-based approach by actively acknowledging existing positive aspects of the parent-child relationship, even when a family is facing risk and adversity.
- Parents are viewed as an essential model for their child's early learning and are actively included and appreciated in class. Further acknowledging the essential role of the primary caregiver, parent education is an integral part of the curriculum and all families receive music materials for the home.
- Aligning with the strength-based viewpoint that long-term skill-building support for both children and primary caregivers is essential, Music Together is designed for children and families from birth to age 5.

Parental and Child Resilience

Research shows that the first 5 years are critical in a child's developmentⁱⁱ and that caring, supportive, and stable parent-child relationships play a significant role in this development.ⁱⁱⁱ These positive relationships are essential to fostering both child and parental resilience in the face of adversity, stress, and trauma.^{iv}

Non-deployed parents may suffer compromised parenting of their 0-5 year old child due to their own psychological distress during their spouses' deployment or after their return. Children in this age-range are also at particular risk for emotional, behavioral, and psychological problems due to the absence of a deployed parent or stress during the homecoming period.^v

The Music Together curriculum supports parent and child resilience in multiple ways:

- Developmentally appropriate and fun music and movement activities and parent education resources support positive parent-child interactions, enhance parenting skills, and build knowledge of children's developmental needs.
- Engaging, supportive, and educational class experiences with their child foster parents' sense of efficacy and confidence in their child-rearing abilities.

- Active engagement with music can have a powerful, positive effect on a child’s personal, social, and emotional development that goes beyond what can be measured. All children are musical, and being given the opportunity to participate in music at an early age and develop basic music competence allows them to experience a strong sense of self and a connection to others.
- The Music Together program supports the development of executive function skills, self-regulation, and the ability to self-soothe and cope, skills that are key to children’s resilience^{vi}. Through music, children can also access joyful feelings, imagination, and creativity in their daily life.
- Regardless of participants’ music “talent”, regular music-making can decrease depression and reduce stress and anxiety in both adults and children^{vii}. The mitigating effects of music-making mean that participation in music activities can be an excellent supplement to appropriate mental health interventions and can even act as a preventive activity to relieve parental stress and foster resilience. Non-deployed parents and caregivers can also find new and meaningful friendships through attending Music Together class, which may help ease stress and feelings of isolation.
- Supportive take-home materials give parents and caregivers a way to continue to have fun with music throughout the week, at home, and on the go, which deepens their experience and understanding of their essential role in their child’s musical and overall development.

Helping Maintain Routine Throughout the Deployment Cycle

In addition to supporting the attachment relationship, maintaining normal routines and activities before, during, and after disruptions like deployment is crucial to fostering resiliency in military families.

- Music itself can provide meaning and comfort during times of grief and loss.
- Music Together classes are offered year-round. Each semester, families enroll for a specific day and time to attend each week, creating sustained, meaningful routines for both children and caregivers.
- Music Together classes can be found in over 2500 communities in over 40 countries. If a family relocates during or between semesters, they may be able to enroll in a class in their new community, providing their children (and themselves) a sense of comfort and the familiar within so much that is new. Finding a new Music Together experience also provides a built-in opportunity to form friendships in the new community.
- For families who are in a deployment cycle and can Skype or engage in phone calls with the deployed parent, sharing songs can foster a sense of connection, comfort, and joy during a stressful time of physical separation.

Supporting and Celebrating Diversity Within the Military Population

Military families are a diverse population with varied and changing needs. As a globally embraced program, Music Together is beloved by families with wide-ranging circumstances, with different cultural backgrounds, and in different geographic locations. Further reflecting Music Together’s commitment to a musically rich curriculum, each song collection has a wide array of songs that represent and honor the diversity in music and culture that exists across the globe. Translations of parent education materials are available in several languages to further support accessibility.

ⁱ Resiliency is an individual's ability to positively adapt within the context of risk or adversity. Rather than focusing on the problems within an at-risk population, interventions should focus on fostering and protecting an individual's normative adaptive abilities that they already possess. In the case of military families, resilience occurs in children when we focus on the relationship between their strengths and adaptive behaviors in the context of the resources and people in their environment. Masten, A.S. (2001). Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 227-238.; Masten, A.S. (2004). Review: Regulatory processes, risk, and resilience in adolescent development. *N Y Acad Sci.* 1021, 310-9.

ⁱⁱ e.g., Fox, S. E., Levitt, P. & Nelson, C. A. (2010). How the timing and quality of early experiences influence the development of brain architecture. *Child Development*, 81(1), 28-40; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2010). *Early experiences can alter gene expression and affect long-term development: Working Paper No. 10*. Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu

ⁱⁱⁱ Landry, S. H., Smith, K. E. & Swank, P. R. (2006). Responsive parenting: Establishing early foundations for social, communication, and independent problem-solving skills. *Developmental Psychology*, 42(4), 627-642.

^{iv} National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2015). *Supportive relationships and active skill-building strengthen the foundations of resilience: Working paper 13*. Retrieved from: www.developingchild.harvard.edu; Sroufe, L. A. (2005). Attachment and development: A prospective, longitudinal study from birth to adulthood. *Attachment and Human Development*, 7, 349-367; Werner, E. E. (1993). Risk, resilience, and recovery: Perspectives from the Kauai Longitudinal Study. *Development and Psychopathology*, 5, 503-515.

^v e.g. Cozza, S. J., Lerner, R.M. & Haskins, R. (2014). Military and veteran families and children: Policies and programs for health maintenance and positive development. *Social Policy Report*, 28(3); Osofsky, J. D. & Chartrand, C. M. (2013). Military children from birth to five years. *The Future of Children*, 23(2).

^{vi} National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2015). *Supportive relationships and active skill-building strengthen the foundations of resilience: Working paper 13*. Retrieved from: www.developingchild.harvard.edu

^{vii} e.g. Horn, S. (2013). *Imperfect Harmony: Finding Happiness Singing with Others*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books.