

HELP YOUR CHILD UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF MILITARY SERVICE



Use the following suggestions to discuss how your child can participate in service every day, in their own way, just like the people within the military!

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Serving one's country as part of the military is extraordinarily honorable. With the suggestions below, you can help your child with special needs understand what service means and how he or she can serve others in his or her own way.

WHAT DOES THE MILITARY DO?

It's often hard for children with special needs to understand what the military is because most of them aren't exposed to these service people in daily life, and so they don't easily understand geography, politics, terrorism, and warfare.

Explain that like a restaurant server who brings us the food and drink that we need, people in the military serve all of the people in our country by giving us the freedom and safety that we need. Freedom means that we are "free" or "allowed" to do things like talk, dress, travel, and have friends as we wish.

Draw concentric circles on a large piece of paper. The smallest circle in the center represents the all-familiar police force that keeps a town or state safe. Contrast this with the larger circle that represents the military keeping the whole country safe. Draw other large circles nearby depicting other countries to show how sometimes people in the military have to travel to other places in order to protect people there as well.

Find photos of soldiers and point out that the uniforms are the colors of nature - like greens and browns - because sometimes they travel through forests and deserts within different countries. Explore the terrain that different branches of military personnel protect, including Army (land), Navy (sea), Air Force (sky), and so on.

Use the following suggestions to discuss how your child can participate in service every day, in their own way, just like the people within the military!

KEEPING PEACE

People in the military help to keep everyone calm and at peace. Similarly, your child and you can think of ways to solve disagreements in order to get along happily. For example, when someone calls out, “You’re a cheater!” while playing a game, your child can help the other child find better words to explain the issue like “You’re supposed to wait your turn” or “The rules are to move only one space.”

ALLEGIANCE, PATRIOTISM, & TEAMWORK

If your child has a favorite NFL team or participates in a local team sport, highlight how important teamwork is. Point out that teamwork is not only for sports. To accomplish a ‘winning’ mission, it is extremely important for people in the military to work together as a team. So, when your child teams up with classmates or siblings, projects for school or around the house get done faster and better.

Explain how people have ‘allegiance’ because they are proud to be part of a group of people who do good work. Just like wearing a favorite team’s jersey, Americans love our country and the people in the military who serve it, so they proudly wear red, white, and blue - the colors of our flag.

Make the connection between cheering for a sports event and cheering on a patriotic holiday. The common thread is to show support, respect, and pride for those working together for a cause. To help your child grow deeper patriotic sentiments, you can read historical stories and visit museums together.

BRAVERY & SUPPORT

Many times, people in the military have to do things that are unpleasant or scary, but they support each other to get through it. Likewise, guide your child to give support to family members and friends to accomplish challenges. For example, if a friend doesn’t think he can throw a basketball into the hoop, your child can encourage him by saying, “Give it a try!” or “You’ll never know unless you

try.” If he didn’t make the basket, your child can be supportive by saying, “That’s OK, we can practice together for next time!”

DUTY & VOLUNTEERISM

People in the military have important responsibilities. Sometimes service people have to volunteer to do a duty that is difficult or unpleasant. Your child will understand the meaning of duty at home, with your show of appreciation when she or he helps you take out the garbage or sweeps the floor. Look up ways your family can volunteer in the community with perhaps a recycling effort or a litter clean-up event.

SACRIFICE & DONATION

Explain how sacrifice means that you give someone something important of yours because he or she needs it more than you need it. People in the military give up their time and sometimes their safety to make sure that we are ok.

While adults are the only ones who are allowed to sacrifice safety, kids can make other sacrifices. Discuss how there are people within our country as well as other countries who struggle without basic necessities. You can encourage your child to sacrifice or donate something that he or she doesn’t need such as clothing or toys. If your child earns money by working on household chores, he or she may wish to contribute earned money to programs that provide food or clean water.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

For everyone including service people, being prepared for an emergency is very important. For example, during a fire drill at school, everyone must listen carefully to the adults’ instructions. Other emergency preparation may be to discuss your family’s emergency plan in case of a power outage. Together with you, your child can be in charge of buying supplies like flashlights, installing fresh batteries, and deciding on convenient places to store them.

When an emergency does occur, people in the military respond quickly. Teach

your child to immediately call for your help in urgent situations if, for example, shattered glass is spotted on the floor. During a bigger emergency or when there’s no adult to help, be sure your child knows to dial 911 and the importance to clearly state your home’s address.

To help the community recover from an emergency, like after a weather disaster, your child may wish to contribute earned money, necessary items, or even lend a helping hand to a local disaster relief organization or the Red Cross.

MEMORIALIZATION & HONOR

Look on the calendar with your child to see when Memorial Day is. Note how the word ‘memorial’ comes from the word ‘memory’ because on this day we remember all of the millions of men and women throughout time who have served our country and have now passed away. Next, have your child find Veteran’s Day on the calendar. Explain that veterans are people who have served in the military, and may still be alive.

On any day, your child can donate to organizations such as the American Legion Family which honors people in the military and their families. If your child receives and wears a red poppy flower, he or she may wish to proudly tell others about what she or he has learned about our great country and the people within it.

With your guidance, your child will feel proud to serve friends, family, and the community. She or he will understand and appreciate the service of all of the men and women who bravely serve our country, not just on patriotic holidays, but every day. •

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Speech-Language Pathologist and Applied Behavior Analysis Instructor, Karen has been empowering people with autism & special needs to have more meaningful conversations like never before. Her highly effective I CAN! For Autism Method™ - perfected for over 10 years and now incorporated within the iPad app “I Can Have Conversations With You!™” - is changing lives through improved social and language skills. It is 100% fun for both kids and adults to use! Join the conversation at www.iCanForAutism.com

