



Thank you for your interest in Operation: Military Kids and Hero Packs.

Operation: Military Kids (OMK) focuses on youth whose parent(s) are being called up through the National Guard and U.S. Army Reserve in increasing numbers for extended assignments. While these youth do not re-locate, their lives are changed dramatically when a parent suddenly is mobilized or deployed and leaves the family for an extended time for dangerous assignments.

Families of Guard and Reserve are usually not on military installations but dispersed throughout the United States in rural areas, small towns, suburbs, and cities. In addition, many of these families live 50-100 miles away from any other National Guard or Reserve family and from the normal military support mechanisms. Until deployment, these families have been civilians and have had little or no experience dealing with the military. Clearly, they face new challenges and risks.

OMK strives to:

- Create a community support network for military youth "in our own backyards" when Soldier parents are deployed.
- Deliver recreational, social and educational programs for military youth living in civilian communities.
- Support military kids coping with the stress of knowing their deployed parents may be in harm's way.
- Collaborate with Schools to ensure that staff are attuned to the unique needs of military students.
- Educate the public on the impact of the deployment cycle on Soldiers, families, kids and the community as a whole.
- Welcome families to become a part of ongoing national, state and local Partner Programs such as 4-H clubs, BGCA, The American Legion, etc. in the home communities.

A core component of OMK is Hero Packs. A Hero Pack is a way to say thank you to military children & youth for their strength and sacrifice while parents are deployed.

Hero Packs are backpacks that include a collection of family support materials, communication tools, and fun items that military children can enjoy with their siblings, non-military parent or friends.

- Communication tools are meant to help encourage a connection between the deployed parent and their child. For instance, the camera can be used to capture memories that the child may wish to share with their parent either by mailing the pictures immediately or saving them in the photo album/scrapbook or picture frame until reunion.
- Fun items, such as a stuffed animal or Frisbee, are there simply to bring joy to the affected youth.
- The support component provides youth with OMK Partner information and family support materials.

Handwritten Cards/Letters

The handwritten notes of encouragement and thanks are for the youth, their family, or their deployed parent. The message in each letter should come from the heart, so there is no standard format which must be followed.

Please keep the message in the letters positive, politically neutral, and do not include personal identifying information (phone number, email address, street address, etc).

The most important thing is to write from your heart. Think about what you would say to this person and put it into words. You might share some of your favorite experiences and pastimes.

Keep it positive

Have fun and thank our every day heroes

Good words to use are: grateful, most appreciated, sacrifice, unselfish, service, patriotism, national honor, pride, love of country, devotion to freedom, token of appreciation, small symbol of support

Thank the youth for the sacrifices they are making - Remind the military youth that they are heroes too.

Do not tell the military youth how bad you think their situation is or how sorry you may feel for them.

Keep it politically neutral

No personal information (last name, phone #, email, etc.)

There is no standard format for the letters; communicate through your heart and reach out to someone who is experiencing something new and unknown. I have seen wonderful cards and letters written in crayon and colorful pictures accompanying the words to some rather lengthy heartfelt letters. Anything goes, as long as it's upbeat and sends a note of caring to the one receiving the card/letter.

Thank you for sharing your time with youth and families.

For more information on OMK, 4-H, or military youth programs, contact Deb Jones at 1-888-4H-YOUTH, deb.jones@usu.edu, 4900 Old Main Hill, Logan UT 84322, or visit the website at www.Utah4-H.org or <http://www.ut.ngb.army.mil/family/>